**Safeguarding Early Adopters Programme – Implementation of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in the wider West Midlands**

**Rapid Review Pilot – Evaluation Report**

Background

The Department for Education (DfE) is supporting a number of Early Adopter projects to assist the smooth transition to the new statutory Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. The Birmingham-led project focuses on the implementation of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) which will replace existing Serious Case Reviews (SCRs).

Drawing on regional and national best practice, the intention is to produce comprehensive Practice Guidance on commissioning and undertaking CSPRs. This will cover all 14 local authority areas in the wider West Midlands[[1]](#footnote-1), demonstrating regional commitment to improving practice and developing a learning system as well as to making best use of scarce and precious resources (human and financial) in the interests of children and families. Indeed, our shared approach across the wider West Midlands area:

* reduces the burden on agencies whose work covers more than one local authority area as staff only need to understand and work to one set of guidance and templates; and
* allows practitioners from across the region to provide peer support to those outside their area as everyone is working to the same framework and guidance.

The initial focus has been on developing a regional approach to the new requirement to conduct a “Rapid Review” following an incident requiring Local Authority “Notification of Serious Childcare Incident” to the National Panel, Ofsted, DfE and the relevant Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

On 4th July 2018 the Chair of the National Panel notified Safeguarding Partners that a rapid review should be promptly undertaken in all serious child safeguarding cases and completed within 15 working days of the LSCB becoming aware of the incident.

The National Panel gave a commitment to respond promptly with a decision on the majority of cases within 15 working days of a rapid review being received.

A regional project team developed a rapid review process and related documentation taking into account *Working Together 2018* and the transitional guidance. All 14 areas in the wider West Midlands agreed to take part in a three-month pilot of the new rapid review arrangements. This pilot commenced on 15th October 2018 and ran until 31st December.

The National Panel confirmed their interest in the outcome of the regional project but declined to formally participate in the pilot as they felt it was early days in gauging the quality of rapid reviews and they were still considering the key components that would support effective decision making at a local and national level. The National Panel reiterated their intention to issue practice guidance early in 2019 and advised that they do not envisage issuing prescribed templates. The National Panel intend to draw upon on the experiences and learning from Early Adopter projects, and will consider supporting materials prior to consulting on the new guidance.

This brief paper summarises the experience of conducting rapid reviews across the wider West Midlands, with a particular focus on the timeliness and effectiveness of decision making.

Evaluation

1. **Number of Rapid Reviews undertaken**

Since their introduction **16** rapid reviews have been commenced in the wider West Midlands from **12** local authority areas. (2 areas have not had cause to conduct a rapid review).

Of these, **7** were undertaken and submitted to the National Panel before the West Midlands rapid review documentation was developed. A further **4** were commenced before the pilot formally began but were submitted to the National Panel after the 15th October start date.

**5** rapid reviews were commenced during the pilot using the new regional documentation.

1. **Timeliness**

2.1 LSCB compliance with the 15 working day target

All rapid reviews should be completed within 15 working days of the LSCB / safeguarding partners becoming aware of the incident.

Figure 1 indicates that only 44% (7) of rapid reviews were competed on time.

Figure 1: Timeliness of LSCB submission of Rapid Reviews to the National Panel

Of the rapid reviews undertaken, seven met the 15-day deadline with a further three just outside the deadline at 16, 17 and 18 working days respectively. At the date this report was produced (11th January 2019), three rapid reviews were still ongoing and had not yet been submitted to the National Panel, with one complex case still not finalised after 63 working days.

The five rapid reviews completed within the pilot period using the new regional documentation all met the 15-day deadline. It would, however, be unwise to draw any definitive conclusions from such a small number of cases. Anecdotal feedback suggests at least some of these cases were relatively straightforward. Several areas who met the deadline also reported that they set clearly defined and tight timescales for the period to be scoped and this helped them meet the 15-day deadline.

There is no discernible pattern between the timeliness of the rapid review and the outcomes. For example, five led to an agreement to progress a SCR but the time taken to reach this decision varied from just seven days to 51 days. Similarly, while some areas were able to determine no further action was necessary relatively quickly, others needed longer to determine that the case did not offer the potential for learning.

Those LSCBs that had taken the longest to complete the rapid review (44, 51 and 61 days) cited complexity as the biggest contributing factor. A lack of clarity of the cause of death or severity of injuries, acerbated by a history of extensive interagency working across number of authorities, appear to be the core reasons. In these cases the LSCBs liaised closely with the National Panel to explain the rationale for the delay.

* 1. National Panel Response

The National Panel set a target to respond to LSCBs within 15 working days of receiving a rapid review.

To date 13 rapid reviews have been submitted to the National Panel from the wider West Midlands area. Figure 2 shows that 69% (9) of the National Panel responses have fallen, or will fall, outside the prescribed deadline for a decision.

On the 11th January 2019, four of the rapid reviews awaiting a formal response from the National Panel will be outside the agreed timescale for a meaningful response: with the next National Panel scheduled for 15th January 2019. A further three rapid reviews remain ongoing and have not been submitted to the National Panel.

Figure 2: Timeliness of National Panel response to Rapid Reviews

Timeliness of responses from the National Panel ranged from 9 – 26 working days. However, the impact of the Christmas break has meant that two cases will have taken between at least 26 and 36 working days to finalise (assuming this can be resolved at the January Panel meeting.)

1. **Effectiveness and Consistency of Decision Making**

Although timeliness of the rapid review process is important, it is equally if not more important to ensure that rapid reviews provide a foundation for robust decision-making and effectively highlight those cases where we can maximise the opportunity to identify and cascade learning at both a local and national level.

3.1 Outcome of the regional Rapid Reviews

The Rapid Review pilot adhered to the transitional arrangements and *Working Together 2015* as, at that time, all 14 local authorities were still operating as LSCBs.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Our regional guidance identified eight potential outcomes from a rapid review:

1. The case raises issues which are complex or of national importance such that a National Review should be considered;
2. The case meets the criteria for a SCR;
3. The case does not meet the criteria for an SCR but warrants an alternative Learning Review to cascade important local learning;
4. The case warrants consideration of an alternative statutory review (DHR, SAR, MAPPA SFO or other);
5. The case warrants a Single-Agency Review;
6. The case warrants a Multi-Agency Audit;
7. The case warrants a Single-Agency Audit;
8. The case does not meet the criteria for any review and does not require any further action.

In practice, only four outcomes have been utilised to date. Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the proposed action recommended by LSCBs in relation to the 13 rapid reviews submitted to the National Panel.

Figure 3: LSCB suggested Outcomes of Rapid Reviews

It is interesting to note how this compares with the national picture. At the National Conference of the Association of Independent LSCB Chairs on 28th November 2018, the Chair of the National Panel shared an overview of rapid review correspondence received between July and November 2018:

* 52% (101) No further action required;
* 10% (19) Requests for an extension in order to finalise the rapid review;
* 32% (62) Serious Case Review to be commissioned;
* 10% (19) Related to none publication requests.

The National Panel have also indicated that there has been an increase in the number of incidents being reported since the new arrangements came into operation in July 2018. This appears to be replicated in the wider West Midlands area.

3.2 National Panel response to the recommendations from regional Rapid Reviews

The National Panel have formally considered nine of the 13 rapid reviews submitted, endorsing 78% (7) of the recommendations made by LSCBs.

In two cases the National Panel did not endorse the recommendation of the rapid review. In first instance, the National Panel clarified that a SCR was required rather than a CSPR as the area was still functioning as a LSCB, but they agreed a formal review was required.

In the second case the National Panel did not consider the case met the criteria for a SCR. They recognised that the subject child had been exposed to abuse but felt it was *“difficult to determine the impact on his emotional wellbeing and whether the harm he has suffered is serious or will result in long-term impairment.”* The Panel did, however, agree that there was potential learning from the case: a table top review of the case is being undertaken to identify and disseminate learning.

1. **General learning from the trial**

Feedback from those participating in the pilot has indicated that the new rapid review process and documentation has proved to be helpful and anecdotal evidence suggests it has the potential to streamline and enhance the process.

It was also recognised that the rapid review process can identify key local learning that can be quickly acted upon, obviating the need for further review.

Unfortunately, the short timeframe for the pilot and the resultant low numbers means it is not possible to quantify any improvements in terms of timeliness. This may be difficult to assess even if the pilot had been longer, given the extremely diverse nature of referrals and the variability in the complexity of cases.

The feedback from the vast majority of areas who have undertaken rapid reviews focused on the challenges of trying to meet the 15 working day deadline. This included:

* Problems retrieving essential historical information that had been archived;
* Engaging all relevant partners within the timescale, particularly when the rapid review spanned multiple local authority areas and where the time period considered needed to be longer because the subject child had been looked after for many years;
* Challenges for organisations who need to scope the records of a number of ‘services’ in order to produce meaningful input to the rapid review;
* Delays by a single agency can effectively derail the entire timescale and efficiency of the process.

One LSCB noted that they would have met the 15-day target had their Independent Chair not requested additional information to ensure a robust decision.

Another area reported that they did not experience problems meeting the 15-day deadline but those who participated in the process did express regret that the rapid review process provided insufficient time to complete an integrated chronology. (Which had been previously been included as part of the decision making process used within their area).

It was felt the National Panel had given a positive message by encouraging an alternative approach to capturing local learning, when a case had not met the criteria for a SCR.

Several areas also felt it would be useful to have clarity around the formal process to request an extension where there are valid reasons to take longer to complete the rapid review.

It was further noted that the development of the new child death partner arrangements will need to make provision to refer cases for a rapid review. This is particularly important where the circumstances meet the criteria for a Serious Incident Notification but the child is not known to the local authority.

During the course of the pilot the rapid review guidance and templates were revised and fine-tuned to reflect user feedback and experience. The rapid review documentation has now been updated and two versions are available: one for use by LSCBs when considering SCRs and the other by the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for completion of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Both sets of guidance and templates are attached as appendices to this report.

1. **Next Steps**

The adoption of a regional approach to rapid reviews has provided greater clarity and support around the process which should both improve the quality and consistency of rapid reviews across the region whilst also facilitating peer support.

The findings from pilot evaluation are to be shared with National Children’s Bureau which is responsible for overseeing the dissemination of learning from the Early Adopter Programme.

A copy of the evaluation will also be shared with the National Panel to help inform the development of national guidance in this important area: this is due to be published early in 2019.

The rapid review process will be subject of ongoing review and will be incorporated within our regional Practice Guidance for CSPRs. Our guidance has drawn upon a thematic review of national and regional best practice around SCRs. Following publication of new national guidance, the regional guidance will be updated.

The final phase of the regional Early Adopter programme will see the delivery of bespoke training across the wider West Midlands region for key stakeholder intimately involved local CSPRs.

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Appendices

**Regional Rapid Review Guidance for Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements**

**(Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews)**

Document 1: Referral Form

Document 2: Initial Scoping and Information Sharing Template

Document 3: Template Letter – Request for Initial Scoping Information

Document 4: Rapid Review Template

Document 5: Template Letter – Submitting the Rapid Review Template to the National Panel

**Regional Rapid Review Guidance for Local Safeguarding Children Boards**

**(Serious Case Reviews)**

Document 1: Referral Form

Document 2: Initial Scoping and Information Sharing Template

Document 3: Template Letter – Request for Initial Scoping Information

Document 4: Rapid Review Template

Document 5: Template Letter – Submitting the Rapid Review Template to the National Panel

1. Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Herefordshire, Sandwell, Shropshire, Solihull, Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Telford & Wrekin, Walsall, Warwickshire, Wolverhampton and Worcestershire. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There are currently two versions of the rapid review paperwork. The trial was based on the SCR version but a CSPR version is also available for when areas make the transition to their new safeguarding arrangements. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)