

# SESLIP

South East Sector Led  
Improvement Programme

# Impact Report

March 2023

The South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP) is a membership group of all single/upper-tier local authorities in the South East that aims to:

- improve outcomes for children and young people across the South East
- establish a culture of honest and constructive dialogue and challenge within and between authorities
- demonstrate the capacity and capability of the sector to achieve a coherent and consistent self-improving system

We believe good children's services are a product of reflective practice, professional supervision/peer challenge, effective leadership and independent audit.

SESLIP is founded on a Memorandum of Understanding [Memorandum of Understanding](#) which has been agreed nationally and in the South East. East Sussex County Council have kindly agreed to act as the host authority and their DCS, Alison Jeffery currently chairs the programme [Steering Group](#)

Additionally, participating authorities have each signed a [tailored Memorandum of Understanding](#) to support the South East children's sector-led improvement programme.

This report summarises the impact of the SESLIP workstreams in 2021/23, including the impact of projects funded via the DfE's Children's Social Care Covid-19 Regional Recovery and Building Back Better Fund in 2021/22, which was worth nearly £2.5million.

Without this substantial financial support in subsequent years, our programme has scaled back to just over £600k, a mixture of core funding and earmarked SEND Improvement funding from the DfE and our own annual subscriptions.

For more information please visit [www.seslip.co.uk](http://www.seslip.co.uk) or contact the SESLI programme manager, Richard Tyndall on 07880-787007 [richard.tyndall@richardtyndall.co.uk](mailto:richard.tyndall@richardtyndall.co.uk)



## Table of contents

Data Benchmarking .....	4
Data to Insight (D2I) .....	5
DCS Self-assessment and Peer Challenge .....	7
Lead Members Network.....	8
Assistant Directors (ADs) Safeguarding Network.....	10
Quality Assurance Network .....	11
Assistant Directors (ADs) Education Network .....	13
SEND 19 Network.....	14
Workforce: Recruitment, Retention, Agency .....	15
Take Your Place: CPD for Future Leaders .....	17
Children Missing Education:.....	18
Family Safeguarding: Motivational Interviewing.....	19
Family Safeguarding: Pre-birth Pandemic Caseload .....	25
Safeguarding Infants – Born into Care Pilot.....	27
Safeguarding Adolescents from Extra Familial Harm .....	29
Lifelong Links South East .....	30
South East Family Hub Development.....	32
Accelerated Family Hubs .....	33
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children National Transfer Scheme Manager .....	34
Small Packages of Sector Led Improvement .....	36
Reducing Court Backlog Training .....	38
Inside Out.....	39
Mockingbird .....	41
Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board .....	42
Special Guardianship and Kinship Work.....	42
Early Help Group.....	44
Regional Fostering Group.....	45
East Berkshire Commissioning Project.....	46
Children with Complex Lives Project .....	48
Further information contacts for each project.....	50

# Data Benchmarking

DCS Sponsor: Alison Jeffery (East Sussex)

Data benchmarking is delivered by East Sussex with the support of Brighton and Hove. The project provides the following benchmarking reports:

- quarterly social care and early help
- quarterly adoption and special guardianship
- twice yearly SEND
- termly children missing education and electively home educated
- quarterly RIIA report shared with the DfE and Data to Insight

Each of these reports provides impact by allowing LAs to compare their performance with regional neighbours in detail. This information is used in service development, peer review

and preparation for inspection.

Regular workshops and meetings support these returns as well as providing a place for LA data teams to seek clarity about the data collections, support new colleagues, review the measures and feed into national processes through the DfE's Star Chamber and the Children's Services National Performance and Information Management Group (CS-NPIMG).

Ofsted provide an update to every Early Help and Social Care meeting.

The chair of these meetings attends the regional Adoption and Early Help Networks to provide updates on the data and is available to the other

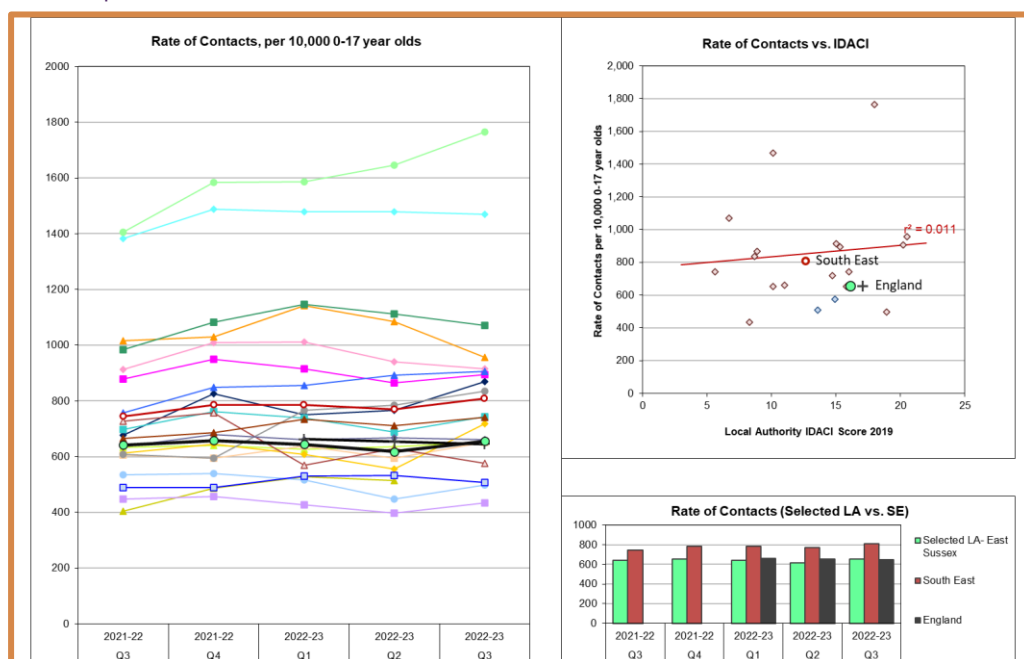
regional groups for support with data and analysis.

The chair and vice chair represent the South East at the CS-NPIMG

*"I would say for West Sussex the SE Benchmarking is generally a helpful tool and the meetings are good so that you know how others are dealing with new DfE requests etc.*

*Recently the South East Benchmarking report provided a much-needed source of comparison information for rate of CP to understand if other LAs were experiencing similar variations. As the information was more up to date it provided some reassurance for the service."*

**West Sussex**



# Data to Insight (D2I)

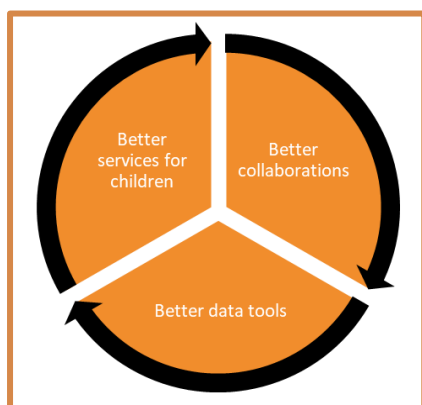
DCS Sponsor: Alison Jeffery (East Sussex)

**Critical data tools:** In 2022, D2I **maintained business-critical data analysis tools** like the ChAT (Children's Services Analysis Tool), used by Ofsted and local authorities in every JTAI and ILACS inspection and in some LAs for regular performance work.

The Children's Services Benchmarking Tool, the most comprehensive and rapidly updated national benchmarking tool for children's services in England, allows LA data teams to report on key performance measures against statistical neighbours, their region and England.

These are alongside a dozen other timesaving and insight-enhancing analytical tools all built on standard data models and technologies so that local authorities can "pick up and play" without any cost or data sharing prerequisites.

**A small team supporting broad collaboration:** D2I supports a national community in developing data



tools, connecting like-minded people, and helping good practice spread across regional boundaries. The team is hosted by East Sussex County Council on behalf of SESLIP and England's eight other regional performance groups.

In 2022 Data to Insight grew to a team of four and delivered **award winning local digital innovation**.



The service is well-supported by the ADCS, DfE, DLUHC and Ofsted, and aligns with the LGA's Digital Transformation programme.

D2I's work has been noted in the national review of children's social care, helping secure a commitment from MPs to "put local authorities in the driving seat of change" on data and digital in children's social care.

Data to Insight is a national service helping local authorities across England make better use of data in children's services.

D2I's core ethos is "build once, use everywhere" – identifying

common problems and contexts across local authorities, building tools to do those tasks which don't require local expertise, **enabling local experts to spend more time on focused analysis and insight work**, and less time on data preparation. This saves the sector thousands of hours of duplicated effort each year and ensures that everyone has access to best-in-class approaches.



**Recent performance and achievements:** The D2I team also supported innovative new data projects, introducing a sector-designed data validation tool for children looked after data, **replacing the old "once a year" approach with a method which could be used on-demand by any local authority**, and promoting new approaches to demand modelling, budget forecasting and scenario modelling for care placements.

The D2I team introduced **a new sector - designed national data collection to break out of regional boundaries and annual**



**reporting cycles:** for the first time the RIA quarterly collection helps local authorities benchmark quarterly against statistical neighbours all over the country.

The D2I team are currently rolling out a similar data collection for Early Help data, which will be **the first national solution for system-wide Early Help benchmarking in England.**

The D2I team also **worked closely with central government departments to represent local authority perspectives** in national policy development work. Supporting national and regional performance networks for children's services, the team gathers views and knowledge to help government design the best possible support for local authorities.

Alongside all this, **the team support skills development in the sector**, running a unique data analyst apprenticeship tailored to the children's services data sector.

LAs contribute time and resources because they benefit from the tools. For colleagues who can't spare the time for apprenticeship training, the team supports code-along projects where analysts don't



just use the data tools and help build them with one-to-one support from expert programmers. LA colleagues learn new skills which they can apply locally to improve their work and contribute to national data tools which benefit the wider community.

**Effective co-production:** D2I focuses on **enabling LAs to engage at the level they feel comfortable** – whether that's leading a large-scale collaborative project, contributing to strategic decision making, or just emailing a bug report, the team helps LAs increase involvement over time, bringing more and more people into the network of colleagues.

In D2I's 2022 annual report 265 instances of local authority colleagues helping improve

the core toolkit in the last year were noted – and that is only one way LAs work with the D2I team.

Part of the D2I mission is to **help local excellence diffuse within and across regional boundaries**, and projects tend to pick up collaborators from broadly distributed local authorities. **The more people get involved, the more we learn, the better the data tools we share, and so the more people want to get involved and learn something – a real virtuous circle.**



**Impact:** In terms of impact, the small amount of funding from the DfE which pays for a central resource is the catalyst for large amounts of activity on the part of contributor authorities, unlocking economies of scale. External funders such as the DfE support D2I projects because they can see the routes to national impact.





# DCS Self-assessment and Peer Challenge

## DCS Sponsor: Alison Jeffery (East Sussex)

2022-2023 saw the fifth round of the programme of [self-assessment and peer challenge for Directors of Children's Services](#), and the second round for Lead Members for children's services.

The five-year period that the DCS Peer Challenge operated in coincided with the five-year programme of ILACS inspections, during which time five of the nineteen South East authorities improved a grade, five stayed the same and two moved down a grade. The Directors commissioned an [ADCS Review of the 2019 South East DCS Peer Challenge](#) which was supportive of the arrangements, and in each following year, there has been 100% sign-up from the SESLIP members.

In 2020-21, the programme was extended to include a parallel process for Lead Members for children's services, inviting each of them to complete a self-assessment of their

effectiveness as a Lead Member, and participate in a peer challenge with colleagues. This was very well received by the participants and the model of working was exported to other regions. The second round of self-assessment and peer challenge was successfully implemented in autumn 2022.

These programmes are designed to support the regional improvement plan, which says:

*"The plan recognises that all children's services have strengths which can help inspire improvement in others; it also recognises that they are all capable of further improvement. It aims to discourage the conclusion that only poor or weak services need improvement help; instead, it celebrates honest self-evaluation and constant improvement as antidotes to complacency."*

The main impact of the programmes is the deployment of reflective practice with structured professional feedback at the highest levels in each children's services team, which models the desired professional behaviour for their staff teams. The process has also been used to shape the content and priority of regional programmes. In particular, the process has identified the need to expand the number of regional networks from three to nine; and to instigate specific work on the memorandum of cooperation on agency social work staff; on new ways commissioning complex child placements; children missing education; the Take Your Place future leaders programme and others. For further information about self-assessment and peer challenge in the South East visit

[seslip.co.uk/peer-challenge/about-peer-challenge](https://seslip.co.uk/peer-challenge/about-peer-challenge)

# Lead Members Network

Lead Member Sponsor: Cllr Hannah Allbrooke (Brighton & Hove)

At the heart of successful children's services is strong, passionate leadership. Lead Members are an integral part of the children's leadership team, alongside the Director of Children Services (DCS), the Council Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council.

We have a wealth of experience, enthusiasm and talent among our Lead Members. As with our DCSs, the support of colleagues within a safe environment is beneficial to all.

This workstream supports the learning and development of Lead Members, with two purposes: -

- Working with Local Government Association to develop and deliver a development programme for Lead Members across the region
- Lobbying of central government

This was achieved with three main outputs:

1. Induction and development support for Lead Members
2. Peer challenge opportunities
3. A programme of expert workshops

Building on the success of the annual DCS-led programme of self-assessment and triad peer challenge and support which shapes the South East Sector-Led Improvement

Programme (SESLIP) action plan, a complementary Lead Member self-assessment and triad peer challenge and support process was introduced.

The purpose of the self-assessment and subsequent triad challenges was to:

- identify strengths and areas for development - for individuals and as a peer group.
- support a culture of reflection and mutual learning.
- contribute to the regional improvement plan.
- build an effective support and learning network for Lead Members across the region.

*"The support is invaluable as both support and challenge on our role. I find it helpful to generate ideas and understand what other councils facing similar challenges have done. Having just completed our second round of triads, we are now getting even more confident as a region in challenging each other and presenting the areas we are strong on."*

A template was developed that explores the unique statutory role that Lead Members undertake, poses a series of questions, provides

prompts and areas for consideration.

*"Not having been involved with a 'challenge' of this type previously, I was completely unaware of what was expected. When I received the questionnaire the proverbial mist descended, so I sought guidance and support from various partners within the LGA who I believed would be able to point me in the right direction. I needn't have worried, the advice provided was swift, accurate and reassuring allowing me to complete the challenge by realising that the work I had been doing to date was making a difference, and that working with my senior officer team we were providing a well-balanced environment for the young people in our care to thrive."*

*"The LGA 1-1 support really helped me understand where my priorities should lie in terms of my responsibilities. Although there are common areas that all portfolio holders have, each authority has slightly different responsibilities and this support was helpful in teasing this out."*

**A Lead Member's feedback**

Lead Members reflect upon and complete the template





before participating in the triad challenge and support sessions. 1-1 support was available through the programme for Lead Members, who wanted help with compiling their self-assessment. Our process has been used as an exemplar of good practice across the other regions.

The first triad events in 2020 led to a programme of five expert workshops for lead members:

Understanding adolescents and the challenges and risks faced supporting and safeguarding complex young people with Dez Holmes of Research in Practice.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and the National Transfer Scheme was led by DCSs and Lead Members from Kent and Portsmouth and Katie Thrussell of the South East Strategic Partnership on Migration

Mental Health services for children and young people with Dr Gavin Lockhart, Clinical Lead for CYP Mental Health in the South East.

Political leadership of effective SEND systems with Dame Christine Lenehan, Caroline O'Neill Strategic Director Children, Adults and Families, Gateshead Council LGA CIA North East Region, Cllr Liz Terry and Deborah Glassbrook then EDCS Reading.

What good looks like for the Lead Member role in improving Children's Services. With Cllr Sarah Russell (Leicester City), Linda Clegg (CIA North West and member of Leicester City Children's Services Improvement Board), Andy Bunyan (CIA East Midlands and East of England).

The second programme of

*'As a participant in the triad following completing a self-assessment, I found it helpful in bench marking my Authorities performance against similar authorities and helped me formulate questions I could share with senior officers back at my own Authority. This is particularly valuable given how many indicators and performance indicators the service works with.'*

self-assessment and peer challenge ran from October 2022 to January 2023 with eighteen of the nineteen councils and 21 councillors participating.

The next version of the work-stream plan is being developed in response to the priorities identified in the most recent round of Triads and will capture emerging demands. Complementing the network meetings and workshops, the offer has included the following:

Access and provision of Lead Members Mentors via LGA

- One to one support from Alison and Deborah

- Access to and participation in the LGA training programme

- Bespoke programmes of learning and peer challenge for individual councils i.e., improving Children's Scrutiny, Corporate Parenting and Children's Services Finance

In summary, Lead Members reported that the process of reflection, learning and support has enabled them to think about how their roles and responsibilities as political leaders were making a difference to lives of children and young people. They reported that it had deepened their understanding of the Lead Member role and responsibilities, developed some of their approaches to working with the Directors of Children's Services and ensuring the whole Council takes its responsibility for corporate parenting and the delivery of effective children's services.

*"Being able to share and discuss common issues with other lead members has been invaluable. Also, collectively, we have been able to lobby Govt over much needed changes to National policy."*

For further information about the Lead Members Group in the South East visit [seslip.co.uk/about-networks/lead-members-group](https://seslip.co.uk/about-networks/lead-members-group)



# Assistant Directors (ADs) Safeguarding Network

## DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)

The Assistant Directors Safeguarding Network has been set up for local authority officers who lead their council's response to keeping children safe.

It has been running for over a decade and includes:

- Induction to the work of SESLIP for all new ADs joining the region (whether permanent, interim or temporary)
- Quarterly Network Meetings
- Weekly Newsletter with digest of key news and developments in Children's Services
- Access to peer support

The induction includes discussion of the full range of sector support available from SESLIP, an overview of the key projects and obligations (including Agency Social Worker Memorandum).

New Assistant Directors are also provided with a single point of contact to make accessing sector-based support straightforward.

They are also provided with access to a wide range of information and resources available on the SESLIP website, including access the confidential areas.

The network meetings moved online during the Covid19 pandemic, and the Assistant Directors have agreed that this format works well.

Dates for the quarterly meeting are set eighteen months in advance.

There is a direct link to the regional Director of Children Services group through the attendance of one of the directors who acts as SESLIP sponsor for this group.

Agendas for the meeting are planned and standing items over the last year have included:

- The Care Review
- Social Worker Recruitment and Retention
- Placement Sufficiency (Foster and Residential)
- Use of Unregulated Care

- Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- UASC
- Ofsted Activity in the Region
- Budgets

The network is also used as a channel to promote SESLIP projects and encourage authorities to engage in SESLIP activity.

The most recent example relates to the supporting a piece of research to develop a better understanding of the profile of the regional children's workforce.

This has included endorsing a series of focus groups and promoting a regional workforce survey (which at the time of writing had elicited close to 400 responses).

The group is also used to identify and develop ideas for future sector led improvement projects.



# Quality Assurance Network

DCS Sponsor: Stuart Ashley, for Steve Crocker (Hampshire & IoW)

The Regional Quality Assurance Network holds regular meetings (four a year). The group is committed to delivering mutual quality assurance activity based on the Peer Challenge Triads/Quartets if requested, but this to date this is not an area that the group has requested or wanted to explore.

## Impact of the Group

The group has clear terms of reference with standard agenda items which can flex in line with the requirements of the group. Standard items include:

- National/Ofsted issues
- Child Protection Chairs sub group feedback
- Quality assurance and performance – challenge and good practice
- Topic for discussion

To demonstrate impact QA leads were asked to consider the impact by considering the questions in the highlighted boxes. A sample of the comments received have been included.

## Group itself

The group includes 19 South East local authorities and attendance at meetings in 2022 was 80%, a proxy indicator that the QA leads find the content of the meetings useful in terms of their time

1. "It has been helpful attending these meetings because (we) were able to reflect and identify a practice gap in relation to recording when plans have been translated "into the child's mother tongue" language. We acknowledge the importance of recording this information on a child's record as this is evidence that the LA (organisation) is being inclusive."

**Shungu Chigocha**  
PSW Windsor and  
Maidenhead

3. "Feedback from the regional Child Protection Chairs Managers' meeting was really useful in how authorities were managing conferences post-Covid."

**Douglas Sinclair**

4. "Being a new member of the group, it has been extremely helpful to attend the meeting and meet peers doing the same role in other LA's."

**Laura Mallinson**  
West Sussex

2. "I updated and refreshed our QA framework last year and from discussions at the SESLIP QA leads meeting we have now introduced a more robust QA of the audit activity and our senior management team will now audit the quality of the audits undertaken by our front-line managers."

"Feedback from the regional CP chairs managers meeting was really useful in how authorities were managing conferences post Covid."

**Douglas Sinclair**  
East Sussex

## Quality Assurance and performance – area of challenge

5. "When looking at re-referral rates and having feedback from other LAs, it confirmed to us that there are different methods in counting re-referrals. That along with internal processes for QA and performance monitoring mean that we are confident that the disparity in our re-referral data with other LA's is not due to an issue with our thresholds, quality of practice, or sustainable impact of work."

**Amanda Meadows**  
Hampshire



6. "When looking at the data issue, we noticed an influx in referral rates. Based on the discussion at the meeting, (we) were able to undertake dip sample audits around re-referrals to understand the narrative around the high referral numbers."

**Amanda Meadows**

7. "We discussed Early Help data and performance. I was able to take back the suggestions to help our organisation to better understand the number of families that are stepped across to Early Help following intervention from CSC and families that are stepped across to Early Help without intervention from CSC. An Early Help Performance Dashboard was created to help manipulate the intelligence and this information."

**Shungu Chigocha**

### Quality Assurance and performance - best practice

8. "We were able use ideas from the best practice discussion to inform us about implementing the Hybrid model. This allowed us to evaluate how well or what changes would be deemed appropriate in delivering an effective service."

**Shungu Chigocha**

### Topic for discussion

9. "Hampshire shared their experience and knowledge following their participation in the pilot JTAI inspection framework. (We) gained a lot of information about the key target areas that the new inspection focused on, and this was help when we underwent a JTAI inspection."

**Shungu Chigocha**

10. "As a result of conversation within the QA group we have moved to a hybrid model of Child Protection Conferences, the impact being better multi-agency attendance as they can be virtual, but the family are supported in person by the social worker and CP chair. We are also piloting not having minutes from conferences, but detailed chairs decision document, the impact being concise recording which saves time and requires less administration resources which can be directed elsewhere.

Family feedback has confirmed they only want one document not two as they currently receive."

**Laura Mallinson**

11. "I raised the issue of return home interviews at one of the meetings and the discussion was really useful in how the other authorities use a range of activity and tools to address this and improve the performance on RHIs."

**Douglas Sinclair**

The Quality Assurance Document Library holds example documents for use by the group, including audits, both thematic in nature, toolkits and more general audits, as well as other key documents which the group are able to access as required. Participating QA leads can load templates and documents directly to this portal.

### Conclusion

The impact of the group is through providing a platform for QA leads to:

- discuss, review and challenge performance,
- share best practice,
- consider and discuss both local and national topics,

in a space of professional, respectful challenge.

The quotes included in this document evidence that QA Leads are using the outputs from the group in a way that is having a positive impact on their LAs QA processes and performance.



# Assistant Directors (ADs) Education Network

## DCS Sponsor: Deb Austin (Brighton and Hove)

**The Assistant Director Education Network** meets regularly to develop shared positions on strategic responses to national education policy and to inform the strategic role of LAs in local education systems, as a partner with schools, MATs, DfE, Ofsted, and others. To facilitate the strategic role of the LA, the Network has now established twice yearly dialogue meetings with the DfE South-east office, via the Director, and with Ofsted South-east..

The AD Education Network has made an impact in the following areas:

### Strategic response to DfE attendance guidance

New DfE expectations on LAs are requiring extra resources: due to some services previously delivered to schools / MATs via SLA have to be provided to all schools, including independent schools now, at no charge. These resource concerns have been escalated to DCS group together with the importance of giving senior

leadership to the promotion of good school attendance across all children's services teams.

Strategic approaches developed by member LAs to supporting improved attendance have been shared: strategic attendance boards, membership across schools and partner agencies and innovative ways of working..

### Education system / academies to strong MATs

Sharing practice while national policy on schools and school organisation has been in a state of flux over the year (Schools Bill shelved).

Local strategic approaches have been shared to address practical challenges such as single / small academy trusts and ways LA can make comparator information available to their local system, as part of being a system leader and honest broker.

### Safeguarding and Ofsted

Discussion took place with Ofsted South-east about

safeguarding concerns reported to Ofsted in individual schools and delayed communication of these to the LA. Improved system of communication and shared understanding of process agreed and will be reviewed at future joint meetings.

### School financial sustainability

Many primary schools are facing falling rolls, due to demographic changes and increased costs not sufficiently covered by central funding. Local school sustainability strategies have been shared, including systematic ways to identify schools at risk and communication for members about the challenges.

Robust conversation with DfE regional director about the challenges and experiences when local proposals are undermined by school reorganisation (for example a school academies to avoid merger) and schools with large deficits that MATs are very reluctant to take on.





# SEND 19 Network

DCS Sponsor: Kevin McDaniel (Windsor and Maidenhead)

The regional SEND Network is designed to provide opportunities for the range of professional involved in SEND to have access to professional support, up-to-date information, and the best SEND practice from the region and beyond.

Individual network groups produce guidance and share information to support challenges as they arise. For example, the network provided opportunities for colleagues to discuss and share responses to the green paper in summer 2022.

There are currently 8 network groups, reflecting the SEND agenda:

- Steering group
- Strategic SEND Leads
- Operational (EHCP) Team Managers
- DCO/DMO forum (organised and chaired by NHS colleagues)
- Inclusion (for staff promoting inclusion in mainstream schools. The group has links to Whole School SEND)
- Social Care/DCSO forum
- Post 16 development group (an amalgamation of the LA post 16 working group and post 16 providers forum)
- High Needs Budgets Forum (consists of 3 working groups – currently under review)

Task and finish groups are established where there is need. A group is currently being considered to look at issues arising from alternative provision.

The network is funded via a three-year DfE grant (2022-25) and an Improvement Plan sets out the outcomes anticipated from the work undertaken.

The network has strong links to SEND colleagues in the DfE, NHSE and regional improvement teams. Central to the work of all groups are the regional parent/carer forums who are represented at the network steering group, chaired by the DCS sponsor.

New to the network is the bi-monthly multi-agency 'forum' which is open to all involved in SEND across the region. It is co-chaired with health colleagues and has covered a range of SEND topics, as well as regular updates from regional DfE SEND Advisers.

Topics covered by the forum have included:

- Improving SEND practice in mainstream schools (NASEN)
- Successful coproduction – sharing of practice/models from regional LAs and PCFs
- The new SEND Area Inspection: sharing from

pilot LAs and presentations from DfE SEND Advisors)

- Local Offer Live (sharing of practice from PCF)
- Introduction to the South East Regions SEND team (Deputy Director and colleagues)
- RISE training offer (NDTI)
- Models for regional SEND review/challenge
- Meeting the challenge of increased demand in the context of staff shortages, particularly around Educational Psychologists
- Feedback from Tribunal and Ombudsman decisions

Since September 2022, feedback from participants has been positive and attendance at meetings is growing, with more than 80 participants at the last forum. A bi-monthly 'SEND update' is produced and circulated to all network participants.

At the time of writing, the anticipated topics for the next forum in April 2023 are:

- presentation from NHS England SEND Lead, Lorraine Mulroney: Update and priorities for the future
- (TBC) presentation from Andre Imich (DfE SEND Lead Advisor): Response to green paper consultation and the SEND Implementation Plan





# Workforce: Recruitment, Retention, Agency

## DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)

Workforce challenges continue to be amongst the most pressing faced by children's services regionally and nationally.

ADCS data from June 2022 showed that almost one in five social worker posts (19%) in council children's services were vacant, up from 14.6% a year previously in the 108 surveyed councils.

Over the same period, the proportion of agency staff in the workforce had risen from 15.6% to 16.7%.

Anecdotal reports from the sector suggest the position has worsened significantly since the survey was completed.

In the face of these issues extensive consultation took place with local authorities across the region to re-consider the South East Memorandum of Cooperation on Agency Staffing (MoC).

This included a detailed survey to recalibrate agreed pay rates and work to get every authority in the region to renew their commitment to working with the MoC.

This was successful with councils in the region recognising that competing to recruit social workers has become counterproductive

and has contributed to the increased reliance on agency staff and escalating costs.

The MoC aims to ensure a more collaborative approach to recruiting social workers and to the employment of agency staff, when necessary, with the aim of making it harder for agencies to persuade social workers to leave their permanent post with a local authority.

The MoC contains four key measures:

- An agency pay cap to stop pay rates from escalating.
- Agreement to refrain from aggressive head hunting.
- A standardised approach to references for agency staff
- A six month "cooling off" period for permanent staff moving to agency work.

As part of the project, the governance process for the MoC has been refreshed and authorities are encouraged to report any instances when they are unable to comply with the terms of the agreement.

This has improved transparency and levels of trust in the MoC.

The MoC is still under significant pressure, which has required the region to agree several exemptions. Despite this the regional DCS group have repeatedly

confirmed their commitment to try to make it work.

In addition to the MoC, a first in-depth regional strategic workforce analysis has been launched.

This project has been launched jointly with regional neighbours, The London Innovation and Improvement Alliance.

The research includes:

- Focus Groups (Social Workers, Managers, Social Work Students and Agency Staff
- Social Worker Survey (with over 1000 responses including 370 from the South East at the end of January 2023)
- Best Practice Research from other regions and partner organisations
- The research phase of the project will be completed by the end of March 2023.

The analysis will be presented at a combined South East and London report, and an analysis at regional and local authority level will be produced.

The findings from the project will be presented to the DCS group in Spring 2023 and used to develop an updated regional workforce programme.

Working jointly with the London Region has also been



helpful in engaging the DfE in productive discussion.

Working alongside ADCS and others real progress has been made in persuading the DfE the significant changes are needed to address the children's social care workforce crisis.

Through this dialogue, there is optimism that the planned changes being developed in response to the care review will bring about real sea-change.

We welcome the government's response to the Care Review and hope that it will follow through on the recommendations. We would specifically like to see the government take action to address the workforce crisis facing the sector, particularly through the proposal to introduce:

- Rules to reduce overuse of agency staff including restrictions on who can be hired and stricter adherence to regional agreements, plus funding

to help councils set up not-for-profit staff banks that would be their first port of call for hiring temporary staff.

During 2023/24 the aim is to use the insights developed from the project's regional research and analysis alongside the national changes to develop and implement a programme of work which will help our local authority partners to recruit and retain the workforce needed.

# Take Your Place: CPD for Future Leaders

## DCS Sponsor: Alison Jeffery (East Sussex)

**Take Your Place** is our approach to developing leadership skills and is open to people who want to progress to more senior roles or improve their leadership skills but are unsure if they want to move to a new job.

Market research identified ambivalence about applying for senior roles (less than 40% of those asked had active plans to apply).

The programme is flexible including experiential workshops. Participants pick and choose which elements they would like to take part in.

Since starting the project has:

- Researched the leadership CPD needs of third tier officers (including a survey of 58 managers followed by in depth interviews with 11)
- Delivered a workshop exploring common myths about leadership (presented by two serving DCSs)
- Commissioned and delivered targeted Leadership CPD for Women and Black and Asian leaders (identified as significant gap in our research)

In 2022 the first Take Your Place blended learning programme was delivered by The Staff College and was designed to incorporate learning from new ways of

*"I thought the sessions were excellent. Good discussion. Genuinely helpful"*

working developed during the Covid19 pandemic.

*"Great experiences from the presenters which made the relevance of their observations and advice more potent."*

Participants attended a two-day residential workshop, followed by a series of online workshops and ending with a face-to-face session.

*"We are all struggling with very similar issues, recruitment and retention is key to all that we do regardless of short-term funding streams".*

The programme aims were to

- Develop a strong, self-directing network of heads of service across the region.
- Reflect and develop on leadership effectiveness and provide a safe space for peer-to-peer support.
- Form a confident group of leaders who understand strategic and systems leadership.
- Individually explore a practical strategic

challenge during the programme

- Develop a pool of aspiring Assistant Directors and future Directors.

*"Really useful to take a step back and look at theory of change."*

The first cohort was attended by 24 people representing 14 of the 19 South East authorities.

The Programme included input from South East serving Local Authority Chief Executive, Lead Member for Children's Service and Director of Children's Services and provided participants with

*"It was really helpful to have the guest speakers who were able to share their experiences – especially the lead member."*

the opportunity to work through real world strategic leadership issues with the support of peers and the course facilitators. The programme also included participation in an Action Learning Set.

An evaluation of the first cohort is underway with a view to recommissioning the programme to support a further cohort in late 2023 or early 2024.



# Children Missing Education:

DCS Sponsor: Mike Stoneman, for Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)

The group collaborates to support LAs to review or develop areas of local practice:

## Research about parents who electively home educate (EHE)

Team from University of Portsmouth worked closely with group members to engage with parents who EHE to help better understand their experiences and motivations.

Ways to better communicate with parents through the process of move to EHE and, in particular, feedback to schools about importance of maintaining good dialogue through this process (for child's learning).

Continuing difficulty to maintain a constructive dialogue with parents when national policy is unclear and

social media amplifies the views of hostile parents.

## Overview of elective home education (EHE)

Continue to monitor through the education data dashboard. The group adds important detail to the raw numbers: the turnover of children in EHE has remained high since covid-19, even if increase in numbers is slower. This is destabilising for children's learning and resource intensive for LAs.

## Implementation of attendance guidance

Sharing of operation strategies in LAs. Such as continuing push for children's services colleagues to recognise school attendance as a priority and responsibility of all working with child or family. Flagging risks to ADs and to DCS group, such as:

Court backlogs are a barrier to returning to increase in enforcement activity.

Children's services colleagues retreating from commitment to attendance; obstacle to implementing education supervision orders.

## Children with mental health needs

Highlighting increasing demand for education provision by the LA due to child with medical needs (increase is almost entirely due to mental health problems).

To be monitored via the dashboard.

Strategies for mitigation include dialogue with key medical professionals and partnership with schools using AV1 robots. Report to AD Network.



# Family Safeguarding: Motivational Interviewing

DCS Sponsor: Sonia Johnson for Grainne Siggins (Bracknell Forest)

The four children's services in the partnership (Bracknell Forest (lead authority), Oxfordshire Portsmouth and Southampton) have each adopted the Family Safeguarding Model (FSM) for their children's social care work. There is a strong basis of motivational interviewing (MI) in the delivery of social work and alternatively qualified professionals as part of the model. It is rooted in the principles of the Children Act 1989 and its commitment to promote children remaining with their families where it is safe to do so.

All authorities delivered whole service training which included offering training events in MI, this included social workers, managers, senior leaders, IRO/CP chairs, early help, administration and residential staff. Information sessions and essential training was provided to partners such as the police health and business support staff as well as foster carers and foster panel members.

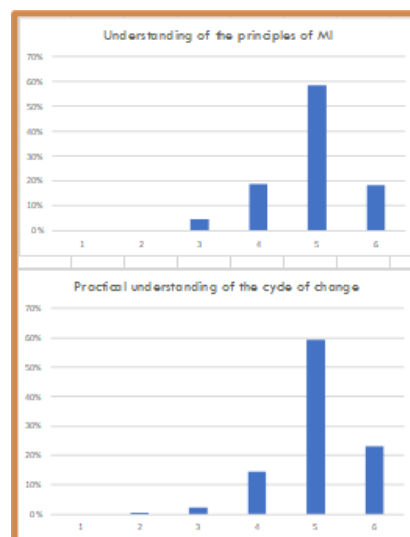
## Bracknell Forest

Across Bracknell Forest 468 staff from children's social care (CSC) and partner agencies attended one of the sixteen events in MI held during the period January to July 2022.

**MI 'champion' trainers:** In Bracknell Forest, a group of volunteers were trained in the skills to train others. Seven volunteers from CSC undertook intensive training to be able to offer the skills to new starters and offer refresher training to others. This group of champions now follow and track new starters for their first year to observe practice, feedback, review and consult to ensure that MI is positively woven into their practice. This will create a cost saving of over £20,000 per year by eliminating the need to use external MI training providers.

## Successes of the training funded by the DfE.

Below are some statistics from the two-day training

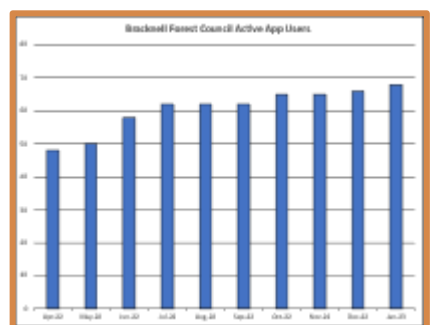


showing over 60% of staff across CSC and partners felt confident with key principles of the training after just two

days of core training. There is a plan to repeat this metric in April 2023 within CSC to understand the impact 12 months after delivery.

## MI: The App

The skills of MI improve with practice and so it is important that staff practice regularly. The company used to train delegates introduced an app for staff phones, so staff who had been trained in the MI cohorts could have access to the app. There has been a good response and take up of users across social care. This means that staff can 'polish up' on any skills and practice by using the bitesize videos and audio sessions on the app. The graph below shows that usage has been consistent since the training.



See further info on the app [here](#) [Motivational skills app – all our resources in one click | Alasdair Cant and Associates \(cambridgetraining.org\)](#).

Bracknell Forest recruited a reflective practice specialist (trained psychologist) who assisted in Family Safeguarding group case





supervision sessions to help managers and practitioners to become more reflective in their practice.

*"B (reflective specialist) worked with us on group case supervision focusing on reflective practice and how to strengthen our MI skills through supervision. This helped ensure that conversations went deeper and considered impacts on all areas of a child's life.*

*B then worked with me during 1:1 sessions to help me consider how to achieve my goals and objectives.*

*Lastly, she worked with my team to consider what we would need to be a high performing team, these sessions helped us reflect on what was and wasn't working and it gave each of us a voice in the team.*

**Team manager in Family Safeguarding**

The expert helped staff to use "Reflective Questions for Managers" materials to support focus on identifying exit criteria and maintaining focus on purposeful intervention and avoid process-oriented intervention. They were also offered one to one strengths-based coaching with the same expert which aided practice improvement and there was a full uptake up of coaching sessions from across the management team and

beyond to wider social work staff. By the end of the funded programme all managers in CSC received at least one coaching session over the period, some had as many as three.

The quality of engagement has been excellent, and this is changing confidence and practice. Qualitative feedback from managers and practitioners has been overwhelmingly positive, with specific feedback that the quality of reflection in group case supervision (GCS) a key

*I was impressed by the values led practice and the commitment to children and families demonstrated by the Family Safeguarding teams and managers Attendance was consistent at supervision and coaching sessions The return on this investment showed in changes in how reflective practice supervisions were chaired; the use of purposeful questioning and exploring of different perspectives on level of risk and capacity to change. Those who had participated reported or demonstrated changes in professional behaviour, maintained over time. This left me with optimism that staff are reflective and able to maintain their practice in a challenging area of work."*

**Reflective practice specialist**

FSM feature, has greatly improved.

**The Make-Safe Team**, who work with children who go missing and/or are at risk of exploitation, have changed the approach to Return Home Interviews to incorporate MI techniques. There was a strong impact with an **8% fall** in missing episodes in 2021/22 compared with 2020/21 and a **28% decrease** in CLA missing episodes. Whilst this cannot be attributed solely to the project, clearly the new approach has had some impact.

Following consultation with children who were frequently reported missing, Return Home Interviews were re-branded as 'Return Conversations' and a checklist of questions was replaced with a semi-structured MI to give the facilitator the opportunity to explore and address ambivalence surrounding push and pull factors. The conversational, non-judgmental approach was cited by the children as important in helping them to open up about what happened to them while missing.

### **Quotes and testimonies about MI at Bracknell Forest**

A February 2022 parents' forum group the following impact feedback was collated.

- very positive experiences of social workers
- has been listened to and that has led to a flexible response to short breaks respite package





- lifeline feels they are in a good place.
- current SW also summarises what they have talked about and checks she has understood correctly.

*especially with colleagues who are feeling stuck with a family or stressed with their job, to unpick their feelings and support them with identifying positives."*

protection and court reports. They are using the 'cycle of change' with parents and young people when they are exploring exploitation, substance misuse and mental health'.

*"I can't thank everybody that's helped us enough it's been very humbling the amount of support we've had and help getting stuff from our home help with shopping just support it's been amazing I couldn't've asked for nicer people, I feel more positive and it's helped me care better for my children it's been nothing but a positive experience and I can't thank everybody who's personally helped us"*

### Portsmouth

We have trained 19 cohorts of staff in MI with Alasdair Cant Associates to CSC, Early Help and our residential staff. Ten colleagues have been trained to become 'change agents'. These practitioners are passionate about MI and its techniques and are helping other workers to embed their learning and demonstrate impact. Taster sessions have also been provided to partners, business support and senior leaders.

A higher-grade social worker stated they used 'cost benefit analysis' when working with a dad using substances. Mother had stopped him from seeing his children, using cost benefit analysis worked well with the children's father as he recognised the impact but also the benefits of reducing his substance intake in order to see his children. Family is now closed to social care.

Feedback from staff who have been 'refreshed/retrained' in 2022 across Bracknell Forest Council, Southampton, Oxford and Portsmouth

The commissioned training events have also had a big impact on staff, who have been left feeling more confident in their practice. Some direct quotes below from staff who attended MI training:

- *"I will use MI skills developed when working with people on care and support needs to enhance independence and take responsibility for a person's growth."*
- *"In all aspects of work (and personal life). I will use it*

As part of the 'change agent' work our Academy Service Leader interviewed 44 practitioners asking them to demonstrate both verbally and in their written work how they are using the MI techniques and how it is impacting on their practice.

All practitioners interviewed have found MI training beneficial in their practice working with families.

Practitioners are using the MI in their practice and are having an impact using the structure of open questions "tell me about your life?", "what do you think are the issues?", "where would you like to be in a year's time?" They are using 'cycle of change' in supervision and referring to this model in assessments and in child

Practitioners are using 'cost benefit analysis' with parents to explore a number of issues.

Higher grade social workers state they use 'Over estimating with parents 'alcohol misuse' – more positive about themselves, bring out their strengths'. Another example was working with a young person regarding his cannabis use and he had an opportunity to attend CB Centre explored his triggers and his usage and reflected on the positives and negatives. 'The young person is doing really well at CB and has reduced his cannabis usage'. Social workers are using 'rolling with resistance' and the 'Columbo' technique and finding it really beneficial



when working with young people 'there has been lots of positive outcomes gained and lots of information obtained using these techniques'.

Practitioners are using the following MI interventions with families:

- Rolling with resistance
- Mind the gap
- Over shooting
- Devils advocate
- Panning for gold
- Positive challenge 'high support high challenge'
- Positive reframing 'Gems'
- Safe venting
- Positive Affirmation
- Internal recognition
- Columbo technique
- Drama triangle
- Reflection
- Scaling 0-5

Practitioners are listening to children, young people, parents and forming relationships to gain an understanding of their views and feelings, to assess their wellbeing and development, to explain what has or is happening to them in a number of other ways in relation to behaviour-change issues.

#### Strategic Impacts

- a new style of recording called an electronic workbook has been implemented which encourages practitioners to be purposeful with their interventions and to undertake a structured parenting assessment which focusses around the 'cycle of change'.

- a new style of multi-disciplinary group supervision has been developed which again encourages social workers and adult workers (mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse workers) to think about cycle of change as a way to identifying strengths and risks and planning for next steps.
- PCC has developed our family safeguarding approach (of which MI is a key strand) to use the concepts with the children cared for to think about reunifying children home at an earlier stage.

#### Southampton

We commissioned multiple roll outs of 2-day Introductory Training and Intermediate Training. MI sits alongside Restorative Practice and a Strengths Based Approach within our Practice Framework.

Overall, the feedback on the course suggests that it was interactive and engaging. The use of smaller groups added value within discussions and engagements, which were beneficial to the whole group.

Concepts were introduced, there were useful videos and there was time for practising the skills. There was space to talk and have open discussions reflecting on the case examples and reflecting on practice. The trainers were described as passionate and engaging.

*"It was fully packed with all the information to educate and empower!"*

*"Interesting and really made me think about how I approach listening and speaking to people"*

*"The trainer was very informative, explained things clearly and gave helpful examples. There was a good variety of teaching, interactive learning, watching clips and group activities"*

*"Lots of tools and ideas that I can use in my practice. Very interactive. I enjoyed doing it in a small group."*

*"I learnt about different tools what will be useful in my practice."*

#### How would you rate the overall training?

10 Very Satisfied	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1 very unsatisfied
64%	24%	9%			3%				



*"Refreshing: it renewed my commitment to use the skills and to learn more on the intermediate course."*

*It explained things very well, and provided constructive feedback in a nice way."*

### Examples of MI techniques:

#### Example 1

I was supporting a mother with a 10-month-old baby. The home environment was described as unclean, cluttered and unsafe. The baby was observed wearing unclean clothing. The baby had been supported by child protection planning under the category of neglect pre-birth.

The mother was aware that the home conditions needed improving and following practical support in the home, there would be a brief, but unsustained, improvement.

A powerful aspect of using MI was exploring motivation. We reflected on other change behaviours she had experienced. She identified that her biggest motivation to change was to have a 'normal' life with her baby without Children's Services intervention.

We explored what, for her, was good about the behaviour and what was not so good. I used lots of open questioning and affirmations.

The mother independently made changes that were sustained for a period of five weeks and contributed to a step down to child in need

planning. Recently, the mother had been very excited to show me the home conditions as she had sustained the improvement.

#### Example 2

I began working with a mother due to her children being placed on child in need plans. Concerns were around her alcoholism and her placing adult expectations on the children. The target behaviour for our MI session was rebuilding her relationship with her daughter. The mother has shown ambivalence towards this on several occasions. I used MI techniques to encourage the mother to rebuild a healthy relationship with her daughter, alongside building her confidence and self-efficacy.

I asked open questions, encouraging a substantial contribution from the mother. For instance, asking for her expertise on how SWs could support her in rebuilding the relationship. This steered the conversation on to change talk regarding her planning to go for a coffee with her daughter. She shared her use of meditation as a coping strategy. In turn, this appeared to support the mother's confidence through her mentioning "I have changed so much" and "this will make me a better parent and grandparent".

#### Example 3

'I just wanted to share some lovely feedback a SW received in a child protection

conference this morning. The mother couldn't have been more complimentary of the support, guidance and impact the SW had on her family, attributing her abstinence and the children's improved situation to his genuine interest in their wellbeing. It was apparent to me that the SW had developed an effective working relationship with the family, based on mutual respect, openness, and integrity. The mother mentioned on several occasions that the SW was great and amazing. Given this family's journey with CSC over the last five years, this is a real testament and an example of excellent, relationship based social work.'

#### Example 4

From reading the young person's file on the electronic recording system it is clear to see the relationship the SW has built with them and their family. There had been time and effort put into capturing the child's wishes and feelings, even when things were difficult with attention and care. Not having any involvement with the family, I was able to see the clear progress that they have made, and this has been recorded in a way that the child can come back in future years and see all the steps taken by the SW.

The SW appeared to be inquisitive, remained professionally curious and reflective in her recording and her work with the family. We felt that this practice, shows



when work is done alongside families then they may benefit from this help and enhance their lived experiences.

### Oxfordshire

We were part way through a project to move to the Family Safeguarding Model of working when the pandemic hit.

Family Safeguarding is a model of practice that involves the development of multi-disciplinary teams within CSC. This includes adult facing practitioners, who are experts in working with challenges around children's safeguarding, particularly the compounding factors to risk of harm known as the 'trio of vulnerabilities' (domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health). A key component of the model is MI, 'a client-centred, directive therapeutic style to enhance readiness for change'; (Rollnick and Miller, 1995) as a framework for practice for all staff.

Family Safeguarding is expected to achieve better outcomes for children, young people and adult carers by supporting keeping families together and help reduce the number of children and young people in care.

An extensive programme of MI training was integral to the transition to the new model of working. The programme of training was adapted and moved to a virtual approach to enable its continuation during the pandemic. As a result we have been able to deliver

training to senior leaders, managers, social work practitioners at all levels, adult facing practitioners and support staff to use MI as key element of our practice framework.

The positive impact of the use of MI in practice is starting to be apparent through examples provided by practitioners during career progression panels and feedback from colleagues

*"We reflected on the session and how the outcome could have been very different (we fully expected to have the door closed to us), but the use of MI techniques and 'panning for gold' helped establish a positive regard which in turn created some shift to enable a way forward. The SW recognised the father's own experiences and how they impact on his views of the world and was trauma-informed in her approach."*

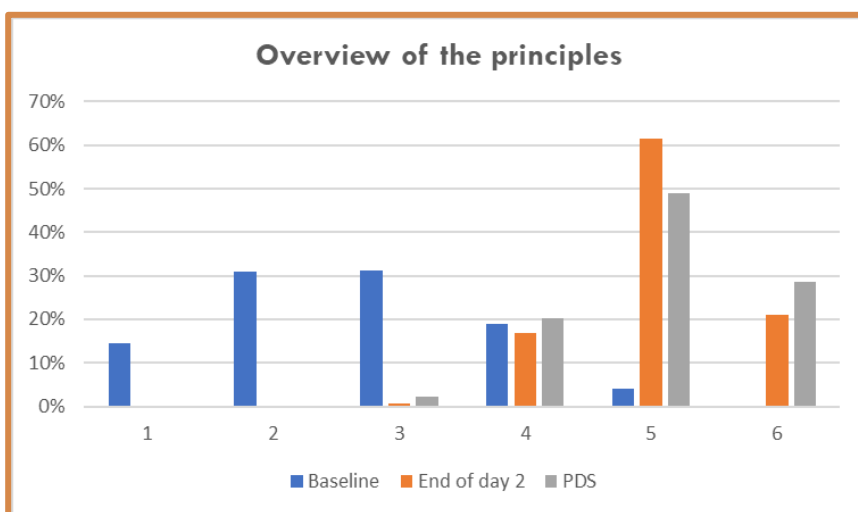
**Extract from a direct observation by manager**

who have attended the reflective sessions a month or so after their training.

*"I use MI techniques naturally within my conversations with people (particularly with families and service users) because it fits with who I am and how I work. I don't often think about how or why I'm using those techniques. However, thinking about this way of working within a theoretical framework gives me more focus and structure, and; a bit more courage in my convictions and my style of gentle, non-threatening challenge."*

*"Supporting my supervisees to work through their cases and to reconsider where the clients are on their cycles of change and how their interventions can be better planned for helping clients to make progress."*

**Reflections after training**





# Family Safeguarding: Pre-birth Pandemic Caseload

DCS Sponsor: Sonia Johnson for Grainne Siggins (Bracknell Forest)

## Aims

We experienced a pandemic surge in the pre-birth caseload and the aim of this project was to respond in the window of opportunity there was to create change at pre-birth stage. We planned to use Family Safeguarding ethos, group work and, in the longer term, to create a specialist pod for pre-birth work.

## Project update

The project aims were to reduce the likelihood of (recurrent) care proceedings through equipping parents with the resources and skills to safely care. A family worker was appointed to work alongside any social workers who are case allocated. The secure base relational model has been used to work collaboratively with expectant parents as well as ensuring fathers are included in the work.

Support Groups (including Dads group) set up and successfully running supported by full time family worker with support from staff across domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse teams.

We used a coaching approach to support parents to manage

difficulties. This project increased engagement with fathers and through the group work for both parents has enabled sustainable change.

We will establish a group for the parents of under-fives to offer continued support to those who been closed to the project in order to mitigate the risk of re-referrals into social care.

Bespoke Training offered to parents who fit the cohort e.g., baby massage, bumps and babies, new mum, understanding your baby, first aid including choking, resuscitation, burns, minor injuries, health visitor for weaning support, fuel poverty support on offer support in applying for support for saving on energy, sun and heat safety, cold weather safety,

The training on offer to parents (or parents to be) includes the 'journey to parenthood' course which is delivered through the weeks of pregnancy and the 'understanding your baby' course once the child is born.

## Impact and improvements

Families have reported feeling supported and empowered to

make changes and have felt a new-found confidence not only in raising their baby and attending health clinics but also in socialising with other parents and the wider community as well as feeling more comfortable around social care staff.

Courses can be offered to suit need in the group on an ad hoc basis to ensure that it's not overwhelming for the parents, either from the lead of the groups or from guest professionals.

Parents state that the under one's project has supported them to grow. Several parents fed back similar views, knowing everyone in attendance is open to CSC they felt less judged. This has enabled parents to build confidence in asking for support and created the opportunity for deeper trust with staff and enabled new friendships with other parents. Parents have also supported each other and reassured families newly open to CSC that they can be supported.

This project has had great impact with parents who feel isolated and anxious to leave the home. Building their confidence, these parents



have gone on to attend bumps and babies and other groups. A group to support Dads in meeting other Dads and spending one-to-one time with their babies was created. We commissioned external support for groups such as first aid and baby massage, which were popular with the parents.

We started a weekly 'giving table' to give parents the opportunity to acquire items for their babies which they may otherwise have struggled to purchase themselves. Staff also were on hand to help buy and build hospital bags for expectant parents. This was such a game changer for some who were struggling financially to prepare a bag with the right items for birth.

Support for parents who are unable to read or write, e.g., support and coaching offered on calling 999 and understanding any direction from call handlers.

### Feedback from Parents via collected questionnaires

We have collected positive comments about staff running the groups and parents report feeling more confident. Parents have become more socially active with other parents and their learning and knowledge around childcare has increased. Two mums volunteered to help with running the groups from autumn 2022 and offered their experiences which gave

further confidence to the group participants.

### Examples of Family successes

Since joining the project, a Mum and baby have returned home from a mother and baby foster placement. The project offered additional support which has included group support at Bumps and Babies and Dads group.

One of the Dads has additional needs and has begun first aid training. A folder of visual aids supports this Dad in his learning. Both parents have formed positive relationships with other parents which has built their confidence. Before this Dad needed to be supervised at **all** times with his son. Due to Dad's increase in knowledge and confidence this is now being reduced. The baby, now 10 months old, has been able to socialise and discover environments he didn't used to enjoy. This includes loud sounds and crowded rooms. He has continued to develop well. The family have stepped down to a 12-month supervision order.

One Mum, who never attended groups, although this was recommended by both CSC and school, attended Bumps and Babies every week for over 6 months. Mum reports being able to build a relationship gave her the confidence to step out of her comfort zone and attend groups. Previously this Mum had felt judged which created a barrier. Mum reports that both she and her children,

9yrs, 3yrs and 9m, have enjoyed attending group, learning, sharing experience and socialising in a supportive non-judgmental environment. This family have stepped down from PLO to CiN with the plan to close at next review. This Mum will be offered the opportunity to continue attending group as a volunteer to support other parents.

### Impact feedback from participants collected from satisfaction questionnaires.

- Parents comment they can be themselves and express fears.
- Parents/mothers return after they have had their baby as they enjoy the group.
- Building relationships of support in the group and report feeling less isolated
- Swapping and exchanging of quality baby items, e.g., prams, bouncing seats, toys, clothes
- Praise for the staff running the training and groups.
- Parents able to request both practical and emotional support.
- Babies able to socialise with other babies where parents were anxious to attend other baby groups.
- Trips and events arranged to places such as soft play and community events.
- Transport supported by the project to enable parents who otherwise wouldn't be able to attend





# Safeguarding Infants – Born into Care Pilot

## DCS Sponsor: Alison Jeffery (East Sussex)

### Pilot

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund, Foundations extended its offer to include pre-birth pregnancy support and preparation for social work assessment to vulnerable parents. This targeted offer recognises that unmet trauma can contribute to poorer outcomes. We hope that by extending the service to expectant parents, parental stability and readiness to prioritise their baby's needs can be improved. This will further reduce the numbers of babies requiring parent and baby placement, on child protection plans or in care proceedings. The extended service is being delivered by an experienced and skilled

Since 2014, the Foundations service has helped men and women who have had children removed from their care. It reduces the likelihood of future care proceedings by offering contraception and enabling them to make positive changes. In their lives Where progress is achieved, parents may decide to have children in the future. The service will help them demonstrate the positive changes made and reduce the chances of children being removed from their care in the future.

practitioner who is delivering a bespoke offer to pregnant women who are referred for level 4 pre-birth assessment where safeguarding concerns exist regarding their unborn child. We provide an intensive tailored intervention working alongside the case holding social worker with the aim of avoiding separation or proceedings.

### Outcomes

A referral pathway has been established for health and social care colleagues.

A pre-birth practitioner has been appointed from January 2022. 13 families have actively engaged with the service and primary indicators look promising.

The manager of the foundations service and the pre-birth practitioner are both contributing to the pre-birth community of practice.

We have shared learning from the research via a Born into Care webinar for health and social care colleagues in East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

A parent appeared live on another Born into Care webinar delivered by the Family Justice Circle for judges and other stakeholders in East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.

### Interventions offered:

Total individuals worked with 16 (3 men)  
Total families actively worked with 13  
Babies born: 9  
Babies removed from parental care to date: 0  
Currently Pregnant: 4

- healthy relationships,
- parenting skills,
- psychotherapeutic sessions,
- emotional regulation,
- substance use
- psychosocial intervention including testing,
- budgeting,
- sexual risk intervention,
- protective behaviours,
- self-esteem,
- life story trauma work,
- tree of life work,
- video interactive guidance,
- housing liaison including refuge access,
- stabilisation.

### Referrals:

Total referrals to the service: 104.

Not all referrals were found to be appropriate because of other team involvements.

### Partnership Response

The introduction of the extended Foundations Service offer has been well received within East Sussex by both health and social care.

The referral pathway is working well and in addition to client work the pre-birth practitioner has been providing consultation to social work colleagues, raising the profile of the service through delivery of presentations, and promoting the findings from the Born into Care research.

### Nature of Risk

The profile of needs for the families that are currently working with the pre-birth service largely relate to concerns around past trauma, domestic abuse, poor mental health, sexual risk, poor physical health, and substance misuse.

### Next Steps

From the outcomes achieved we can demonstrate that a skilled pre-birth practitioner is a very useful resource to offer to parents presenting with known risks and with previous social care involvement.

Presenting parental issue	Parent's ethnicity and gender	Threshold	Previous removal	Outcome	Foundations Status
Domestic abuse, Mental ill health, Learning needs, Trauma	White British Female	Child Protection	2	Baby at home. Case now closed	Open
Trauma, Substance misuse Young parent	White British Female	Child Protection	0	Baby at home on CP plan	Open
Trauma, Domestic abuse, Learning needs, Mental ill health	White British Female	Child Protection	1	Baby at home on CP plan	Open
Learning disability, Mental ill health	White British Male	Child Protection	0	Baby at home on CP plan	Open
Domestic abuse, Mental ill health, Sexual risk	White British Female	Child Protection	0	Baby at home on CP plan	Open
Domestic abuse, Mental ill health, Sexual risk, Substance misuse, Criminality, Trauma	White British Male	Child Protection	3	Baby at home on CP plan	Open
Domestic abuse, Learning needs, Physical disability, Mental ill health, Trauma	White British Female	Child in Need	0	Baby at home case now closed	Closed
Mental ill health, Domestic abuse, Trauma	White British Female	Child Protection	1	Baby at home, current CIN status	Open
Mental ill health, Learning needs, Domestic abuse, Trauma	White British Female	Child Protection	1	Baby at home, now CIN	Open
Mental ill health, Substance misuse, Domestic abuse	White British Female	Child Protection	3	Baby at home on CP plan	Open
Mental ill health, Domestic abuse, Trauma	White British Female	Child Protection	2	EDD May 2023	Open
Mental ill health, Substance misuse, Domestic abuse	White British Male	Child Protection	0	Baby at home on CP plan	Open
Mental ill health, Learning Disability, Domestic abuse, Trauma	White British Female	Child Protection	5	EDD May 2023	Open
Mental ill health, Domestic abuse, Substance misuse, Trauma	White British Female	Child Protection	2	EDD May 2023	Open
Mental ill health, Trauma, Substance misuse, Criminality	White British Male	Child Protection	0	EDD Feb 2023	Open
Mental ill health, Criminality, Domestic abuse, Sexual risk	White British Female	Child Protection	0	Baby at home, case is CIN	Closed



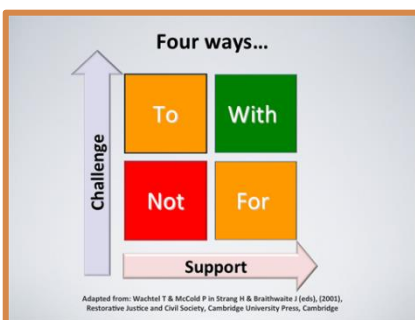
# Safeguarding Adolescents from Extra Familial Harm

DCS Sponsor: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)

**Restorative practice** provides a framework for creating and sustaining a school climate where teaching and learning can take place effectively and where students and adults can thrive as they learn from each other.

Creating a relational and restorative school is a deliberate act of design that flows through structure, policies, procedures, and everyday interactions.

Relational practice describes a way of being which enables healthy relationships to be built and maintained. It promotes a whole-school ethos. This includes a range of approaches to managing conflict and tensions that repairs harm and mends relationships if and when these break down.



The underlying premise of restorative practices rests with the belief that people will make positive changes when those in positions of authority work *with* them, rather than

doing things *to* them or *for* them. We do this with a combination of high challenge and high support. "Challenge" does not mean confrontation, but setting, rules, limits, and expectations. There are consequences to actions, concerns are expressed openly and honestly, both responsibility and accountability are encouraged. "Support" includes ensuring people have the tools to meet the expectations and are shown empathy, encouragement, compassion, kindness and respect.

## Relational Practice

Trafalgar School (part of Salterns Academy Trust) has exemplified what can be achieved through a whole-school approach to relational practice. A measurable impact is the extremely low rate of suspensions. In 2020/21 and 2021/22 the school recorded just two compared to mainstream secondary school averages of 95 and 120 in the two years.

From January 2022, several schools in Portsmouth have been working with Trafalgar as the first "wave" to further develop relational and restorative practice.

We now have funding for waves two and three over

three years. Our aim is to develop a whole school relational culture which will become, *"the way we do things in Portsmouth"*.

One important part of this practice is the use of questions (often five) to enable others to share their perspective, express emotions, understand impact and find a solution.

What happened?  
What were you thinking or feeling?  
Who is affected?  
How are they affected?  
What needs to happen to make it better?

Eleven schools have begun the journey and a further 20 schools are engaging in relational practice, such that half of Portsmouth's schools 31/ 61 are working in this way. This is in addition to the work across children's services. The result is that there are more consistent ways of working with children, young people and families and professionals are using more consistent language which better facilitates working together.

We received financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund.



# Lifelong Links South East

DCS Sponsor: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)

## Lifelong Links

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund East Sussex, Kent, Oxfordshire and Portsmouth have spent the last year developing their knowledge and services implementing of Lifelong Links. This project aims to ensure that a child in care has a positive support network around them to help them during their time in care and into adulthood.

The model includes tools and techniques for coordinators to use to find family members (known or unknown to the young person) and other adults (such as former foster carers or teachers) who care about the young person.

This network is then brought together in a **family group conference** to make a life-long support plan with, and for, the young person. This work has been supported by Family Rights Group who have supported over 17 other Local Authority areas in rolling out Lifelong Links.

## Portsmouth City Council

We are unique in the way that the team delivers this service: our co-ordinators are commissioned through the authority's work with Daybreak (our commissioned Family Group Conference provider). In the past 12 months we have been able to achieve the following:

- four Daybreak coordinators trained.
- a local multi-agency implementation group
- awareness raising and promotional activities have taken place with stakeholders,
- two young people have completed their Lifelong Links journey (seven more underway).
- We have finalised a business case to embed Lifelong Links as BAU
- created a seven-minute video guide for practitioners; and recorded a practice session.
- delivered two lunchtime, and a one-year celebration, events attended by 70 professionals
- produced resources for foster carers and provided three workshops
- encourage children and young people to feed into evaluation
- established a steering group involving the children in care council and stakeholders from parts of the service. We plan to involve the foster carers
- completed twelve Lifelong Links conferences with twelve more planned

Family Rights Group have helped shape our approach to reunification; and our thinking about how we can change our culture to achieve a greater emphasis on a child's personal network at an earlier stage.

*Kent and Portsmouth spoke at an international conference about the work both authorities are doing to embed Lifelong Links and support reunification at an organisational level.*

## Oxfordshire County Council

Our project focused on ten requests from one team. We:

- trained five extra coordinators, creating a total of twelve
- recorded a video 'starring' a child, their foster carer and social worker talking about the impact of Lifelong Links

Our Steering Group's priorities are:

- including all the children we care for in the offer of a Lifelong Links conference
- embedding Lifelong Links into the culture and practice of the whole service
- working with the Family Rights Group to evaluate our project

## Kent County Council

On average we receive more than ten referrals each month resulting in support and better outcomes for our children in care.



We have been running regular events for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people increasing their contact and cementing connections. In 2022 we arranged eleven Lifelong Links conferences for this group.



On average 32 young people attend each event, with 44 on

the trip to Chessington. We are planning nine events for this year.



At an event at the Tonbridge Youth Hub, two young people were reunited for the first time since leaving their village in Afghanistan (one young man had been trafficked), and two young men from Syria were reunited.

At another event at Ashford one young person stated it had been nine months since

he was able to use his own language.



We have provided mentors for colleagues in Portsmouth and East Sussex, and shared our learning related to structure and practice. We have attended the Portsmouth Steering Group and arranged for our coordinators to share their learning around searching, working with SGO and adoption breakdowns and working with UASC with newly training coordinators in Portsmouth.



# South East Family Hub Development

DCS Sponsor: Steve Crocker (Hampshire and Isle of Wight)

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund, we recruited a co-ordinator to lead the development the Family hub model alongside the National Centre for Family Hubs (NCFH).

This work started in December 2021 and ran for 12 months. We offered bespoke support to each local authority (LA) in the region. We established a regional community of practice, which promoted co-production between LAs and support through regular newsletters, workshops, and visits.

*"I just wanted to say a massive thank you for presenting in person at our conference. Everyone was really engaged and there was a real buzz in the room. I really appreciate you giving up your time and helping us".*

**Head of Service**

The 12-month project has now ended and we will continue the work through a variety of links between LAs.

## Project impact

The community of practice is well established, with several LAs continuing to provide peer support to each other and to regions.

Workshop themes were co-produced and facilitated with the LAs. The feedback was positive and on average, sixteen (84%) LAs attended. Neighbouring regions also attended the workshops and virtual visits, supporting the development in both the East and the South West.

*Out of the 19 LAs in the South East, 17 have engaged with the project, to either implement or further enhance their offer to families within their communities. This equates to more than 89% engagement rate.*

The regional work has been recognised nationally as an example of best practice from the NCFH and DfE. Much of the reporting and project planning used within the region has been shared more widely to assist other LAs

*"I thought the blog in the newsletter was spot on - exactly the conversations we are having as an LA. We do not want the buildings to be spaces where services deliver in isolation. Integration across the partners is key. Big culture changes required - exciting stuff"!*

**Service Manager**

wishing to adopt the Family Hub model.

*"I wanted to express my ongoing appreciation for everything that the project has achieved. Your regional lead has energy, expertise, and determination, they have made an enormous difference to local authorities in the South East and their capacity to develop family hubs. We work very closely, but I also work across the south west and the east of England, so I have observed at first hand the different way in which the lead has approached their role and the relative advantage this has given to those developing family hubs in your region".*

**Regional Lead – National Centre for Family Hubs**

The monthly newsletters were co-produced with the NCFH. They included opportunities for LAs to write blogs on current Family Hub queries and were well received.





# Accelerated Family Hubs

DCS Sponsor: Steve Crocker (Hampshire and Isle of Wight)

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund, we helped families to engage or re-engage in community resources and support through outreach provision.

We launched a bidding round of community capacity grants to third sector providers. After a competitive process, six community providers were awarded funding to deliver outreach and targeted family support. The grant allocations ran from July 2021 for 12 months.

In addition to the grant awards, we commissioned a new lead professional post for 12 months from July 2021. The post supports families at universal and early help, preventing escalation to tiers 3 and 4, focusing on families most affected by the pandemic.

The successful providers, and their impact to date are:

## Community Activators

Supporting families to connect with local support in their towns and villages, as well as virtual, island-wide support.

Two new partnership stay and play groups established in areas of need.

## Bumpstart

Small, targeted parenting sessions for expectant parents. Working with eleven families a month, (target was eight).

## Virtual Libraries

Virtual support within libraries with volunteer and staffing support. Implementation of the Bookstart Treasure Pack for areas of greatest need across the island.

*Isle of Wight has an ongoing financial commitment to the Community Capacity Grant programme and will continue to support community groups to apply for future funding to sustain their work with families.*

## Wild @ Heart

Counselling and group work with parents and carers, improving mental health and wellbeing and connecting families to outdoor spaces within their communities.

Delivered sessions to 188 families since September 2021.

## Family Connections

One-to-one and group parenting sessions in schools and the community, supporting families not accessing early help or social care.

Established online and in person parenting courses covering three localities, with 62 families completing the six-week course.

*"Thank you, you definitely are helping the family and us as a school, you are the voice of reason."*

**Family Liaison Officer**

## Tidal

Creating a community space for families to drop in and access advice and signposting for family support, such as debt management and food banks.

Engaged five schools who are signposting families to the service, which exceeds the target of three within the first quarter.



# Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children National Transfer Scheme Manager

DCS Sponsor: Steve Crocker (Hampshire and Isle of Wight)

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund, we appointed a manager and placement officer with the aim of increasing local authority (LA) participation in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

The project began with an exploratory phase, to better understand the regional situation for LAs and asylum-seeking young people.

Common themes emerged with the most widespread issue identified being children placed out-of-area, caused by the lack of UASC placements within local authority boundaries.

*71% of UASC placed in foster care were in locations outside the responsible LA's boundary.*

This is an issue particularly prevalent in relation to foster care placements. Such placements presented local authorities with many difficulties including:

- impact on social worker time to complete statutory visits due to travelling distances and diminished ability to respond to crisis situations

- strained education and health services in areas with high concentrations of asylum-seekers
- delays in accessing additional support services in locations unfamiliar to caseworkers
- care leavers being unable to access social housing in the area local to their placements due to not having a 'local connection' resulting in budgetary overspend to maintain placements and minimise disruption to young people

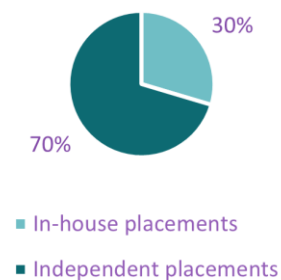
This causes a bottleneck, preventing the desired 'flow' of young people achieving independence and creating placement capacity for new arrivals.

During this phase, in response to the high numbers of asylum-seekers entering the UK, the Home Office increased the number of UASC for whom each local authority was responsible from 0.07% to 0.1% of the child population.

Our research showed that 70% of all UASC placements were commissioned from independent providers.

In the second phase, we set out to engage with the market by holding a series of provider events.

In-House & Independent UASC Placements



A variety of speakers were arranged aiming to raise awareness of regional issues, clarify processes, challenge misconceptions, and share success stories and examples of good practice.

Over 100 delegates registered for the events, including representatives from around 60 placement providers.

The events were positively received and have been a catalyst for ongoing discussions with providers.

In the current phase, the project is continuing to help independent providers understand the LAs' needs and offer guidance regarding regional market expansion.

We are acting as a conduit for placement vacancy information to ensure LAs can benefit from all possible placement opportunities.

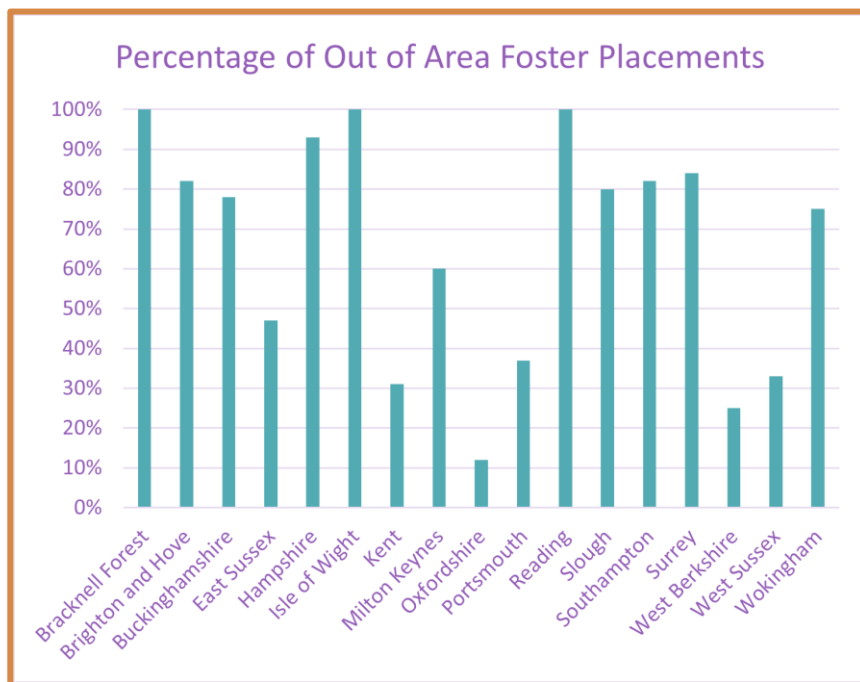
Moving forward, the project is looking to address other concerns identified by local authorities, such as the variation in the quality of support offered to UASC by independent providers.

A training needs survey was sent to providers, with responses evidencing a clear appetite for training opportunities in relation to UASC needs.

The project will look to identify existing training that can be shared with independent providers.

An information pack is being developed which will give foster carers and support workers an introduction to the needs of UASC and raise awareness of available support services.

Feedback from some independent fostering agencies confirms work now taking place to increase foster



carer recruitment in the region.

As this work is in the early stages, it is difficult to predict how many additional placements this will result in, but the project will monitor any regional growth.

Through the work with independent providers, the

increase in placement availability will mean more children will be placed within the boundary of their local authority, resulting in more consistent care and better access to local support services.

# Small Packages of Sector Led Improvement

## DCS Sponsor: Steve Crocker (Hampshire and Isle of Wight)

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund, we coordinate the small packages of sector led improvement support on behalf of the region.

The grant covers up to four packages of support each year for other local authorities, for a maximum of 39 days each.

Our model for improvement uses a blended team of subject matter experts. This has ensured the highest quality of support to the recipients as well as subject matter experts taking learning back to their local authority.

This impact report will cover the three completed packages. Further packages are underway, and planning has begun for future years.

### Reading Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC)

Collaborative auditing took place over five days (June 2022), with the auditing team comprising experienced managers from Hampshire and West Sussex.

Fifty cases were audited from different teams including children with disabilities, children in care and care leavers.

Conducting the audits collaboratively with Reading staff enabled reflective conversations and learning to take place.

Through the identification of several unregulated

placements, additional constructive conversations about contextual safeguarding took place, including how practitioners' use of additional tools can enhance assessment, oversight, and planning.

One Care Leaver Team Manager took learning back to their team, drawing up an action plan to think about their own OFSTED preparations. *"there were some good referral processes in place using local contacts and organisations which allowed support to be identified and actioned in a timely way to meet the needs of young people"*

**Care Leaver, Team Manager**

Recommendations covered:

- unregulated placements
- the safeguarding toolkit to.
- life story work
- dip sampling
- targeted auditing and management oversight.

### Wokingham

This small package provided peer support and challenge of the care leavers and children in care services.

The team comprised eight people from Hampshire and Slough.

We focused on four areas identified by Wokingham for improvement:

- pathway planning and transitions
- the progression of care leavers
- the impact of the IRO Service, and
- supervision and management oversight.

*"My 3-day engagement with this regional review was very well planned with excellent support and data provided, as required, and timed to enable opportunity to reflect and discuss learning during the review."*

**Slough Team Manager**

Recommendations covered:

- use of graphics and images in pathway plans
- translation of pathway plans for asylum seeking young people
- SMART planning
- care leaver criteria
- supervision recording
- Wokingham practice model
- data dashboards
- window into practice
- communication plans

### Medway

We provided support to Medway in two areas:

- 1) To better use and understand the intelligence around the use of data



(expertise provided by East Sussex Data Manager). Through this work Medway now understands the best possible intelligence they can get from their data in its current structure. They have acquired knowledge of Power BI to better share and evidence good practice within the service and have been

*Verbal feedback from the Medway Head of Improvement stated that the coaching sessions have been invaluable in helping the new Commissioning Manager know how to run his team and upskill his managers.*

supported to improve their strategic reports.

2) Supporting the Commissioning Manager of external placements through peer coaching/mentoring.

Six peer coaching/mentoring sessions have been held to provide critical friend support in specific areas.



# Reducing Court Backlog Training

DCS Sponsor: Steve Crocker (Hampshire and Isle of Wight)

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund, we organised Reducing Court Backlog training for the region.

The workshops covered the following areas:

- child protection processes
- PLO processes
- discussion regarding the required court papers and proceedings.

Ten of the nineteen Local Authorities (LAs) took up the opportunity to attend the training.

Different LAs had different approaches when considering the application of the PLO processes.

The workshops enabled a wider understanding, knowledge, and benefits of sharing good practice around the use of the toolkit going forward.

Most LAs in the region have a toolkit embedded within their working practices reflecting the PLO national guidance.

However, those that did not, took away the learning from the workshop with a view to adopting and embedding a toolkit, to lead to improved practice.

The feedback provided by those attending confirmed that they would ensure the

toolkit is disseminated within their own teams.

They will change working practices to ensure work was undertaken in child protection planning to avoid the Court arena, and ensure, where possible, risk is managed in the community with LA support.

This will require early intervention and support from families in ensuring children are prioritised.

When asked what they will do differently following the training, answers included: *I will "ensure the handbook / toolkit is disseminated within my teams."*

*"The importance of working proactively such as exploring family support at earlier stages rather than exploring family options for alternative carers later in proceedings."*

*"Looking at how we can comply with recommendations for even shorter PLO timescales."*

The impact of which will be a more positive experience for the child and family, as well as reducing costs.

Those with toolkits already in place shared good practice with the group.

All the attendees said they would recommend the training to other Local Authorities:

*"It was "helpful to meet with other local authorities to share ideas and consider different processes and ways of working."*

*"Good to link with other LAs to share learning."*

The workshops provided an opportunity to share and exchange ideas about working practices, across the region.

Those in attendance reflected on their processes and considered how to reduce risk, support families, and enable wider family engagement to make sure plans were understood – all positive impacts to the service provided.

It is worth noting that the impacts of the changes that the LAs are planning on making following the training, will take time to work through the system.

# Inside Out

DCS Sponsor: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund, we worked with eleven Local Authorities (LAs) and the regional fostering group.

The LAs delivered a range of interventions all designed to prevent placement breakdown which included weekends or weeks away, Video Interaction Guidance (VIG), trauma-informed therapy, psychotherapy and other therapeutic interventions. The recipients of the intervention included children and young people; foster carers; kinship carers; and the birth children of foster carers.

Overall, there were 56 beneficiaries across the region and of those placements 51 remained in place at the end of the project, a 91% success rate, with an estimated associated savings in the region of £1m annually.

However, it should be noted that some LAs changed their cohort midway through so this success rate is likely inflated. Carers were surveyed at the start of the project and at the end. Their perceptions had improved on how well supported they felt 4.4 out of 5 (up from 3.9 at the start) and in relation to placement stability (4.4 out of 5 up from 4.1 at the start).

Their feedback had stayed the same on their own wellbeing (3.9 out of 5) and their own confidence in their ability to manage any challenging behaviours of the child placed with them (4.2 out of 5).

Seven out of eleven projects are being continued as part of the core offer. Other LAs had more difficulty with getting their Inside Out projects up and running. The LAs that had more success with their interventions had:

- consistent project manager or social care leads who were able to identify cases and get other workers on board for participating in the project
- a clear vision of what they were trying to test with their Inside Out intervention
- LA leads with sufficient capacity to take forward the project (some LAs struggled due to staffing changes, restructures and performance issues)
- carefully selected cases ensuring that case-working

social workers were brought in to the interventions.

Some LAs chose a single consistent intervention (i.e., all

*"Things have been going well. VIG has been a useful tool it has allowed special guardians to have that moment to consider their interactions with the children. It has given them snapshots of them at their very best. For example, whereas before grandparents wouldn't call out behaviour for fear of upsetting them [the birth parents] or being called discriminatory it has given them new language. They are no longer at breaking point. We are going to use this and take it to the fostering service as an intervention. We will continue to use in SG. We already have agreement to continue the hours."*

**West Sussex**

*"Three cases were absolutely on the edge of the breakdown which has been prevented which is fantastic. One of the carers has said 'This is pure gold' ... She was close to breakdown, compassion fatigue."*

**Surrey**

recipients received the same thing to try to prevent placement breakdown); other LAs had a range of interventions which were highly tailored to the needs of the family. There was no correlation between whether the intervention was successful and whether there was consistency or tailoring in place. None of the LAs that are



continuing with the Inside Out intervention have chosen a budget allocated for highly tailored, one-off interventions.

The LAs that chose to use Inside Out to work with kinship carers or a mix of kinship carers and foster carers (Bucks, Kent, Surrey, Achieving for Children and West Sussex) reflected that the carers felt highly motivated to prevent placement breakdown, and it may be that there is merit in therapeutic and other interventions which are focused on this cohort of carers going forward.

*"We had a young person whose placement had broken down. He was on the way to very expensive residential placement... We ended up placing with single male carer newly approved and put extra capacity in through Inside Out and he is smashing it. The empowerment training is about empowering carers to empower young people drawing on neuroscience it works visually and has clear strategies. They don't necessarily want the reasons or the theory. The carer was self-employed and had to say no to work at the beginning of the placement. Through Inside Out we gave him £1700 for 6 weeks to recognise the impact on his self-employment and that we couldn't place another child in the spare bedroom whilst this young person was settling. As a consequence of this we have agreed to the enhance fee for carers over the short term for when they are taking kids stepping up or down into residential."*

**Brighton and Hove**

Local authority	Number of cases in cohort	Number that did not break down and remained in place	Is Inside Out initiative carrying on in the LA	Was inside out a tailored or standard intervention
Bracknell Forest	4	4	Yes	Standard
Brighton & Hove	5	5	Yes	Tailored
Buckinghamshire	4	2	No	Tailored
Hampshire	2	2	No	Standard
Kent	5	4	Yes	Standard
Milton Keynes	5	4	Yes	Standard
Reading (BFfC)	11	11	Yes	Tailored
Surrey	5	5	Yes	Standard
Windsor&Mhd (AfC)	5	4	No	Tailored
West Sussex	5	5	Yes	Standard
Wokingham	5	5	Not decided	Standard
Total	51	56	7	7 Standard 4 Tailored

# Mockingbird

DCS Sponsor: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund and led by The Fostering Network we rolled-out take-up of the Mockingbird project. It delivers sustainable foster care, and is an evidence-based model structured around the support and relationships an extended family provides.

**Bracknell Forest** are continuing to move through the implementation process but have been slowed by staff capacity and internal transformation programmes. They are meeting with their Mockingbird coach on 2/2/2023 to confirm timelines for launch.

The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community.

**Buckinghamshire** launched constellation 1 on 01/10/22. This constellation is going well, and the service have identified a hub home carer for their second constellation.

The Fostering Network are currently working with 63 services across the UK to

deliver Mockingbird, four of these are in the South East – Oxfordshire, Portsmouth, Slough and Surrey.

**West Sussex** launched constellation 1 on 27/10/22. This constellation is going well, and the service are planning recruitment activities for a hub home carer for their second constellation in February.

The programme follows a specific methodology which increases the resilience of foster carers and helps prevent placement breakdown.

It does this by grouping fostering families together in constellation communities of six to ten satellite households. This acts as an extended family network for the carers and children in each satellite.

**Wokingham** are continuing to move through the implementation process and are hoping to launch their first constellation in April/May 2023.

Each satellite has a 'hub home carer' who builds strong relationships with everyone in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to

**Achieving For Children (Windsor and Maidenhead)** were a new addition mid-2022. The implementation is underway. A timeline for their launch is yet to be confirmed but likely to be summer/autumn 2023.

placement breakdown, which increases protective factors around the children.

The hub home carer often offers sleepovers and can host family time for foster children to interact with birth families.

Through this wave of funding Mockingbird was funded to be expanded into eight further Local authorities in the South East, although three LAs have had to withdraw their involvement due to lack of capacity.

Southampton have paused their implementation while they embed a new service manager in January 2023.

Feedback from The Fostering Network is that we have been less successful in mobilising than other regions. Feedback from some LAs is that they have either had to delay or withdraw altogether due to capacity constraints. Other LAs have reflected how transformative their Mockingbird constellation has been for the carers and children that benefit from it.



# Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board

DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)

The regular meeting of the South East Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board has been able to ensure a regional grip on the performance across the Regional Adoption Agencies and consider together the common themes and differences in relation to Adoption timescales, matching challenges, alongside recruitment and support.

The group is well attended by:

- all the RAAs in the region,
- LAs not yet in RAAs,
- Kinship,
- PACT,
- Coram
- BAAF and
- courts' representatives.

When issues have been raised the group has been able to harness themes and consider the opportunity of mitigating differences in adoption

practice across the region and to share good practice across the RAA representatives.

This has enabled open discussions regarding matters such as the recruitment and support of BME adopters, best practice in contact and post adoption support alongside matching considerations and timescales.

The group has also been able to utilise the knowledge of participants to set up and organise 'Lunch and Learn' sessions in relation to Special Guardianship arrangements, where there continues to be a range and variety of practice across the region.

This has enabled an opportunity to consider models of support and approaches with the view of ensuring a more coherent and

consistent approach going forward.

The South East ASGLB has also enabled the opportunity for the South East region to feed into the considerations and working groups of the National Board as it considered the priorities across the sector.

Even though this National Board has been concluded by the Secretary of State, there continues an appetite to continue clear governance over this area of our work across the southeast and ensure a clear line of sight at a regional level as to the success and challenges that can be faced by LAs within RAA arrangement

## Special Guardianship and Kinship Work

DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)

Kinship is an important, but fledgling area of practice in the South East.

The Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board sponsored a regional conference and a series of lunch and learn sessions over

2021-2023 which aimed to create a community for workers and to share and build practice in this area.

The conference was very well attended with every one of the 19 Local Authorities in the South East attending, and over

130 attendees and an overall rating of over 90% satisfaction. Attendees identified strength in our existing practice:

Which were further summarised into 5 key areas:

1. best practice in SG support (including





- As part of the conference an offer was launched to all LAs of some consultancy capacity to help them complete a SG self-assessment to assess the quality of their SG and kinship practice and to develop an improvement plan.
- There was very limited take up of the offer due to LA capacity issues.
- The original intention was to focus capacity building/training on areas for development identified through self-assessment.

Two lunch and learn sessions are confirmed one focusing on coproduction which took place in 2022, and one scheduled for April 2023 hosted by the DfE to encourage take up of the Adoption Support Fund by eligible kinship carers.

[illegible]

**Lucy Peake, Chief Executive, Kinship**

[illegible]

# Early Help Group

DCS Sponsor: Grainne Siggins (Bracknell Forest)

The early help (EH) group was established in 2022 and meets quarterly.

The group has as a priority to share good practice and has identified opportunities for joint project work:

- the development of a regional EH narrative.

opportunities to hear more about family hubs.

- practice sharing: general sharing of practice and identification of new regional projects based on the areas of strength identified; impact of covid, and prevention agenda;

## Areas of strength in our early help practice:



- benchmarking: separate categories for child and family level data; definition of what an EH assessment is (as opposed to an EH referral); - action via the Data to Insight national EH project which is reporting into the group each quarter.
- family hubs: sharing of practice for areas who are part of the 74 LAs receiving the first round of family hub funding (including process and system pathways, learning); - action via a standing item on the agenda where the regional EH lead (Julie Greer from the Anna Freud Centre) is updating the group on progress, learning and

interface and different models of EH (e.g., relationships and structures with social care, health etc.); - action via sharing an element of LA practice they

*"For me, I find the opportunity to connect with other senior managers in other LAs incredibly useful, as it is reassuring to know that we are all facing the same challenges yet also passionate about finding solutions. I feel that it's safe and supportive space to share ideas and gain feedback on the development of our services."*

**Carly Bain, Service Manager, Early Help, Isle of Wight**

are proud of at each meeting.

- investment case and outcomes: working to develop a regional business case which shows the impact associated with investing in EH; - action via the EH narrative referenced above.

## Areas for regional collaboration:



# Regional Fostering Group

## DCS Sponsor: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)

The fostering group is highly active and well networked, with participants ranging from team manager to service manager and head of service.

All LAs are represented and the group stays connected between meetings through emails and calls sharing practice, templates and responses to emerging and urgent issues (for example cost of living payments, fuel charges).

The fostering group has collaboratively undertaken 9 waves of mystery shopping (of nineteen LAs and five IFAs) and nearly every one of the 19 local authorities has hosted a discussion at one of the quarterly meetings sharing practice of something that works particularly well in their LA.

The group has

- commissioned research into the unique selling points (USP) of LA fostering over IFA fostering,
- has sponsored the delivery of the Inside Out and Mockingbird projects; and more recently
- has set up a project with foster carers mystery shopping LA websites and other online presences (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram).

The nine waves of mystery shopping have enabled the fostering group to develop a framework for strong fostering recruitment practice:

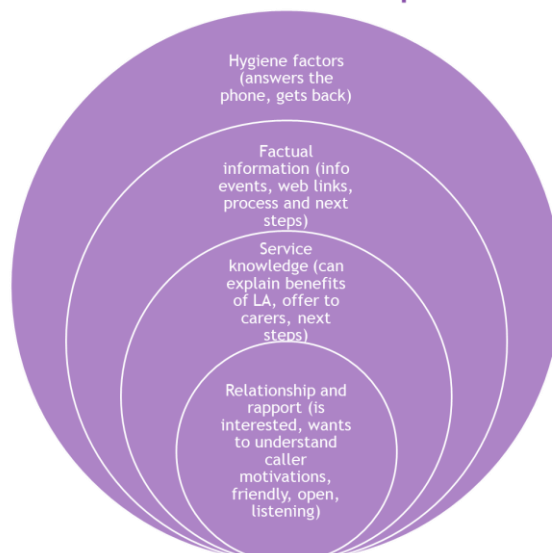
*"I have been a regular attendee and have found the opportunity to meet with other peers in the Fostering Service of great benefit to my own practice and in relation to developing our service and practice in Brighton and Hove. This space is well organised by Rebecca, and it has the added benefit of sharing experiences, identifying opportunities and establishing working relationships across regions with others. There is a wide and helpful variety of topics that are covered, and the objective and purpose of different speakers or updates fits well with expectations and need."*

**Cathy Seiderer, Fostering lead,  
Brighton and Hove**

*"I really enjoy the opportunity to meet with practice experts in this field and to learn about the innovation work in the region. The group is well attended, and the engagement is strong and there is a real appetite to share and learn from each other. From my perspective it also helps keep the fostering world high on my agenda."*

**Sarah Daly,  
DCS Sponsor and Chair**

## A possible model of best practice



# East Berkshire Commissioning Project

DCS Sponsor: Kevin McDaniel (Windsor and Maidenhead)

With financial support from the DfE Covid-19 recovery fund our commissioning team has been working with Bracknell Forest, Slough, and Frimley Health and Care to develop the local marketplace for residential placements for 11-16 year-olds with very complex needs.

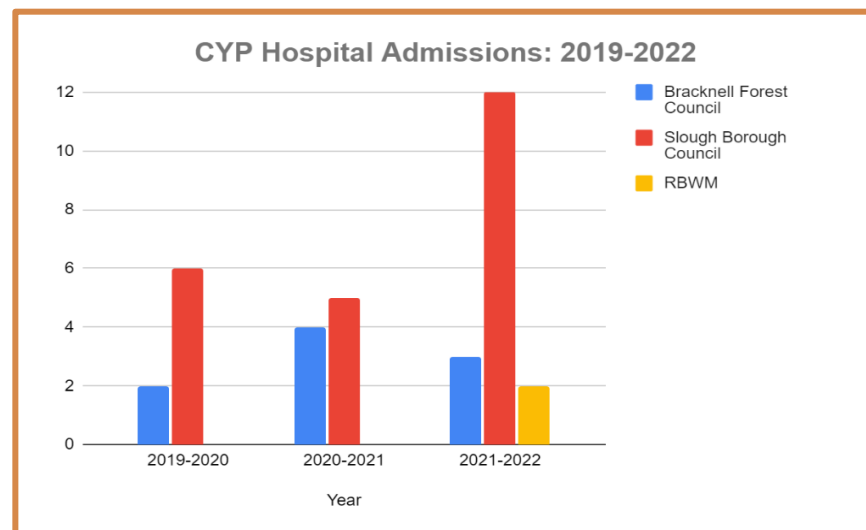
Placement volumes in all three local authorities are low which leads to spot purchasing.

The absence of local provision means that placements are often out of area which raises concerns about overall quality.

Our aim is to produce a joint service between the three councils, with the partnership evolving to include Frimley Integrated Commissioning Board (Frimley ICB).

Specific consideration is being given to the following market areas:

- short term regulated capacity for young people in crisis.



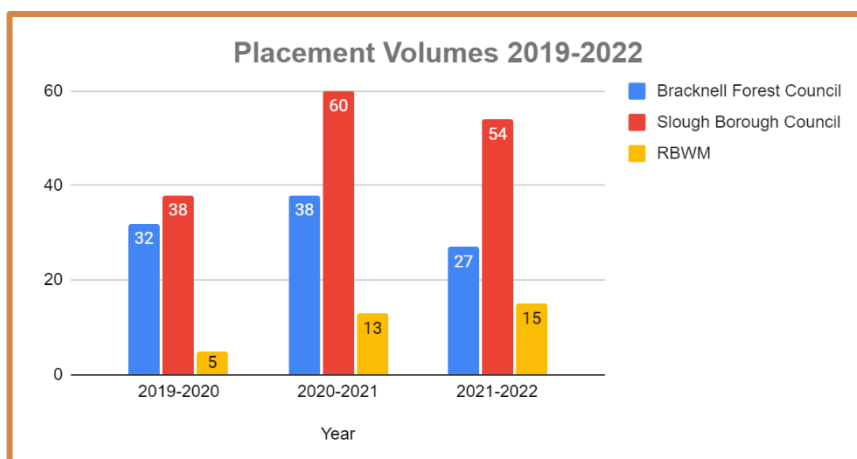
- placements and support for those requiring multi-agency support to thrive.
- placements for those with life-long, complex needs which require access to educational provision.
- long-term capacity for those with additional needs working towards independence locally.

All three local authorities are members of the South Central Residential Framework (SCRF), which has been unable to meet the needs of the most complex young

people and has resulted in spot purchases at very high costs. It has also resulted in LAs having to use high-cost unregulated provisions. As a result, the use of a dynamic purchasing system is being explored to help regulate the spot purchase market in the short term, *'the Bravo commissioning project'*.

'Spot purchase' providers will shortly be encouraged to prequalify for electronic tendering, which will give an opportunity to quality assure settings prior to placement; share a detailed placement specification across the marketplace; influence and monitor costs and demonstrate best value.

Work with Frimley ICB has identified an increase in the number of hospital admissions for young people with mental health problems, together with a lack of appropriate social care placements to



ensure that young people have a properly managed transition from hospital into the right setting to meet their needs. This has resulted in expensive hospital bed blockages and continuing poor health outcomes for the young people the project is trying to support.

The next phase for the partnership is to develop a specification for the development of a local provision. The remodelled service will be health-led and managed by a clinical lead. Frimley ICB will also take responsibility for triaging referrals and making appropriate placement decisions. The social care support package will be provided by an independent residential homes service provider who will be procured through a competitive tendering process using the Bravo system.

The focus is on the development of local, residential short-term placements for children and young people who require intensive mental health and social care support to ensure a

managed transition into appropriate care settings - which would include stepped down residential or foster care placements.

Frimley ICB has committed £1.4m in capital funding, secured from the National Health Service (NHS England). This funding has a utilisation window of three years up to 2025. We are now in the process of identifying appropriate local assets to host the residential space with a planned capacity of between 4-6 beds across one or two children's residential homes in the East Berkshire area.

As the capital grant cannot be used to fund project management, the partners are currently exploring possible sources of revenue funding to procure the services of a Project Manager over a two-year fixed term contract.

Initial costs are estimated at £56,000pa. The possibility of grant funding via the Better Care Fund is also being explored.

The benefits of the strong multi-agency local partnership between the three

local authorities and Frimley ICB are resulting in:

- Enhanced delivery of strategic sufficiency duties across all partner local authorities the placement options for young people with complex needs are improved through the delivery of our own short-term intensive support in conjunction with plans to utilise stepped-down provisions.
- Improved market management which will enable quality assurance of spot purchase providers; reduction in the costs of placements and demonstrate value for money.
- Improved access to support for young people by enabling early hospital discharges to local placements and thereby reducing the risk of readmission.

Ultimately, improving the health and social care outcomes for young people with complex mental and emotional health needs through the better integration of their support services



# Children with Complex Lives Project

DCS Sponsor: Lucy Butler (West Sussex)

This is a long running project (started in late 2019) that has researched and worked to identify solutions to the sufficiency crisis for looked after children.

The project has benefited from DfE funding on two occasions.

The first phase of the project focused on developing better understanding of the regional challenge in relation to sufficiency.

The project was developed following a discussion with the Assistant Directors (Safeguarding), who were particularly concerned about:

- the difficulties finding good placements (residential and fostering) for children who have experienced complex lives.
- the increasing costs of placement

During this phase work focused on four key elements:

1. understanding what the data LAs hold could tell about this group.
2. undertaking qualitative research about the lives of a sample of this group of children.
3. developing a better understanding of the lived experience of children with complex lives
4. developing a dialogue with organisations that provide placements to children with complex lives.

The data collection exercise yielded a rich picture with all 19 South East Authorities sharing data about 1,215 children.

This included information about costs, placement moves, distance of placement from child's home and other factors.

This information was supplemented by qualitative information about the children using a questionnaire designed to help develop a better understanding of their needs.

In parallel with the research, a specialist organisation was commissioned to help understand more about the lived experience of this group of children.

They worked with Children in Care Councils at four LAs to explore what the common features of a good placement for children with complex needs look like.

The final element of the project involved developing partnerships with umbrella bodies that represent organisations who provide placements for this group of children.

The project worked with the National Children's Home Association (NCHA) and the National Association of Foster Care Providers (NAFCP) to develop insight into how local authorities could form better working relationships with providers.

The aim of this dialogue was to identify how these organisations could work together to improve the both the quality and value of placements available.

This phase of the project delivered two key outcomes:

- regional strategic needs analysis for children with complex lives
- a film in which care experienced young people tell the audience about what a good placement looks like

The main conclusions drawn from the work were:

1. more needs to be done to keep children local.
2. new ways need to be found to preventing the need and use of unregistered/unregulated care.
3. authorities need to do more commission the services required to deliver sufficiency options for this group.
4. new placement options such as hybrid LA/independent providers, developing links between residential and foster care need to be developed.

The second phase of the project has concentrated working with a smaller group of three authorities (West Sussex, Kent and Southampton) to commission services to address some of the gaps identified through the research.



The group worked closely with NCHA, NAFCP (and their preferred experts) to design an approach that addresses the challenges set out above. This work is coming to completion, the planned tender was issued in late February 2023, for more than 30 placements and a total contract value likely to exceed £100 million pounds.

Both the procurement methodology and tender itself are innovative. The procurement includes opportunities for iterative questions of potential providers and the contract are for soft or flexible blocks. The approach has been designed help foster a strategic partnership between the local authorities and

providers which should enable them to work together in improved ways to meet the needs of children with complex lives. The tendering process will be completed in Summer 2023 with a view to the first placements becoming available for use from early 2024.

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