# Notes from Principal Social Worker Network Meeting 30/07/25

Attended: Annelies Henshall, Oxfordshire (Chair); Lara Patel, DCS; Diana Obreja, Kent; Lore Riedel Brighton and Hove; Michaela Smith, Slough; Lori Goossen, Medway; Melanie Spencer, West Sussex; Helen Gore, Bracknell Forest; Victoria Clottey, IoW; Jenny Boyd, SESLIP

Apols: Clare Poyner, Portsmouth; Katie Smee-Giles, East Sussex; Shungu Chigocha, Windsor & Maidenhead; Kasey Senior, Surrey; Rachel Bedford, Wokingham; Jenni Chalk, Hampshire

1. Matters arising from previous meeting:
   1. Teams Chat: Jenny has been unable to set up a Teams chat group due to restrictions on her Teams account, this needs to be undertaken by someone within an organisation. **Action: Annelies to arrange this from Oxfordshire CC**
   2. Ratification of ToR: Agreed to include peer support and be more focused in purpose. Agreed to incorporate National PSW Network priorities and specify principles. **Action: Jenny to update and re-circulate**
   3. Confirmation of dates for meetings for 25/26 – agreed changes to November and January dates: 25/11/25 10.00 – 12.30 and 26/01/26 1.30 – 4.00 pm. **Action: Jenny to send out invitations**
2. Social Care Reforms and implementation of Families First

Discussion amongst all present regarding how FFP is being approached within their respective local authorities, with a helpful presentation from Melanie Spencer, West Sussex (separately circulated to all members by Melanie).

2.1 Common approaches:

* Programme management approach, with cross cutting workstreams across, eg, front door, early help and family support, child protection; workstreams typically including data and systems, property, commissioning, workforce, voice of child and family, comms. Some local authorities have appointed a dedicated programme manager, others are managing this through their head of service group
* Key considerations – partners need to be fully integrated into the workstreams in order to achieve proper co-production; workstreams need to have representation at all levels through the organisation and each workstream to be led by a relevant manager eg early help/family support by an early help manager. Education services are crucial and need to be fully involved.
* All local authorities are adopting a gradual and phased approach, rather than opting for “big bang” transformation. LAs which have recently adopted new models, eg Family Safeguarding, are seeking to adapt that where needed, rather than make large scale further changes.
  1. Key challenges – large scale transformation, particularly for those authorities which have recently undergone significant transformation or management turnover, causing change fatigue; staff job anxiety, particularly for early help staff, ASYEs and workers who were considering apprenticeships in social work – some authorities have seen a drop in apprenticeship applications; recruitment generally – particularly to child protection posts; engagement of partners, particularly when the implementation grant is ring fenced for local authorities; need for system integration, both in terms of assessment and plan templates/recording and data collection/KPI analysis.
  2. Key perceived risks - introduction of child protection “experts” and leads – will this lead to creation or perception of two tier system? Diminution of skills and confidence of family help staff, which could in turn impact directly on the safeguarding of children; lowering of thresholds in order to access MACPTs, escalating more children into child protection; more transfers between workers (need to transfer to QSW if child protection concerns identified; current guidance is very process orientated, potentially leading to more, not less, bureaucracy.
  3. Unknowns – future of current child protection conference chairs; role and function of Lead Child Protection Practitioners

Local authorities are working on mitigators to the perceived risks, some have started this process and it will be helpful to keep this on future network agendas through this year.

1. Local, national and regional updates:

* We look forward to the Reading newly appointed PSW starting in post in August
* New DCS appointed in West Sussex – Dan Ruaux
* Medway struggling with recruitment, although new senior management team bringing stability. Medway is doing a lot of work related to WRES and advised members about a new toolkit from BASW called Shades of Bias [Shades of Bias (SoB) | BASW](https://basw.co.uk/shades-bias-sob)
* WRES – a number of local authorities have registered for this, it was noted that although the registration deadline has passed applications are still being accepted
* At a national level members noted that although there are regular PSW/DfE meetings held, these are not always helpful, due to lack of informed debate and feedback from DfE. **Action: Lara agreed to take this up within ADCS forum**
* At a regional level members noted that communication from SESLIP could be improved, sometimes information is not cascaded within LAs in a timely way. Lori (Medway) raised that there has been a recent communication from the SESLIP Black and Global Majority Network, including a request for a survey. The content and timing of this duplicates the requirements of WRES. **Action: Jenny agreed to take this back to SESLIP**. **Also agreed that Jenny would pass on relevant information from the SESLIP weekly DCS update. Some people get that already, but others don’t and this would guarantee receipt to all.**

1. DCS/SESLIP update

4.1 Lara gave feedback from a recent ADCS meeting held with the Centre for Family Safeguarding Practice and Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler, focused on FFP. This meeting echoed the discussion held earlier in this meeting. A number of local authorities are opting to interpret the guidance in different ways, particularly around MACPTs and Lead CPPs.

4.2 Jenny gave an update presentation about the regional improvement work, which is supported by an uplifted grant from DfE. The intention is for LAs to nominate their own staff to be involved in delivering packages of support. This is a good development opportunity as well as the best way to deliver improvement. It was suggested that some guidance/a workshop for LA staff could be helpful to boost confidence in undertaking work in other LAs. **Action: Jenny to take this back to Targeted Support Core Team (Jenny is part of this) and SESLIP.**

5. International Social Work update and discussion – insufficient time for this item.

To move to next meeting

Jenny Boyd

SESLIP Consultant & PSW Network Convenor