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Evaluation of the effectiveness of the new Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBS)

Alan France and Emily R. Munro

Introduction

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) were implemented in April 2006 to replace Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs). The Boards have a statutory responsibility to co-ordinate and ensure the effectiveness of the work of partner bodies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. LSCB functions include: the development of policies and procedures for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children; communicating and raising awareness; participating in planning and commissioning children's services; collecting and analysing information about child deaths; undertaking serious case reviews and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of what is done.

The Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP), in partnership with the Centre for Children and Family Research (CCFR) (both based at Loughborough University) are undertaking an evaluation to explore the structures and processes adopted by LSCBs to fulfil their core functions. The study will also examine whether these new structures and processes have overcome identified weaknesses of Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) and promoted co-operation between services responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Aims

To examine and assess:

- if LSCBs are fulfilling their core functions to safeguard and promote the welfare of children;
- the working practices put in place and their effectiveness in securing effective operation of the LSCB functions and ensuring that all member organisations are effectively engaged;
- how LSCBs manage and evaluate their role in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and the effectiveness of lines of accountability;
- how LSCB partners transfer knowledge and information between member organisations;
- how LSCBs work alongside other local strategic bodies and partnerships;
- if the new systems and arrangements are 'fit for purpose' and whether they safeguard and promote the welfare of children in the local area;

- how far the new LSCB arrangements are influencing and improving frontline practice;
- the estimated costs of the new LSCB arrangements.

Methods

The research is designed to examine effectiveness by assessing practice against an evidence base that already exists in the social sciences about strategic partnership working. A mixed method approach will be adopted and will include:

- National electronic mapping of LSCBs (web based survey to identify models of working and organisational structure).
- The identification, with input from DCSF and Regional Government Offices, of six case study areas based on a criteria that includes diversity of models, geographical areas, and levels of need. This will be aided by web based analysis of key reports and information provided by LSCBs.
- The use of a case study method that will include, interviews with: six LSCB chairs (twice); 60 strategic partners from health, social work, education, youth justice, police, early years and the voluntary sector; and 180 frontline professionals.
- Social Network Analysis will be piloted in two of the case study areas - it will provide detailed micro information on relationships and partnerships between Board members.
- User involvement will be explored through interviews with user representatives on LSC Board's and representatives of organisations responsible for the protection of users.
- Data on the costs of Board activity will be collected, including budget and spending information and details on the level and type of financial contributions made by member organisations to the running of the Board. Time use data from LSCB members will also be sought to capture activity involved in the running of an LSCB.

Implications

Findings from this study, jointly funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health, are expected to be of national significance and cover issues central to the current government agenda for children's services. A strong emphasis within this evaluation of LSCBs will be identification of best practice and 'what works', in what context. Learning will be fed back to national, regional and local policy makers and implementers.

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