

Children's social care and early help practice guides

Purpose of Report

For discussion

Summary

As part of its children's social care reform programme the Department for Education has commissioned Foundations – the What Works Centre for Children and Families to produce Practice Guides to set out what the evidence says about how to achieve the outcomes in the Children's Social Care National Framework. Practice Guides will summarise the available evidence as to what works to improve children's outcomes, to support senior leaders and commissioners in councils to develop appropriate services for their communities. Today's session is an opportunity to hear more about the guides and offer feedback as to what councillors and councils would find most helpful to support improvement in children's social care.

LGA Plan Theme: Putting people first

Recommendation(s)

That the Board provides feedback to the Foundations What Works Centre on what would be most helpful in the new practice guides to support children's social care and early help services.

Contact details

Contact officer: Louise Smith

Position: Senior Adviser – Children and Young People

Phone no: 07464 652769

Email: louise.smith@local.gov.uk

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Background

1. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care 2022 recommended the introduction of 'Practice Guides' to highlight the best available evidence to achieve key objectives.
2. The Department for Education accepted this recommendation in its response to the review, outlining in its children's social care implementation strategy [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) that:

Practice Guides will support leaders and practitioners to embed the Children's Social Care National Framework. They should provide a useful tool for all those working with children and families, distilling the best available evidence on important practice issues into key ideas and recommendations. Practice Guides will both help leaders to commission and design services and support practitioners to plan and deliver help for children and families.

Practice Guides will draw on a range of available sources of evidence, from robust, well-conducted experimental evaluations to systemic reviews, qualitative research, and practitioner and service user insights. They will be based on a clear set of evidence standards and a set of criteria for assessing the strength of evidence behind different approaches or interventions. Recommendations will be transparent about the evidence that sits behind them.

Practice guides

3. In December 2023, the Government published the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#), statutory guidance on the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care. The Framework specifies the following outcomes that children's social care should achieve for the children, young people and families they support:
 - 3.1. Outcome 1: children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
 - 3.2. Outcome 2: children and young people are supported by their family network
 - 3.3. Outcome 3: children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes
 - 3.4. Outcome 4: children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes.
4. Foundations - the What Works Centre for Children and Families (formerly the What Works Centres for Children's Social Care and Early Intervention) has been commissioned to develop Practice Guides setting out how to achieve these outcomes.

5. The practice guides will include information on:
 - 5.1. What works
 - 5.2. Why and how it works
 - 5.3. Who it works for
 - 5.4. Barriers to and enablers of implementation
 - 5.5. Perspectives of beneficiaries
6. The guides will include both national and international evidence alongside recommendations for senior leaders. They will be aimed at commissioners and senior leaders rather than practitioners, though evidence for practitioners will be highlighted where it exists. Cost-benefit analysis for programmes will be included where this has been sufficiently well-evidenced.
7. The first practice guides will focus on those areas where evidence is strongest, with the first three guides looking at:
 - 7.1. Support for kinship carers and children
 - 7.2. Parenting interventions where the child is up to the age of 12
 - 7.3. Mentoring and befriending for children who are care experienced and/or at risk.
8. Foundations will attend today's Board meeting to update councillors on the development of the practice guides and to receive feedback on what councillors would find most useful in these guides to support improvement in children's services.
9. Members may wish to consider the following questions ahead of the session:
 - 9.1. Do you use any similar guidance at the moment? If so, how do you use it?
 - 9.2. How do you currently approach thinking about the effectiveness of support offered to children and families in your local area?
 - 9.3. Is there anything that would be helpful for councillors to have alongside the Practice Guides to support them in their role?
 - 9.4. How can Foundations work with councillors to encourage the use of Practice Guides in their local areas?

Implications for Wales

10. The evidence compiled in the Practice Guides will be applicable to Welsh as well as English authorities.

Financial Implications

11. None.

Equalities implications

12. The Practice Guides will consider issues around equality including evidence where available as to differences in effectiveness of different interventions for different groups.

Next steps

13. Feedback provided by the Board will be considered by Foundations as it develops the Practice Guides, to ensure that these are as helpful as possible for local authorities.