

Evidence Group

30th July 2021

Attendees

Evidence Group members:

- Leon Feinstein, Evidence Group Chair
- Paul Bywaters, Evidence Group
- Lisa Harker, Evidence Group
- Dez Holmes, Evidence Group
- Janet Kay, Experts by Experience Board & Evidence Group
- Geraldine Macdonald, Evidence Group
- John Simmonds, Evidence Group
- Oliver Southwick, Evidence Group

Review Team:

- Josh MacAlister, Independent Reviewer
- Duncan Dunlop, Independent Adviser to the Review
- Review Team members

Observing:

- Michael Sanders, What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC)

Apologies:

- Karen Broadhurst, Evidence Group
- Haroon Chowdry, Evidence Group
- Donald Forrester, Evidence Group
- Chris Wild, Experts by Experience Board & Evidence Group

Agenda Item 1: Minutes of last meeting

- Review team member provided an update on outstanding actions from previous meetings: actions 1.5, 1.8, 2.3 and 2.5 are all open; actions 1.10 and 2.7 will be covered later on in the meeting; and action 2.4 to form a sub-group on the Call for Evidence is now closed. Regarding action 2.4, all documents which were submitted or referred to via the Call for Evidence have been coded and compiled into a review research library which will be used throughout the review by the review team. Given the priorities and capacity within the review team, further analysis of the content will not be produced.
- There were no further comments on the minutes of the last meeting.

Agenda Item 2: Update and reflections on the Case for Change

- Review team member presented the slides shared in advance with the group, thanking the group for their support and contributions on the Case for Change. At the time of the meeting, the review team had received around 70 responses to the Case for Change via the feedback form, more of these were from those with lived experience and those working in the sector. Earlier chapters had higher response rates. The review team understood that many organisations were planning to respond closer to the closing date.
- The Group was asked for their reflections on the Case for Change.

Discussion:

- The NICE guidance is useful in the health space but arguably less impactful in children's social care, it also does not consider what is needed to bring about organisational change. Guidance should consider the impact it will have on the ground, visibility it has with professionals, its connection with inspection frameworks, and the breadth of evidence it can consider.
- Daily logs of foster carers were discussed; there is no national guidance that daily logs need to be completed, however, this is what is translated through the inspection framework. Any central guidance can be interpreted in a number of ways, this is then solidified as it is moved into practice. There are also sometimes issues where "the centre" wants to do something, but the sector is not translating it. The Design Group may be able to consider how the review can really make an impact.
- The recent IICSA report of historic failings by Lambeth Council provides evidence of the system at its worst; when considering a future system, the review should consider how systems avoid the horrors of what happened.
- A concern was raised that care and leaving care is moving down the agenda across the sector and that the Group is less strong on the research and evidence in this area. Whilst discussions at the Evidence Group have focused more on child protection, the Experts by Experience Board and Design Group discussions have been more balanced. The work of the review team covers strengthening families *and* supporting children in care.
- The increase of S47 enquiries and assessment, and the critique received around conclusions made in the Case for Change around both not leading to help were discussed. Work by the Office of the Children's Commissioner on young carers was highlighted: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2016/12/27/an-estimated-four-out-of-five-young-carers-receive-no-support/>
- The effectiveness of Children in Need plans, including being overly complex and demanding was discussed. Multi-agency partners are felt not to "pitch in" with enough commitment at the S17 stage regarding adolescent safeguarding and extra-familial harm. Going down a child protection route is seen as a way to get partners to engage. The effectiveness of Children in Need plans is being investigated by the review through the local area visits, the ethnography work, and through engagement work.
- Ineffectiveness of inspection and regulation reflects ineffectiveness elsewhere in the system.
- There are large evidence gaps around racial disparities.
- How law and legislation work in the system was discussed. The Paramountcy Principle and its significance when the Children's Act 1989 came into law should be embedded into the review's recommendations.
- In the foster care system, the person who cares for the child does not have parental responsibility, what does this mean for the parenting of those children? Moving parental responsibility and delegated authority were discussed.
- The Case for Change received many positive comments around what was wrong, this seemed to resonate with professionals and with personal experiences. The review should consider how we arrived here, and the unintended consequences of anything that is recommended in response - this would be welcomed by the sector. However, just because some of the Case for Change resonated, not all of it will be agreed with, so the response must be measured. The change in tone of the final version of the Case for Change was praised.
- There was plenty in the Case for Change which sets out what is wrong with the system, how do we ensure the process the review follows is part of the change? This can't be an isolated activity which comes up with the answers. How does the Group work with the review team in a way that allows time for dialogue?
- Regarding the Case for Change, the intention was to publish the problems early, so that the review does not rush to get to the answers and solutions. It should allow time to debate the issues. It can be tempting to jump to the conclusions, as some may feel uncomfortable sitting with not knowing – it would be helpful if the Group could encourage those uncomfortable conversations.
- Some organisations / parts of the sector feel that the problems lie outside of their remit and therefore, solutions lie elsewhere. These organisations may only focus on their part of the system and may put up some perceived resistance to critique, this may be in response to the tone being used or them feeling being "done to" by the centre, rather than because they think there is nothing to change.
- The Case for Change could have included more on the wider context. It was noted that a discussion on poverty was included in the Case for Change, stating that poverty was a contributing factor, however, it is not an issue

of poverty alone. The exclusion of poverty in previous reviews was discussed, although it was acknowledged that they were written when the evidence base was less developed and in a different political context.

Actions:

- Dez to connect the review team with NICE implementation colleagues (3.1)
- Geraldine to share research on assessments and Children in Need plans (3.2)
- The group to revisit the conversation on how to ensure the review has an impact, with this being for the Design Group to focus on (3.3)

Agenda Item 3: Discussion on plans for the remainder of the review

- Review team member presented slides shared in advance with the group, this covered the themes of the review, the “three horizons” approach, bringing together the those with different experiences across the sector, the timelines for the remainder of the review, and the review’s workstrands.

Discussion:

- There was agreement that how the Group engages with the review should change, this could include being more dynamic/on-hand to answer questions that the review team are grappling with.
- The review is considering having bigger public discussions to have uncomfortable conversations, these could involve Evidence Group members presenting any contradictory evidence alongside hearing from those with lived experience.
- The work of WWCS for the review will be shared with the Group.
- The Group wanted to hear more about the individual workstrands of the review, such as the ethnography, WWCS work, systems thinking work, and local visits. It was agreed that the review team would hold separate teach-ins on each workstrand for Evidence Group members to understand more about the work and offer their views. Following these, the review team and Evidence Group should discuss how best to be involved more closely with workstrands going forward.
- Review team member and Chair agreed to discuss the meeting structure and propose how best to bring in the Group’s expertise and knowledge. Members can then decide how they would like to be involved. The review team is also having similar conversations with the Design Group and sees value in bringing together smaller groups with design, evidence and lived experience on particular topics.

Actions:

- Review team to share WWCS evidence summaries and rapid review proposals with the Group.
- Review team to arrange teach-ins for Group members on the review workstrands.
- Review team member and Chair to discuss mechanisms for the Group to input into the review more constructively and to share a proposal with the Group.

Agenda Item 4: AOB

- Chair thanked the Group for joining and the meeting was drawn to a close.