



Learning into Practice Evaluation Summary

Background

The NSPCC and the Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCIE) developed the Learning into Practice Project (LiPP) to pilot innovative ways of improving the quality of Serious Case Reviews (SCRs), and of improving the use of SCRs in practice. The LiPP consisted of 4 main workstreams:

- developing a mechanism for collating and producing accessible information on practice issues and causes from SCRs
- the establishment of a strategic Alliance of national strategic and leadership bodies to consider and implement improvement work, from a national perspective, as a result of SCR findings
- supporting commissioning and conduct of reviews through a set of Quality Markers
- Improving lead reviewer expertise through a series of masterclasses.

Aim

SCRs are conducted when a child dies or is seriously harmed, abuse or neglect is known or suspected, and there is cause for concern about how agencies have worked together. At present, SCRs are commissioned and managed by Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs).

The starting point for the project was that SCRs have the potential to provide vital information to guide improvements to multi-agency child protection practice. However, this potential is not being fulfilled – the quality of SCRs varies, frontline practitioners are not always aware of them, and agencies do not use the learning from other areas that can come from SCRs.

The LiPP was testing a proof of concept – aiming to establish what is needed on an ongoing and sustainable basis to improve the quality and use of SCRs in England.

Evaluation

The aim of the evaluation was to explore:

- stakeholder perceptions of the potential for the new mechanisms being developed and tested to achieve improvements in the quality and use of SCRs in the future, and in turn, better outcomes for children and families
 - what might be needed for these mechanisms to become sustainable and implemented on an ongoing basis
- The evaluation involved 63 qualitative interviews with those involved in LiPP activities; and an online survey aimed at non participants in the LiPP activities to explore wider views on the proposals. 126 people completed this. Alongside the external evaluation, the project team conducted an internal evaluation of the LiPP, focussing on describing the mechanisms being tested, and the emerging learning from these.

Findings

Participants in the evaluation indicated clear support for the ideas that the LiPP was testing, often based on their awareness of significant gaps in terms of using the findings nationally from SCRs to understand practice problems, and identify solutions, as well as issues around the varying quality of SCRs.

Feedback included:

- participants were supportive in general of the aims and outputs of the collation and analysis, and felt it was a valuable process to extract learning from SCRs locally and nationally, and focus on practice issues and high level themes
- there was support for the concept of having a national Alliance and bringing together professional and leadership bodies from across the child protection sector, and the group wanted the Alliance to play a role in supporting and leading practice rather than only scrutinising and judging
- most participants in the evaluation felt the Quality Markers would be useful for commissioning and managing the SCR process, and would appeal to different audiences
- the 11 Masterclass attendees we spoke to were very positive about the experience as the lead reviewer role is often very isolated, and lacks ongoing training and development opportunities

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with the project activities. Most indicated agreement, with the strongest areas they supported being identifying national trends about practice problems from the SCRs and better understanding of these through input from frontline practitioners.

Recommendations

Improving the quality and use of SCRs is an on-going challenge but the findings from this evaluation provide a helpful basis for prioritising future action to improve outcomes. Some of this will be taken forward as part of other policy developments.

The aim of the project was to establish how the different mechanisms being tested should continue in the future. A series of Government announcements in December 2015, including proposed changes to the commissioning of SCRs, and a review of LSCBs, mean that there is considerable scope to further develop the learning that has come from the LiPP. The findings from the LiPP project should meaningfully contribute to these developments.

The LiPP has established an important principle that improving the quality and use of SCRs should be a collaborative process involving practitioners, LSCBs, different agencies, families and national level bodies. This wider conversation needs to continue, and build on the appetite in the sector for a variety of different stakeholders to be involved in improving the impact of SCRs so that they really make a difference.

This evaluation study was carried out between May 2015 and March 2016 by OPM.

The DFE's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme funded this project and its independent evaluation. Co-ordination of the evaluation was undertaken by the Rees Centre from the University of Oxford (www.reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk.) A full copy of this report can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications