



The independent review of children's social care



Evidence Group Minutes & Actions Wednesday 28th April 2021 09:00 – 11:00

Agenda

- Agenda item 1: Introductions
- Agenda item 2: Role of the group and ways of working
- Agenda item 3: Review structure
- Agenda item 4: Early thinking on review and the case for change
- Agenda item 5: Future meetings
- AOB

Attendees

Josh MacAlister

Leon Feinstein

Duncan Dunlop

Review team members

Dez Holmes

Karen Broadhurst

Geraldine Macdonald

Lisa Harker

Janet Kay

Oliver Southwick

Eleanor Briggs

Donald Forrester

John Simmonds

Apologies

Paul Bywaters

Haroon Chowdry

Actions

Number	Action	Owner	Deadline	Status
1	To circulate quarterly meeting dates in advance.	Review Team	21 May 2021	Open
2	To inform the Review Team if you would like to do a blog about the first evidence group meeting.	Group Members	10 May 2021	Open





The independent review of children's social care



3	To inform the group when there are seminars, teach-ins or sprints they could attend with the review team.	Review Team	On-going	Open
4	To inform the group which centres/organisations the review team are already engaging with on evidence. The group should then suggest anyone the team could engage with outside of this list.	Review Team & Group Members	14 May 2021	Open
5	To share any relevant international evidence with the Review Team.	Group Members	30 June 2021	Open
6	To share Duncan Dunlop's reflection summary document from the Scottish & New Zealand review. Group members to inform the Review Team if they would like Q&A with Duncan.	All	7 May 2021	Open
7	To share early draft of the Case for Change with the group in a google document so members can see other comments.	Review Team	10 May 2021	Open
8	[Redact] to share examples of good practise.	[Redact]	26 May 2021	Open
9	[Redact] to share document outlining the significance of the law.	[Redact]	26 May 2021	Open
10	Hold specific evidence hearings on 2 or 3 topics with external speakers and invite EbyE members along if they wish to attend.	Review Team	On-going	Open

Minutes

Agenda item 1: Introductions

- Each attendee gave a brief introduction to the group

Agenda item 2: Role of the group and ways of working - Josh & review team member presented slides

- Different approach to having one expert panel and instead have 3 groups of expertise
- EbyE have got lived experience and has met about 4 times now. The board has good discussions on how we get everyone heard in the review. They focus on engagement, currently doing workshops and looking at seldom heard groups.
- Two others groups, design group focuses on approaches we should take on designing recommendations but they will not sign off recommendations nor will this group.





The independent review of children's social care



- The evidence group focuses on bringing challenge and support to review on the evidence and evidence gaps.
- Members of EbyE Board are on each group and will feed back to the Board
- Review will be asking big and challenging questions, and it's a tremendous opportunity so we ask that you bring your ideas to this review.

Group comments on agenda item 2

[Redact] – other reviews are going on at the same time so it must coordinate with other reviews. Report has just been published that looks at specific issues on court proceedings, public law working group are continuing to review the issues. Another example is the SEND review. We should link up across the sector.

[Redact] – point is noted and we should think about intersections across the review

[Redact] – think about how to conceptualise the system. One of the key issues is that social work is affected by individual courts and judges. I wonder if we should think more carefully about the intersection at the court process

[Redact] – good to hear from Josh, it would be a mistake to just focus on the social work activity in LAs

[Redact] – we only have a year to do this, and it could be a trade-off. We should mirror the good systems of social care. Support the point that papers should come out 2 weeks in advance and schedule meetings in advance

[Redact] – we need papers in advance and need sufficient time to read and comment but this is fast-moving review and it is also important we see things as they develop. That means a 2 week structure may not always be possible. Concern that meeting 4 times could mean we miss critical moments so we should work flexibly, it seems difficult to set the structure rigidly and so we should have balance so we don't miss the critical points

Josh – Static model that we give dates and papers in advance, pace of the review and engaging so many groups and other government departments, it is not possible to give long amounts of time in advance as it could delay the review.

[Redact] – two weeks is a good advance but where this is not possible we get specific dates. Do you go to all OGDs before every meeting?

Josh – no only for major publications

Review team member – we will try get stuff to you as quickly as possible and aim for 2 weeks' notice. Every quarter with a date set in advance, we might want smaller group meetings towards the end of the review.

[Redact] – Nods from the group on that. I will work with Review Team members to ensure we get answers on questions but not result in many follow up meetings

[Redact] – we are public servants and what comes out of this review will be taken forward. Stakeholders have mixed feelings, even if people don't agree with the direction of travel we should keep everyone informed.

[Redact] – we need to ensure transparency

[Redact] – acknowledge the review is being more transparent than typical government commissioned reviews- publication of contract, open recruitment for EbE board and publishing the case for change early on to show people how we are thinking and invite





The independent review of children's social care



challenge. There are plans beyond the publication date to do further engagement and someone has also joined to support review communications, if anyone has ideas please let me know. You may wish to do a blog after this meeting, let us know and if you have people you would like us to speak with, please let us know.

[Redact] – I like that we are not focussed on fixing surface problems but redesigning system. it feels like you have got some good experts, there could be some additional design support here from this group as we do have the expertise. There could be something here on how we feed into the big decisions

[Redact] – any other questions on ways of working? What interaction should we have between meetings? We will do what we can to respond and recognise we may not always be able to. We support the idea of challenging. What do we mean by evidence?

Josh – given the timescale of the review, producing new analysis at this point is not possible. You have already identified big questions and we are working out the best way to bring that all together in a way that brings a narrative to how the whole system is interacting and we will share this narrative back to you. We will ask if it is an accurate reflection of what we have drawn upon. We are running many workshops at the moment and we are ensuring we are bringing together what we hearing from those with lived experience with high quality research. There is a shortage of high-quality research but we need to draw upon it fully.

[Redact] – important role of this group is to ensure important gaps are addressed and represent the wider field of researchers and evidence. We need to be sighted on all of this and we may get into methodological discussion and hope we do.

Review team member – the role of this group is about research and analysis, high challenge and high support to ensure we are using the most appropriate research and using it correctly. We have worked with what works centre and they have given us some great teach-ins on methodology and this has been for the full review to ensure we are being as robust as possible. We can commission new analysis but the role of this group is to ensure we do this appropriately

[Redact] – high quality research, you said you were not using a fixed hierarchy of evidence. The big question lend themselves to diverse methods, we need to use qual and quant. The big question does not lend itself to a what works question. Quant is so important but it may not lend itself to the big question

[Redact] – this group recognises all forms of evidence and will be concerned about the fit of the evidence to the question and we should offer challenges on precisely that.

[Redact] – balance specific review and specific cases

Josh – agree on the point of balance but there is an imbalance in availability of quant high quality studies so when they come along, we should be especially interested in them. Agree there is a need for both types of evidence qual & quant. We are doing lots of work with national safeguarding panel and looking to do some joint work with them on risk assessment and decision making. There are huge number of sources of evidence we can draw on.

Agenda item 3: Review structure – Josh & review team member presented slides

- Launched Jan following the manifesto commitment





The independent review of children's social care



- Aiming to conclude spring next year
- Ensure the final recommendations are driven by evidence and that is where this group can support
- Different groups, the EbyE is above the other groups, they are being influential in shaping the review. Below that is the design group and evidence group
- Review team member started last week to look at stakeholder management and public engagement
- Multi-disciplinary review team – civil servants, people from charities, ex social works, teachers.
- Partnered with what works social care, using them to commission evidence summaries, rapid reviews and analysis. Currently feeding into the case for change. Share with the group on call for evidence, thanks to those who responded to that.
- Approached by research centres and also asking the team to do seminars while we are developing the case for change. If you want to come and speak with us about your work, let us know – we would be very open to that.
- Case for change, there will be gaps but we will be getting views on the case for change so there will be a more targeted call for evidence consultation during summer on this and host some roundtables.

Group comments on agenda item 3

[Redact] – could you invite members of this panel to sit on the seminars, it would be good to have the opportunity to attend?

Josh – fine for people to do that and would be a good idea. We will flag with the group when we are doing the teach-ins

[Redact] – are there any important centres/sources of insight that the team should go out to? To answer that we need to know which organisations you are already speaking with. Sam to share this via email

[Redact] – how widely are you looking for research? UK or beyond

Josh – can be beyond UK but when we go through the case for change, we should look at the challenges.

[Redact] - Research from beyond the UK would be great to get sight of especially where things are working well on a systems level change

[Redact] – if colleagues can advise on how to prioritise, this would be welcome

[Redact] – international evidence is important part of collation and we can help with that. Other research centres have done this collation well and we can give you a steer on that

[Redact] – is this review team explicitly using the research scoped from the Scottish review?

Josh – yes we have met the Scottish review team including review team member equivalent. Duncan has done a reflections summary from the Scottish and New Zealand review its about 10 pages. We can circulate that round after the meeting and can host a Q&A with Duncan if people wish.





The independent review of children's social care



[Redact] – the social care system could be excluding the pre-care phase like early help. What are the parameters of the review?

Josh – Children who are taken into care then returned to birth families is something we are looking at. The early help phases and before going into care is in scope, we are not bound by the statutory services. The scope is very broad.

[Redact] – we need to ask ourselves are we looking at and measuring the right things and this group needs to play a role in what we are not looking at specifically.

[Redact] – appeal for evidence on where we think care is working internationally, there are some nations that have a similar system and they don't work in any of the nations. There may be places that have a better system and it would be great to have that knowledge. Lifelong community where a system is working, let us know if you are aware.

Josh – the EbyE Board have also raised the same point that there are some big points that are worth the big discussion in or outside the meetings. We could bring those people together to discuss certain issues. Take this offline and discuss.

Agenda item 4: Case for change – Josh & review team member presented slides

- We wanted to publish this early on to set out the major issues driving problems in the social care system across England. Then pose these questions and have debates of what we should therefore do
- Publishing it early summer, we will be asking if there is anything we have missed or misunderstood anything in the problems. This means the final version of the final report will take account of this when we publish. There will also be a lot of questions to ask and open up challenging discussions with people.
- Second phase we will do more in depth work where we do some top down and bottom up work where we design some principles for a future system.
- Phase 3 and 4 will be focused on recommendations and how we drive this forward
- We will share early written draft with you of the case for change in a few weeks.

Group comments on agenda item 4

[Redact] – raise the significance of what the law says, particularly 89 act because the issues of what we do and deliver are so deeply embedded in law. There is domestic legislation which needs to be recognised in the case for change

[Redact] – collating and synthesising the evidence is a key part of this in the sprints, I ask that you invite members of this panel to observe this.

Josh – they are great meetings, if members would like to join you are welcome, but we will keep an eye on numbers to ensure the balance is right with the review team and advisors.

[Redact] – To send round the outline of what he means by significance of the law

Josh – outlined early case for change themes

- o The current system does not help families enough, help is needed but instead families often met with investigation and safeguarding mindset. This is getting worse rather better e.g. rising number of section 47s. we need to get better at





The independent review of children's social care



helping families and this should prompt some good questions on how we set up a system to support

- Child protection system which has examples of poor quality risk assessment is a prominent feature in serious incidents as is poor quality decision making. Family justice system inequalities. Finally multi agency information sharing and accountability issues.
- When children enter and leave care, we have not prioritised family, safety or stability and love.
- Other issues include community support not just government.

[Redact] – really like that, essentially, I think it is right. A few issues to raise... One is budgets. Are we working with an assumption of no additional funding? Because if we are, then to fund additional services there needs to be a focus on reducing care rates. We should try to create system to allow and encourage diversity of provision because areas have different needs and don't know one way that works for everyone. Recommendations should take account of this.

[Redact] – wary of separating these issues of protection and support and how we couple with recommendations that are cost effective. Low-cost options will not meet the ambition of the review.

Josh – aware that recommendations will likely need some additional funding and is prepared to advocate for this

[Redact] – case for action upfront, must acknowledge review unfair distribution of preventative resources. We should avoid saying it is all bad, some LAs have good practise and care does work for children. [Redact] to share some good examples of excellent practise.

[Redact] – the case for change is very inspiring. Multi-disciplinary approach needed e.g. midwives, schools

[Redact] - fundamental gap in knowledge - systematic analysis of service inputs and quality and longer-term outputs. Help is really important to all families - and beyond child removal - we shouldn't withdraw from families once we remove children - given families come back

[Redact] - 'early help' family support does not only exist to 'scoop' children into social care, nor should it exist to 'gatekeep' social care

[Redact] - but 'reduction' is not the prize per se... it's about ensuring that care / social care is used for the right families, in the right way, no? so judging effectiveness of early help / family support solely on demand reduction seems unhelpful

[Redact] - We need to understand what the spend on early intervention is - what do we mean by this - early help can net-widen, but can also restore and repair

[Redact] – social workers should be curious and get to the bottom what support is needed

[Redact] – remember that more state intervention does not always lead to better outcomes

[Redact] – support for direction of travel that the review is setting out





The independent review of children's social care



[Redact] – consider space for the impact of good ideas you come up with, what could go wrong is a fundamental point

Close & AOB

Josh – we will share the drafting so we can get into more feedback from the group

Review team member – next meeting is 19th May, before that we will share a draft of the case for change so you get early sight and we discuss that in much more depth.

Take away and discuss with [redact] if there should be topics to be deeper discussed.

Clearer proposition on how we will work between each phase, people are willing to contribute more - let's think about how we will enable that. Send notes next week due to team being on leave

Josh – share as a google doc of case for change so we can see what other people comment.

Thanks

