

South East Sector Led Improvement

Memorandum of Understanding SE DCS Peer Challenge 2018

Local authorities and trusts¹ in the South East are committed to the principles behind sector-led improvement. We individually and collectively believe that it is our responsibility to ensure that the services we provide and the approaches we take are rooted in ensuring that outcomes for children, young people and their families are improved and that our populations are better off as a result of the work we do. Our ambition is that sector-led improvement sits at the heart of the shift away from a compliance culture and towards a learning culture. The approach we are adopting across the region including, over time, with our partner agencies and organisations, will ensure that we develop reflective practice throughout the system and the necessary skills to embed our vision of self-reflection, self-assessment and peer challenge leading to targeted action.

We are not naive or complacent. We know that this shift in approach is ambitious and will present significant challenges along the way. To achieve our aspirations we recognise that we need to continue to change culture rather than structure and this takes time, commitment and determination.

We are determined that the ambitious approach we have committed to will lead to the development of next-practice, rooted in system change rather than best-practice which is so often invested in an individual or group. To ensure that our approach has lasting commitment we have all secured support from our Chief Executives and Lead Members (or Trustees). To root the agreement we have signed this Memorandum of Understanding. This move demonstrates both our commitment and determination to improve outcomes beyond those achieved already.

1. Principles

- 1.1. This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is between the Local Authorities and Children's Services Trusts in the South East namely; [Bracknell Forest; Brighton and Hove; Buckinghamshire; East Sussex; Hampshire; Isle of Wight; Kent; Medway; Milton Keynes;

¹ This MoU has been drafted so as to enable Local Authorities and Children's Services Trusts to choose to access the sector-led programme. Whether or not each LA or Trust makes that choice is a matter for them; their participation is made possible, but not assumed nor compelled by this document.

Oxfordshire; Portsmouth; Reading; Slough; Slough CST; Southampton; Surrey; West Berkshire; West Sussex; Windsor and Maidenhead; Achieving for Children and Wokingham.]

- 1.2. This MoU sets out the specific agreement to undertake self-assessment and peer challenge of the overall effectiveness of our children's services. The aims of this programme are:
- Securing improvement work that is focused on galvanising children's services to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people. In particular this will focus on the need to avoid service failures, improve performance in relation to the more intractable challenges and sustain progress during a period of significant economic restraint.
 - Building on existing capability in children's services and associated corporate support, and, where appropriate, with partners to diagnose improvement challenges, identify risks to performance and commission effective, evidence based and value for money solutions.
 - Systematically sharing knowledge about what works across the sector and ensuring that there is effective brokerage of next-practice interventions.
 - Contributing to the development and implementation of policies designed to improve the lives of children.
 - Respecting the collective duty of care for the region's leaders of children's services
- 1.3. The programme will promote:
- Mutual respect, openness and honesty
 - Non-judgemental feedback
 - The need to diagnose and understand why things are like they are
 - A practical focus on how outcomes for young people could be improved
- 1.4. This MoU is not a statutory or contractual document; it is a statement of commitment to work collaboratively to support the regional sector-led improvement model.
- 1.5. The activity covered by this MoU includes:
- an annual self-assessment
 - a review of benchmarking data
 - a process of peer challenge in DCS/Trust CEx-triads to establish lines of enquiry
 - a field-work visit to validate the lines of enquiry
 - a report back to the host authority
 - an annual summit to review improvement priorities across the region and shape the work programme for the following year

1.6. Each DCS/Trust CEx agrees to:

- participate in the programme with the full knowledge and support from their Chief Executive and Lead Member/Trustees
- complete and submit an annual self-assessment using the agreed template
- continue participation in the regional benchmarking data group
- participate in the triad peer challenge session with other DCS/Trust CExs
- identify, prepare and release appropriate senior staff for peer challenge field-work visits
- receive a peer challenge report for discussion as appropriate within each authority, eg with each Chief Executive and Lead Member/Trustees
- contribute to an annual regional improvement summit, which will be part of the programme of SE ADCS meetings

1.7. A major part of the work of SESLIP will be to support and co-ordinate the activities defined in this MoU.

2. Indicative Timetable

2.1. Typical plan – these dates are flexible: we will need to firm up dates in due course

	When	What	Who
1.	July/August	Self-assessment completed	Host DCS/Trust CEx
2.		Data profile prepared	SESLIP with host staff
3.	August/September	SESLIP team review inputs and draft a challenge script for each host authority	SESLIP staff
4.	September/October	Triad-peer challenge meetings	All DCS/Trust CExs
5.	October/November/December	Peer challenge field work visits	Host DCS/Trust CEx and visiting team
6.	December/January	Peer Challenge reports produced	Visiting DCS/Trust CEx
7.	January/February	Annual Summit	All DCS/Trust CExs

2.2. It is proposed to operate this process on a three-year cycle, and for DCS/Trust CExs to be assigned to triad groups each year according to the following principles:

- The triads to be reviewed each year
- The triads to vary between the different combinations of counties and unitaries (all one type of authority or split 2:1 either way)
- To avoid, as far as is possible, putting nearest neighbours in the same triad
- With 19 possible participants, it is not possible to devise a programme which divides neatly into six groups of 3.
- The following tables are illustrative of how the programme might work. Not all 19 partners will be ready and able to participate every year, and so we anticipate there will be flexibility in assigning triads.

	Year 1					
Host	Buckinghamshire	Oxfordshire	Hampshire	West Berkshire	Windsor and Maidenhead	Milton Keynes
Visitor	East Sussex	Southampton	Brighton and Hove	Bracknell Forest	Portsmouth	Slough
Observer	Surrey	Reading	Kent	West Sussex	Medway	Wokingham
Floater	IoW					

	Year 2					
Host	West Sussex	East Sussex	Medway	Slough	Reading	Southampton
Visitor	Hampshire	Milton Keynes	Wokingham	Kent	Surrey	West Berkshire
Observer	Oxfordshire	Windsor and Maidenhead	Buckinghamshire	IoW	Portsmouth	Brighton and Hove
Floater	Bracknell Forest					

	Year 3					
Host	Kent	Wokingham	Bracknell Forest	Portsmouth	Brighton and Hove	Surrey
Visitor	Buckinghamshire	Medway	Oxfordshire	Windsor and Maidenhead	Reading	West Sussex
Observer	Hampshire	IoW	East Sussex	Milton Keynes	Southampton	West Berkshire
Floater	Slough					

3. Process

The detailed guidance and advice on the process is set out at <http://seslip.co.uk/se-dcs-peer-challenge>

4. Annual Programme of Improvement Activities

4.1. Each DCS/Trust CEx commits to:

- a) Lead, host and quality assure at least one Peer Challenge Review in the MoU period.
- b) Undertake review activity within the agreed processes as outlined in the scheme.
- c) Deposit reports of reviews with SESLIP staff to facilitate the extraction of development themes for integration into the regional programme of sector led activities as appropriate.

5. Regional accountability

- 5.1. The DCS/Trust CEx group will exercise a duty of care to each other. They will remain vigilant for behaviours or disengagement from the regional activities that might be symptomatic of denial, pressure or avoidance.

- 5.2. They will monitor reviews to assure themselves that proportionate responses have been made by the receiving LA/Trust, holding each other to account.
- 5.3. The DCS/Trust CEx group will follow up any areas of concern for their peer DCS/Trust CExs through one-to-one communications with each other, starting informally and then escalating through more formal engagement by the SE ADCS Chair or the lead DCS for Sector Led Improvement. If these communications do not allay the concerns of the group, then the group commits to take their concerns formally to the most appropriate senior leader in that DCS/Trust CEx's Local Authority or Trust.

6. Implementation

- 6.1. This MoU commences on [date to be agreed]. It will continue to remain in force until such time as it is revoked by the parties.
- 6.2. The MoU will be reviewed after [date to be agreed] and may otherwise be reviewed at any time at the request of any party.

7. Commitment

Signatures provided below to show the commitment to this scheme of the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children's Services and Chief Executive of the Council or appropriate signatories from a Children's Services Trust.

Name of Local Authority Bracknell Forest Council

Director of Children's Services

Signed NE Edwards Date 17 January 2018

Lead Member for Children's Services

Signed [Signature] Date 17 January 2018

Chief Executive of the Council

Signed Timothy Wheats Date 17 January 2018

With thanks to the East Midlands Sector Led Improvement Programme for their permission to use their document as a basis for developing this MoU