



SESLIP Regional Alliance Peer Challenge Handbook 2020-21 (Virtual version)

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2020-21 SESLIP Regional Alliance Peer Challenge (virtual version)

Introduction

This handbook explains the SE DCS peer challenge, which aims to:

- Serve as the primary means by which the sector will address the early identification of concerns before they reach crisis point;
- Build and share best practice;
- Contribute to an evidenced-based model for improvement;
- Create the conditions for a learning system which unites all stakeholders from regulation to delivery in a robust and collective approach to improvement.

How it works

The SE DCS peer challenge has the following components:

- All SE local authorities will take part in a regional peer challenge in 2020-21
- The 2020-21 peer challenge is based on the format of the 2019-20 peer challenge cycle with modifications to reflect a virtual format, and with co-ordinated input from the QA network who are being coordinated into matching triads/quartets with the aim of supporting the DCS peer challenge
- Colleagues are invited to participate in a training webinar in advance of the sessions. These are provided to support colleagues who may be new to the SE DCS peer challenge ethos and process.
- Each authority will provide their draft Ofsted Annual Conversation self-assessment, signed off by the DCS in good time for dissemination to participating authorities.
- We are working towards all authorities producing self-assessments that cover all of Children's Services, not just Children's Social Care.
- Nominated participants to the 2020-21 SE DCS peer challenge cycle have been granted access to the [peer challenge library](#) where the region's self-assessments and data profiles are stored.
- There is an option for each LA to ask SESLIP to resource a review of their self-assessment with a critical friend lens, to be conducted between November and December 2020
- 6 peer challenge days have been scheduled to take place between January and February 2021; five of the days will involve three local authorities (a triad) and one will involve four authorities (a quartet).

- The days will be 3 (or 4 for the quartet) x 2-hour challenge sessions with breaks and a wrap-up session.
- The days will be attended by the 3 x DCS and any members of their team they wish to bring
- SESLIP will resource a facilitator who will also collect and write up examples of best practice/common systemic issues that need to be addressed.
- SESLIP and LGA are also supporting Lead Members to conduct their own parallel peer challenge exercise in the same triads/quartet
- Outcomes from the peer challenge days are:
 - each authority's own reflections insights and action points
 - each authority's list of "asks" and "offers" which will form the basis of a forward plan improvement activity to be organised on a bilateral or multilateral basis
 - a prioritised list of suggested actions to be included in the following year's regional improvement plan

The proposed process in detail

Triads: The Triads/ Quartet for the 2020-21 cycle will be the same as those that were proposed at the end of June 2018 on the principle that neighbouring authorities are separated, there is a mix of county councils and unitary authorities and that there is a mix of authorities at different stages of improvement journeys in each triad. They are as follows.

ad	Date	LA1	LA2	LA3	Lead reviewer		
1	29 January 2021 (Likely virtual, tbc)	Wokingham	East Sussex	Surrey	Wokingham to read Surrey	East Sussex to read Wokingham	Surrey to read East Sussex
2	12 January 2021 (Virtual event)	West Sussex	Kent	Portsmouth	West Sussex to read Kent	Kent to read Portsmouth	Portsmouth to read West Sussex
Quartet 3	1st February 2021 (Likely virtual, tbc)	Slough	Hampshire and Isle of Wight	Milton Keynes	Slough to read Hampshire	Hampshire to read Milton Keynes IoW to read Slough	Milton Keynes to read IoW
4	10 February 2021 (Likely virtual, tbc)	Windsor and Maidenhead	Oxfordshire	Medway	W&M to read Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire to read Medway	Medway to read W&M



5	8 February 2021 (Virtual event)	West Berkshire	Buckinghamshire	Brighton and Hove	West Berkshire to read Bucks	Bucks to read B&H	B&H to read West Berkshire
6	13 January 2021 (Virtual event)	Bracknell Forest	Reading	Southampton	BF to read Reading	Reading to read Southampton	Southampton to read BF

Benchmarking pack: The SESLIP data team produce on an ongoing quarterly cycle a Peer Challenge benchmarking data pack, which uses the most up-to-date data published by the DfE and Ofsted, including educational achievement and school Ofsted grades. It uses a wide range of unpublished data from the SESLIP data benchmarking group including a sheet that summarises all the indicators and SE rank and a sheet for each LA that includes SE rank, England Rank and quartile for England rank. It also includes statistical neighbour data where this is available. The benchmarking packs are available from the password protected DCS-only part of the [SESLIP website](#), the Datagroup password-protected area of the SESLIP website and the dedicated restricted area providing access to all registered participants, the Peer Challenge Library.

Self-assessment: Each authority will provide a copy of their draft Ofsted Annual conversation self-assessment signed off by the DCS in good time for dissemination to participating authorities as well as a summary Presentation. The project manager will contact each LA to identify if they want to take up the option to ask the SESLIP team to confidentially review the self-assessment and presentation with a critical friend lens, providing confidential feedback to the LA in time for amendments to be made before the triad/quartet challenge days.

QA triad/quartet support: New for 2020/21, the SESLIP QA network is organising triad/quartet mutual review activity which is designed to assist each DCS in reading and challenging their partners. We do not have full coverage of all the triads yet, please contact Diane Williamson (dianewilliamson27@gmail.com) or your QA lead for further details.

Preparation event: A webinar training session for DCSs (and senior colleagues) to offer a framework for critical analysis and feedback that will help to uncover and discuss areas of risk that may not be sufficiently in the authority's sights, or which the authority maybe aware of, but unclear of risk.

Peer challenge days: Peer challenge days have been scheduled in January and February 2021. The SESLIP team will host via MS Teams and facilitate the sessions, collecting and writing-up examples of best practice/common issues that need to be addressed. The DCS of each the participating authorities has been assigned as Lead Reviewer of one of the other participating authorities. There will be three (or four, for the quartet) sessions of two hours with breaks to

allow participants the opportunity to have screen breaks as well as refreshments and lunch, with a 15-minute plenary at the end to identify common themes. Within each two-hour session, the DCS will briefly present their self-assessment (15 minutes) and colleagues will ask questions to explore strengths and possible signatures of risk, led by the 'Lead Reviewer', who will go first during the questioning.

Annual summit: The DCS/Lead Member meeting in March 2021 will be used to share general themes from the peer challenges between DCSs and Lead Members. This includes celebrating things that are working well. The summit will also include reflections from the steering group on the key issues/challenges identified across the region and there will then be a facilitated discussion of how to respond to these. This may involve identifying collective action by SE LAs or regional or national lobbying of Government. It will also inform the commissioning of the SESLIP improvement priorities for 2021-22.

Project management: Isabelle Gregory the project manager who is facilitating and managing the logistics for the process in consultation with the Steering Group. Richard Tyndall is leading the team, providing overall consultancy support to the process.

Post challenge support options: The menu of optional post-peer challenge support is provided in **Annex 1**, and respondents noted that there will need to be evidence of change/impact following all peer challenges to demonstrate that they are improving practice. There will need to be an agreed process for coordinating the support offer to local authorities, so that they are not overwhelmed and that actions are appropriately prioritised.

SESLIP values

SESLIP DCS's have identified a set of values which they feel should underpin all the work of the regional alliance. These are as follows:

- 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



A little bit of neuroscience

To get most value from this process, the peer challenge days need to be approached with what Dan Siegel¹ has referred to as the three fundamentals of well-being: *openness, objectivity and kind intention*. The best outcome for this process is that people will feel able to share openly and honestly their current strengths and challenges without fear of judgement or blame. Within the current oppressive context for children's services, this state of mind is not always easy to maintain, and for some this encounter may be perceived as carrying a degree of threat.

Stress arouses the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which initiates the classic fight or flight physical response. Arousal of the SNS results in increased secretion of multiple neurotransmitters including epinephrine and norepinephrine, which are associated with activation of the body. Individuals experience an increase in blood pressure. Blood flow is redirected to the large muscle groups. Breathing speeds up, digestion is shut down. Meanwhile, even neural circuitry is reallocated, in the sense that the brain appears to focus on those circuits deemed necessary to survival rather than higher quality rational thinking. Sadly at the time when you might feel you need all your wits about you, the body lets you down, in its automatic assumption that you are facing a physical threat rather than a psychological one. In this state, you can easily become hypervigilant, seeing threats where none are intended and this may result in difficulty in concentrating and extracting the most value from the day.

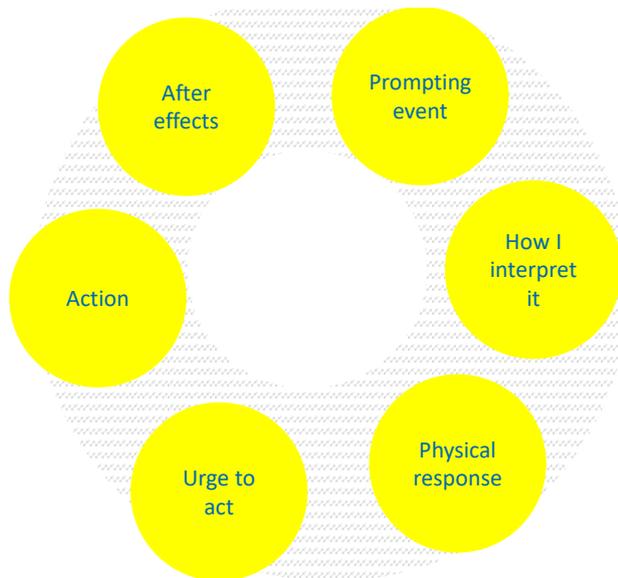
What is needed for a clear head and rational thought and insight is the activation of the parasympathetic nervous systems (PSNS). While the SNS is responsible for the body's ability to react quickly and effectively to physical or emotional provocation, the PSNS is responsible for recovery from such excitement and for keeping the body functioning at rest.

It is possible to evoke responses within the human body that arouse the PSNS, reversing the effects of the stress response and arousal of the SNS. This can operate like an antidote to stress. Renewal can come from several sources: hope, the experience of compassion, including self-compassion, and the practice of meditation leading to mindfulness.

Supportive relationships are the key to arousal of the PSNS. In studies, caring relationships and good social networks have been associated with lower blood pressure, enhanced immunity, and overall better health. In terms of these events - warmth, positivity and welcome from colleagues will be very beneficial, to help reduce anxiety. For individuals, focusing on the breath and breathing slowly for even as little as 16 seconds can calm the SNS significantly.

¹ Siegel, Daniel J.. *Aware: the science and practice of presence — a complete guide to the groundbreaking Wheel of Awareness meditation practice*. Scribe Publications Pty Ltd.

The 6-part emotion cycle



An emotion is a reaction you have to an event. Something happens, your mind processes it, your body responds. Then you behave in response to your mind's interpretation and your body's response. Emotions are physiological, cognitive, and behavioral experiences. The 6-part emotion cycle that occurs is outlined below.²

Prompting event. This is the stuff that happens outside you, in your environment, such as an Ofsted call or a valued manager resigning. Prompting events can also happen within you; they can be thoughts, memories, or even other emotions.

Interpretation: Your mind makes sense of what happened. The event is filtered through your evaluation, understanding, beliefs, and assumptions, and you explain it to yourself in a particular way. 'Ofsted will be looking for our worst practice'

Physical response. The event and your interpretation result in a physical response in your body. Your thoughts about the situation may produce stress hormones that make your heart race, your throat constrict, and your hands tremble.

Urge to act. Almost simultaneous to the physical response, you feel an urge to do something. You may or may not act on this impulse, but it's useful to notice what you feel compelled to do in those first moments. You might imagine walking out of the office and not coming back.

² Aguilar, Elena. *Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators*. John Wiley & Sons, 2018



Action: Then there's what you actually do, and you may or may not feel in control at this point. You may calm down and make a phone call to the inspector with a friendly greeting at the start

Aftereffects. Finally, the emotion affects other emotions, thoughts, and behavior and your body. The after-effects can be a prompting event that sets off another emotion cycle. You might tell yourself, 'I'm no good at this job.'

Expansive listening

Listening is a vital part of this process and there is a difference between expansive ways of listening and constricted waste of listening. On the one hand, you may be closely attending to what your colleagues are saying, keeping your heart open and letting his or her words fill you. Other times, perhaps your mind wanders to a place of judgement, anxiety or impatience, or perhaps you want to jump in and offer solutions and advice. Listening well lies at the centre of an effective interaction. Hedy Schleifer describes the need to focus on the other and purposefully cross the bridge between us and the other person, leaving behind all our prejudices, assumptions, connections to our world and worries about what to ask next, and most of all our ego and identity. If we can do this we are listening expansively. We are trusting the speaker to find the phrases they need and we are offering questions from the place of humility and curiosity. We are helping them to think.

Listening in this way involves some of the following behaviours:

- We speak slowly and not rushing our questions
- We breathe deeply, so as we listen so we make sure our restorative system is activated
- We relax our face, relax our arms and let our jaw relax.
- When the other person finishes, it may be just enough to say, "thank you tell me more". We don't always have to ask a powerful question
- We ensure the ratio of their speaking to our listening is at least 80% to 20%.
- If we can't think of a useful question straightaway, we say "I need a moment to think", before we respond. Taking time to think does justice to their thoughts.
- We think about the place from which you are listening and make a choice to do so from a place of affirmation of the person who is speaking.
- We are full of curiosity and we really want to understand their world.
- If we start to feel emotions as they are speaking, our mirror neurones have been triggered so we can ask "What is it that you are feeling right now about this?"

Body language often says more than the words that are being spoken. This means that conducting these events virtually will add additional challenge to all participants.

If by any chance a presenter becomes emotional, it is helpful to get the person to reflect on their own emotions, “what are you actually feeling right now as you’re speaking to me about this situation?” This helps the person regain self-control and shift from a position of ‘reacting’ to the position of ‘responding and reflecting’ on their emotions.

The process for the peer challenge days

The process chosen for the peer challenge is based on a team coaching model. The reason for this is because it provides an effective way of enabling the local authority presenting to get insights from the other two teams in a way that is not confrontational and judgemental but allows for a full exploration of signatures of risk, and the chance of developing insights which may help the authority with its improvement journey. The process draws on Ron Heifitz’ concept of adaptive leadership³, where he recommends that leaders take the time to get up on the balcony and observe what is really happening on the dance floor. We are inviting the two other authority teams to be on the balcony during this process, at any time they are not asking a question. And when the options discussion occurs, the idea is to share insights from the balcony.

1. Facilitator notes the time
2. **Presentation of self-assessment (15 minutes)** The presenting local authority gives a 15-minute presentation of their self-assessment. The facilitator asks the DCS if there are any signatures of risk (see pages 11-14) they would like the group to focus on particularly.
3. **Exploration of signatures of risk (1 hour 10 mins)** : The members of the team from the other two LAs take it in turns to ask the presenter open questions which explore the signatures of risk they feel may be most relevant to the self-assessment, and questions that may help the presenting team to think in a different way about the issue (The facilitator bans any disguised suggestions at this stage such as “Have you thought of doing X”).
4. **Affirmation (5 minutes)**: The presenting team move their seats back from the table, and do not take part in the ensuing conversation. They listen attentively and can take notes about aspects that stand out or touch a chord. The members of the team from the other two LAs start by each identifying a positive strength of the local authority/team that has caught their attention.
5. **Insights and options (15 minutes)**: Group members then gossip about the presenting authority’s self-assessment and the signatures of risk. They look at the situation from their perspective on the balcony and identify any insights that they have gleaned. They ask themselves what guides the LA team’s behaviour? What are they taking for granted? Might

³ Ron Heifitz (2009) *The practice of adaptive leadership: tools and techniques for changing your organisation and the world*



there be some limiting beliefs? Group members ultimately arrive at a number of possible insights indicating what alternatives might arise if the presenting team were to use different assumptions or take different things for granted. They may also suggest new possibilities and avenues for support. The facilitator takes bulleted notes during this session.

6. **Reaction to reflection – 10 minutes:** presenting DCS and team react to the affirmation, thoughts and insights
7. **Reflection and actions - 10 minutes:** Response from the presenting DCS and team. It is their choice whether they use any of the ideas or not. They give their thoughts on what they will take from the discussion. The facilitator asks the presenter to consider initially what they might put forward as offers of good practice for others to learn about, and in what areas they might wish to consider asking for support and these are also recorded.

Record of the session: Following the session the notes of the three sessions will be sent to the three/ four DCSs. They will then make any amendments before a formal note of the session is agreed. We have agreed that the notes for each individual LA's session once agreed, would be shared with the Lead Member by the DCS.

The facilitator will help the group to agree a prioritised list of action for possible inclusion in next year's Regional Improvement Plan; and a list of improvement "asks" and "offers" suitable for taking forward at low cost either bilaterally or multilaterally.

The process for the peer challenge days



The presenter presents the self-assessment and identifies the signatures of risk they are most concerned about
15 mins



Each group member affirms the strengths they have observed
5 mins



The presenter reacts to the affirmation, thoughts and insights, then responds. They say what they will do, including first thoughts on asks and offers.
20 mins



The group take it in turns to ask open questions to identify strengths and get a deeper perspective on the issues and consider other signatures of risk
1 hour 10 mins



The group gets on the balcony to discuss perspectives and offer insights on the self assessment, risks, key issues arising and ways forward
20 mins



At the end of the day the facilitator draws out key learning points from the group

Timetable for the day (this may change in response to participants' feedback)

Timetable	
10.00	Introductions: Each person states their name and role and what they want to give to and receive from the process today
10.15	First DCS presentation on their children's services self-assessment
10.30	Questions from the two other local authority teams, led by the Lead Review DCS
11.40	The presenting team sit back and listen as the other two teams reflect on what they have heard, affirming strengths and potential good practice offers first and then offering thoughts and insights into possible areas of risk and where to focus improvement
12.00	Reaction to reflection – presenting DCS and team react to the affirmation, thoughts and insights
12.10	Response from DCS and the team of how the questions have shaped their thinking, what they will be taking back to their own work plan and first thoughts on asks for support they may have from the region as a result. They will also confirm the offers they could make to other authorities. Invitations for a Topical Peer Challenge visit during the following year.
12.20	Lunch
13.00	Second DCS presentation on their children's services self-assessment
13.15	Questions from the two other local authority teams, led by the Lead Review DCS
14.25	The presenting team sit back and listen as the other two teams reflect on what they have heard affirming strengths and potential good practice offers first and then offering thoughts and insights into possible areas of risk and where to focus improvement
14.45	Reaction to reflection – presenting DCS and team react to the affirmation, thoughts and insights
14.55	Response from DCS and the team of how the questions have shaped their thinking, what they will be taking back to their own work plan and first thoughts on asks for support they may have from the region as a result. They will also confirm the offers they could make to other authorities. Invitations for a Topical Peer Challenge visit during the following year.
15.05	Tea/coffee
15.15	Third DCS presentation on their children's services self-assessment
15.30	Questions from the two other local authority teams, led by the Lead Review DCS
16.40	The presenting team sit back and listen as the other two teams reflect on what they have heard affirming strengths and potential good practice offers first and then offering thoughts and insights into possible areas of risk and where to focus improvement
17.00	Reaction to reflection – presenting DCS and team react to the affirmation, thoughts and insights



17.10	<p>Response from DCS and the team of how the questions have shaped their thinking, what they will be taking back to their own work plan and first thoughts on asks for support they may have from the region as a result. They will also confirm the offers they could make to other authorities.</p> <p>Invitations for a Topical Peer Challenge visit during the following year.</p>
17.20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritisation of suggestions for workstreams to be included in the SESLI Programme for the next year and taken to the annual summit in March • Suggestions for multi-lateral problem-solving groups/topics • Suggestions for new 19-a-side regional networking group
17.35	Finish

Questions on strengths and signatures of risk

The following section identifies questions that can be asked to explore strengths and signatures of risk. It is important that the discussion doesn't only focus on the risk areas that the DCS would like the group to explore, so the group should take some time to ensure that they have fully explored the authority's strengths. Questions in grey text are possible follow up questions. These questions are only provided as a guide. It is for the visiting teams to decide what questions will be most powerful, and they may explore any risks, not just the ones suggested to them by the DCS. During the questioning stage, the rule is always to ask open questions and not make suggestions.

Strengths

- What are the signature strengths of children's services in your LA? What sustains these?
- What improvement progress are you and your team most proud of? *What were the critical success factors in delivering that improvement?*
- If we asked people that know your service well to share what they most value about the work your service does with vulnerable children and families - what would they say?
- When have you seen the work you do with vulnerable children and families at its best in your service – *how did this occur?*
- What practice is there in your LA that it would be worth showcasing to other LA's so that they could learn from it?

The political climate

What evidence is there of the political priority given to safeguarding and vulnerable children?

- *If you judge the priority given to children to be insufficient, what is being done to address this? What was the impact?*
- *What actions have you initiated to sustain the current level of priority given to children? How do you know if these actions are having impact?*

- When have you felt comfortable with the interaction with politicians with respect to priorities and when have you felt discomfort? What have you learned from this?
- What evidence do you have that the corporate centre understands and supports children?
- If I was to talk to front line staff in your service, what would they say about the political support that children receive? What is being done to address this? How do you know if these actions are having impact?
- Where is there evidence of the impact of political decisions on children whether positive or negative? Where it was negative what happened and what was the outcome? Have you initiated any action to prevent this happening again? What result did this have?
- If I was in your lead member's shoes, what would I be saying about the pace of improvement in the service. What would I say about Cabinet support for children?
- What would he/she be most concerned about? What would I say the DCS needed to do differently?
- What evidence is there of the impact of children's and parent/carer's voice on political decisions
- What do you think the Leader of the Council's perspective on children is? How do you feel about this? What has been done to address it? How do you know if this action has had any impact?
- What is the current narrative about children's services in the political realm? Is it the same or different from the corporate narrative? What is happening to address this? Will it work?

Corporate support

- Where has the corporate centre shown tangible support for vulnerable children including looked after children? Where have you wanted support but not received it? What are you doing about this? Who are your corporate allies? What ally would you like to have that you haven't secured? What is the current narrative about children's services in the corporate centre? Is it the same or different from the political narrative? What are you doing to address this?

Meaningful indicators

- How do you know your data is accurate, up to date and meaningful?
- Are you able to identify case-load issues through your data collection and reporting arrangements? Do you monitor, measure and adjust case-loads at a range of levels of granularity?

Turnover in senior leadership

- How stable is the children's service leaders at top, middle and front line levels? If there has been high turnover, what do you feel are the most significant factors? Have these factors changed as a result of your leadership?



Service reorganisation

- What has been the impact of service reorganisation on staff delivering services to children?
To what extent have service reorganisations delivered on the goals that drove them in terms of impact on children, staff and budgets? What was the learning from the reorganisations that you and your team have undertaken? Have you undertaken any reorganisations with budget reductions that you felt were too challenging?

Budget

- Is the budget for your service under/overspent? To what extent was this difficulty known when it was set last year? What if any, representations did you make about this at the time? What is the narrative about children's service financial management from the corporate centre?
- How confident are you that continued improvement is possible within the budget umbrella you have been set for 2020-21 from 0 not confident at all to 10 very confident? What have you done to make your concerns known to others? What impact has this had?

Performance

- Which goals in terms of performance and practice improvement do you feel you will not meet? Are your members aware of this? What action do you and your team have in place to address this? How do you know if these actions are having impact?
- How robust is your performance management system in terms of accuracy of data, quality of data analysis and external benchmarking? If you do not feel it is sufficiently robust, what is happening to improve it? What impact is this having?
- To what extent do front line managers in your service feel accountable for the performance of their team members and motivated to improve performance? If you do not feel they are sufficiently accountable and motivated, what is happening to improve this? What impact is this having?

Leading with others

- To what extent do you feel partners have bought into a common vision for children? If they haven't what is being done about this? How do you know if these actions are having impact?
- Who are your strongest and weakest partners? What is happening to address the weak partnerships? How do you know if these actions are having impact?
- What important relationships have been disrupted as a result of any senior staff turnover? What has been the impact of this?

Workforce

- How would front line staff in your social care and SEND teams describe the culture of children's services? To what extent do you think the culture needs to change? What are you and your team doing about this? How do you know if this is having impact?
- (If there are high levels of agency staff) - What are the key factors that lead to high turnover of staff? What are you and your team doing to increase retention and increase the percentage of permanent staff? How do you know if this is having impact? How confident are you that this will improve? What would your service need to improve it? What would front line staff say that you need to do? Do you agree?

Learning culture

- If 0 is a complete blame culture and 10 is a learning culture, where would you say that children's service as a whole sits on this continuum? Which services would have the lowest rankings? What is being done to improve the culture in these services. To what extent is this having impact? How do you know?
- If 0 is a command and control culture where staff follow processes blindly and don't feel accountable and 10 is a culture in which staff feel empowered to take action to improve children's lives and take responsibility for good practice and performance, where would you say that children's service as a whole sits? Which services would have the lowest rankings? What is being done to improve the culture in these services. To what extent is this having impact? How do you know?

Practice leadership

- Who provides the practice leadership in children's services? How impactful is it on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is no impact and 10 is a very powerful impact? What is happening to improve practice leadership? How do you know if it is having impact?
- On a scale from 0 to 10 what do you judge to be the gap between the perspectives of front line managers on the priority to give to practice improvement in their teams and the perspective of senior leaders where 0 is a massive gap and 10 is no gap at all? What is happening to address this gap in perspective? How do you know if it is having impact?
- If you have an approved model of practice in your service, what evidence do you have that it is fully understood and being consistently used across the service? To what extent do partners understand the model that you use? How do you know? What are you and your team doing to embed the model of practice? To what extent is this having impact? How do you know?
- What are your windows on practice? To what extent are you satisfied with them? Do they include direct observation of practice? What is being done to make these windows more effective?
- What do front line staff say about the impact, quality and frequency of supervision they receive? What are you and your team doing to improve supervision? To what extent is this having impact? How do you know?
- What do front line staff say about the impact, quality and frequency of the professional development they receive? What are you and your team doing to improve professional development? To what extent is this having impact? How do you know?



Challenge and feedback

- What external challenge have you, your CX or Members sought from other sources? What has it told you? What happened as a result of this? What impact did this have? OR What has prevented you, if anything, from seeking external perspectives on the service?
- What feedback have you received from children and families on the quality of service delivered to them. What have you done in response to this? What examples are there of major policy change as a result of this feedback? To what extent is there a continuous improvement learning loop operating as a result of feedback from users? How much impact is this really having? Where are examples of genuine coproduction in practice?
- What feedback have you received from front line staff about the extent to which they feel supported in undertaking their jobs? What changes were implemented as a result of feedback? What impact did these have? How do you know?
- What recent examples are there of staff being able to express concern about issues within the service to senior managers? How easy is it within your culture for staff to identify that something is going wrong? What are the opportunities for them to share concerns and reflect on the ups and downs of the child's journey through the system

Questions you can ask yourself when you are on the balcony

These questions may be useful as a reflection tool for the group options discussion:

- What are the basic assumptions behind the story being told here?
- How do the LA team define their own role in the situation and that of others?
- What images or metaphors do the interviewees use? (Pay attention to the choice of words)
- What does the LA team judge as 'good' and 'bad'?
- Are the descriptions based on facts or interpretations?
- What assumptions are being made, do you think they are justified?
- To what extent do preconceptions play a role?
- Are negative aspects highlighted, or positive ones as well?
- Are situations seen as static or dynamic?

Plenary

At the end of the day there is a plenary where the facilitator will ask four questions of the group:

- What has been the key learning from today that each of you will take back to your local authorities
- **What are the workstream priorities to be included in the SESLI Programme for the next year and taken to the annual summit in March?**
-
- **What are your suggestions for multi-lateral problem solving groups/topics?**
- **What are your suggestions for new 19-a-side regional networking group?**

The facilitator will record this which will be shared in a report drawn up after all sessions have been completed.



Annex 1: Post challenge support options

Further peer challenge either “topical” or “leadership and management”

A topical peer challenge involves an LA selecting a specific service area that they would like peers to look at in more depth. The host council produces a self-assessment of that service or outcome area and a lead DCS from another authority discusses with the host Council exactly what they would like the peer challenge to look at. Fieldwork takes place over two days with an oral or PowerPoint presentation at the end of the visit. There is an optional 6-month follow-up.

A leadership and management peer challenge involves three local authorities working together. The overall aim is to allow the DCS, together with CEx and Lead Member, to improve understanding of how leadership and management processes impact on service quality, practice and service improvement. The peer challenge team visit focuses both on developing insights which will secure operational improvement, and on seeking insights to the way leadership and management might change to better support service delivery and improved outcomes for children.

Partners in practice

There are 15 local authorities who have been identified nationally as Partners in Practice (PiPs). PiPs will offer some universal thematic support. However, a significant part of their focus will be to support those councils who are at most at risk of failure. Where local authorities wish to draw on this support, the next step would be a conversation with the DfE advisers for the region who are Sophie Roberts and Kos Wireko. This support may be from a PiP inside or outside the region depending on need. Hampshire is the only SE authority who are funded to deliver PiP. However, there are 14 others including 6 London authorities who may be in the position to support authorities in the SE region. The DfE advisers would work with the local authority to identify what the needs are in consultation with the LGA and the SESLIP team. There will be a menu of targeted options that local authorities can consider, or support can be designed bespoke to the needs of the local authorities.

Support from a peer authority in the region

There will be the option for the SESLIP team to gather together a list of authorities in the region who have developed specific areas of recognised and evidenced good practice to provide peer support to other local authorities. This could include support from one leadership team to another, peer coaching, or consultancy to set up specific programmes, systems or projects.

Development of regional projects to support key risk areas

Part of the SESLIP improvement plan will continue to involve setting up specific projects to support improvement. An example of this is the work currently being undertaken by the workforce development group to implement a memorandum of co-operation around agency arrangements, to share best practice, undertake research and develop apprenticeship

arrangements. There is also the option for 2-3 authorities to work together to commission project work which will deliver improvement in their areas. There is also the option to develop further group audit/ assurance activity, for example the current look at LAC efficiency.

Leadership development and CPD

SESLIP funds will be made available to support leadership development either within one authority, or on a regional basis in order to respond to issues, improvement priorities or risks identified by the peer challenge process. There continues to be the capacity within SESLIP to develop regional training that meets identified needs across the region. Currently courses on leadership development, change management and coaching are available, both as individual courses or as Train the Trainer packages

Continued development of benchmarking data

The benchmarking group will continue to grow and develop in areas where authorities value increased access to data

Support from the LGA

The LGA can offer a range of support which could include:

- A corporate peer challenge which offers a diagnostic and support for the Council's corporate and political leadership, focusing specifically on the Council's capacity to drive improvement in children's services
- Access to a multi-disciplinary peer review (as part of the LGA's national support offer). This includes a safeguarding diagnostic, a care practice diagnostic and peer reviews of CSE, LSCB and SEND. There is now also a financial efficiency diagnostic tool in development
- Managing and delivering intensive packages of support to build political leadership capacity, including training, coaching and mentoring for lead members; providing effective political oversight and scrutiny and implementing strong corporate parenting systems
- Developing and supporting lead member networks for each region – this will include transfer of learning on key aspects of political leadership responsibility for children's services, providing lead members with an overview of regional improvement priorities and focus and to ensure they are confident and capable to hold their own councils to account
- Utilising the LGA's regional principal advisers and regional children's services improvement advisers to provide support through such activity as mini 1 day reviews, facilitation of vision and strategy development, coaching, financial reviews and Ofsted readiness assessments.