

Children's Services Plans Review and Strategic Engagement 2018-2019: Summary report

June 2019

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLANS 2017-2020: REVIEW FINDINGS

Introduction

1. In 2018, the Scottish Government conducted a review of Children's Services Plans (CSPs) 2017-2020, to see how they addressed the challenges presented by local circumstances. This reviewing process continued into 2019, and included a review of the annual reports where these were available. The reviews focused on particular questions of relevance and interest to the Children and Families Directorate, Scottish Government, with each briefing looking at an individual local authority's CSP, with the exception of Angus, Dundee City, and Perth and Kinross, who created a joint CSP for the Tayside area. This document presents an overview of the common themes.

Views of children, young people, and families

2. The majority of CSPs prioritised and promoted the views of children, young people, and families in their design. Direct, specific, engagement with children and young people in relation to the CSP was common, and a wide range of methods for engaging with a diverse array of individuals were frequently used. However, more could be done to make a clear link between the views and wishes represented by children, young people, and families, and the priorities, objectives and actions highlighted in the plans.

Governance & Accountability

3. The majority of CSPs had clear and well-presented governance and accountability mechanisms described within their CSPs. These mechanisms were normally linked to pre-existing local authority and/or Health and Social Care Partnership structures. Reporting mechanisms commonly reflected the periodic updates required to the CSP, as well as often providing specific names and job roles to responsibilities to ensure that the actions were carried out as stated in the plan.

Assessment of Need

4. Across the CSPs, there was a consistent use of an assessment of need by local authorities prior to determining priority areas, objectives, or actions. While the majority of local authorities had successfully completed an assessment of need prior to writing the CSP, those who had not were clear in their commitment to carrying out such an assessment in the near future. Whether a bespoke assessment of need had been completed or not, CSPs also made extensive use of existing data sources, such as Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS) returns, and census data sets.

Matching Needs and Resources

5. There is a need for greater alignment and association between the challenges identified in the CSPs (needs) and the stated priorities and objectives (actions). How the actions committed to in the CSP will address the needs identified is not always as clear or explicit as it could be.

Children who are looked after

6. Throughout all of the CSPs, there was a common theme of addressing the specific needs of children who are looked after. Data specific to children who are looked after was frequently presented to illustrate the scale of local challenges. There were often references to the need to better support transitions into care settings, between placements, and out of care. In particular there was a focus on efforts to support increased educational attainment among children and young people who are looked after.

3rd Sector Links

7. All CSPs included references to the 3rd Sector, but they varied in the extent to which 3rd sector organisations were integrated into the plan. Many CSPs had extensive links to 3rd sector organisations, and these organisations had been engaged in the development and delivery of the CSPs priorities and objectives. However, other CSPs indicated a lower level of engagement of the 3rd sector. In these CSPs, where specific organisations or programmes were mentioned, it was most often in relation to delivery of services, with little evidence of their engagement in planning or needs assessments.

Adult services & Part 12 (Support for Parenting)

8. Very few CSPs made the link between the needs of their children and the delivery of adult services, such as those relating to disability, or support for parenting. A similar pattern is seen in references to Part 12 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which provides for support for parenting and family group decision making, which was mentioned in only three of the 30 CSPs.

Drug & Alcohol Services

9. Many CSPs recognised the significant impact that drug and alcohol misuse can have on the lives of children, however this could be more explicitly reflected in priorities, objectives, or actions. Linked to the lack of reference to adult services, substance misuse services were rarely mentioned in the CSPs, and generally there were few actions which were aimed at reducing the impact of drug and alcohol misuse on children and young people.

Disability

10. Disability was referenced in the majority of CSPs, but it was not regularly recognised as a priority or specific objective.

Mental Health

11. It was common for the challenges and impact of poor mental health on children and young people to be highlighted in the plans. However, there were few references to how the mental health of other family members might affect children and young people despite this factor being routinely highlighted through engagement with children and young people.

Conclusions

12. Throughout the CSPs, there was clear attention to the views and wishes of young people, and a focus on populations of concern who were in situations which made them more vulnerable. Greater attention could be paid to adult services which promote the wellbeing of children and young people. Finally, significant challenges remain in the level of focus and priority given to key areas such as mental health and disability.

SUMMARY OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT

1. The Children Services Strategic Engagement is a Scotland-wide programme of engagement with Children's Services Strategic Partners which ran from October 2018 to June 2019. The key aims of the visits are to identify examples of practice being applied to improve outcomes for children and young people; understand the challenges for local areas and promote collaboration and multidisciplinary working.

2. The majority of partnerships reported that they have used the 2017-2020 planning cycle to focus on the governance structures and streamlining the priorities for the delivery of improving outcomes. Overall Partnerships found preparing for the visit a good opportunity to realise their successes and look at priorities for the 2020-2023 Plan. There was agreement across all visits that there is further work to be done to reduce bureaucracy, encourage collaborative use of resources and better alignment of adult and children services.

3. All partnerships have embedded the GIRFEC approach and language, but are at different stages of implementation. The visits allowed local areas to showcase examples of Getting it right for every child in action. There were key themes across the partnerships on what is working well and what should be the focus for improvement, these included:

- Multidisciplinary approach to support children, young people, families and practitioners
- Targeted services channelled through universal services to reduce stigma and encourage involvement
- Supporting children, young people and families within communities were possible
- Improving outcomes for looked after and care experienced children and young people, with a focus on bringing young people back to the local authority
- Improving education and delivery of Corporate Parenting duties
- Earlier intervention, advice and support for mental health and wellbeing
- Multi-agency collaboration to deliver routes into work for parents and young people
- Streamlining and consolidating parenting opportunities to ensure offers are consistent across all sectors

4. The key challenges at local level and to the Scottish Government were that:

- the legislative and reporting landscape for children services is complex and cluttered
- collaboration of resources in local areas is variable and there were tensions around this in some partnerships
- there is a need for leaders to work across boundaries and be truly collaborative

- assessment of need should be done jointly with local authorities and health boards – working together using all resources provides better assessments of need
- there is confusion of improvement offers and where to focus resource
- a more joined up narrative from across the government on improving outcomes for children and young people would be helpful and how data should support this
- Scottish Government funding to local areas should be more flexible to support improvement across the partnership not just a specific sectors
- National performance outcomes and wellbeing indicators should be at the heart of children’s services and cross government if possible.
- An outcomes model that can be applied across all sectors would be helpful for local areas
- data collection should look outwards to other areas across Scotland to support applying improvement from other partnerships
- SIMD for rural areas creates challenges

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