Integrated Children's System
ICS Guidance Note

Guidance on 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. This guidance is, therefore, primarily targeted at those who are responsible for local decision making in how the ICS is implemented.

This guidance is divided into a number of sections. The first is an analysis of ICS recording formats. It consists of an overview of ICS processes and the recording formats related to these. The relationship of each recording format to other recording formats is also considered. This is to assist local authorities in considering the impact of changes across the suite of recording formats, particularly in regard to pre-population and single data entry.

The second section is a best practice overview. This will look at some of the key aspects of the statutory guidance *The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*, which is embedded within *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010)* and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and associated guidance. The Assessment Framework underpins all recording formats within the ICS. Guiding principles for social workers working with families using the Assessment Framework are addressed, including ensuring the wishes and feelings of children and the views of parents and carers are considered and recorded. This section also considers recording policy and procedures and the importance of considering how the ICS is to be locally implemented in the context of these.

The third section considers options for implementation of the ICS, outlining some of the potential approaches to it and the relative advantages and disadvantages of these. It includes an analysis of all ICS fields and whether these are "mandatory" or "non-mandatory" in nature. It examines where a field has its basis in regulations and statutory guidance and/or is required for statutory reporting.

department for
children, schools and families

Every Child Matters
Change For Children

Contents

1 An analysis of ICS recording formats

1.1 An overview of ICS processes and formats

The ICS was developed to support practice by being clearly linked to the core processes of assessment, planning, intervention and review. These core processes underpin all social work with children in need and their families, encompassing children living at home receiving services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, children who are the subject of a child protection plan and looked after children.

Within these overarching high level processes there are a number of related processes which facilitate assessment, planning, intervention and review to support specific elements of social work practice with children in line with regulations and guidance. These encompass:

- referral for incoming work to the social work department;
- assessment to ascertain whether a child requires services under section 17;
- whether a strategy discussion should be convened to consider if there should be a section 47 enquiry;
- whether there is a need to provide accommodation under section 20;
- processes to support section 47 enquiries and conference and review where the child subsequently becomes subject to a child protection plan;
- decisions about whether to make application for a supervision or care order; and
- processes to support looked after children.

These processes are further supported by specific recording formats (originally referred to as the "exemplars") which together form the core spine of the ICS. It is these records, and the options for implementation of them, with which this guidance is concerned.

1.2 ICS recording formats

The ICS recording formats are used to record information gathered at each stage of the process of work with children and families. They can be divided into four types:

- information;
- assessment;
- planning; and
- review.

The following table below lists these four record types in more detail:

Information
• Contact Record
• Referral and Information Record
• Placement Plan (originally published as the "Placement Information Record")
• Chronology
• Court Chronology
• Child's Permanence Report
• Closure
Assessment
• Initial Assessment
• Record of Strategy Discussion
• Record of Outcome of Section 47 Enquiries
• Initial Child Protection Conference Report – incorporating the Outline Child protection Plan
• Core Assessment
• Court Core Assessment
• Assessment and Progress Record
• Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Record
• Private Fostering Arrangement (Visit Under Regulation 8)
Planning
• Initial Plan
• Child's Plan – incorporating the Child Protection Plan
• Care Plan for a Looked After Child
• Adoption Plan
• Pathway Plan
• Court Care plan
Review
• Child/Young Person In Need Review
• Child Protection Review
• Looked After Review (including those children for whom adoption is the plan)
• Adoption Review (for children placed for adoption)
• Review of Pathway Plan

Each record, its purpose and relationship to other records will now be briefly described in turn. Within this, reference has been made to the concept and design of the *original* record as published on the DCSF ICS website, so that these factors can be taken into account when considering the approach and impact of local changes and implementation. Please note that there is a separate guidance paper dealing in detail with plans and reviews. Although the purpose of each of the plans and reviews is

summarised below, Expert Panel members advise that consideration for implementation of plans and reviews should take this guidance into account. The guidance can be found at: www.ecm.gov.uk/ics.

Contact Record: this records details of contact made with children's social care regarding a child.

Referral and Information Record (RIIR): the RIIR records complete referral details and the response to it. The RIIR can be partly pre-populated from the Contact Record. The RIIR is used to record essential information. Essential information should be updated as required as the case develops. For this reason, the RIIR was also originally conceived to be given to carers if the child is accommodated. However, some LAs preferred to incorporate this information into the Placement Plan (Placement Information Record) or to present it as a separate document, pre-populated from the RIIR/demographic fields on the IT system.

Placement Plan (originally published as the "Placement Information Record"): Placement plan is the terminology specifically referred to in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/safeguardingandsocialcare/childrenincare/careplanning/careplanning/ The Placement Plan contains key information required by carers when a child is accommodated. Schedule 2 of the Regulations sets out what must be covered by the plan.   These regulations will come into force on 1st April 2011.

Chronology: The chronology records all significant events and changes which should be updated as required during a period of social work involvement. It is an analytical tool designed to help practitioners understand the impact on the child/young person, both immediate and cumulative, of such events and changes. In order to assist with such analysis the chronology was grouped under the following headings – previous social services activity; health history; education, training and employment; changes in legal status; placement history for a LAC; history of offences; and significant events/changes in the child and family circumstances. However, there is no requirement for the chronology to be structured in this exact manner. The ICS Chronology was designed so that it could be partly informed and pre-populated from other ICS records – primarily the reviews.

Court Chronology: The Court Chronology is a requirement during family court proceedings and is structured as set out in the Public Law Outline 2008 (section 34). The Court Chronology does not necessarily need to be 100% consistent with the ICS chronology (it is acceptable to produce differing versions of a chronology to suit differing purposes – although a court chronology should reflect pertinent information contained on children's social care records). However, the LA may wish to look to technical/structural solutions to maximise population between the ICS Chronology and that required for court.

Child Permanence Report (CPR): the CPR provides all of the information specified in Regulation 17 and Parts 1 and 3 of the Adoption Agency Regulations 2005. It sets out the information about a child, his or her parents and wider family that must be submitted

to the Adoption Panel. The CPR is a requirement of Statutory Adoption Guidance. A large proportion of the CPR is taken from information in the RIIR, the Placement Plan (PIR) and Adoption Record; so that this can be directly pre-populated from information already entered on these ICS records.

Closure Record: The Closure Record has been designed to summarise, at closure, the impact of actions taken and services provided for all cases that have progressed beyond an initial assessment. The Closure Record was structured so that it can be partly pre-populated from the ICS plans. However, it does not have to be set out in this manner. Nor is it a requirement of primary legislation.

*The **assessment records** have been designed to record information gathered from a range of sources including other professionals and agencies. The child and their family must also be involved in the assessment process but the assessment formats were NOT designed to be used as questionnaires. There are guidance notes on the assessments based on research findings, information about child development, health and education standards and suggestions for use of specific tools, questionnaires and scales. The Core Assessment, Assessment and Progress Record and Pathway Plan Assessment also contain statements accompanied by a "Yes/No" and a "Notes and Evidence Section" (used to record the presence or absence of an issue). Please note that the purpose of the statements and options for local implementation and usage of these have been addressed in detail in the October 2009 guidance on the Core Assessment. For this reason these will not be addressed again within this paper.*

Initial Assessment Record (IAR): The IAR is the record of the initial assessment and the decisions and actions resulting from it, including an Initial Plan. An initial assessment identifies whether a child is in need - and if so, whether the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm - and the services and interventions required to respond to those needs. It will also identify if a Core Assessment is necessary to develop a more in-depth understanding of a child's needs, for example in more complex circumstances.

Core Assessment/Court Core Assessment: these have been examined in detail within guidance issued in October 2009. This guidance can be found on the following link: www.ecm.gov.uk/ics.

Record of Strategy Discussion: A strategy discussion should be held whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm (Working Together 2010, Chapter 5). The Record of Strategy Discussion records the decisions made at a strategy discussion.

Record of Outcome of s47 Enquiries: It records the outcome of section 47 enquiries where these have been instigated following a strategy discussion. The ICS Record of Outcome was designed so that recommended actions outlined at the strategy discussion are pre-populated (the Record of Outcome indicating the result of these actions).

Initial Child Protection Conference Report (ICPC): An initial child protection conference report should be convened if, having completed s47 enquiries, it is

concluded that a child may continue to, or be likely to, suffer significant harm. The ICPC report provides a summary of all of the information known to children's social care services up until the time the conference is held and assists with an analysis of this information. The format of the report was structured to facilitate the transfer of information from the IAR and the CA. Where the conference decides that a child or young person should be made the subject of a child protection plan, this should be informed by the Initial Plan (see discussion on the Initial Plan below).

Assessment and Progress Record (APRs): APRs are intended to monitor the developmental progress of looked after children. They are arranged in age bands and were designed to be updated periodically whilst the child is looked after. The APRs include ratings, linked to the domains and dimensions of the Assessment Framework, which are intended to give an indication of the child/young person's developmental progress over time. The outcomes of these ratings inform the LAC and adoption review records. The format of the APRs is closely related to that of the Core Assessment. This is to assist with the records informing each other when a child becomes or ceases to be looked after (a core assessment should be undertaken to inform the care plan of a child being looked after and a plan should be in place for a child returning home). The completion of an APR is not a requirement of primary legislation. However, local authorities will need to consider alternatives for assessing the developmental progress of looked after children if they do not wish to use these records or to make alterations to them.

Private Fostering Arrangement Assessment Record (PFAAR)/Private Fostering Arrangement Record (PFAR): The PFAAR is used to record key information following notification and to record the decision as to suitability of the private fostering arrangement. The PFAR is used to record the outcome of visits to a private fostering arrangement as specified under Regulation 8 of The Children (Private Fostering Arrangements for Fostering 2005). Both records utilise the domains and dimensions of the Assessment Framework. This is required by the regulations but can also facilitate transfer of information if a decision to take further action under the Children Act 1989 is made (e.g. to undertake an Initial Assessment).

Initial Plan: The Initial Plan is intended to address the child's immediate or short-term needs. It can be used where such services are being provided as a result of an initial assessment and a core assessment is not necessary, or where services are being provided pending the completion of a core assessment. The Initial Plan was designed to follow the same tabular format as the other plans but the domains were not broken down into the dimensions. A column was included to record the outcome of actions and services. There is no review record linked to the Initial Plan as this column was intended to be used to monitor progress and for completion at review or closure. The Initial Plan is located at the end of the IAR, the Record of Outcome of section 47 enquiries (so that it can be updated as a result of the enquiries) and in the ICPC (to form the outline child protection plan).

Child's Plan: The Child's Plan is used for children in need with more complex needs. It is completed following the completion of the core assessment and replaces the initial

plan. The format for the Child's Plan was also used for the *Child Protection Plan* and for *Short Break Care* (in conjunction with Part One of the LAC Care Plan).

Care Plan: this is the plan for the looked after child (including those for whom adoption is the plan). The Care Plan is in two parts. Part One sets out the overall aim of the plan which can only be changed at a statutory review. Part Two identifies actions and services to be provided. Part Two has been formatted in line with the Child's Plan. This was designed to facilitate transfer of information for children who have been receiving section 17 services or who have been subject to a Child Protection Plan prior to being looked after (similarly to inform the Child's Plan when a looked after child episode is ceasing and the child/young person is returning home).

Adoption Plan: The Adoption Plan covers all the steps that are needed for a child to be adopted as set out in the statutory guidance to the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Adoption Plan substitutes for part two of the Care Plan once a decision has been made at a statutory review that the plan is for adoption. The Adoption Plan and part two of the Care Plan follow a similar structure to facilitate transfer of information.

Pathway Plan: The Pathway Plan must be completed for each young person who is eligible, as defined by the Children (Leaving Care Act) 2000 and for each relevant child who does not already have one. The Pathway Plan replaces Part Two of the Care Plan and is itself split into two sections. Part One is the needs assessment, Part Two is the plan (some authorities have chosen to implement these as separate documents). The tabular format used for the Pathway Plan is the same as for other plan formats.

Court Care Plan: the Court Care Plan is a requirement for care proceedings. The format is in line with that set out in Local Authority Circular LAC (99) 29. This format is consistent with the LAC care plan to facilitate transfer of information. (NB LAC 99 (29) will be replaced by Vol. 1 and 2 of The Children Act 1989 Regulations and Guidance by 1 April 2011)

*There are five **review** records. Each record is split into two parts. Part One is the social work report which outlines the impact of actions and services provided. Part One was designed so that it can incorporate and be pre-populated by the current plan (the actual outcomes column being updated by the social worker for the review to state progress so far). Part Two is the chair's report and is an evaluation of how well the plan is meeting the child's needs.*

Child/Young Person In Need Review: this is a review of the Child's Plan for children/young people receiving services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. There is not a requirement under primary legislation to undertake a CIN review nor is there a requirement regarding the content of this, although it is recommended best practice to do so every six months (see paragraph 4.36 of the Assessment Framework).

Child Protection Review: this is a review of the Child Protection Plan. It outlines the conference format for a child/young person subject to a Child Protection Plan (see Chapter 5 of Working Together 2010).

Looked After Child Review (including those children for whom adoption is the plan): this outlines the review format for LAC Care Plan.

Adoption Review (for children placed for adoption): this is the review record for children placed with adopters whilst they remain looked after, prior to the making of an adoption order.

Review of Pathway Plan: this is the review for Pathway Plan.

2 Best Practice Overview

2.1 The Assessment Framework

The domains and dimensions of the Assessment Framework underpin the ICS and its related recording formats. The need to address the domains and dimensions in work with children, young people and their families is stated throughout regulations and statutory guidance (see Section 3.1 below).

The Assessment Framework provides a systematic way of analysing, understanding and recording what is happening to children and young people within their families and the wider context of the community in which they live. This systematic approach provides a context for and basis of making clear professional judgments – including whether the child being assessed is in need, whether the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm and which actions and services would best meet the needs of the particular child and family.

The evidence based knowledge which has informed the development of the Assessment Framework has been drawn from a wide range of research studies and theories across a number of disciplines and from the accumulated experience of policy and practice. The effectiveness of utilising the Assessment Framework in social work intervention with children is also supported by research findings.[1]

It should be stressed that the Assessment Framework is not a practice manual, a questionnaire or a step by step procedure for intervention: rather it sets out a framework which should be adapted and used to suit individual circumstances. It is for this reason that the recording formats that support the Assessment Framework and underpin the ICS need to be presented in a way that avoids the potential of a mechanistic approach to social work practice. These issues are outlined further in section three.

2.2 Recording Policy, Procedure and Practice

Whatever the approach taken to ICS recording formats, they are unlikely to be effective or to assist with achieving improved outcomes for children, if their content or purpose are not understood or information is inadequately entered into the system. For these reasons, the impact of the local implementation of ICS recording formats is likely to be

---

[1] For example, see *Assessing Children's Needs and Circumstances: The Impact of the Assessment Framework*: H. Cleaver , S. Walker and P. Meadows, 2004; *The Developing World of the Child*, Edited by J. Aldgate, D. Jones, W. Rose and C. Jeffrey 2006; *Safeguarding Children living with trauma and family violence – Evidence based assessment, analysis and planning interventions*: A. Bentovim, A. Cox, C. Bingley Miller and S. Pizzey 2009; and *Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity: The impact of parental mental illness, learning disability, problem alcohol and drug use, and domestic violence on children's safety and development*: H. Cleaver, I. Unell and A. Aldgate 2010.

greater if undertaken within the context of a sound recording policy, procedure and practice.

Within this sub-section, Expert Panel members are not attempting to advise local authorities on all that could or should be encompassed within recording policies. However, they believe it is important that such policies should emphasise the importance of analytical practice, as this is essential to meaningful implementation of the conceptual approach of the Assessment Framework which underpins the ICS. The policy should also support the core processes of APIR (assessment, planning, intervention and review) which form the spine of the ICS and to which all of the recording formats are linked. The detailed procedure should address issues of how, where, why and when information should be recorded.

There should to be an awareness of the policy at all levels of the organisation. Some local authorities include reference to, or coverage of, their local recording policy within their induction programme; some have trained local authorities on their recording policy before introducing them to the specific IT system; others introduce their policy and procedure and their ICS system within an embedded training programme.

Whatever approach is taken, however, it is important for the policy and the implementation of this within their ICS system to be clearly linked and understood. In order to assist with this in daily practice some authorities have "help" buttons linking the input screen on the IT system to the policy and procedure it relates to, or explaining how information is entered at that stage of the process. Local authorities have also produced "crib sheets" or practice examples to support good recording practice. Expert Panel members consider that it is good practice for local authorities to share such documentation with other authorities, especially where it has had a positive impact locally.

2.3 Reflecting the views of children, parents and carers

ICS recording formats must reflect the wishes and feelings of children, and the views of parents and carers. It should be noted that the requirement to record children's wishes and feelings is enshrined in section 53 of the Children Act 2004 (which amended sections 17, 20 and 47 of the Children Act 1989). Local authorities should ensure that the child's wishes and feelings are reflected in records at the key points in social work practice e.g. for assessments, plans and reviews. However, reflecting views and recording wishes and feelings should be an integral part of all social work intervention and should not be seen simply as a "box filling" exercise undertaken at particular points in time.

Local authorities may wish to consider guidance for front line practitioners as to what recording the wishes and feelings of children, and views of parents and carers should encompass e.g. what they consider to be the relative strengths and weaknesses of the current plan, areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction or whether there have been specific complaints.

3 Analysis of all ICS fields/consideration of options for local implementation of ICS recording formats

The previous two sections have summarised the core processes of the ICS, the key recording formats linked to them and some issues of best practice which should be considered when looking at options for local implementation. These sections, therefore, set out the context in which local implementation and simplification of the ICS recording formats should be considered. This section will concentrate on areas that will assist local authorities in taking practical implementation decisions.

Underpinning the information presented in this section is a field by field deconstruction of the ICS. This can be located at the following link: www.ecm.gov.uk/ics . The deconstruction consists of a table which considers each of the core ICS recording formats in turn. It sets out the origin of each item for a specific recording format in relation to legislation, regulation, statutory guidance, research findings and best practice.

The table is grouped into specific sections – assessment records, children in need, child protection, looked after children, outputs for court, private fostering and general records. Specific recording formats are discussed within each section. Please note that all basic demographic information (name, DOB, address etc) should be taken "as read" and do not form part of the item level deconstruction for each record.

For this reason, the ICS Contact Record and ICS Referral and Information Record have not been deconstructed as they largely consist of baseline information which should be recorded to the relevant level of detail at these stages, with demographic information being fed through to other records as appropriate. The local authority should, however, be aware of demographic information that MUST be recorded as this is required for data collection. A list of these can be found at http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/datastats1/guidelines/children/returns.shtml.

The deconstruction table makes reference to all relevant legislation and guidance including that which has been issued since the publication of the original ICS recording formats ("the exemplars"). This includes Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010; the Care Planning, Case Review and Review (England) Regulations 2010 and associated guidance; National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2009 (draft); and National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes 2010 (draft). It should be noted that the deconstruction has only taken into account what is relevant from the new regulations and guidance in relation to the original ICS formats. *It does not take into account elements of new regulations and guidance which were not reflected in the original formats but will need to be considered for future recording requirements.* The deconstruction is also only a snapshot of the situation at the time of publication of this paper. Advice and support to local authorities on the ramifications for their ICS recording systems of any future publication of regulations and guidance will be

considered as part of the 'ICS Future' in the context of the wider social work reform programme.

3.1 Utilising the deconstruction table

Where an item on the table is linked to a legal requirement (including those set out in statutory guidance issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970) or to a statutory report it is referred to in the table as "mandatory". Items listed as "non-mandatory" are not underpinned by legal or statutory reporting requirements but have a basis in best practice or findings from research. The comments section on the far right hand side is to assist local authorities with suggestions/issues when considering their local approach.

Stipulating an item as "mandatory" does not necessarily imply that the item has to be set out in the exact manner presented. Even within a "mandatory" item there may be degree of flexibility, for example a local authority may decide it can meet its obligations by addressing a mandatory item as a data field rather than in free text (or vice versa), by merging items, or by instructions for recording requirements in guidance notes. Similarly, a "non-mandatory" item should not imply that addressing that item does not need to be considered. For example, the timescale and content for an Assessment and Progress Record (APR) is not stated in primary legislation.

However, an authority that decides not to utilise the APR format and does not provide alternative provision for assessing and recording the progress of a looked after child within a placement, is likely to find themselves in difficulty following an inspection or if a child makes a complaint regarding the quality of care being provided.

For these reasons, Expert Panel members are keen to suggest that the deconstruction table should not be used as a crude "quick fix" for stripping out the recording requirements in the ICS but as a method of assisting with informed decisions as to how the ICS should operate in local practice. The comments sections on the deconstruction table and the issues for general consideration outlined below are intended to assist local authorities in making such informed decisions.

3.2 Issues to consider when addressing options for local implementation of ICS recording formats

In issuing this guidance, Expert Panel members are seeking to support local authorities in making decisions about ICS recording formats, within an overarching model of simplification, which also considers issues of best practice and usability. In seeking to do this it is not the intention to make recommendations as to what the recording formats should "look like" or contain, nor to address in detail all of the options for every single core ICS record.

In general, there are no hard and fast rules and local authorities will need to consider what is best for them within the context of their local practice priorities and policies and specific IT systems. However, there are over-arching issues that Expert Panel members

believe should be considered in order to maximise the effectiveness of local changes. These are outlined below.

3.2.1   Addressing changes across the suite of core ICS recording formats

Local authorities may wish to consider changes by working through each core ICS format systematically in turn. However, in doing so there is a danger that the end result may not fit well together around the central spine of assessment, planning, intervention and review. Considering changes across the suite of ICS formats does not mean that the local authority will need to make or apply the changes "en masse" (indeed, within the confines of specific system functionality, a gradual implementation strategy may make more sense for front line practice). However, by applying some common principles to the approach taken, there is likely to be greater coherence across the system as a whole.

3.2.2   Addressing single data entry and pre-population

This is closely linked to issues considered above, as the ICS formats were originally designed with the intention of facilitating direct pre-population and exchange of information between relevant records. It is therefore important, when considering changes, to be aware of the potential impact of alterations in one record for another record.

A system that can maximise single data entry is likely to be of benefit to practice and should, therefore, look beyond basic key data (e.g. name, address, date of birth) in terms of information exchange. However, in doing so, it is important that practitioners are aware of what is being fed in, from where and why – as a system where information appears without this knowledge may cause confusion and can be as irritating as one where similar information needs to re-entered. On screen "indicators" showing where information has flowed from elsewhere may assist with this.

The comments column on the deconstruction table and the description of core recording formats in section one of this guidance indicate where a similar field structure has been used on the original ICS designs to facilitate data flow. A major area of data flow on the original design was between plans and reviews. Local authorities may, therefore, wish to refer to the specialist guidance on plans and reviews when considering changes in these areas.

3.2.3   Consideration of the legislation, regulation and guidance

Whatever stance is taken regarding the ICS recording formats, local authorities must ensure that they continue to meet their statutory obligations. For those local authorities that wish to use the deconstruction table to assist with this process, it is important to note the approach taken to the definition of "mandatory" and "non-mandatory" fields within that table and to bear this in mind when taking decisions (see "utilising the deconstruction table" above"). It is important that local authorities ensure that statutory obligations are both reflected in the recording formats and recording practice itself.

As an example, if a local authority decides to meet a statutory obligation by reference to a guidance note on their ICS system (rather than by using a specific text box or field) they will need to ensure that they have mechanisms in place to ensure the guidance note is actually resulting in relevant information being recorded in day-to-day practice.

It should be noted that at the time of publication of this paper, there have been recent changes in major areas of children's social work practice that need to be reflected in ICS recording systems. These will result from implementation of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and associated statutory guidance. Local authorities are advised to pay particular attention to Chapter 5 of Working Together and to *Putting Care into Practice*, the statutory guidance which accompanies the 2010 regulations. To assist local authorities in this task, Working Together 2010 and the regulations and guidance for care planning have been taken into consideration for the ICS deconstruction and are referred to on the deconstruction table. Working Together 2010 Paragraph 5.159 states that "The records (Department of Health 2002) produced to support the implementation of the Integrated Children's System contain the information requirements for local authority children's social care with others when recording information about work with an individual child in need or his family." Working Together further sets out that the child's individual record "should be consistent with the information set out" in the Department of Health, 2002 formats for the Referral and Information Record (Paragraph 5.34), the Initial Assessment Record (Paragraph 5.47), the Core Assessment Record (Paragraph 5.62), the Record of Strategy Discussion (Paragraph 5.49), the Outcome of the section 47 Enquiries Record (Paragraph 5.74), the Initial Child Protection Conference Report (Paragraph 5.91), the Child Protection Plan (Paragraph 5.123) and the Child Protection Review (Paragraph 5.140).

3.2.4 Options for addressing the domains and dimensions of the Assessment Framework

As stated in section two of this paper the domains and dimensions of the Assessment Framework underpin the ICS recording formats and are a major component of regulations and guidance. Local authorities will, therefore, need to ensure that the domains and dimensions are reflected in their local interpretation of the formats. Local authorities will need to decide when they consider it is appropriate to address a domain "as a whole" within a record, or where it is also important to specifically address each of the related dimensions within a domain.

In order to assist local authorities in this regard, both the deconstruction table and the outline of ICS core recording formats in section one of this paper, make reference to how the domains and dimensions have been presented in the original published formats. Local authorities may also wish to consider the advice given with regard to the domains and dimensions in the October 2009 guidance on the core assessment, available from: www.ecm.gov.uk/ics

Local authorities will need to consider their approach within the confines of the specific IT system facilitating their ICS e.g. some systems have adopted an approach where the domains are presented with a drop down pick list of the associated dimensions, so that practitioners can make professional judgements as to when to utilise these.

3.2.5 Consideration of recording formats not covered by the core ICS

The ICS formats have been designed to support the central spine of APIR (assessment, planning, intervention and review) and the core processes within this. As such the ICS formats may not cover all the records that the local authority may wish to utilise to facilitate quality recording practice as part of achieving optimum outcomes for children and young people. Formats that local authorities have placed on their ICS systems to supplement the core ICS have included for case notes, management decisions (sometimes as a case note "type"), supervision and for case audits.

Expert Panel members advise local authorities to be circumspect in the use of additional formats so that the system does not become unwieldy. Local authorities should consider issues of pre-population and ease of usage when considering additional formats and remember that the solution to local issues - such as a local recording procedure not being followed - does not necessarily need to be resolved by the design of a new form! Examples, where local authorities have considered utilising pre-population for local formats include for partial population of auditing records (e.g. date of last assessment), or for supervision (e.g. recommendations from the last supervision directly populating the next record).

3.2.6 Consideration of options for supporting the core formats and processes within IT systems

Local authorities will need to consider how to reflect the core APIR processes in their specific ICS system. As an example, whatever the format the local authority use for a review report, there is still a lot that needs to occur to make the review "happen" e.g. organisation of meeting date and room, issuing invites and ensuring the report is written, authorised and circulated beforehand.

The LA will need to consider to what degree this is done on or recorded on the IT system and how the IT system can support administrative processes. In doing so there is a balance between the need to ensure work is done to local standards and timescales, without making the system unusable by incorporating too many "mandatory questions" or workflow processes that do not allow for work to progress until a link in the chain is completed. Usability and functionality are key here for example, workflows which involve several members of staff, a number of stages or levels of authorisation, sub-processes or a myriad of mandatory questions within an input screen, or more likely to lead to problems than a system where these are kept to what is really necessary.

3.2.7 Consideration of options for entering information and formats for printed outputs

This is a wide area with no hard and fast rules. For input screens local authorities should decide where information should be entered as a free text box, where as a data field (such as a "tick box" to state when the child has been seen), where information will be asked for directly (e.g. "please state below the parents views of the current plan") or as part of a guidance note ("e.g. when answering the questions below please consider the following issues...."). In reality, all systems are likely to be made up of a mixture of these approaches. However, local authorities should ensure that whatever approach is taken the system is clear and consistent in how it is facilitating the core processes of APIR.

Local authorities should try to avoid approaches where there is over sophistication in how information is entered, or where data fields have been atomised to such an extent that a front line practitioner can be confused as to where they are in the system regarding the core APIR processes. High level process maps, either embedded within the system or as part of a training pack or "wall chart" and "help" buttons may assist.

The relationship between how information is entered and how it appears on printed output documents is also important. Some practitioners prefer the WYSIWYG approach ("what you see is what you get") where what is printed out closely mirrors what is seen on the input screen. In some systems information is collated and presented in an agreed format that has a common look and feel across all records. Practitioner controlled flexibility for printed outputs is also important e.g. the ability to print with or without guidance notes, or without sections where no information has been entered into the system.

There is a more detailed discussion of these issues in "Improving outputs for ICS systems" – which was issued as part of the October 2009 guidance from the Expert Panel: www.ecm.gov.uk/ics .

3.2.8 Consultation

When considering options for local implementation of the ICS formats it is important to involve front line practitioners when looking at potential changes. Local authorities may already have a process of change control to consider alterations to their ICS system, or may decide to set up a specific working group/groups. If, in doing so, there are to be specialist sub-groups – e.g. to consider formats for a looked after child; it is important that this work takes place within an overarching strategy, to ensure consistency of approach and to maximise single data entry.

3.2.9 Learning from, liaising and sharing with other local authorities

Expert panel members are keen to encourage collaboration between local authorities e.g. consideration of each others formats, especially where these have had a positive impact on the quality of local practice. Such sharing of information may be particularly useful when there is a common system or close geographical location. Some authorities

with the same supplier are considering changes via Supplier User Groups. Liaising and sharing may also assist the local authority from a financial perspective by spreading the costs associated with making changes to recording formats e.g. a shared change management process or induction training.