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Guidance

Get support from children's social care sector-led improvement partners

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Applies to England

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Sector-led improvement is about local authorities supporting each other to improve their children's services.

The programme aims to improve the overall performance of children's social care by using the strongest performing local authorities to provide peer support to authorities who are working to improve their services.

Support available

There are currently 19 sector-led improvement partners across England. Sector-led improvement partners are local authorities who are rated good or outstanding for children's services by Ofsted and have been selected through a DfE procurement exercise to deliver this support.

Each sector-led improvement partner has its own approach and expertise in working with other local authorities, along with specific regions they are able to work in.

Who can access support

Sector-led improvement support can be accessed by any local authority rated as inadequate or requires improvement.

Support can also be accessed by local authorities rated as good, where there is significant evidence of a decline in performance.

How to access support

Use the list of children's social care sector-led improvement partners to find a partner best placed to support your needs.

The list includes the regions the partners can work in and a summary of the support they can provide.

Once you've identified a partner you would like to work with, contact them directly to see if they are able to offer support. The partner will then work with their grant manager in DfE to develop a proposal for work to take place, subject to DfE approval.

List of sector-led improvement partners

Achieving for Children

Regions

The local authority is based in London.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

Achieving for Children is a community interest company set up in 2014, to provide statutory children's services for Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead.

Our main focus is providing statutory services in an innovative way, with a focus on efficient back-office support, digital, recruitment and retention of practitioners.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- performance management
- digital transformation such as audio recording child protection conferences to assist with staff challenges, timeliness of plans and accuracy of case notes
- training and workforce development
- developing policies and procedures such as pandemic response documents, privacy shield work and Brexit plans
- the progression and development of colleagues
- setting up a community interest company set up - including governance and financial set up and management
- social care policy and practice

- social care practice improvement
- safety mobilisation and implementation

Contact details

Contact: Lucy Roberts, Head of New Business

Telephone: 07710 968 942

Email: lucy.roberts@achievingforchildren.org.uk

Bi-borough with Hammersmith and Fulham (Centre for Systemic Social Work)

Regions

The 3 local authorities are based in London.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

Since 2016, Hammersmith and Fulham, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster City Council have worked together delivering sector led improvement through the [Centre for Systemic Social Work](#).

This approach has increased the skill levels and confidence of practitioners and managers and improved the outcomes for children, young people and families.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- introducing and embedding systemic practice
- delivering systemic practice courses for social workers, managers, and leaders
- developing an alternative pathway within child protection processes
- supporting organisations to actively challenge racism, oppression, and all misuses of power
- developing a systemic assessment within Early Help and Youth Offending Services
- integrated partnership working
- developing family hubs
- integrating working and family hubs
- trauma informed approaches
- non-violent resistance

Contact details

Contact: Kati Maskell, Operations Manager

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Contact: Helen Bowring, Programme Manager

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Cornwall

Regions

The local authority is based in the south-west.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

Cornwall has a proven track record of working with partner authorities to improve the quality of practice and effectiveness of services to children and families.

We work with our partners using an approach built on relationship-based practice, our performance and learning culture, innovative early help, and a strong commitment to children's rights.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- creating a single point of contact for information, help and guidance to access multi-agency early help, specialist and statutory interventions
- developing a highly effective system for direct payments
- transforming the focus and approach of independent reviewing officers and child protection chairs to become children's rights advocates
- integrating health visitors and school nurses within early help, children's social care and education services
- using child and education psychologists to help children recover from trauma arising from neglect, abuse, separation and loss
- developing a career and qualification pathway for social workers and team managers that contributes to stabilising recruitment and retention
- developing practice quality standards and rigorous quality assurance and performance management

Contact details

Contact: Ben Davies

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Essex

Regions

The local authority is based in the East of England.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

In 2011, Essex was judged inadequate by Ofsted. To become outstanding, we

focused on quality of practice and developed innovative, whole-system solutions, improving outcomes at a very low cost.

Having partnered with 25 local authorities to successfully deliver change, we will share our learning to help you design solutions to fit your needs.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- examining practices, identifying strengths and areas for development in your team
- building peer to peer relationships to support improvement
- running learning workshops
- implementing strengths-based and relationship-based approaches throughout large complex systems
- developing a single point of contact for services, advice and redirecting to community resources, where appropriate
- Early Help
- developing effective assessment and short-term intervention to support analysis and change
- developing effective care and life planning with young people and wrap-around support
- creating a seamless delivery and transition from 0 to 25 years, with assessments that focus on achieving appropriate independence
- performance management
- developing effective safeguarding boards
- creating high success interventions to support children to remain at home and return home
- provide trauma-informed and therapeutic fostering
- adopter recruitment, training and support

Contact details

Contact: Dave Barron, Head of Children's Improvement Partnerships

Email: dave.barron@essex.gov.uk

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight

Regions

The local authority is based in the south-east.

They are available to support local authorities in:

- south-east
- south-west

Introduction

In 2019, we created our own sector led improvement team, to provide transformation and improvement services to children's services nationally and regionally that enables measurable improvements to performance, and crucially to outcomes for children and families. We also support British Overseas Territories.

This dedicated improvement team comprises of experienced social work qualified managers alongside consultancy and programme management professional whose skills are enhanced by subject matter expertise and input from our managers and practitioners spanning the whole service.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- service diagnostic and assurance (including document review and auditing)
- preparing for inspection and Ofsted readiness
- performance and quality assurance
- leadership, management and service transformation (including peer business process improvement)
- peer mentoring and coaching
- business processes and support
- Early Help
- Front Door
- children in need and child protection
- children with disabilities
- looked after children
- care leavers
- fostering and adoption
- youth offending
- quality of practice
- service redesign

Contact details

Contact: Alison Smailes or Claire Woodcock

Email: sectorled@hants.gov.uk

Hartlepool

Regions

The local authority is based in the north-east.

They are available to support local authorities in:

- the north-east
- Yorkshire and the Humber

Introduction

Regulated services in Hartlepool have consistently been judged as good in all categories and outstanding in care leavers.

We are relentlessly focussed on making sure that everyone has the skills, resources, knowledge and expertise to do their job to the best of their ability. We are determined to give our children and young people, families and carers the best experiences possible with more aspiration, hope and confidence to chase their ambition.

Our work with vulnerable children means we have a lot to offer local authorities on their improvement journey.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- effective multi-agency decision making through integrated front door arrangements
- delivering consistent good quality relationship based systemic social work using professional judgement across children in need, safeguarding, children in care and care leavers
- developing a strong and stable workforce that prioritises the health and wellbeing of staff and celebrates high quality practice
- embedding performance management and quality assurance to provide clear insights into the quality of front-line practice
- evidencing improvement through performance data and service user feedback on:
 - the effectiveness of intervention
 - quality assurance
 - staff morale, confidence and the use of professional judgement
- effective social work interventions with children, so they receive the right support at the right time

Contact details

Contact: Sally Robinson, Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

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Contact: Jane Young, Assistant Director, Children and Families

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Telephone: 01429 523 957

Hertfordshire

Regions

The local authority is based in the East of England.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

Hertfordshire County Council has developed Family Safeguarding, a strengths-based, whole family approach to child protection, using motivational interviewing. This approach brings together all professionals working with a family in one multi-disciplinary team with the goal of keeping more children safely at home with their families.

Independent evaluations have shown that in each authority where this model has been implemented, there have been significant reductions in:

- the number of children entering care and being the subject of child protection plans
- police callouts in relation to domestic abuse repeat victimisation
- unplanned mental health contacts

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- doing a peer review of children's services across whole service pathway, and wider partnership arrangements
- providing a more detailed diagnostic assessment of prospective family safeguarding adopters
- calculating and analysing the costs and benefits of setting up this model
- engaging with strategic leaders, partners, and elected members to support the case for change, including attending events
- coaching and mentoring for senior leaders and for practice leads
- creating a practice development programme offering a comprehensive learning and development curriculum
- providing culture change workshops across children's services, and with partnership leaders, to focus on changing how we work with families
- providing learning workshops to support managers to lead multi-disciplinary teams and use group supervision effectively
- producing evaluation reports and performance dashboard based on evaluation and outcome measures
- the requirements needed to implement the IT workbook

Contact details

Email: FSProjectTeam@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Islington

Regions

The local authority is based in London.

They are available to support local authorities in:

- London
- south-east

Introduction

We want to work collaboratively, share learning and respond to need with a range of activities, to help improve practice and outcomes to children and families.

Alongside training and coaching to embed new practice and culture at all levels of children's services, we use a strategy for 'whole systems transformation' to:

- improve the conditions for practice, supervision and leadership
- encourage a good use of data
- reduce bureaucracy and caseloads
- work effectively with partners

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- engaging with other local authorities and building trusting relationships
- ensuring effective safeguarding
- developing strong senior leadership by providing peer support to senior leaders and leadership training to middle managers
- using data to improve practice and outcomes to children
- developing practice models including the observation and coaching of managers

- to improve practice
- service reviews
- whole systems change to support practice and reduce bureaucracy
- creating a reunification framework to assess children and young people in care returning home to family

Contact details

Contact: Laura Eden, Director of Safeguarding and Family Support

Email: laura.eden@islington.gov.uk

Contact: Chrissie Gregory, Partners in Practice Manager

Email: christine.gregory@islington.gov.uk

Leeds

Regions covered

The local authority is based in Yorkshire and the Humber.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

Leeds is the second largest metropolitan district in the UK with approximately 180,000 children and young people.

Through changes in leadership and practice, we have successfully implemented culture and whole system change which focuses on improving outcomes for children, young people and their families. At the heart of this change has been:

- restorative and relational approaches
- the development of a child friendly city
- a citywide commitment to be the best area for children to grow up

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- relational and restorative approaches to improvement across children's services and partnerships
- leadership and management development for strategic, middle and family-facing managers
- approaches to quality assurance, learning and performance
- Early Help
- Front Door arrangements
- recruitment and retention
- developing your workforce
- organisational structures and redesign
- family group conferencing
- fostering and kinship care
- getting feedback from children, young people and families
- 'child friendly city' initiatives
- developing action learning sets, workshops and training sessions
- mentoring

- service area diagnostics

Contact details

Contact: John Maynard, SFPC Strategic Lead

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Lincolnshire

Regions

The local authority is based in the East Midlands.

They are available to support local authorities in:

- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- East of England

Introduction

Lincolnshire children's services are ambitious and future focused with a proven track record of working with partner authorities for the successful implementation of transformative change. We are recognised for our insightful, highly motivated and extremely child-centred senior leadership team and workforce.

We champion continuous service-wide development, innovation and collaborative working with communities and other agencies for service redesign to improve children's experiences and outcomes.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- identifying strategic challenges and solutions using restorative practice, reflective thinking, feedback, learning and support
- establishing quality and performance benchmarks through data analysis, case audits, and review of care pathways
- conducting inspection readiness or service reviews to assess existing strengths, challenges and opportunities for improvement
- developing a learning and improvement plan and performance management framework
- developing a core set of management tools including performance data sets, a casework audit programme, and a quality assurance framework using Lincolnshire methodology
- developing workforce development, and recruitment and retention plans
- establishing practice and innovation groups
- good practice for services including:
 - Front Door
 - early help
 - Edge of Care
 - early years
 - family group conferencing
 - adoption and permanency planning
 - kinship care

- school improvement
- children in care transformation
- development and recruitment
- robust financial modelling
- legal services

Contact details

Contact: Sarah Nardone, Head of Service, Sector Led Improvement Lead

Email: sarah.nardone@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Contact: Tracey Robinson, Sector Led Improvement Programme Manager

Email: traceya.robinson@lincolnshire.gov.uk

North Tyneside

Regions

The local authority is based in the north-east.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

The health, safety and wellbeing of children and young people is at the very heart of North Tyneside Council, and we are delighted our children's services were rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted in 2020, followed by 'outstanding' for our youth justice service in 2021.

As a national leader in children's services, we are well-placed to support other local authorities improve their strategy and delivery of children's services and, most crucially, outcomes for children and young people.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- developing your workforce
- Front Door
- early help
- creating practice models
- placement management
- planning and performance management
- learning reviews and events
- diagnostics
- planning and redesigning workshops
- improvement planning
- peer support and action learning
- planning case management system alignment
- doing thematic audits and improvement testing

Contact details

Contact: Kirsty Parsons, Senior Improvement Manager

North Yorkshire

Regions

The local authority is based in Yorkshire and the Humber.

They are available to support local authorities in the:

- north-west
- north-east
- East of England
- East Midlands
- West Midlands

Introduction

North Yorkshire's children's services are 'outstanding' in all areas. Using our experience of working with other local authorities we are able to provide effective support and guidance across a range of services, including:

- practice improvement
- strategic vision and planning
- service efficiency and design

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- tailored reviews and whole system diagnostics
- developing a relational practice culture
- business intelligence including budget monitoring and evidencing the impact
- developing trauma informed practices and approaches
- risk management approaches for complex adolescents
- effective partnership engagement and working
- quality of practice framework and approaches, including case reviews and internal audit support
- Edge of Care including preventative strategies
- developing and running an outstanding 'Front Door' service, and successful multi-agency working
- creating residential and edge of care services with embedded specialist roles such as police, clinical psychologist and speech and language therapists
- analysis and support to make changes within your fostering service
- developing a leaving care service to support young people into adulthood
- reviewing Virtual Schools arrangements to identify strengths and areas for effective provision
- restorative practice approaches

Contact details

Email: PartnersInPractice@northyorks.gov.uk

Salford

Regions

The local authority is based in the north-west.

They are available to support local authorities in the:

- north-west
- north-east
- West Midlands

Introduction

Salford City Council has had a grading of 'good' on its 2 most recent Ofsted inspections and is recognised as a value led thought leader in children's services.

Innovation and transformation are supported by a stable collaborative political and corporate leadership which embraces systemic organisational and partner change.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- the edge of care and placement instability
- complex safeguarding and contextual safeguarding
- threats to life
- developing young person's plans (an equivalent to a child protection plan)
- reducing the need for child protection plans
- domestic abuse including training and tool kits
- reducing recurrent care proceedings
- developing your approach and assessment to neglect
- the discharge of care orders
- performance management
- quality assurance
- reducing commissioned placements through strong governance
- coaching support

Contact details

Contact: Sayma Khan, Head of Service Innovation and Transformation

Email: sayma.khan@salford.gov.uk

South Tyneside

Regions covered

The local authority is based in the north-east.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

We are ambitious for our children, young people and families, and passionate about the role of skilled social work in enabling change.

We work within a strengths based practice model, with a focus on children and

families lived experience. Our improvement approach is rooted in a culture of evidence based challenge and support, from front line practitioners though to our lead member.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- diagnostics and reviews using a mixed methods approach, 'critical friend' support and reflection
- leadership and the role of the team manager
- developing assurance frameworks including operational and leadership assurance, blending performance insight and quality assurance, and audit approaches and methods
- strength-based practice, including voice of the child
- care planning and permanence planning
- enabling services to develop a strong care leavers service offer and strengthen engagement and participation
- reviewing specific areas including:
 - Front Door
 - Edge of Care
 - your care leavers service and engagement
 - fostering and connected care

Contact details

Contact: Anthony Newham, Project Officer

Telephone: 01914 246 252

Email: anthony.newham@southtyneside.gov.uk

Stockport

Regions covered

The local authority is based in the north-west.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

Stockport delivers consistently strong social work practice through an awarding winning and innovative model of Stockport Family. Our model of delivery is integrated services across health, education, and children's social care, placed based working, underpinned by restorative and systemic practice.

Since being awarded Partner in Practice status in 2018, Stockport Council has worked to help more than 10 local authorities in need of support to improve the quality of services and social work practice for children and families with strong evidence of impact and improved outcomes following Ofsted inspections.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- whole system restructure towards integrated working with health and education services working in localities

- building a team around the school innovation with social workers embedded in schools to provide earlier help and reduce demand
- front door and multi-agency safeguarding and support
- early help
- workforce development offer
- looked after children and edge of care services including sufficiency, commissioning, and residential, family, and foster placements
- care leaver offer
- high risk domestic abuse, complex and contextual safeguarding
- quality assurance framework and practice improvement
- restorative practice
- peer reviews including diagnostic and audit activity on a range of practice areas
- early permanence, pre-proceedings and court work

Contact details

Contact: Rebecca Key, Interim Director of Operations and Principal Social Worker, Stockport Family

Telephone: 07800 618 771

Email: rebecca.key@stockport.gov.uk

Telford and Wrekin

Regions

The local authority is based in the West Midlands.

They are available to support local authorities in the:

- East Midlands
- north-west
- West Midlands

Introduction

Telford and Wrekin's children's services have gone from 'requires improvement' in 2016 to the 2020 inspection where we were judged to be 'outstanding' .

We focus on the development and wellbeing of our workforce and delivering the best support we can to children, young people and families within the borough.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- diagnostics and peer reviews
- sharing models, good practice and learning on a range of themes such as:
 - the response to children facing risks outside of the family
 - working directly with children
 - leaving care services
 - approaches to parenting assessments
- developing strategies and plans
- policy and procedure reviews
- data and performance analysis

- recruitment and retention planning
- workforce development and delivery
- leadership and management support including coaching and mentoring

Contact details

Contact: Laura Moore, Service Delivery Manager

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Warrington

Regions

The local authority is based in the north-west.

They are available to support local authorities in any region.

Introduction

Warrington Borough Council are an outward looking local authority, with a well embedded learning culture. Leaders embrace purposeful innovation and continual improvement.

In 2019, we introduced a systemic practice model and in 2021 we established our Systemic Practice Hub which supports social workers through reflective conversations, systemic family work and training to further embed the model. We have supported other authorities on their own improvement journeys.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- launching and embedding a systemic practice model
- workforce development including:
 - introduction training
 - direct work tools
 - skills sessions
- developing a quality assurance framework including:
 - peer reviews relating to specific practice areas
 - practice audits and deep dive case reviews
 - analysis and recommendations plus impact of a change
- circle of change – a specialist process developed by Warrington with a view to improving family inclusion in planning meetings
- improving partnership working and relationships
- bespoke children's social care practice and processes for example:
 - care orders at home
 - No Wrong Door
 - Missing From Home

Contact details

Contact: Tania Young, Children's Social Care Programme Manager

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Telephone: 01925 442 520

Contact: Alex Woods, Principal Social Worker

Email: alexandra.woods@warrington.gov.uk

Wiltshire

Regions covered

The local authority is based in the south-west.

They are available to support local authorities in:

- the East Midlands
- London
- the south-east
- the south-west
- the West Midlands

Introduction

We have a focus on continued improvement which has seen us go from inadequate to good. The outcome that we achieve for our families and children is our single most important performance measure.

Effective quality assurance, a clear line of sight and accurate knowledge of self, have all been key to our improvement journey.

Areas of support and expertise

We can provide support to local authorities on:

- planning a service diagnostic and auditing schedule to identify areas they need to improve
- using key performance data (including regional and national benchmarking) and relating it to practice themes and culture within the local authority's organisation
- creating a clear plan of support, with outcomes and timescales
- getting feedback from children, young people, their parent's and carers through focus groups and direct contact so we have a 360 view
- coaching and mentoring to develop leadership at all points in the organisation
- the evaluation and development of quality assurance frameworks, data sets, performance monitoring and workforce development plans
- developing early intervention initiatives to offer families the right help at the right time and reduce the need for statutory intervention and entry into social care
- redesigning services including:
 - Early Help Integrated Front Door and MASH
 - CIN
 - safeguarding
 - contextual safeguarding
 - Public Law Outline

Contact details

Contact: Netty Lee, Head of Sector Led Improvement

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