

Integrated Children's System Strategic manager's guide



Successfully commissioning and managing effective ICS improvement

This guide has been designed by practitioners and managers on the Expert Panel to support strategic managers in commissioning and managing the Integrated Children's System improvement in their local authorities.

It is not intended to be a document that tells you what to do. Rather you can dip in and out of it as you need. We hope that it will prove a useful aide memoir and that over time you will add to it and develop your own local version.

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Executive Summary

This guide is one of a series being produced to support the current ICS improvement cycle. It is intended for those individuals and teams in local authorities (LAs) who make strategic decisions regarding the delivery of children's services, in particular ICS. This includes people making local decisions directly on the implementation of ICS, but also people from other areas and from non-social work backgrounds who support the implementation and ongoing development of ICS, such as in IT services and procurement. It is especially relevant to the ICS Champions within LAs.

The purpose of this guide is to support strategic decision making using best practice from the national ICS improvement team and examples from other LA's which have tackled similar decisions. It is not a technical guide; rather it provides practical suggestions, with real examples and case studies, on how strategic managers can best facilitate the ongoing development and improvement of ICS by smarter procurement and supplier engagement, by working together, by looking at the solution holistically, by examining ways in which ICS can be supported at all levels within your authority. Much of it you may be doing already.

This paper has four principal sections:

1. Introduction;
2. The role of strategic decision makers and senior managers in ICS improvement (including the role of ICS Champion);
3. Practical suggestions for commissioning and improving ICS in your Authority;
4. The future of ICS.

There are also two Annexes which provide:

- (1) a list of the guides and tools available on ICS Improvement; and
- (2) a list of current suppliers of ICS systems in the UK.

Section 1 – Introduction

The Introduction sets out the background to this paper, its purpose and intended audience.

Section 2 – The role of strategic decision makers and senior managers in ICS improvement (including the role of ICS Champion)

Experience from local authorities who have successfully implemented ICS shows there are a number of common contributors to success. A key factor is the existence of leadership within the Authority that:

- is strong, resilient and consistent;
- is well informed;
- is proactively involved in the ICS implementation;

- recognises that ICS is more than just a computer system;
- believes in, and understands the importance of ICS in the wider business, regulatory and strategic context; and
- is represented by all areas of the LA which impact upon ICS, including areas outside of Children's Social Care Services (eg. procurement and IT).

Particularly important is recognition that ICS comprises more than a technological solution. A common error, particularly in the first iteration of ICS implementations, was a focus by some LAs on the technological solution alone, when attention was also required in other areas such as improvement of assessment and recording practice, caseload management, performance management, training and communication. Those local authorities that took the opportunity to review their service holistically at the time of ICS implementation have generally fared better than those who simply installed the electronic records system on top of their existing structure and business processes.

Just as strong, consistent leadership is crucial to success, so is the presence of an authoritative voice for ICS in your LA – the ICS Champion. The ICS Champion's principal goal is to obtain the strategic commitment from the Authority to implement and then to support the ongoing development, evaluation and continuous improvement of ICS within the LA.

Section 3 – Practical suggestions for commissioning and improving ICS in your Authority

Local authorities are not required to use systems which adhere to the DCSF specifications for ICS. However, they do of course need to ensure that their overall system approach and practice are compliant with all relevant legislation, regulations, and statutory guidance. So decisions about how to improve ICS need to be taken at a strategic level to ensure implications for the wider system, data recording, and social work practice are fully taken into account.

Local authorities that have found the specifications a useful guide, or have systems that are already serving their needs, may choose to make no further changes to the ICS. For those authorities who are continuing to develop and improve ICS, research and experience from other local authorities indicates that there are a number of strategies that can contribute to a successful ICS implementation or improvement.

Section 4 – The future of ICS

ICS improvement, where it is necessary, should be seen as a core aspect of the local change programmes for social work improvement in children's services. In *Building a safe and confident future: implementing the recommendations of the social work task force*, the Government set out its priorities and ambitions for the social work reform programme and described how the government is now working with employers, higher

education institutions, the profession itself and people who use social work services to put the task force's recommendations into effect.

This national programme will be supported in 2010-11 by a £15m capital grant to local authorities, to spend on improvement of IT-enabled case management systems for children's social care.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background, Purpose and Intended Audience

Following the advice of the Social Work Task Force (SWTF), the DCSF is leading a programme of work to help local authorities (LAs) to improve their ICS systems so that they support effective record keeping and case management by social workers. It does not, however, seek to mandate a particular approach to front-line social work practice.

This guide has been developed by an expert panel of ICS users, who are helping the DCSF to identify how local authorities and their suppliers can deliver positive business outcomes, including better value for money, improving effectiveness and efficiency, the experience of service users, and ultimately outcomes for children and young people.

Evidence from local authorities that have reported a successful implementation of ICS shows that there is a correlation between the degree of success and strong, informed leadership within the context of a well-defined strategic plan not just for ICS, but for Children's Services as a whole.

This guide is intended for those individuals and teams in local authorities who make strategic decisions regarding the delivery of children's services, in particular ICS. This includes people making local decisions directly on the implementation of ICS, but also people from other areas and from non-social work backgrounds who support the implementation and ongoing development of ICS, such as in IT services and procurement. It is especially relevant to the ICS Champions within LAs.

The purpose of this guide is to support strategic decision making using best practice from the national ICS improvement team and examples from other LA's who have tackled similar decisions. It is not a technical guide; rather it provides practical suggestions, with real examples and case studies, on how strategic managers can best facilitate the ongoing development and improvement of ICS by smarter procurement and supplier engagement, by working together, by looking at the solution holistically, by examining ways in which ICS can be supported at all levels within your authority. Much of it you may be doing already.

This guide is one of a series being produced to support the current ICS improvement cycle. Annex 1 provides a full list of the guides and tools available.

Local practice and procedures, and ICS systems themselves are different in every local authority, so not all of the concerns or solutions in this guidance will be relevant to all children's services departments. Some local authorities will already have an ICS solution that works for them and will not be seeking to make any changes or improvements that they have not already planned within their continuous improvement strategies.

However, the Expert Panel found that the approaches used by authorities which had made ICS work well for social work practitioners tended to view ICS as a practice tool and to work creatively with front line staff to develop whole system solutions which reflect and support good practice rather than focusing on the IT system alone.

The front line manager and practitioner guides that were published in October 2009 have a number of strategies to encourage front line managers and practitioners to develop robust feedback loops to strategic management to ensure that the issues experienced by the front line are fully understood. Equally it will be important that the strategic managers understand practitioner expectations about the capacity of the local authority to affect change and improvements to the ICS. Strategies including sharing successes with other authorities, including their practice tools, and effective ways to work within current systems will need to be implemented alongside options such as re-commissioning and improving existing functionality. Some of these changes will not occur as quickly as practitioners would like, and finding ways to prioritise and support effective change whilst maintaining an ability to deliver services day to day will require a partnership approach between strategic managers, front line managers and practitioners.

2 The role of strategic decision makers and senior managers in ICS improvement

2.1 Leading and supporting the implementation and improvement of ICS in your Authority

ICS is a key business system supporting the work of Children's Services. It contains:

1. the statutory guidance *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (the Assessment Framework)* which underpins the workflow and the records held in ICS as used by the practitioner to carry out their assessment planning interventions and reviews (APIR) on children in need, including children who are the subject of child protection plans and who are looked after;
2. a set of records designed to capture the information from the APIR processes that are based on the Assessment Framework domains and dimensions; and
3. an electronic record for the child which contains all the information and records generated on a child by all local authority social care services personnel working with the child and family, the data of which is used to inform the performance information returned to central government and to support Ofsted's inspections.

Those local authorities who have successfully implemented ICS have highlighted a number of common contributors to success. A key factor is the existence of leadership within the local authority that:

- is strong, resilient and consistent;

- is well informed;
- is proactively involved in the ICS implementation;
- recognises that ICS is more than just a computer system;
- believes in, and understands the importance of ICS in the wider business, regulatory and strategic context; and
- is represented by all areas of the LA which impact upon ICS, including areas outside of Children's Social Care Services (eg. procurement and IT).

Particularly important is recognition that ICS comprises more than a technological solution. A common error, particularly in the first iteration of ICS implementations, was a focus by some LAs on a technological solution alone, when attention was also required in other areas such as improvement of assessment and recording practice, caseload management, performance management, training and communication. Those authorities which took the opportunity to review their service holistically at the time of ICS implementation have generally fared better than those who simply installed the electronic records system on top of their existing structure and business processes.

Indeed there are numerous business factors which surround and influence ICS usability. If users are reporting usability problems, this may be due not to the electronic system itself, but to other factors, such as:

- training that users have received, and their understanding of the principles, policy and practice set out in the Children Act 1989 and in its associated Regulations and guidance, and also of the Assessment Framework: these underpin ICS;
- time available to practitioners, and their caseload;
- budget available for implementing ICS and associated business change activities;
- wider LA IT infrastructure and support;
- communication within the business.

The above are reasons for the involvement of senior management: these areas are outside the immediate scope of the ICS system and the ICS project manager. They may require the influence of senior managers to bring about necessary change.

2.1.1 Useful Resources

The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for statutory Directors of Children's Services and other children's services professionals in leadership roles. ADCS members specialise in considering, developing, commissioning, leading and managing children's services in all the diverse ways in which they are provided to children, young people, families and communities.

The ADCS website can be found at: <http://www.adcs.org.uk>

The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). Funded by the DCSF, C4EO has been established to help transform outcomes for children, young people and their families. It will do this by identifying and coordinating local, regional and national evidence of 'what works' to create a single and comprehensive picture of effective practice. Using this information, the Centre will offer support to local authorities and their Children's Trust partners, working with them to help improve services.

C4EO website can be found at: <http://www.C4EO.org.uk>

2.2 The ICS Champion

Just as strong, consistent leadership is crucial to success, so is the presence of an authoritative voice for ICS in your LA – the ICS Champion.

This person carries the torch for ICS in the Authority, promoting and championing the importance, value and benefits of ICS across children's social care services and the wider authority. The ICS Champion's principal goal is to obtain a strategic commitment from the local authority to implement and support the ongoing development, evaluation and continuous improvement of ICS within the LA. The ICS Champion is proactive in keeping him or herself, and thence colleagues in senior management, up to date on local, regional and national developments in ICS and related regulatory changes and initiatives. The Champion represents the various ICS stakeholders in senior management fora and provides a communication channel both upwards and downwards in the organisation. The Champion might also represent the local authority at external events, such as regional ICS working groups, or ensure that the authority is represented at such events and that the information is disseminated. This task will require a real time commitment from the champion and this will need to be taken into consideration when appointing to the role.

The Champion's role should not be confused with that of an ICS Project Manager or an ICS Application Manager. Their role is normally to manage the day-to-day delivery of the ICS system and any associated business and process change. The Champion, on the other hand, supports them in a number of ways, for instance by guiding the more complex issues to resolution via appropriate management fora.

The following are examples from ICS Champions in local authorities of how they brought about positive change for ICS. They:

- set up and chaired a local working group for champions in surrounding authorities to share knowledge and ideas; and
- facilitated a workshop presentation on ICS for the LA's senior management group with the aim of informing managers from outside children's social care services of ICS and its importance and impact upon the LA.

Case Study – The role of the ICS Champion at Islington

At Islington, the ICS Champion is a service manager who is responsible for performance and information within Children’s Social Care. She directly manages the staff responsible for the ICS Application. Although it is an advantage that she is a social worker herself, this is not essential as she is also able to pull in specific practice expertise from across the workforce (e.g. child protection or adoption) to ensure best practice is promoted in how the system is developed.

The development of ICS has broader, corporate support and the council's Technology and Information Management Board has committed development of the work, so that for example

- a. some groups of children for whom the council has a statutory duty, who are currently not captured or case managed well enough can be in the future (e.g. special guardianship assessment and approval)
- b. the assessment, supervision and support of special guardians and kinship foster carers can be managed within the ICS.
- c. Development of ICS fits in with the council’s technology plans for the future and is sustainable and supportable for the long-term.

The planning for this kind of development will require the ICS Champion to bring together key stakeholders at different stages, namely:

Stakeholder	Planning	Specification	Roadmap	Delivery
Supplier	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supplier User Group	✓	✓	✓	
Operational Practice Managers and Workforce Development staff	✓	✓	✓	✓
Internal Senior Management Team	✓		✓	✓
Children’s Services Performance & Quality Unit (statutory reporting team)	✓	✓		✓
Council’s ICT department	✓		✓	✓
TIM Board	✓		✓	✓

2.2.1 Useful Resources

The DCSF publishes Champions Newsletters on its website. This newsletter is aimed at ICS Champions in local authorities in England, and provides regular updates on progress with ICS developments. It is also copied to members of the ICS Expert Panel and other relevant stakeholders and is posted on the DCSF website:

www.ecm.gov.uk/ics

Another useful resource – whilst not specifically related to ICS – is the Every Child Matters *Championing Children: A shared set of skills, knowledge and behaviours for those leading and managing integrated children's services*. Championing Children is a framework that establishes a shared set of skills, knowledge and behaviours for those who lead and manage integrated children's services. It provides a common understanding about the particular abilities required by leaders and managers of these services. Individuals, teams and organisations can also use this document as a planning tool to help develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours necessary. The document can be downloaded from:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/managersandleaders/championingchildren/children/>

3 Practical suggestions for commissioning and improving ICS in your Authority

Local authorities are not required to use systems which adhere to the DCSF specifications for ICS. However, they do of course need to ensure that their overall system approach and practice is compliant with all relevant legislation, regulations and statutory guidance. Decisions about how to improve ICS have to be taken at a strategic level to ensure implications for the wider system, data recording, and social work practice are fully taken into account.

For instance, when authorities are altering or removing ICS functionality that supported legislation or regulation, they will want to ensure that it is supported elsewhere (whether picked up in the ICS system or other local policies or procedures). The guides on Recording the Core Assessment, Cloning and Copying, and Improving Narratives around the Child and Family, all contain more specific and detailed suggestions for improving ICS functionality including any areas of impact that should be considered.

Local authorities that have found the DCSF specifications a useful guide, or have systems that are already serving their needs, may choose to make no further changes to the ICS. For those local authorities which are continuing to develop and improve ICS, research and experience from other local authorities indicates that there are a number of strategies that can contribute to a successful ICS implementation or improvement. For example, ensuring that:

- ICS is owned by Children's Services as the key business system for social care supporting case management, service delivery and outcomes tracking for children and their families;
- any change in the legal framework, policy or practice is reflected and supported by the electronic social care system;
- any commissioning of development or an upgrade to the electronic social care system supports practitioners to carry out the key tasks of assessment, planning, intervention and review;

- any commissioning of development or improvement to the electronic social care system involves practitioners throughout and uses practitioners to test it prior to any roll out;
- robust long term arrangements are in place for monitoring the quality and performance of the electronic social care system and that issues experienced by users can be properly escalated to senior managers and the supplier;
- there is effective delivery of training across the system's areas of practice which promotes a view of the ICS as a practice tool;
- their authority is represented at the relevant Supplier User Group and works collaboratively with other authorities with the same supplier to ensure a high quality product that will meet the needs of users; and
- the IT infrastructure is able to support the demands of the electronic social care system.

There are a number of ways in which strategic decision makers and senior managers can positively influence and support the commissioning and improvement of ICS in their Authority. Principal among these are:

1. ensuring a strategic approach is taken in ICS commissioning and improvement that forms a part of the overall IT and Workforce development strategies;
2. supporting the ICS Usability Assessment;
3. acting upon the Usability Assessment's findings, including assessing your existing ICS system's fitness for purpose and, if necessary, making tough decisions about improvement, including considering re-procurement;
4. proactively engaging with your suppliers and the NLAR to ensure that mandatory requirements are met by their systems and that user-driven improvements are implemented;
5. sharing experience and working collaboratively with other LAs to deliver services more effectively and efficiently; and
6. keeping yourself informed on the future strategic direction of ICS, integrated working and Children's Services through your ICS Champion.

3.1 Ensure a strategic approach is taken in ICS commissioning and improvement

ICS represents a transformational change in the way many local authorities and other agencies capture and manage information about children. As a result, the implementation of ICS has in many cases required significant investment in technology, people, process and practice change. That investment does not stop with the 'Go Live' of the ICS system. Ongoing development and upgrading of the IT systems and infrastructure, application of regulatory changes, meeting performance targets, ensuring staff are properly trained and qualified, operating within budgetary constraints must all be considered in the planning of service delivery. Indeed a culture change will be

required to move from a central specification to a locally-based view – local flexibility and accountability.

Ad hoc reactive responses to change has been common in Social Services delivery in the past, often caused by rapid change combined with insufficient resources to respond to that change. Whilst local circumstances certainly can intervene (for example when major flooding occurs resources are diverted and requiring reallocation of budgets and priorities), planned and proactive implementation and ongoing development will in most instances lead to a smoother, more cost-effective, and rewarding experience for service providers and users.

Proactive LAs recognise the role and impact of ICS within their wider strategic context and take a holistic approach to forward planning. Development and formal adoption of a strategic plan for Children's Services, which runs for at least 5 years and includes the commissioning, implementation and ongoing development of the systems and associated practices and processes around ICS will improve a LAs ability to predict future resource requirements and investment. Importantly, it will aid informed decision making around priorities in times of change. Embedding change often takes more time than a strategy takes account of. Taking a long view on gains made is a skill that requires courage and 'stickability', especially in the face of political, public and financial pressure.

Excellent benchmarking of the status quo and clear measurable outcomes will assist local authorities in understanding both the intended and unintended consequences of any change strategy. It is important that the outcomes measures are short, medium and long term, allowing for the tracking of progress along the route.

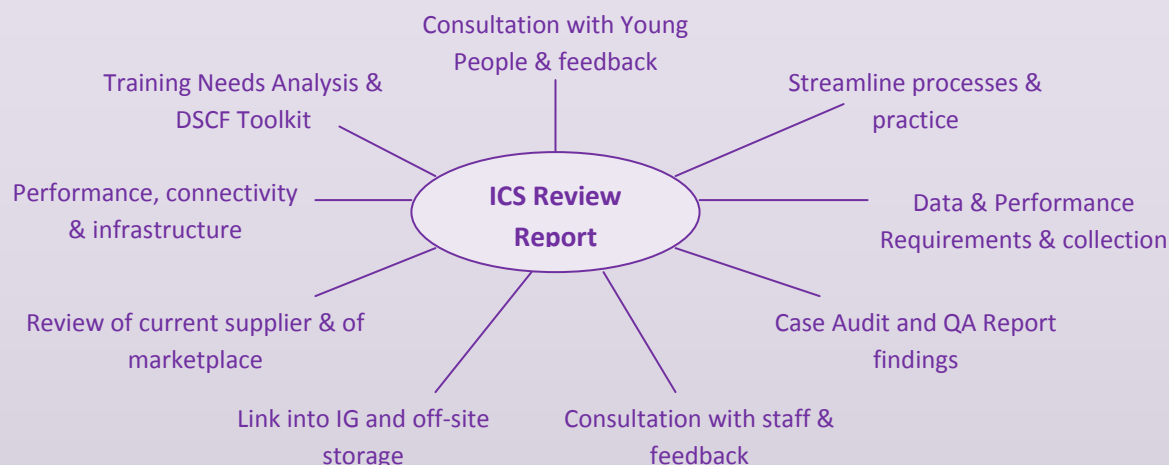
Case Study - Using the DCSF guidance to make a difference for our practitioners in Stockport

The DCSF guidance released in September 2009 was useful in encouraging LA's to use the toolkit to undertake a baseline review of their ICS to deliver usability improvements for their practitioners.

In Stockport, we used the toolkit with our practitioners in September 2009 and to some extent, the findings reinforced what we already knew were areas that needed attention to deliver improvements. The toolkit was useful as it presented the findings in graphical report which was instrumental in presenting a business case to the board (senior management) for resources to undertake a review of ICS across children's social care.

The senior management team are committed to delivering usability improvements and commissioned a full review of ICS which started in January 2010 and aims to be complete by 31st May 2010. In planning the scope of the review we referred to the "Getting the best out of your ICS: Guide for practitioners and managers" and the "associated guidance tools" and the more recent "Improving the usability of ICS systems" guidance which provided some good suggestions and recommendations from other LA's, especially in the case studies of how other LA's have gone about planning and making improvements. This guidance has helped us to reflect and consider what we already knew about our ICS implementation from our practitioners in Stockport and to plan a review that will be wide enough to make a real difference for our practitioners.

We have a wide but measured scope for our review to provide an ICS baseline relating to social work practice and tools to support electronic recording, the areas will include:



The main element of this review will be in reviewing and streamlining the business processes and pathways with practitioners/ managers. We have structured a programme between March and May 2010 to review care pathways in turn with respective managers across the service areas who work to this process, taking account of the key elements which include;

- Process including recording requirements outside ICS,
- Exemplar content,
- Outputs and
- Reports.

We plan to use the DCSF guidance tools within these sessions to assist managers/ practitioners to be aware of options used in other LA's for example options for deconstructing the core assessment and use this model across other exemplars, building in the child's narrative and options for making better use of cloning and copying with workflow and improving outputs.

On completion of the review, we plan to incorporate any approved usability changes and improvements to be delivered concurrently to our workplan for implementing ICS Phase 1C.

In looking towards the future, and beginning to discuss areas and options for integration with other case management systems (CMS) outside social care, the "Integrated Children's System (ICS) and interoperability" guidance released by the DCSF in December 2009 has been particularly useful in offering a view of how ICS will interface with the other initiatives ContactPoint and eCAF. This has prompted more detailed discussions within our authority, and considerations for aligning our structures and resources.

3.1.1 The national context: ICS, ContactPoint and National eCAF interoperability

In addition to the wider local context, social workers and their managers will increasingly begin to use two national systems in the course of their work: ContactPoint and National eCAF. In their forward planning for service delivery, strategic managers must consider the interoperability requirements of these systems.

ContactPoint was developed in response to a key recommendation of Lord Laming's inquiry into the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, which among other things highlighted

the need to improve information exchange between different agencies working with children. ContactPoint is an online directory that provides a quick way for authorised practitioners to find out who else is working with the same child. It is a critical tool to help improve the wellbeing of all children, keep them safe, and to ensure that no child slips through the net of support services.

ContactPoint contains only basic identifying information for each child in England up to their 18th birthday, contact details for their parents or carers, and practitioners working with a child. It does not and will not hold any case information (for example, case notes, assessments, medical data or exam results).

Further information is available at: <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/contactpoint>

CAF and National eCAF. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was introduced in 2006. The CAF is a shared assessment and planning framework for use across all children's services and all local areas in England. It aims to help the early identification of children and young people's additional needs and promote co-ordinated service provision to meet them. The CAF consists of: a pre-assessment checklist to help decide whether a child/young person would benefit from a common assessment; a process to enable practitioners in the children's workforce to undertake a common assessment and then act on the result; a standard assessment form; and a standard delivery plan and review form.

National eCAF will be the IT system for storing and sharing CAF information securely across local authorities. It will enable authorised, trained practitioners from across the children's workforce to electronically store and share CAF information quickly and securely and to work together to build a holistic picture of a child or young person's needs. The system reduces the need for children, young people and their families to repeat their story for different services. In order to gain access to CAF information held on National eCAF, practitioners will need explicit consent from the child or young person who is the subject of the CAF (or their parent or carer where appropriate).

Further information is available at: <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/ecaf/>

3.1.2 Useful Resources

Interoperability Guide: In support of its ongoing programme to support ICS Improvements, DCSF published *The Integrated Children's System (ICS) and 'interoperability'* paper in December 2009 which provides an overview of ICS, ContactPoint and National eCAF 'interoperability'. It describes both the business process and system landscape in which ICS operates, including that of the near and medium term future that will include ContactPoint and National eCAF. It can be downloaded from: <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/ics/>

IDeA Website: A priority area for the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) is Children and Families. IDeA works with local authorities, including lead members for children's services, to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. IDeA

maintains a comprehensive online resource, including numerous publications and toolkits to help local authorities deliver better, more effective children's services:

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=11216113>

3.2 Undertake the ICS Usability Assessment in your Authority

Many local authorities have invested significant resources in developing their ICS over the past five years. There have been mixed results from the implementation, resulting in many practitioners struggling to carry out their day to day practice with the systems provided. Elsewhere, however, LAs have successfully developed local solutions for the common problems encountered within ICS and continue to do so. Most social work practitioners and managers are clear that they need an electronic recording system, and many say they can see much good in the ICS. However, the experience of too many has been that the difficulties in using the system outweigh the benefits.

What are some of the ICS-related barriers to effective practitioners and service users? Are they real or perceived? What should be put in place to understand the difference? How do we gather the necessary evidence to inform management of the real impact on the ground? In many cases tools such as time measures and logs that categorise concerns into practice, technical and supplier issues fall short due to a lack of use and perceived lack of time by the worker to provide the evidence-based information; compounded by claimed lack of time by the team managers to analyse and feed MI upwards. Stories from the shop floor have tended to be largely anecdotal and the responses ad hoc and often not thought through in terms of what improvements are expected as a result of the feedback.

The Social Work Task Force (SWTF) raised the need to address usability in ICS and assist local authorities as they work to improve usability locally. Baroness Morgan, in her letter of 22 June 2009, committed to support authorities in this area. To that end, the SWTF and DCSF developed a *Usability Toolkit* and *ICS Guidance Note: Improving the usability of ICS systems* (see below) which have been designed to help local authorities conduct an in-depth analysis of their ICS and the issues practitioners are encountering. Many local authorities are using this tool alongside their other evaluation processes to better understand how best to improve their ICS. Those LAs that have used the *Usability Toolkit* have found it to be an excellent aid to support their improvement process.

The *ICS Guidance Note: Improving the usability of ICS systems* describes various aspects of usability, and considers it in the context of ICS. It describes the wider business factors which influence ICS usability, and presents some concrete ways and examples of improving ICS in your authority.

In essence, however, there are some very straightforward things that authorities can do to get the measure of how usable (or otherwise) their ICS is, and to begin to take action:

- **Use the DCSF Usability Toolkit.** This is a structured solution to enable you to identify usability issues, and work out where to take action.

- **Engage strongly with frontline practitioners.** They are aware of where usability issues lie, and will often have clear ideas about how to resolve them. Because usability affects their day-to-day work, they will be keen to see improvements here, and also, often, to participate in the improvement work itself.
- **Be proactive in your Supplier User Group (SUG) and engage with the NLAR (see below).** The authorities represented in your SUG may well have experienced similar usability issues to you, and may be able to help in finding solutions to them. SUGs are also the best way of coordinating and prioritising development work with the supplier.
- **View usability improvement work as a continuous,** and not a one-off, activity.

Local authorities are today taking proactive steps to address and improve usability in their ICS systems. This yields benefits for practitioners, service users, and ultimately the authority itself as it manages its responsibility for social work services with children and young people.

3.2.1 Available Tools

DCSF ICS Usability Toolkit and Guidance. The DCSF ICS Usability Toolkit was issued to local authorities in July 2009, firstly to 10 pilot authorities for evaluation and then to all others. A slightly revised version of the toolkit was published in August 2009 which allowed a sample of 100 responses rather than the previous limit of 20. This revised version, is now available from the DCSF website:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/ig00635/>

To complement the Toolkit, DCSF has published the *ICS Guidance Note: Improving the usability of ICS systems* (December 2009), also available from the DCSF website:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/ig00635/>

IDeA Integrated working: evaluation toolkit. Target users: team leaders, senior managers, partners. This toolkit aims to help you evaluate the progress and impact of integrated working between teams. The toolkit has been created to inform self-assessment and future development. It is organised in a series of components that will enable teams to adapt it to individual circumstances.

It is supported by:

- questionnaires;
- interviews with key client groups involved with integrated services; and
- the views of team leaders, partners and managers.

IDeA will collate and analyse this information. Evaluative and constructive feedback is provided at a one-day partner service event to identify next steps and learn from areas of success. A six-month follow-up will help you monitor and evaluate the impact of action planning. See: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=11216113>.

3.3 Support the ICS usability assessment findings

The ultimate outcome of the ICS usability assessment process will be a statement on the fitness for purpose (or otherwise) of your Authority's existing ICS and associated practices and processes. It should identify the changes necessary to provide a system that will better meet the needs of the regulators, practitioners and service users.

3.3.1 Act upon the findings of the usability assessment

Crucially, LAs need to act upon the findings of the usability assessment. Conducting a review and then failing to act upon it will result in a loss of confidence from front line managers and practitioners; particularly in LAs where fundamental problems are identified. In many cases failure to implement changes could ultimately cost the LA in increased revenue and capital spend and, in more extreme cases, reputational damage. It will be the strategic managers' responsibility to ensure that the necessary improvements are driven through.

It is recommended that a carefully considered plan which outlines how and when issues will be rectified and improvements made be drawn up. This would be set within the context of the LAs overall business plan, taking into account such constraints as regulatory requirements, budgets, timing, resource availability, training needs, geography, IT infrastructure. This in turn would lead to the development of one or more business cases to deliver the recommended improvements within the Authority.

3.3.2 Presenting the case for change

An important role for strategic managers (and the ICS Champion) is to challenge the change proposals presented by the ICS team and through that challenge process help them develop sound, deliverable business cases. The strategic manager can then confidently take these business cases through the executive approval process.

During this process, strategic managers will need to ask the following questions:

- Does the business case adequately reflect and address the findings of the usability assessment?

- Does the business case present a well-balanced range of options, including innovative solutions to IT infrastructure and practice improvements, such as mobile working or the use of voice recognition software?
- Is the change justified? Is it really needed (must have vs nice-to-have)?
- Do any changes relating to simplification compromise statutory requirements and/or good practice?
- Are the benefits of the proposed changes real and measurable?
- Are all the relevant business areas included (e.g. Children's Services, Information Management/Services, Procurement, Workforce Development, Policy & Legal, unions), actively engaged and understand the impact of the changes on their area?
- Are the changes deliverable within the available timescales, budget, and resources?
- What priority should be given to the changes, both within the business case and against the wider priorities of the LA?
- What is the cost/benefit case for making changes to the electronic system and infrastructure versus alternative options such as making changes to business processes or practice (e.g. does all the work need to be done on the ICS electronic system, or can a practitioner or an administrator complete some of that work more effectively off-system? Can a particular business process be amended to better suit the off-the-shelf functionality of the ICS software?)

3.3.3 Considering re-procurement

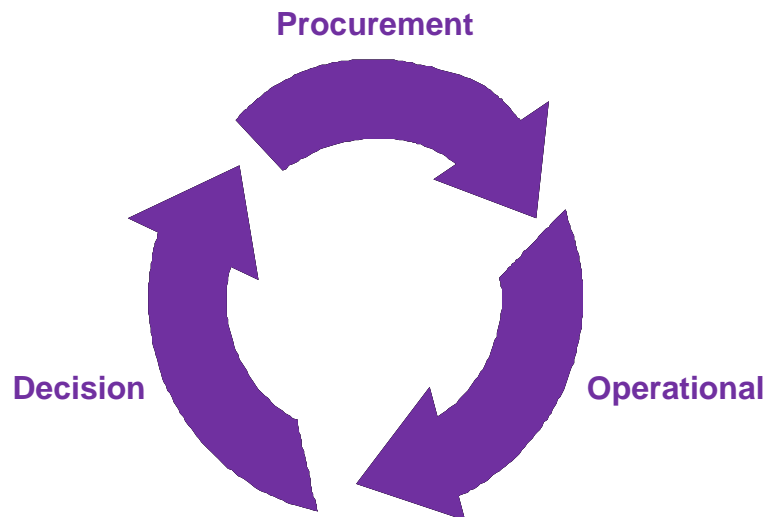
Strategic managers and decision makers should also consider the case for re-procurement where their system is failing to meet the needs of the various stakeholders. Whilst the initial cost to replace an existing system may seem high (both in terms of financial and reputational loss), in the medium to long term it may be the most effective solution.

3.4 Engage with Suppliers to deliver products which better meet the needs of their customers (ie. the local authorities)

The majority of local authorities use electronic case management systems to record, collate, analyse and output information to support their work with children. These are delivered in various ways including; off-the-shelf, customised off-the-shelf; and fully customised packages. The purpose of this section is to set out ways in which local authorities can better engage with their ICS system suppliers and work collaboratively with other local authorities to improve and develop system usability and drive down associated costs.

3.4.1 The System Lifecycle

Suppliers (and other LAs) are engaged in different ways, depending on which stage of the overall system lifecycle you are in. The following diagram sets out the core stages in an ICS system lifecycle and the following sections summarise the measures that may be available to improve the value for money from suppliers and better inform the decision making process at each stage.



Procurement Stage

The business case will set out the compelling need to make changes to your IT systems, taking into account all aspects of the change from re-training to transition. It is important to challenge the ‘need’ and address whether changes or enhancements to the ICS system will support improvements in practice or whether the requirement for change sits elsewhere, for example training, or changes in working practice. Engaging colleagues in the LAs procurement function early on in the process will help ensure the procurement strategy is appropriate, agreed and baselined in line with the full business case.

There a number of different ways to decide the requirements that a new system must meet. Through the publication of the ICS Business Requirements Specification (currently at Phase 1C), the DCSF has identified a number of ‘must have’ functional requirements that ICS systems should comply with in order to meet legislation and regulations. The Phase 1C specification also includes a number of ‘should have’ requirements. However, it is not a comprehensive system requirement specification. There are many other aspects that need to be defined for an effective procurement and bespoke local requirements may be devised by working with user groups and could be informed by the market through “soft market testing”.

It may be helpful to speak with other local authorities who have recently been through the process of procuring a new system. DCSF-led forums and nominated local representatives can also support the requirement definition process by sharing good practice.

It is important when planning a procurement to allow sufficient time to not only identify requirements but also to express them in terms of outcomes and ensure good quality tender and contract documentation.

Involving business, technical, operational and procurement staff in bid evaluation will help ensure you get the best solution to meet your local needs.

Operational Stage

During operation of the system, operating the “steady state” and managing change (to achieve continuous improvement) can both benefit from sharing knowledge and experiences with other LAs. When considering changes to systems, working with other authorities using the same supplier will provide mutual benefits through greater bargaining power and minimising duplication of effort.

The formal service delivery reviews that are held regularly with suppliers will help ensure that the service is being delivered as agreed, to the required level of performance and quality.

Review Stage

A regular review of the supplier relationship, taking into account views of the business, technical, operational and procurement staff, as well as regular interaction with other authorities using the same supplier, will help inform whether to further improve the current service or consider procuring a replacement (which might be through a joint process with other LAs).

Within legal constraints, contract options for extensions can be used strategically to negotiate improvements, and provide an opportunity to explore options for joining up with other local authorities on possible new procurements.

Soft market testing, conducted with the help of procurement colleagues to ensure it is conducted in a fair and appropriate way, can further support the decision making process by highlighting the possibilities and opportunities available.

3.4.2 Encouraging a more proactive relationship between supplier and customer

Communication across local authorities, even within the same supplier group has been poor. To date suppliers have tended to be less than pro-active, and local authorities have sometimes felt powerless to effect the changes required due to the suppliers refusing to make changes once their product had been approved as compliant by the DCSF. The DSCF will no longer be involved in supplier compliance and each local authority will need to ensure that the product they commission is fit for purpose. Managing the supplier relationship is a key strategic role. Below are a number of strategies that have been adopted by successful commissioners of IT including:

- business mapping is a key tool to ensure that the specification for any development is fit for purpose;

- partnering together in consortia to buy services and products at a better price/deal. A non ICS example of this taking place in practice is in Cumbria where four local authorities came together to buy a piece of expensive software which resulted in a significant discount for each authority and shared maintenance and training, which further reduces costs.
- sharing intelligence with other local authorities – lessons learned (see section 3.5 below);
- outlining the ideal relationship between the business owner(s) and the technical team;
- working with the Nominated Local Authority Representative Forum (NLAR), drawing on LA examples and experience of the improvement team (see 3.4.3 below);
- prioritising – not everything a computer system can do needs to be done on ICS. It is about when it leads to better outcomes for children that the development is worthwhile. ICS must hold all of the child’s case information and improve information sharing. If functionality is being included that does not do that – why is it being requested?
- updates/new releases to systems – management and timing of the business impact/change. It would be good to get a case study here from another type of organisation where the software suppliers are responsible for responding to industry standard changes rather than expecting the client to continue to pay for them as part of an ‘upgrade’ each time.

CASE STUDY - Getting the most from your suppliers

Below is an example from a supplier group about how they have worked together to develop a product that meets the needs of the users.

The supplier recognised early on that there was some freedom to re-design ICS and invited their customers to work with them to decide how best to use this opportunity. A Supplier Working Group was established, with representatives from local authority technical managers, ICS operational leads, practitioners, senior managers and 4 members of the ICS Expert Panel. The supplier facilitates these meetings but the working group determines the agenda and work programme. The actual work is undertaken within sub-groups by means of conference calls and emails, and the full working group meets regularly with the supplier to report on progress, ensure consistency and agree timescales for further work.

Both the supplier and the members of the Working Group have recognised the value of this working arrangement. In six months the working group has redesigned the Contact, Referral, all Assessment and Child Protection ICS exemplars and these have been released to all the supplier customers for implementation; positive proof of the effectiveness of this process.

The new forms have been tested by a number of the local authorities and have been enthusiastically received. One manager wrote of an Initial Assessment completed on the new form that *“This is a joy to read! I’ve spent far too long reading ICS assessments where I’m no clearer at the end of the document as I was at the beginning what the issues were, whereas this was so easy to read and understand.”*

The supplier keeps the DCSF updated about this work and the Expert Panel members have proven to be an effective bridge between working group and ICS Expert Panel, thus providing important assurances that the redesigned ICS forms are compliant with DCSF requirements.

The Working Group is also providing a strategic steer to the supplier for the future development of its system. This is welcomed by both sides as it gives customers much more ownership of the product and gives the supplier greater clarity as to the direction of travel for further system developments.

The relationship with the supplier is positive, but robust, with inevitable tensions about timescales and system flexibility, but the forum created by the Working Group has proven to be an effective way of resolving these issues and ensuring momentum is maintained.

3.4.3 The role of the NLAR: Nominated Local Authority Representative Forum

Over the summer of 2009, the DCSF asked Supplier User Groups (SUG) to nominate a lead local authority that would represent all other local authorities who share the same supplier (a list of ICS Suppliers can be found in Annex 2). These nominated leads together with the leads from those local authorities with in-house systems were brought together into one group, chaired by the DCSF – the ICS Nominated Local Authority Representative Forum (NLAR).

Key areas of focus for the NLAR are:

- enable NLARs to network and resolve issues as a group, giving each other support in doing so;
- enable feedback on national issues from SUGs;
- identify common themes (including systemic issues with the ICS market) and agree and prioritise work;
- raise any issues relating to product assessment;
- receive regular updates on the ICS improvement work;
- enable NLARs to agree messages to feed through to suppliers;
- give NLARs an opportunity to share good practice e.g. testing scripts, business process maps;
- tackle particularly tough issues, providing guidance to all local authorities where appropriate;
- provide a regular forum for communication with the DCSF – raising queries and issues and communicate challenges experienced in the improvement of ICS;

- compliance and accreditation;
- ensure that we work towards interoperability;
- discuss difficulties with suppliers;
- solve collectively any problems that authorities are facing;
- communication to supplier and customer; and
- guidance on a "good" user group.

The first meeting of the NLAR took place in December 2009. The Group met again in February 2010 to finalise the terms of reference and begin work on scoping what guidance would be useful to local authorities in this area.

Although it is early days, the nominated representatives are already feeding back the results of the meetings to their Supplier User Group. The information provided at the group on effective supplier management has been found to be useful.

“We are sharing ideas and taking these away. The 2nd meeting (February 2010) was the first real consultation group with the NLAR delegates looking at specific issues. The first meeting was to specify what the role of the NLAR is and where it fits. I intend to use what was discussed with the other authorities and how they work with their supplier and other customers to take forward to the Liquid Logic User Group”.

***Donna Dennard,
ICS Applications Manager, Islington Council,
NLAR for Liquid Logic Supplier User Group.***

3.5 Share experience and work collaboratively with other LAs to deliver services more effectively and efficiently

As LAs move towards taking local responsibility for their electronic social care system and practices, there is a sound case for joining forces with neighbouring and/or like-minded authorities to bring about economies of scale, share knowledge, and increase bargaining power with suppliers. The current economic climate also means that local authorities face increased challenges in meeting the needs of their citizens within the available resources. As a result LAs are seeking ways to deliver services more effectively and efficiently.

In conjunction with the Usability Assessment, LAs might therefore wish to consider ways in which they can work together to avoid duplicating effort and deliver better services to the public.

Areas in which local authorities might benefit from working jointly include:

- **Sharing lessons learned.** LAs across the country have all learnt valuable lessons over the past five years of ICS implementation. Much value could be gained if LAs proactively shared those experiences openly with one another

without fear of criticism. How can we match local authorities which have had similar struggles to overcome in terms of size, technology, resources, recruitment and population? For instance, understanding how one big rural authority has successfully overcome the 'Go Live' and communication issues or how an urban local authority enhanced their system to account for a large asylum seeking population. Everyone in senior management has comparator authorities that they are measured against in terms of Performance Indicators. They are not necessarily within their region. Nevertheless they may also be natural partners for ongoing strategic ICS development including mobile working options, voice activated software or other technological solutions that are not supplier-based.

- **Actively engaging with the Nominated Local Authority Representatives Forum** (NLAR - see 'The Role of NLAR' section 3.4.3).
- **Developing common specifications and requirements for ICS improvements.** Indications are that there are common requirements emerging across local authorities from the usability assessments. What opportunities exist for the joint development of a core set of requirements within each software user base?
- **Redesigning LA systems** – where possible and appropriate, so that there is less local customisation, more shared functionality and processes which in turn reduces the cost of ongoing maintenance, development and training in the ICS.
- **Sharing ICS training.** Many LAs use the same ICS software. What opportunities exist for sharing training in that software within each software user base?
- **Developing joint online training and reference resources.** What opportunities exist for shared development of online training packages and information resources that are accessible to staff from partner authorities?
- **Sharing technical support and development.** Along similar lines to training, can LAs share technical resources, from within their own resource base and from external sources (such as the software supplier or independent contractors)?

Many examples exist where LAs have joined forces to procure, customise, develop and maintain business systems, whilst retaining their own individual requirements to suit their LAs unique environment and circumstances.

4 The future of ICS

ICS improvement, where it is necessary, should be seen as a core aspect of the local change programmes for social work improvement in children's services. In *Building a safe and confident future: implementing the recommendations of the social work task force*, the Government set out its priorities and ambitions for the social work reform programme and described how the government is now working with employers, higher

education institutions, the profession itself and people who use social work services to put the task force's recommendations into effect.

As part of this broader reform programme, the Government remains committed to supporting local improvement of the ICS as a tool to support effective social work practice, while being clear that systems should be locally owned and implemented. It is the responsibility of local authorities to determine how their IT systems can best support the delivery of social care services and improved outcomes for children and their families. Local authorities also have a responsibility as employers to ensure that their local ICS is an effective tool in supporting social workers to do their job effectively. The Government will continue to provide support, funding, guidance and challenge to local authorities in fulfilling these responsibilities.

This national programme will be supported in 2010-11 by a £15m capital grant to local authorities, to spend on improvement of their electronic social care system for children's social care. All local authorities are eligible for this funding and it will not be conditional on compliance with national specifications. Although local authorities will have discretion in how they apply this capital funding, the DCSF will encourage them to spend it collaboratively in order to provide value for money.

ANNEX 1 – Summary of companion ICS guides

Guidance has been developed to address the most important issues identified by users of ICS and has been largely based on the input from attendees at the stakeholder conferences in August and September 2009, and from the Expert Panel. It is specifically designed to support local authority directors of children's services and senior management in making decisions about the future of their local systems and how they can be improved.

Integrated Children's System (ICS) improvement: Newsletter and guidance (22 Oct 2009)

The following guidance and resources can be downloaded from:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/ig00623/>

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Covering letter](#) (70.9Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Introduction](#) (276.5Kb)

NB It is recommended that this is read alongside all components.

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Introduction](#) (62.1Kb)

NB It is recommended that this is read alongside all components.

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Getting the best out of your ICS: Guide for practitioners and managers](#) (600.5Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Getting the best out of your ICS: Guide for practitioners and managers](#) (282.6Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Guidance note 1: Recording the core assessment](#) (590.5Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Guidance note 1: Recording the core assessment](#) (270.7Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Guidance note 2: Child and family narrative](#) (459Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Guidance note 2: Child and family narrative](#) (107.7Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Guidance note 3: Copying and cloning](#) (288.5Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Guidance note 3: Copying and cloning](#) (88.6Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Guidance note 4: Improving outputs from ICS systems](#) (290Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Guidance note 4: Improving outputs from ICS systems](#) (86.8Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Complete set](#) (1.1Kb)

 [ICS Improvement guidance \(October 09\) - Complete set](#) (575.8Kb)

Integrated Children's System (ICS) improvement: Newsletter and guidance (16 December 2009)

Improving the usability of ICS systems. A guidance note jointly produced with the Expert Panel to help and support authorities as they seek to make usability improvements to their systems.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/ig00635/>

Integrated Children's System and 'interoperability'. A paper produced in response to the request from the Social Work Task Force, in their letter of 5 May, for the DCSF to explain how ICS interfaces with other systems including ContactPoint and National eCAF. The paper was drafted in consultation with a number of LAs.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/ig00635/>

ICS Usability Toolkit. An update to the toolkit that was originally issued to LAs in the summer.

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/ig00635/>

Integrated Children's System (ICS) improvement: Further guidance (31 March 2010)

Strategic Manager's Guide: Successfully commissioning and managing effective ICS improvement. This guide has been designed by practitioners and managers on the Expert Panel to support strategic managers in commissioning and managing the Integrated Children's System improvement in their local authorities.

<http://www.ecm.gov.uk/ics>

Guidance on ICS Recording Formats. This guidance is being issued to assist local authorities with local decision making and options for implementation of ICS recording formats. The aim of this guidance, which has been produced in consultation with Expert Panel members, is to give local authorities the information they need to improve the usability of ICS systems and recording formats, making them more practical for every day use and the outputs more relevant to those who use them – whether they are other professionals, families or the children themselves. (NB Accompanying this document is a deconstruction table which has been set out in two different formats).

<http://www.ecm.gov.uk/ics>

Consolidating Plans and Reviews. This guidance is being issued to assist local authorities with local decision making and options for implementation of planning and review processes, recording formats and practice procedures for their ICS. The aim of this guidance, which has been produced in consultation with Expert Panel members, is to give local authorities the information they need to improve the usability of ICS systems for plans and reviews, within a context of meeting legal and regulatory requirements and best practice for achieving optimum outcomes for children and young people. <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/ics>

Using ICS to record the evidence of whether a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. This paper has been produced by the Integrated Children's System

(ICS) Expert Panel to support front line practitioners and managers to use the Integrated Children's System effectively to record the evidence of whether or not a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/ics>

ANNEX 2 – List of ICS Suppliers

Below is a list of current suppliers of ICS software products in the market at the time of publication, from the eGovernment Register (<http://www.brent.gov.uk/egr>). Information on the ICS systems in use can be found at:

[http://www.brent.gov.uk/egr.nsf/ProdTypes/Integrated+Children's+System+\(ICS\)](http://www.brent.gov.uk/egr.nsf/ProdTypes/Integrated+Children's+System+(ICS))

Click on the product name below to view the details of that product in the eGovernment Register (including the LAs listed as using those products).

Supplier	Product name
CACI	OfficeBase ICS
Capita	Capita ICS
CareWorks	RAISE Children's Services
Civica	Paris ICS
Corelogic	frameworki
Esprit	ShareCare
Local Authority in-house systems - an example of which is Kensington & Chelsea	KCics
Liquidlogic	PROTOCOL ICS
Northgate	Northgate ICS
OLM	CareFirst
Visionware	MultiVue