

November 2012

(Formerly branded as JRIEP News)

Welcome

This first regional newsletter for a few months contains a lot of information about joint-work between the children's service departments of the nine Local Authorities in the East Midlands to support improvement. The previous branding of JRIEP has been put aside to give way to 'sector-led improvement', as this phrase better describes the political and strategic aspiration of the Directors of Children's Services (DCS) to work together with peers to improve outcomes for the region's children, young people and their families. The regional DCS group continues to provide the executive governance for this work and they ask the Operational Group colleagues, listed later, to support local engagement and mobilisation. Co-ordination is provided by the SDSA.

Annual Peer Challenge Summit

Between May and July all nine Local Authorities participated in this peer challenge process. It started with the analysis of self assessments, performance data and inspection outcomes, followed by a series of challenge activities involving all DCSs and their performance colleagues. At the final summit event the DCS group identified the priorities for the region to be supported through joint-work this year. These priorities are summarised as follows:

Priority: The quality of services

- Safeguarding services not yet consistently good enough
- Instability and lack of placement permanence for children in care
- Early help arrangements not yet protecting vulnerable families effectively
- Strategic planning for children at risk from low priority in Health and Wellbeing Board arrangements

Priority: Addressing the funding challenge

- Welfare changes pushing more families into need while services are being cut
- Reducing budgets and potential increase for demanded services exacerbates the financial risk
- Insufficiency of affordable specialist provision in-region for those with complex needs
- Growth in numbers of children looked after

Priority: Partnerships with schools

- Councils' diminishing influence on schools to promote 'wider outcomes' for children and young people
- School finance changes are putting partnership services with Local Authorities at risk
- Diversity of school admission organisations requires new partnership arrangements to address needs

Peer Challenge Team Reviews

Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Nottingham councils recently experienced a peer review as part of the East Midlands' scheme for the sector-led improvement of children's services. Within the next few months Derby and Leicester will receive theirs. These DCS-led peer challenge visits involve Lead Members and a mixed team of senior officers from across the region, that works to review and report on identified local priorities.

Safeguarding Assurance Visits

Derbyshire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire councils have also received a Safeguarding Assurance Visit as part of the East Midlands' scheme. Leicestershire, Derby and Rutland will soon be receiving their visits. These SAVs are led by Local Authority Directors of Safeguarding accompanied by specialist social work managers to examine safeguarding arrangements.

The regional pool of peer challengers

The regional peer challenge scheme of PCTRs and SAVs reported above calls upon the reciprocally gifted time of senior leaders from local authorities. Participants are drawn from a 'pool' of colleagues who become available by having an Expression of Interest endorsed by their DCS and receiving training/preparation. **The next training sessions will be held on Wednesday 27th February.** New colleagues seeking to participate in this peer challenge work can contact either their DCS or peter.chilvers@sdsa.net to obtain further information.

If suitably experienced senior colleagues from partner organisations would be interested in participating in these peer challenge arrangements, please get in touch. While the focus is all about council service improvement there is routine attention paid to partnership working. There is no payment for reviewers' time, but if your employer might value the considerable learning you will bring back, we would be interested to hear from you.

Evidence-based early interventions

About 40 colleagues from all nine LA areas are currently participating in series of action learning sessions with the Social Research Unit (Dartington). The sessions are examining the evidence base of early interventions in integrated children's service work that can demonstrate impact upon outcomes. The cross-regional discussions are further enriching the learning about the provision of appropriate, timely help to vulnerable families. To find out more about this activity, which runs until late January, contact julia.smith@sdsa.net or alternatively the local participants in your area may be contacted through your Operational Group colleague overleaf.

Social work leadership programme

A pioneering regional leadership programme has just started in the region for leaders of teams, some multi-agency, that deliver front line social work. The programme is specifically designed to support the implementation of Munro's recommendations to improve early help and develop a culture of reflective practice. It brings team leaders together from across the region to participate in a blended programme of keynote inputs, seminars, support groups and work-based activity. Further information can be obtained from your LA Director of Safeguarding or rebecca.hand@sdsa.net.

The LA's role in relation to schools

During the coming months a regional group of Local Authority senior officers leading schools policy is undertaking a peer review exercise. Given the range of policy positions being adopted across the region, the idea is to capitalise upon the expertise of regional colleagues to strengthen local arrangements. The starting point will be a self-audit based upon ISOS's recent work. To find out more, please contact your local lead LA officer for schools.

Within the changing schools' environment, two current critical issues relate to admissions and place planning. A different regional group of officers, known as EMRAG, is co-ordinating targeted support in this area. LA link colleagues for this are:

Derby	Derbyshire	Leicester
Diane Whitehead	Andrew Wingard	Steve Letten
Leicestershire	Lincolnshire	Northamptonshire
Gurjit Bahra	Steven Gamble	Sarah Cook
Nottingham	Nottinghamshire	Rutland
Andrew Paulson	Scott Hollingsworth	Robyn Mole

DCS PLUS sessions

The regional DCS group is holding a new series of single item agenda sessions to devote time to some of the current priority topics. The PLUS notation signifies that they will be inviting key groups of colleagues to join them for these discussions. Forthcoming sessions will

address sector-led improvement with Lead Members, the changing school landscape with their LA colleagues and some academy headteachers, and safeguarding issues with LSCB chairs.

ALICSE

ALICSE, the regional leadership programme, Advanced Leadership in an Integrated Children's Service Environment, continues to go from strength to strength. This year's cohort includes 70 participants from across all sectors of children's service partnerships from all nine Local Authority areas. Each participant is undertaking a significant piece of work-based activity into a local priority in addition to the main taught elements. This year's programme will conclude with a major regional event to present and disseminate project outcomes on Wednesday 19th June to a wider audience. Further information and invitations about this event will follow in due course but, if you might be interested, please protect the date.

Early Years Development Demonstrator

This is the title given to an interesting piece of joint-work between our nine Local Authorities to share and demonstrate local developments in the planning and delivery of Foundation Years services that support holistic approaches to narrowing the gap for children aged 0-5. All areas have completed a self evaluation of their practice and colleagues are now planning a series of learning events to investigate some of the priority action themes and share effective practice across the region. For further information, please contact your local LA link colleague for this activity.

Derby	Derbyshire	Leicester
Coral Golding	Sue Ricketts	Carole Cafferty
Leicestershire	Lincolnshire	Northamptonshire
Michelle Nicholls	Steph Douglas	Jo Elks
Nottingham	Nottinghamshire	Rutland
Caroline Hurst	Jude Burgess	Jan Dick

Stability of placements and adoption

Early in 2013 a new opportunity is available for colleagues from across the region to learn the diagnostic process that is used by the government to interrogate the 'adoption scorecards' that are gaining prominence in national policy. The process identifies the causes and forces at work behind placement timescales, as well as determining what improvements could be made to improve performance and practice. It also looks at the stories behind the data and a wider picture of the effectiveness of support for children in care. This activity is likely to include 2-3 events led by national exponents of this work, and will include opportunities to share practice and identify future needs. To express your interest in this activity, please contact peter.chilvers@sdsa.net.

Local Learning Seminars

Further to the success of recent seminars, the following series is being arranged for the first half of next year, specifically to address some of the region's priority themes. Additional details will become available soon, but places can already be booked using the links below.

Monday 21st January 9.30 – 11.30am

Developing a Health Outcomes Strategy

Hosted by Nottinghamshire DCS, Anthony May
Book at: <http://healthoutcomes.eventbrite.co.uk>

Wednesday 13th March 1.30 – 4.00pm

Improving placement stability

Hosted by Leicester DCS, Rachel Dickinson
Book at: <http://childrenincare.eventbrite.co.uk>

Wednesday 22nd May 9.30-11.30am

Learning from Serious Case Reviews

Hosted by Rutland DCS, Carol Chambers
Led by Kate McKenna
Book at: <http://casereviews.eventbrite.co.uk>

Tuesday 11th June 1.30 – 4.00pm

Getting the 'front door' right

Hosted by Derby DCS, Andrew Bunyan
Led by Professor David Thorpe, University of Lancaster
Book at: <http://frontdoor.eventbrite.co.uk>

Thursday 20th June am

The changing school landscape

Hosted by Lincolnshire DCS, Debbie Barnes and CfBT
Book at: <http://schoolandscape.eventbrite..uk>

Child Poverty resources

A regional group of colleagues who lead and support their local child poverty strategies has recently been working with a sector specialist and the Child Poverty Unity to develop some useful resources. The materials include technical briefings and a range of training materials that can be used or adapted for each local situation. Each LA area is being supported to pilot or plan the best use of the materials. The project will culminate with a regional showcase event in 2013 and learning will be shared through ongoing peer support.

Derby	Derbyshire	Leicester
Simon Fogel	Julie Hirst	Trevor Pringle
Leicestershire	Lincolnshire	Northamptonshire
Danny Myers	Jo Sims	Stephen Marks
Nottingham	Nottinghamshire	Rutland
John Yarham	Irene Kakoullis	Adrian Wells

Learning from Serious Case Reviews

The May seminar opposite will be a presentation and discussion of work that will take place in the preceding months to analyse Serious Case Reviews across the region. This analysis will be undertaken with senior managers to ensure that each of the nine councils of the region is fully aware of the issues at play in crisis cases and we are effectively learning with and from these experiences. For further details about this activity, please contact kate.mckenna.associates@gmail.com.

Reflective casework practice

During the past few months some action learning groups of social work colleagues from across the region have been working with C4EO to investigate reflective practice. The process has led to a review of casework procedures in a number of areas and a set of training and development resources is now freely available. To find out more about this activity and the resources, please contact rebecca.hand@sdsa.net.

Joint efficiency projects

A number of projects are well underway to deliver efficiencies, savings and improvements in some specialist high-cost services for 14-25 year olds with complex needs. These projects have been developed over the past 12-15 months and Children's and Adult Service colleagues from Local Authorities have opted in to suit their circumstances. In summary, the projects are:

Special Education Placements

A collaborative approach to driving efficiencies in external special education placements.

Care Funding Calculators and Negotiation

Increasing the use of the Care Funding Calculator in adult care placements and piloting the use of the Children's Care Funding Calculator.

Use of Assistive Technology

Trialling the use of Assistive Technologies with young people who have complex needs to improve and extend the quality of care at home.

Equipment Services for Disabled Children

A programme to develop competencies and workforce training to ensure appropriate prescriptions. This is a joint programme between LAs and health.

Personalised Housing and Support Planning

Specialist training and mentoring in person-centred planning with the most complex cases. This is a joint programme between LAs and health.

Supporting Cultural Change

Support for family leadership activity has been funded in 5 LAs and link with NHS Living Local programme.

Each project has different groups of linked colleagues, but to find out more in the first instance, please contact mark.lambell@sdsa.net.

Case audit peer support

A new piece of joint-work just under consideration is being designed to strengthen the case auditing of children and families receiving support, especially multi-agency support. The assumption in the design is that, within the region, there is rich variation in practice and a wealth of learning that can be drawn out from collaboration and peer review. If you have a key interest in this work as it proceeds, please register your interest in a simple email message to peter.chilvers@sdsa.net.

Commissioning Champions

A regional group of strategic commissioners in children's services has recently been reconvened, under the auspices of Ian Curryer (DCS Nottingham) and within the spirit of sector-led improvement. The intention is for this group to develop its role in sharing effective practice and seeking collaborative advantage, particularly within these unprecedented times of public finance. Further information about the work of this group can be obtained from mark.lambell@sdsa.net.

Improved website coming soon

The online presence of this joint-work within the East Midlands is still quite basic, sometimes out-dated and patchy. Most of what exists can currently be seen at www.jriep.com or www.alicse.com. By the end of the year it is planned to update, refresh and integrate all of this within a new site with an easy-to-use search facility to support knowledge exchange. Progress and information will appear in the next newsletter.

Operational Group

Local support for aspects of planning, communication and co-ordination of this regional programme of work is provided by a group becoming known as the SLI Operational Group. The group meets 3-4 times per year with Anthony May (DCS Nottinghamshire) in the chair.

Derby	Derbyshire	Leicester
Mark Barratt	Beverley Smith	Gill Stacey
Leicestershire	Lincolnshire	Northamptonshire
Peter Chester	Dave McWilliams	Louise Crookenden-Johnson
Nottingham	Nottinghamshire	Rutland
Elaine Mitchell	Helen Richardson	Sarah Bysouth
Voluntary Sector	National College	DfE - EFA
Karen Parsons	Pauline Smith	Hilary Armstead

Should you require contact information, please get in touch with julia.smith@sdsa.net

Top tips for pre-inspection work

At a recent national meeting relating to sector-led improvement, the following information was shared following a detailed analysis of the challenge being faced by local authorities in recent children's services inspections.

1. What is your quality assurance process? Is it independent and do you see regular reports of lessons learned, how many audits have been undertaken and how the results have been used to improve practice and outcomes. What are the recent themes from audits and how are they being progressed and what is the speed with which you are doing this?
2. This inspection is about observation of staff, how ready are they for this experience? How does management oversight work, can you explain it succinctly? How confident are you in all your teams?
3. What is the progress in implementing any previous inspection actions, or serious case reviews, show me the evidence? Have you developed the evidence portfolio of *early help* as it relates to child protection?
4. What are the outcomes for children? Have you looked at the evidence your DCS would offer to Ofsted? You will be asked for three good cases to showcase, what do you know about these and are you comfortable with the judgements?
5. Do you regularly review trends in your statistics about your safeguarding service? What are the caseloads for social workers like, what are the trends in repeat referrals, how stable are your staff groups and the trends in overall numbers and types of cases?
6. What corporate help does the DCS need, are there any blockages corporately?
7. If there is a lot of transition going on, restructures, budget savings, new IT systems and new ways of working, what impact is that having on the capacity of management in the service and the demands on them?
8. If you are thinking about a new structure, bring in an external view and challenge by someone who is not a close colleague to your senior team.
9. Have you seen the annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding, has it been presented to the DCS and CE of other partnerships such as police, health, etc?
10. Who is earmarked to run the process when you get the call, get the data ready etc that is required in Annex A, has this all been reviewed and quality assured recently?