SESLIP Regional Improvement Plan 2024-25

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1.   Introduction

1.1.   The purpose of this regional improvement plan is to identify action that will assist all the local authorities in the South East to deliver effective services which improve outcomes for children and young people.

1.2.   The plan recognises that all children's services have strengths which can help inspire improvement in others; it recognises that they are all capable of further improvement. It aims to discourage the conclusion that only poor or weak services need improvement help; instead, it celebrates honest self-evaluation and constant improvement as antidotes to complacency.

1.3.   The main features of the plan are
- a non-stigmatising approach to improvement
- support for innovation and new approaches to service delivery challenges
- development of the skills of staff, managers, corporate and political leaders
- increased sharing of ideas, insight, understanding and solutions

1.4.   The core activities include the collection and publication of benchmarking data, an annual round of self-assessments and triad peer challenge, the identification of improvement needs and interventions and the support of regional practice networks.

1.5.   We are planning to support 12 practice networks and five projects

1.6.   The SE19 SEND programme has been significantly expanded following the announcement of DfE grant for its activities, which is now entering the third year of a three-year funding commitment. There is now a separate SEND regional improvement programme and plan, see https://www.seslip.co.uk/download-file/1373

1.7.   Following consultation with DCSs across the region, four broad priorities for 2023-2024 were identified, and these have been carried through to 2024-2025:
- collaborative and supportive networking arrangements
- collaborative commissioning (with each other and health; alongside collaborative provision and the RCC project)
- SEND
- workforce – including developing anti-racist practices

2.   Objectives of this plan

2.1.   We will identify ways in which local authorities can support each other to improve and take collective action to address systemic issues within the region.

2.2.   We will recognise both positive and negative variance in performance and try to ensure that no child is left behind.

2.3.   We will ensure that authorities who are facing more challenges have access to support from others in the region and, where appropriate, national programmes.

2.4.   We will take collective action where this will support several authorities with their improvement journeys, including lobbying government where necessary.

2.5.   We will support the effectiveness of lead members and their deputies and colleagues.

3.   Regional investment

3.1.   In 2023-2024, following the publication of Stable Homes Built of Love, SESLIP supported the development of bids for two major DfE regional projects:
- Local Authority Fostering South East – a recruitment and retention hub covering 18 of the 19 SESLIP authorities. This bid was successful, and the project is being led by Bracknell Forest and is worth £4.4m
- South East Regional Care Cooperative – this project will be led by West Sussex

3.2.   SESLIP will continue to support these projects, and also provide seed-corn funding should the DfE announce further bidding opportunities for regional projects.

4.   Feedback from 2023-2024 DCS Peer Challenge sessions

4.1.   Six DCS peer challenge triad sessions were held in 2023-2024. Their reports are shown in full at Appendix 1. The headlines are:

- **SEND**: focus on commissioning, budgets, parental expectations
- **Sufficiency**: addressing challenges related to sufficiency, especially in dealing with highly complex needs.
- **Quality assurance**: ensuring quality standards are met and maintained. Exploring flexible and innovative approaches to supervision.
- **Reforms and frameworks**: discussion around reforms such as SHBOL/WT2023/national frameworks.
- **Health, police and other partnerships**: Emphasis on relationships and collaborations between Local Authorities (LAs) and other stakeholders.
- **Workforce issues**: dealing with challenges related to turnover, recruitment, and retention of staff.
- **Anti-racist practices**: focusing on promoting anti-racist and inclusive practices within services.
- **Leadership changes**: adapting to significant leadership changes and political shifts within the authorities.

5.   17 proposed workstreams for this improvement plan

Table 1: 17 Workstreams for South East Sector Led Improvement in 2024-25

Workstreams 2024-25	Outputs
Practice Networks (12): We will support 12 regional practice networks: AD Education; AD Safeguarding; Commissioners; Data Benchmarking; Early Help; Fostering; Kinship Care; Lead Members; Principal Social Workers; Quality Assurance; Regional Adoption Leadership Board; SEND – SE19 The work programme of each group will be a mixture of "top-down" and "bottom-up" activity. The SEADCS meeting will refer tasks for further investigation; the networks will provide mutual support and encouragement and also bring suggestions to the SEADCS group. Each of the groups will routinely • celebrate and support innovative approaches to service delivery • identify ways in which they can support fellow members to improve • suggest how collective action can help address systemic issues within the region • recognise positive and negative variance in performance, and react accordingly to publicise the positive and tackle the negative • ensure that authorities who are facing more challenges have access to support from others in the region and, where appropriate, national support	
1. **AD Education Network** An active regional network that offers problem-solving approaches, develops shared positions, identifies and escalates issues of risk, facilitates dialogue with the regional education system, and monitors data on vulnerable children and young people **DCS Sponsor: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)** **Project Manager: Chris Owen (SESLIP)**	Briefing and case studies for lead members about the demographic decline and pressures on school sustainability Establish regional discussion programme with DfE Regional Director and with Ofsted South-east (min twice a year) Ensure that LA challenges in response to the SEND and AP Improvement Plan are raised and coordinated across education Support responses to challenges faced in the early years sector and safeguarding in schools at local level
2. **AD Safeguarding Network** To deliver a community of practice for ADs Safeguarding that helps to improve services and provides collaborative support. **DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)** **Project Manager: Mark Evans (SESLIP)**	To support ADs in implementing the changes arising from Stable Homes Built on Love To support SESLIP workforce projects, Take Your Place and the PSW network To provide induction to SESLIP for all new ADs (regardless of tenure) To complete tasks and projects as directed by the regional DCS group
3. **Commissioners' Network** To deliver a community of practice for Commissioning Leads that helps to improve services and provides collaborative support. **DCS Sponsor: Lara Patel (Reading/Brighter Futures for Children)** **Project Manager: Chris Baird (SESLIP)**	To expand the reach of the network to include all 19 SESLIP authorities To continue to develop links with NHS commissioners and provide a focus for improvement of continuing care arrangements To monitor developments in the RCC arrangements
4. **Data Benchmarking Network**	Quarterly production of the national RIIA dataset

Workstreams 2024-25	Outputs
To collect and publish a range of data benchmarking reports. To deliver a community of practice for data analysts **DCS Sponsor: Carolyn Fair (East Sussex)** **Project Manager: Luke Ede (East Sussex)**	Quarterly production of benchmarking data for children's social care, early help, education, SEND, adoption and special guardianship Annual production of peer challenge 55 dataset profiles; CSC workforce benchmarks Support for the national Data to Insight project
5. **Early Help** To develop this network through regular meetings, sharing of practice and the development of collaborative projects **DCS Sponsor: Grainne Siggins (Bracknell Forest)** **Project Manager: Rebecca Eligon (SESLIP)**	To share national messages, agree responses to consultations and make representations on Early Help To share practice that brings together CIN and Early Help in response to *Stable homes built on love*) To commission projects that provide benefits and understanding across the region
6. **Fostering Network** To enable sharing and improvement of fostering practice. **DCS Sponsor: Sarah Daly (Portsmouth)** **Project Manager: Rebecca Eligon (SESLIP)**	To meet quarterly to: Act as a forum for LAs to share good practice, and collaboratively problem solve Enable fostering leads to identify regional issues which require escalation To share practice regarding LA responses/implementation of *Stable homes built on love* (regional care cooperatives, extension of staying put arrangements). Undertake mystery shopping of 19 LAs and the most used IFAs to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers. Oversee Mockingbird delivery through the region and liaise with Local Authority Fostering South East
7. **Kinship Care** To identify the founder members of this new network and institute regular meetings **DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)** **Project Manager: Rebecca Eligon (SESLIP)**	To identify regional projects relating to kinship care which respond to and shape national policy consultations in this area To respond to any funding which may be made available.
8. **Lead Members Network** To provide support and challenge opportunities for Lead Members so that they meet their statutory responsibilities in the most sustainable and impactful ways. **Lead Member Sponsor: Cllr Jacquie Russell (West Sussex)** **Project Manager: Deborah Glassbrook (SESLIP)**	To provide induction for new Lead Members To offer one to one support To deliver four themed workshops based on outcomes from Triad events To review and further develop self-assessment documents
9. **Principal Social Workers (PSWs)**	Support PSWs to have an influence in the development of the regional sector led

Workstreams 2024-25	Outputs
To develop a regional network to act as a community of practice **DCS Sponsor: Lara Patel (Reading/Brighter Futures for Children)** **Project Manager: Mark Evans (SESLIP)**	programme and links to the national PSW meetings Develop collaborative approaches to shared issues and challenges to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort Develop peer support for PSWs to encourage region wide collaboration and resilience
10. Quality Assurance Network We will analyse learning from inspection activity to shape consistent frameworks/policy across the region with the ambition of influencing national approaches. **DCS Sponsor: Kevin Kasaven (Kent on behalf of Sarah Hammond)** **Project Manager: Lynsey Murphy (Kent)**	Galvanise the network's leadership to drive quality and impact of auditing which may influence national QA initiatives. Further the shared understanding of good practice through network meetings, sharing practice standards and publishing coordinated thematic research across the region. Develop opportunities for mutual external audit moderation and challenge. Maintain the library of shared Quality Assurance Tools.
11. Regional Adoption Leadership Board To relaunch the board with a sole focus on adoption To hold regular meetings and ensure a route at a regional level between strategic leaders in Children's and the RAAs and VAAs that operate in our region. **DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)** **Project Manager: Rebecca Eligon (SESLIP)**	Maintain regular meetings of the Adoption Leadership Board Align practice in process and support in securing permanency arrangements Embed S.E. RAA arrangements in adopting a consistent approach to practice Narrow the gap in children waiting and available carers through the analysis of data
12. SEND 19 Programme To hold regular meetings of the SEND 19 Network, its sub-groups, including joint meetings with AD Education network, focused on supporting and sharing successful practice in delivering effective SEND services and managing SEND resources. Build on learning from Covid19 response groups to maintain improved levels of collaboration. **DCS Sponsor: John MacIlwraith (Buckinghamshire)** **Programme Manager: Sheelagh Sullivan (SESLIP)**	Support the delivery of the SEND Improvement Plan through: Arranging monthly bi-monthly multi-agency SEND forums to share practice and provide national updates/information Ensuring the refinement and delivery of SE19 SEND Network groups, including development /review of regional agreements and MOUs associated with SEND working alongside the workforce project (see line 17 below) Liaising with key partners including DfE Advisors, NHSE, CDC, and NDTi Developing and delivering a SEND peer support mechanism around 'constructive/courageous conversations'
Projects (5)	
13. DCS annual self-assessment and peer challenge	To support all 19 authorities in the production and assurance of a comprehensive self-assessment

Workstreams 2024-25	Outputs
To plan and hold 6 peer challenge events in 2023-2024 **DCS Sponsor: Sarah Hammond (Kent)** **Project Manager: Richard Tyndall (SESLIP)**	To organise 6 triad/quartet peer challenge events to validate each self-assessment To produce a prioritised list of regional activity for future regional improvement planning
14. Small package SLI support Hampshire will broker requests for small package SLI support from around the region. **DCS Sponsor: Sophie Butt (Hampshire on behalf of Stuart Ashley)** **Project Manager: Saba Farooqui (Hampshire)**	The DfE has renewed the funding for small packages of SLI support. There will be a minimum of four packages of support this year, none exceeding 39 days input, for peer reviews, diagnostic work, case audits or other similar improvement work. The scope and size of each package will be the subject of discussion and agreement between the target local authority and Hampshire's programme manager.
15. Take Your Place – our future leaders' programme Support the region to develop future leaders and to improve succession planning **DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)** **Project Manager: Mark Evans (SESLIP)**	Use learning and insights from 2023-24 programme to develop specification for this year's programme Work in partnership with the Staff College to design the 2024/5 programme Market and recruit to the 2024 Take Your Place Programme Deliver and evaluate the 2024 programme
16. Workforce Matters Work with authorities across the region to address the challenges in recruiting and retaining a high-quality children's social care workforce **DCS Sponsor: Mac Heath (Milton Keynes)** **Project Manager: Mark Evans (SESLIP)**	Support and maintain the regional MoC, and seek better alignment with neighbouring regions Improving agency social worker numbers and cost data working in partnership with LIIA. Establish a SE regional children's workforce website Address disproportionality and the negative experience of Black and Global Majority social workers in the region Work with SEND group to respond to workforce challenges (see line 13 above) Organise and deliver a one-day conference on the role of unqualified/alternatively qualified staff in case holder children's social care cases and the potential role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the delivery of children's services.
17. Working Together 2023 To conduct preliminary research with safeguarding partnerships about the potential for joint development work on the new requirements in Working Together 2023 **DCS Sponsor: Sarah Hammond (Kent)** **Project Manager: Caroline Tote (LGA)**	To survey safeguarding partnership managers about their perception of the new requirements in Working Together 2023, to assess the potential joint development work, to propose further interventions with senior leaders from Health and Police services.

6. Budget

Table 2: South East Sector Led Improvement Budget 2024-25

Income	24-25 budget	Notes
Carry forward – earmarked for SEND	94,407	Earmarked see line 26
Carry forward from previous year	87,407	Unrestricted see line 27
DfE core funding – data	80,000	See line 4
DfE core funding – peer challenge	60,800	
DfE core funding – small package SLI	94,000	See line 15
DfE SEND support	114,584	See line 12
SE subs	165,500	New subs from Jersey
Data only subs	0	Awaiting Swindon, Somerset
Total In	**696,698**	

	Expenditure	24-25 budget	Notes
1	AD Education	18,000	
2	AD Safeguarding	16,000	
3	Commissioners	12,500	
4	Data Benchmarking	80,000	Paid to ESCC
5	Early Help	10,000	
6	Fostering	10,000	
7	Kinship care	10,000	
8	Lead Members	12,500	
9	Principal Social Workers	10,000	
10	Quality Assurance	12,000	Paid to KCC
11	Adoption	10,000	
12	SEND – SE19	208,991	
13	DCS and FD seminars	2,500	Now closed
14	Self-assessment peer challenge	15,000	
15	Small package SLI support	94,000	Paid to HCC
16	Take Your Place	48,000	Paid to The Staff College
17	Workforce matters, MoC	30,000	
18	Spare	0	
19	SE ADCS Rooms	13,000	
20	Programme Management	20,000	
21	Website	2,000	
22	KCC Overhead	12,000	
23	Working Together 2023	5,000	
24	New self-funded projects	45,000	BGM and QA projects approved in June
25	Spare		
26	SEND – SE 19 carry forward	0	
27	Unrestricted carry forward	207	
	Total Out	**696,698**	
	Total In	**696,698**	

7. South East Sector Led Improvement Programme

7.1. The Regional Innovation and Improvement Alliance for the South East is known as the South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP). Further details can be found at www.seslip.co.uk

7.2. The members of the steering group which oversees the programme are: Sarah Hammond (DCS, Kent, in the chair); Deb Austin (DCS, Brighton and Hove, vice-chair); Stuart Ashley (DCS, Hampshire and Isle of Wight); Becky Shaw (Chief Executive, East Sussex) and Michael Bracey (Chief Executive, Milton Keynes); Cllr Jacquie Russell (Lead

Member, West Sussex); Improvement Advisers from the LGA (William Brooks; Children's Improvement Adviser, Helen Watson); David Myers, DfE Regional Improvement Adviser

7.3.   The lead authority is Kent which acts as treasurer for the programme. Richard Tyndall is the programme manager who is retained by Kent.

Approved by the SESLIP Steering Group
10 June 2024

Appendix 1

1. Triad 1 DCS peer challenge (East Sussex, Isle of Wight, Wokingham – Surrey called away to deal with Ofsted Focus visit)

   East Sussex reflected on the challenge of commissioning and re-commissioning an AP service that had become inadequate
   Isle of Wight reflected on the challenge of re-creating the service separately and alongside their Hampshire colleagues
   Wokingham reflected on the progress they have made with early help and children's social care and the challenges of school expansion in response to dramatic rises in school age population

   Overall themes common to all services were:
   - SEND commissioning
   - SEND QA
   - SHBOL/WT2023/National Framework reforms
   - LA-ICB relationships; risks and benefits of AI

2. Triad 2 DCS peer challenge (Portsmouth, Kent, West Sussex)

   Overall themes common to all services were:
   - **Whole system issues**: focus was often what is taking place in the wider system, how to work with, influence and navigate through this - political, rising demand, relationships with parent/carer organisations, schools and settings, ICBs and NHS England, national government and its bodies. Felt different to previous sessions
   - **Developing confidence**: confidence in local support and advice, local provision including what takes place in schools, confidence amongst parents/carers. Influences so much of culture and practice, and demand for something else. Also, how to develop the same level of confidence in addressing mental health issues as the system now has in addressing safeguarding issues.
   - **Balance of providing support and reducing developing independence**: Discussion of how this is relevant across all age ranges and moving into adulthood. Constructive to have this focus as part of the discussion and evaluation of services, including working with settings, schools and parents/carers
   - How ready is the system for **political change**, if it happens?
   - How can the region work more effectively as a region with **Health** bodies at the different levels?

3. Triad 3 DCS peer challenge (Hampshire, Reading, Oxfordshire):

   Overall themes common to all services were:
   - Different approach at the **front door** - Is there something else that we could do, not up or down but doing differently, with different thinking about roles and responsibilities – a system approach, 'relationships' and conversations instead of contacts and referrals. Some agreement that MASH has had its day.

- **School inclusion**: Continued cultural change is needed with schools-led systemic approaches being pursued. All on a journey and schools are expected to be more inclusive than previously, but increasing expectations of parents, suspensions, tribunals and budget pressure are all impacting. Continuing theme with conflation of behaviour, mental health, anxiety, emotional-based school avoidance.
- **Placements**: Cost pressures associated with placement budget and school to home transport, especially YP coming in slightly older, not known to systems in crisis – possibly can be picked up by regional commissioning project?
- **Neighbourhood/locality working**: At varying stages on journey around family help and differently qualified as well as professionals based in localities which enable and support relationships at a local level.
- **Adolescent contextual risk and transitional safeguarding**: How as a region do we develop approaches that are not punitive and are systemic and preventative whilst reflecting that care leavers are adults, also some need as a region to consider the resource implications of this and differential thresholds in adult services.
- Flexible and innovative approaches to **supervision**: moving away from tick box considering a much wider set of activities as part of 'supervision' and moving away from the term 'supervision'.

4.   Triad 4 DCS peer challenge (Medway, Milton Keynes, Bracknell Forest)

Overall themes common to all services were:
- Shared **sufficiency** challenges: large sibling groups, small but increasing number of children with highly complex needs, adolescents and extra-familial harm, SEMH and stepdown from tier 4. Leading to the question, "Can these usefully be considered through regional care cooperative pathfinder?"
- **Practice**: consistency in quality
- Focus on **system leadership** approaches (esp. relating to education, SEND and EH) and success across authorities on reducing permanent exclusions
- **Culture**: the importance of a systemic approach and a culture around intervening early, preventing issues from escalating working right across the system, including cultural approach to risk management.
- **Workforce**: Challenges around turnover, recruitment and retention and succession planning
- **SEND**: Challenges around budgets and parental expectations
- **Tripartite funding** arrangements particularly with health colleagues and court ordered therapeutic input which may not be available

Possible future projects being considered by multiple authorities:
- bringing SEND to shared front door
- residential homes
- neglect pathway

5.   Triad 5 - West Berks, Brighton and Hove and Windsor and Maidenhead

B&H have seen a significant increase in contacts (the service is well regarded and the increase in demand is partly a result of their success). They have also seen a significant decrease in their number of looked after children. This is positive as they have historically had higher numbers than similar authorities, but they are very focused on working to make sure this reduction is safe. They particularly celebrate their anti-racist practice. The authority has invested in this over several years. It has become an area of strength. It has had positives in improving both practice and supporting retention of staff. **RBWM** have made positive progress in their approach to recording, with all case notes addressed directly to the child. They have a good track record in participation and have used an exercise called the Big Conversation to engage senior leaders in the council with care leavers. They would like to improve their anti-racist and inclusive practice (and will be linking up with B&H on this issue).
West Berks is undergoing some significant leadership changes with an entire new team coming into place. They are also dealing with a significant political change for the first time in decades. These changes have led to a renewed focus on ensuring some key systems are working well (e.g. relaunching QA framework and revisiting to Family Safeguarding Model)

6. Triad 6 - Buckinghamshire, Southampton and Slough

    Buckinghamshire report significant challenges in working with TVP, these were shared with **Slough**. This prompted consideration of bringing together the group of SE authorities that work with TVP to develop a more joined up conversation about how police and children's services work together
    Southampton shared that they have a good system leader group that helps to promote good partnership with Police and others (Southampton to share ToR of this group)

    Overall themes common to all services were
    *   Identifying **being care experienced** as a protected characteristic and queried if there could be a role for SESLIP in developing practical guidance about how this can be used to improve young people's lives.
    *   **Placement sufficiency** (and costs) as one of their greatest challenges, they welcome the RCC pathfinder (Southampton and Bucks are already committed to building their own residential resources)