Information outputs for children’s social services

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Additional Information:

- Report of a research project commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills and the Welsh Assembly Government

Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/2912

Publisher: © CCFR / Thomas Coram Research Institute

Please cite the published version.
Information Outputs for Children’s Social Services

by

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Version 1.0a
February 2004

Report of a research project commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills and the Welsh Assembly Government
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First published February 2004 by:

Centre for Child & Family Research, Loughborough University
Thomas Coram Research Institute, University of London

ISBN 0 907274 35 8

Acknowledgements
The authors of this report are greatly indebted to the fieldwork authorities and their staff, to those who responded to the consultation or attended the workshop, as well as to the many individuals who have generously contributed their experience and comments. Every effort has been made to take account of these suggestions.
Summary

Outputs are whatever is retrieved or extracted, in whatever form, from an information system. They include not only printed reports, but information viewed on the computer screen, alerts that may appear on screens, e-mail and other messages and notifications and the information that can be selected and browsed like books on a library shelf.

However, the information systems in current use in children’s social services are generally designed more for recording information than for retrieving and using it, especially in daily practice. This severely limits their usefulness and reduces the quality of the data they contain.

This report sets out a description of different types of outputs, identifies some of the obstacles which prevent them from being obtained and used and proposes a framework for identifying and classifying them. It identifies a number of the key outputs that are required by staff at each level in social service departments, and suggests that in a ‘virtuous’ information system, operational and management information outputs can complement and reinforce one another, with those available to team managers being particularly important.

Research evidence from recent childcare studies is evaluated to identify some of the key questions for social work practice and management and to demonstrate how specific outputs might be used to provide answers for each. While these may be considered to be the critical outputs for improving outcomes for children in need, it emerges that in most cases they are the same ones that would be required for effective day to day operation, administration and management at case, team and service level.

Outputs implications for the Integrated Children’s System are considered, especially the way in which exemplars may be implemented in an electronic information system (EIS), and suggestions are made for both a chronology and a ‘rolling record’ to relate assessed need, planned action, actual intervention and outcomes on a continuous basis.

This report suggests ways of improving common outputs for effective day-to-day case and team management. These include alerts built into the EIS to give advanced warning of actions required, shortcomings or failures in service delivery; notifications to improve communication between teams, departments and agencies; and exception reports to identify, flag and follow-up the cases of individual children who have specific needs which are not being met. A principle of ‘subsidiarity’ is suggested, whereby staff at all levels of children’s services should be encouraged, required and provided with output tools to enable them to analyse their own work, make comparisons with others and contribute data to service-wide performance evaluation.
Some of the children’s services processes charted in the Department of Health’s Process Model are examined and the outputs that might be used to manage and improve outcomes for the children are identified. The way in which outputs can be assembled into performance management frameworks is discussed, and a number of tools are provided in the Appendix for mapping outputs to processes, trigger events, staff responsibilities and roles and the key objectives of children’s services. The conclusions chapter lists a series of issues which merit further attention. Finally, a number of specific recommendations are made for local authorities to consider as they work to extend and improve their information systems and the ways these are integrated into daily practice and service delivery.
1. Introduction

1.1 The Department of Health has published the Core Information Requirements for Children’s Social Services, which set out the common core processes through which children’s social services are delivered (Process Model) and specify the information that needs to be collected and stored to underpin them (Data Model). The information generated through the Integrated Children’s System and collected in the course of social work interactions with children and families forms part of these requirements.

1.2 Whilst the Process Model and the Data Model have been welcomed by ADSS, they are not by themselves thought to be sufficient to promote the use of information to improve the management and delivery of children’s social care services. ADSS therefore requested the Department of Health to provide advice on identifying the core reporting requirements for information systems in order to plan and manage their children’s services more effectively. In response, the DH, together with the Welsh Assembly Government, commissioned a short research project from the Centre for Child and Family Research (Loughborough University) and the Thomas Coram Research Unit (University of London Institute of Education).

1.3 The project attempts to provide a third part of the core information base. It seeks to identify not only the possible printed ‘management reports’, but those outputs of all kinds that local authority managers and practitioners require from their information systems in order to carry out their daily work and to improve outcomes for all children in need. The outputs identified will be checked against the DH Data Model to ensure that they can be derived from the core information specified.

The Conceptual Framework and consultation

1.4 In the first phase of the study a conceptual framework (DH 2003.2) was developed for identifying and categorising the types and levels of information outputs. The draft framework was published on the DH website and comments were invited from all local authorities and interested parties. Twelve responses were received. The framework was further discussed at an exploratory workshop attended by representatives of 13 local authorities.

Research in the field

1.5 Following the workshop, detailed fieldwork was conducted in six local authorities, four in England and two in Wales. In each authority visited, discussions were held with the Assistant Director or a senior childcare manager, information or performance management officers, team managers, practitioners, and administrative staff (over 50 in total). Aspects of the electronic

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1 DH (2003.1). Published originally in 2001, the Process Model has recently been revised to bring it fully into line with the Integrated Children’s System. Version 3 of the Data Model is due to be published shortly.

2 While this project was under way responsibility for social care was transferred from the Department of Health to the Department for Education & Skills.
information systems in use in each authority were discussed, examples of outputs and relevant documentation were collected, and attempts made to identify the ‘wish-lists’ of staff at each level of children’s services. In addition, information was collected concerning organisational culture, supervision, team meetings and performance management processes and reviews. This fieldwork provided an invaluable overview of the way in which information systems operate and are used on the ground, from a range of perspectives. It also highlighted the issues that would need to be addressed in order to develop more effective use of information outputs in children’s services.

**Identifying ‘core’ outputs**

1.6 When this project was originally conceived, it was hoped that it could identify a small number of ‘core’ outputs, based on research findings about what leads to good outcomes for children. However, for a number of reasons, this proved an impossible task. A well-functioning EIS could produce an almost infinite number of different outputs, all of them valuable in answering different questions. Drawing up a comprehensive list of those which are likely to be the most important would be an extremely complex and time-consuming exercise, which was beyond the capacity of this small-scale study.

1.7 Fieldwork for this project also showed that staff are often unaware of the outputs they can already obtain from their EIS, suggesting that even if a core set of outputs could be identified, this would have little impact on improving outcomes for children unless there is an organisational culture in place that promotes, at all levels, analysis of outcomes and the importance of learning lessons from failures and successes alike. An ‘off the shelf’ list of core outputs could potentially be counter-productive, by discouraging local authorities from considering which are the most important outputs to support their own practice and establishing the organisational structures and processes which will use them.

1.8 Also, no list can be definitive. Different outputs will be identified as necessary to answer new questions as and when they arise. One of the features of a well-functioning EIS should be its capacity to produce new outputs when these are required without the need for major re-engineering.

1.9 What we have been able to do in this report is to provide a revised Outputs Framework, to consider in detail the different types of output that could be produced for different users, and to provide examples of the kind of outputs that would help local authorities to assess how well they are performing (and to improve their performance) in a number of areas that research has suggested are important for children’s well-being. This latter endeavour showed both that many of the relevant outputs are not high-level aggregate indicators, but the simple outputs at case team management level which enable practitioners to carry out their work and that work to be planned, audited and supported by their managers. Equally, it
turns out that there is a considerable degree of overlap, with the same low-level outputs contributing answers to several different key questions.

1.10 Perhaps the answer to our dilemma is that there is no critical or core set of outputs, but rather, in a learning organisation, a disposition to seek out that information which best describes what is happening, what the problems are, and which solutions seem to work.

The structure of this report

1.11 The information presented in the body of this report addresses a number of areas related to information outputs for children’s social services:

Chapter 2 examines the difficulties that most authorities are experiencing in extracting and making use of information, and some deficits on the input (recording) side.

Chapter 3 presents a formal framework for thinking about the different kinds of outputs that electronic information systems could provide.

Chapters 4 to 6 expand on some of the dimensions within this framework, illustrating the different types of outputs, the ways information could be selected to provide the most relevant content, and the sort of outputs that might be most useful to different users.

Chapter 7 considers the outputs that will be required by the Integrated Children’s System and, in particular, the role of the ICS exemplars.

Chapter 8 discusses eight key questions from recent childcare research and lists some of the outputs relevant to each. This is a lengthy section of the report, but it shows that different questions often require the same outputs. In effect, there are certain common outputs for effective day-to-day case and team management that all information systems should be able to provide.

Chapter 9 examines the culture within which outputs are used and interpreted by social workers; in supervision, team meetings and in performance management frameworks at departmental level.

Chapter 10 draws conclusions from the project and suggests fruitful areas for further enquiry. This is followed by a set of recommendations.

Chapter 11 lists areas that may merit further attention.

The Appendix provides tables and tools for local authorities to audit existing outputs and identify others required by specific members of staff, childcare processes or external trigger events.
2. The Problem

2.1 Outputs are the information that is extracted from information systems. Such systems always provide for the recording and storage of information, without which they would not exist. Often, though, when systems are designed the question of how information can be extracted and used is accorded a lower priority with the result that the outputs which might enable staff and managers to deliver better services are not readily available. In many local authority information systems, information can be extracted only by certain key staff with specific IT skills, using special software. Such staff often have limited availability and are unable to respond to the needs of all who require information outputs.

Getting information out of information systems

2.2 Evidence from inspection, research and the Children in Need census shows that staff in local authorities often lack the tools and skills to organise, analyse and interpret information. Even where these are present, the organisational culture that can promote and support research and analysis is often absent or eclipsed by financial pressures, staffing volatility and regulatory overload. Whilst the Integrated Children’s System (ICS) will help to systematise the way in which information is recorded about individual children, local authorities need to know how best to extract and use this information in order to conduct, monitor and improve their service to children and their families.

2.3 Currently, information systems often act as little more than repositories for information: much data is entered into them but little is taken out or used. Unless information is going to be used and its potential value adequately understood, there are few incentives to input data in the first place, ensure that it is complete and accurate and update it regularly (Gatehouse & Ward 2002). Poor quality data is the inevitable result. Even where provision for outputs is built into systems, such outputs (especially printed reports) are often not used. If no staff member is responsible for an output report and it is unclear how it will be used, it may never be printed out or may be merely printed and filed. It is therefore also important to consider not only the output itself, but the organisational context and culture which will make use of it.

2.4 Discussion of outputs often assumes a clear segregation between data-entry (inputs) and reporting (outputs). However, in many of the most effective information systems the distinction becomes increasingly blurred. Both data-entry (adding or changing information in the system) and outputs (obtaining information from the system) become simply part of the way of accomplishing regular tasks (recording a referral, assigning a case, conducting an assessment, delivering a service, scheduling a review, etc.). Systems built upon too rigid a process and work-flow model may tend to reinforce the separation between input and output.
2.5 Similarly, the drive for improved management and performance in children’s services tends to focus most attention on the kinds of aggregated outputs required by managers, for monitoring purposes or for reporting to central government. Sometimes this has been at the expense of those outputs which practitioners, team leaders and administrative staff need both for their daily work in delivering services and for analysing the outcomes of service delivery for the individual children and families for whom they are directly responsible.

2.6 When the Looking After Children and Assessment Frameworks were introduced, there was an expectation that in many local authorities recording would be mainly conducted on paper, with some of the information being transferred at a later time to computer-based information systems. The paper forms for the LAC system were made mandatory in Wales. With the development of better computer systems and the more widespread availability of PCs or workstations to social workers, there is an expectation that the Integrated Children’s System will be mainly computer-based. Therefore the ‘exemplars’ which accompany the ICS documentation will not necessarily exist as paper forms. The information they contain may be presented in the screen forms of the computer system and these may, and almost certainly should be used as much for outputs, for viewing and analysing information, as for inputs, for recording it. Arguably, ICS implementations will benefit greatly from considering from the outset the outputs that are required.

Obstacles to obtaining outputs

2.7 The fieldwork for the present project revealed a number of obstacles to obtaining outputs from electronic information systems (EIS) for children’s services, which were also found in an earlier study in Wales (Gatehouse & Ward 2003). These obstacles included:

- The weakness of core IT systems, especially the lack of fast, reliable network connections in locations remote from the local authority administrative centre. This often means that outputs are unavailable or take too long to access and produce for particular staff and teams. Staff at the centre are often unaware of the difficulties experienced in outlying offices. Such difficulties have a significant impact not only on outputs but on inputs and data recording and may significantly diminish the quality and completeness of data in the system.

- Outputs are not usually considered or specified in any detail when an EIS is commissioned. Subsequently, however, it is hard...
Information Outputs for Children's Services

CCFR & TCRU

to find resources to carry out analysis and design of outputs, even when changes in practice or regulation make this imperative.

• The user-interface of the EIS is itself the most important output. Poorly designed menus and screens and inflexible systems based upon wrong assumptions about how staff work are the greatest impediment to using information systems effectively and obtaining information from them.

• Printed reports are often not available from the menus of the EIS—users are required to launch a separate software application.

• Where separate reporting applications are used, these tend to be complex to learn and use and, because of the cost of software licenses and training, are sometimes not made available to the staff who most need them.

• Production of outputs is restricted in practice to a few specialist information or IT staff who produce a limited set of standard reports but may not have the resources to respond in a timely fashion to specific requests. High turn-over of IT staff in particular leads to the loss of experience both of the information system and of effective ways of working with the staff who use it.

• Senior managers tend to impose their priorities on and obtain the lion’s share of the IT staff and resources required to produce outputs. Sometimes this leads to neglect of the information needs of front-line staff and, especially, team leaders and other first level managers.

• Inadequate training and induction processes, coupled with high staff turn-over, mean that many staff may be unaware of the outputs that exist within an information system and how they should be used.

• The lack of immediate access to a PC at their own desk effectively excludes staff, especially practitioners, from using outputs, renders alerts, notifications and e-mails ineffective and tends to exacerbate the delays, inaccuracies and duplication of data inherent in systems where paper and electronic recording run in parallel.

• Where practitioners do little direct recording, they will tend to be excluded from and have little interest in the outputs that could improve their work. In such environments, practitioner use of the EIS tends to be limited to looking up names and basic details on the client index.

• Children's services departments have great difficulty obtaining the outputs required to complete annual returns to government, let alone those that would help managers in routine operational management and strategic planning.

• Alerts and warnings (screen messages to the user), notifications (e-mails or other messages to third parties) and other non-
printed forms of output tend to be neglected in the design of information systems.

- Computer screen forms tend to be designed for data-entry rather than data retrieval.

- The user interface is often strongly constrained to a single-case or single-process idiom, making it hard for users to obtain a good overview of the complete information on a single case (in order, for instance, to correlate placement history with education, health and life events) or to browse through related cases for a group of siblings or children with shared characteristics.

- Users are not provided with simple means of filtering (querying) records and browsing those selected in order to collate and compare cases with similar characteristics (e.g. siblings, those of a particular age, those assigned to a particular social worker, etc.).

- ‘Cross-views’ of data are often omitted. For instance the foster placements of individual children are recorded, but the system does not provide the output to view the fostering history (including placement breakdowns) of individual foster carers.

- An EIS for children’s services typically records a variety of chronological events or episodes (placements, legal status changes, service delivery, health and education events, dates of visits, reviews, assessments). However the outputs to collate and present such events as a single chronology are seldom available although such reports are frequently required by practitioners for case summary, review and court processes.

- Documents such as review reports, plans and assessments, which contain large amounts of text, are not usually stored electronically within the EIS. Typically they are written in a word-processing application and then named and stored in folders managed by individual social workers or administrative staff, making it difficult or impossible for anyone else to locate, retrieve or view them. It should be possible to locate a child’s record in an EIS, see a date ordered list of the reviews, plans and assessments the child has had and click on any one in order to view or print the document without the need to know what the particular file is called or where it is stored. Failure to provide for management of these documents within the EIS is a crucial weakness.

- The interface between discrete data (mostly numbers and classifications) in an EIS and textual data (descriptions, summaries, and conclusions) in plans, assessments and review forms is not well implemented. It tends to be discussed in mechanical terms as the requirement to ‘populate’ a paper form with information from an EIS (to fill in the child’s name, address and date-of-birth, for instance), rather than as the need to provide ways of combining and viewing together sets of information which for practical reasons are collected and recorded in different ways.
2.8 Of course, not all these obstacles characterise every EIS, but if even some of them are present they will tend to limit the ways in which information can be retrieved from information systems. Above all, limitations on the ability of staff to extract the information they need and to analyse the cases for which they are responsible both reduces their own effectiveness and undermines their confidence in the information system.

Deficits in information recording

2.9 Many of the problems above concern only information output and assume that the requisite information exists, has been recorded and input to the EIS. However, there are also specific deficits on the input and recording side which need to be addressed.

2.10 The data items specified by the Core Information Requirements for Children’s Services should provide all the information about children’s needs, the services they receive and indicators of progress necessary to answer such questions (Ward 2004). The evidence suggests that, with some notable exceptions, there have recently been improvements in the comprehensiveness and quality of information collected but that it is not yet used to its full potential.

2.11 The following input-side difficulties obstruct the full use of information:

- It is essential to have a unique persistent identifier for each child that remains unchanged through initial contact, referral and re-referral and is independent of the status of the case. Case numbers do not always fulfil this function, because often there is no certainty that the same case number will be assigned to an individual child on re-referral after a case has been closed.

- Information required for government returns is sometimes divorced from the children to whom it relates. For instance, some authorities receive outcome information such as examination results in aggregate form. If outcomes cannot be related to individual children it is not possible to identify who requires additional support to help them progress satisfactorily.

- Local authorities collect much information about their ‘core’ children’s services (child protection, respite care, foster and residential, adoption, leaving care), but the information about other services for children in need, especially family support and family centres, is often sketchy. Yet these initiatives are the locus of preventive work which, if successful, should avoid harm to children and diminish the need for child protection and care work.

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6 Significant efforts are being made to agree on an identifier that will operate across agency boundaries (DfES 2003) or even be a single national identifier. This is also identified as a key issue in relation to IRT (CYPU 2003).
• There is a similar dearth of information in children’s social service case files and electronic records about their referral to partnership projects such as SureStart, CAMHS and YOTS, although each of these will usually have its own independent information system with details of its service users and their families.

• Very little information is collected about the additional services that are received from professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, physiotherapists and speech therapists, who work in agencies outside social care. Without this information it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of interventions, or to cost them.

• It is rarely possible to distinguish between services that were planned and those that were actually received. Shortfalls cannot therefore be identified.

• Plan recording should include details of each of the planned actions and intended outcomes. Recording of service provision needs to include details and dates of all services provided and whether they were taken up. Services received are unlikely to be recorded sufficiently accurately for them to be accurately costed and their effectiveness evaluated unless the EIS includes tables of services and presents the user with drop down lists from which actual service provisions can be selected. Review recording should include services received, reasons for delays and failure to access planned services, evidence of progress and assessed needs still unmet.

• The circumstances of many vulnerable children can often be improved by interventions that affect their parents or their environment. Information about such interventions also needs to be accurately recorded, linked to the information about the children and made accessible, within electronic information systems, to the children’s social workers.

• Information is often out of date, or undated. This makes it impossible to monitor changes over time and to measure the delays in service delivery which can significantly affect the severity of the problem experienced by the child and the likelihood of a successful outcome.

• Baseline information about children’s current developmental status is rarely recorded. This means it is not possible to measure progress.

• Undated information also makes it impossible to identify relationships between certain events such as, for instance, changes of placement and changes of school.

• Certain key pieces of information that are needed to make sense of performance indicators are not always recorded. These include: statements of special educational need; reasons for
placement endings; the steps, delays (and the reasons for them) in legal proceedings.

- Better information about children’s developmental needs, issues concerning parenting capacity and family and environmental factors which result in their being identified as ‘in need’ would make it possible to identify groups of children who follow similar pathways and require similar packages of services (Ward, Wynn, Macdonald and Skuse, forthcoming).

- Many EIS cannot accommodate textual information at all or can store only brief text items.

- In most EIS, little consideration is given to how information will be captured from paper-form based recording systems such as the LAC and Assessment Framework forms. Most have not resolved how textual information will be stored, linked to the main child records and presented for output. For instance, will assessed needs, planned interventions and outcomes be recorded by picking pre-defined items from a list? If not, and these items are recorded as text, is it possible to select certain items and juxtapose them with others in such a way, for instance, as to present lists of needs and outcomes together without having to read through an entire text document?

**How does your local authority score on outputs?**

2.12 The list of questions on the next page provides a useful introduction to the topic of outputs and the problems identified above. It could be used in discussions with local authority staff to identify output requirements and the obstacles that need to be overcome.
# Twenty Questions about Information Outputs in Children’s Services

In your local authority...

1. Does every social worker have a computer? Do they have swift and reliable access to the council network, wherever they are based?

2. Do social workers have to fill in by hand basic information on children (name, date-of-birth, case or ID numbers, allocated social worker, ethnicity, etc., etc.) on standard forms (e.g. LAC forms, Assessment forms, Review forms)?

3. Can each social worker see on screen the list of children currently allocated to her/him?

4. Can the social worker print off the essential details of a case (for instance prior to making a visit, or when going to court, or to take into a supervision or other meeting)?

5. Can the system print out a chronology of the main events in a case between two dates?

6. Does your system alert the allocated social worker when a review or assessment is due and when it is overdue?

7. Does your system provide the means for contacts, interventions and changes of circumstances with a child to be notified to the allocated social worker if they have been made or recorded by others (because the allocated social worker is absent from the office, on sick-leave, holiday)?

8. Can your team managers see a list of all the children allocated to the team and the social workers they are allocated to?

9. Can the team manager select from the list of children and pull up on screen details of a particular child, showing, for instance, any reviews or assessments due, when visits were last made, current legal status, contact arrangements and other details?

10. Can the team manager use the system easily to prepare basic statistics on the activities of the team (contacts, referrals, visits, open cases, assessments, court processes, reviews overdue, etc.)?

11. In supervision with individual social workers, do team managers use and/or review the computer records of the children under discussion with the social worker?

12. Can you produce statistics on ‘other services’: e.g. referrals to CAMHS, family support work, use of family centres, special clinics (e.g. enuresis), youth projects, etc.? Are referrals to these recorded in care plans and completions and outcomes in the subsequent reviews? Is this data recorded in your system?

13. When performance indicators are compiled, do you identify the ‘exceptions’ (cases which fall outside the desired norm) and are these notified to or discussed with the allocated social worker? e.g. when a looked-after child has had more than 2 placements in 12 months, they become a statistic to be counted for PAF A1. But what happens to that child? Is a marker entered on the child’s record or case file? Is the social worker notified? Is the team leader notified? Can senior managers follow up the list of these children at some later point in time and ask what happened to them and whether placement stability improved?

14. Can you see on screen the placement history of each looked after child, including the name of the foster carer(s)?

15. Can you view on screen the caring history of each foster carer, including the names of children placed with them and the reason for the placement ending?

16. Can your system issue invitations for review meetings (generate letters or e-mails)?

17. Can your system identify children due to sit SATS or GCSE exams next summer?

18. Can you see on your system some kind of alert or warning about special needs or risks of a particular child (e.g. needs signing or language interpreter; has nut allergy; is diabetic and requires daily insulin injections; certain contacts forbidden; etc.)?

19. Can your system routinely produce the elements of a regular performance review, without the need for extensive work to extract data by hand? (e.g. the statistics on the various performance indicators, etc.)

20. Do senior managers (ever) use the information system themselves? Do they compile their own reports and statistics or are they dependent on specialist staff to do so?
3. **The Outputs Framework: a classification scheme**

3.1 The first phase of this project involved the development of a Conceptual Framework for outputs which was published for consultation (DH 2003.2). That framework has been refined and simplified in the light both of responses received and the fieldwork and is here presented as the Outputs Framework.

3.2 The Outputs Framework consists of two parts: the schema for classifying outputs and a set of tables which provide output mapping tools. These can be used both to audit existing outputs and to identify those required by particular members of staff, the processes through which they carry out their work and the responses they make to specific external triggers.

3.3 The Framework is best described as a set of dimensions for classifying outputs together with proposals for classification categories. None of these should be regarded as final or set in stone. The importance of the framework is to provide a somewhat systematic way of thinking about outputs which should enable users to define their own needs and, possibly, identify outputs they might not otherwise have considered which could assist their practice.

3.4 The Framework itself is comprehensive: it provides a means of identifying and classifying all outputs, whatever their priority or importance. It can, of course, be used in a more selective way: for instance to identify only the information required by senior managers. However, it seems likely that only by identifying or at least sketching the full potential of an information system to provide its users with knowledge will it be possible to decide what is most important and what may lead to improvements in outcomes for children and families. It should enable a local authority as a whole to explore the questions: ‘What do we need to know? When do we need to know it? Who needs this knowledge? How will they obtain it?’ As ever, knowledge is more than the mere possession of information—it is using that information for effective purposes.
3.5 The output is what is presented. Its principal dimensions are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Sub-dimension</th>
<th>In brief</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Name and brief description of the output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Level</td>
<td>At what level?</td>
<td>For use at what level of the organisation (Case, Team, Service, Department, External)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>When/How?</td>
<td>e.g. for casework, for financial management, performance review, exchange of information with another agency, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td></td>
<td>In what form?</td>
<td>The way in which retrieved information is presented, e.g. on a computer screen, on paper as a printed report, as an e-mail message, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Record type</td>
<td>What does it contain?</td>
<td>What sort of output: summary of a case, chronology, list, aggregate statistics, task list, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universe</td>
<td>About which?</td>
<td>Single case, selected case or all cases of children, or other entities (e.g. carers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissemination</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>To whom?</td>
<td>Who is the output aimed at?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Section/Department/Agency</td>
<td>Where?</td>
<td>Where do they work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td>How delivered?</td>
<td>How will it be delivered (e.g. to EIS screen, by e-mail, internal mail, post, etc.)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 These dimensions and the proposed classifications are set out in Table A. In addition, there are a number of other dimensions that could be considered, noted beneath the table (time period, frequency, generation, dissemination, confidentially, consent, IT requirements, training needs). These have not been included in the
other tables and examples given below, for the sake of simplicity and in order to avoid the difficulty of compressing many columns onto a single sheet of paper. It would be relatively easy to design a spreadsheet or simple database to list outputs with the full range of dimensions. An alternative, functional classification is also provided at Table A.1.

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7 This is listed among the various tasks for follow-up in Future Directions, (see below, p.86).
4. Types of Outputs

Types of Output

4.1 Outputs are often thought of only as printed reports. Yet information extracted from a system can be presented in a number of different ways:

Screen forms

4.2 Computer screens displayed by a database system share some of the characteristics of a paper form. They are structured with precisely located ‘fields’ to contain particular items of information. They may have one or more ‘pages’ or a tabbed structure like an address book or deck of index cards (see below p.34 for an example). In general they provide a template which associates different items of information by locating them in the same area of the screen and providing an order (left-to-right and/or up-and-down) in which they are read.

Screen forms tend to be designed primarily for data entry and they are often based closely on the paper forms and processes they are intended to replace. More generally, they are ‘windows’ through which data in underlying tables can be viewed, added and modified.

4.3 In reality, however, screen forms are just as important as outputs, as a means of extracting, associating and viewing information that has been stored previously. They can be considered as templates for information output. Provision of additional forms is a comparatively trivial task for database programmers so that, where necessary, separate forms can be provided for recording and information retrieval.

4.4 An EIS will not fulfil its potential unless at least as much thought is given to the use of screen forms for output as for data recording. In many information systems the same screen forms may be used both for input and output. For instance, a social worker may locate a child’s record, read some of the details and then add additional information.

Reports

4.5 Generally speaking a report is a ‘snapshot’ of the data at a particular point of time. Usually it is ‘read-only’ — the data cannot be modified by the user from within the report. Reports are designed for printing, rather than reading on screen.

An EIS will not fulfil its potential unless at least as much thought is given to the use of screen forms for output as for data recording. In many information systems the same screen forms may be used both for input and output. For instance, a social worker may locate a child’s record, read some of the details and then add additional information.

Forms and reports

EIS screen forms tend to be designed primarily for entering rather than retrieving and working with information, with the result that users remain reliant on ‘reports’. Reports, in turn, are often designed for printing, rather than reading on screen.

In a good EIS the distinction between ‘reports’ and ‘forms’ becomes blurred, the main difference being that reports are generally a read-only snapshot of the data, laid out as though for printing, while forms are updated dynamically and generally focus on a few selected pieces of information on each record, allowing some data to be added or changed.

In an EIS designed to be accessed via a web browser over the Internet or an organisation’s intranet, the distinction between forms and reports largely disappears. Information is formatted in web-pages for viewing or editing on screen, though poor design often means that users prefer to print out web pages and read them on paper.

While, increasingly, they are being designed to be viewed as web-pages with an internet browser.
4.6 Modern computer printers can produce text in different fonts and sizes, graphics, photographs and drawings, in black and white or colour. Computer generated reports can thus imitate official forms exactly. However, producing a readable and attractive report can be a skilled and time-consuming process. It is difficult to reconcile the goals of reproducing as much relevant information as possible while conserving space and readability. There is a limit (usually less than 10) to the number of columns of information that can be accommodated in a single row.

Configurable reports

4.7 It should be possible for an EIS to provide the user with a degree of choice over the data fields to include in a report. However, owing to the constraints of the paper page, it is difficult to allow a free choice of fields without sacrificing readability. Specialised reporting software can make it easier to format custom reports, but takes time and training to use effectively.

Generic reports

4.8 If filtering facilities are available (see below p.35), it is possible for an EIS to provide a much simplified set of core reports, each of which can be used in conjunction with filters to provide an almost infinite variety, without the need to construct and format a fresh report for every purpose. For instance, a ‘core’ set of reports on children could include a List, Summary, Detail and Full report. The list would have a single printed line per child containing just the child’s name and key identifiers. A summary report would have a number of lines for each child containing, in addition to the key identifiers, basic attributes and the current status of the child. Detail and Full reports would contain successively greater levels of detail, with a Full report equating to a print-out of the full electronic case file. Each report would be available on an individual child or any subset of children selected by a filter.

4.9 At the next level would be generic reports providing aggregate data (counts of numbers of records), where individuals (children, carers, and others) would not be identified. Again, with the aid of filters the same simple, generic aggregate report can be used for a wide variety of different purposes.

4.10 Although reports are generally snap-shots at a particular point in time, an EIS can store data from previous time periods so that trend reports can easily be produced. Similarly reports for one reporting unit (perhaps a social work team) can include comparative figures for other units or teams, other local authorities or national targets.

4.11 While there would still be other reports which required specific construction, it is likely that these ‘generic’, filterable reports would satisfy a large proportion of the printed output needs of practitioners, administrative staff and first and second-level managers.
Exception reports

4.12 Reports which provide aggregate statistics are often uninformative unless they include or are accompanied by exception listings that identify and list the individual cases that fall outside some target or norm. For instance, a report for service managers might include a figure for review compliance showing that a higher than usual number of children were not given their statutory case review on time. An exception report identifying the individual cases might reveal, however, that the variance was accounted for by several children from the same family and that their reviews had been deliberately delayed until a time when the birth mother could be present.

Alerts and warnings

4.13 An EIS can be programmed to provide outputs in the form of alerts and warnings (messages conveyed within the system to the user). These may denote temporary conditions (something has or has not happened or is due to happen) or permanent states of affairs. They can be generated either automatically (for instance when a calculation of dates shows that an event or intervention such as a review or visit is due or overdue) or by the user (for instance a note or warning that a child has an allergy, or requires an interpreter). They may be broadcast to all users of the EIS or displayed only to the assigned social worker, team leader and/or service manager as appropriate.

Alerts

4.14 In general alerts relate to events, processes and changes in the data and highlight actions that:

- need to happen (a review or visit; age-dependent immunisation; child reaches age for National Insurance number to be obtained; pathway plan);
- should have happened (case not allocated to a social worker; review or visit overdue; care plan indicates child should have returned home);
- are due to happen (child’s birthday; SATS, GCSE and other examinations);
- are happening and may affect case (allocated social worker on holiday, or long-term sick leave);
- are incomplete (core assessment, assessment and progress record);
- are actions which require checking, authorisation or follow-up (out of hours team action on case; action taken by person other than allocated social worker; action requiring authorisation by manager; action taken by social worker requiring administrative follow-up such as creation of case file, replacement of case file cover sheet);
• are changes in the data that others need to know about or check (data on child changed by person other than allocated social worker; changes of name, address, placement, school, etc.)

4.15 In most cases the EIS itself can calculate dates or flag changes and post the alert automatically.

### Speeding information flow and ensuring data quality

If an authority is running a paper-based system alongside an electronic, information flow can be tortuous. For instance, in one authority the paper trail for a change of (or new) placement of a looked after child, is as follows:

- Family Support Team (FST) does initial assessment. Decides child requires placement.
- Family Placement Team (FPT) chooses suitable placement.
- Child’s case re-assigned electronically from FST to a LAC Team.
- Child’s paper case file transferred from FST to LAC team office.
- FPT prints financial record form (for carer payment) and sends it by internal mail to the LAC team Admin Officer (LAC-AO).
- LAC-AO completes a Change of Circumstances form and sends by internal mail or fax to a Central Admin Officer (CAO). Copy placed on child’s case file.
- CAO inputs data to the EIS and prints new case file Cover Sheet.
- CAO sends case file cover sheet by internal mail to LAC-AO to file in child’s case file.

A number of these steps could be eliminated or speeded by alerts and notifications in the EIS.

4.16 In general, alerts can be used:

- to reinforce key practice behaviours relating to childcare objectives and performance indicators;
- as part of the data quality assurance provisions of the EIS, enabling users to make changes in the data, but flagging those changes to be checked by the relevant person;
- to enable administrative staff to ensure quality control and support without themselves having to perform all data recording;
- to supply (in conjunction with an audit trail) the system of checks that gives managers the confidence to delegate authority and minimise bureaucratic delays, while retaining control and oversight.

### Warnings

4.17 Warnings are generally independent of dates and refer to characteristics of or risks affecting the child. Usually these will need to be defined by the social worker, but thereafter the EIS can present or highlight the warnings where appropriate.

4.18 They include such things as:

- the physical impairments of disabled children (uses wheelchair, very restricted vision);
- medical conditions (asthma, allergies, diabetes);
• medication requirements (must carry inhaler; requires daily insulin injection);
• other requirements (interpreter)
• specific risks (prohibited contacts)

4.19 Alerts and warnings need not necessarily take the form of specific messages or dialog boxes—they may consist of colour coding or an arrow, asterisk or other symbol on the computer screen and in printed reports. Where the person who needs to be alerted is not a regular user of the EIS, the alert should take the form of a notification (see below).

4.20 Alerts need not and almost certainly should not be ‘hard-wired’ into the code of the EIS software. Instead it should be possible for the system developers to provide an interface for the user to specify the rule which triggers the alert (e.g. ‘Child next review date < today’), the form the alert will take (e.g. dialog box on sign-on plus red bar on child’s record header), and to whom it will be made visible (e.g. allocated social worker, team manager and reviewing officer). In this way alerts can be added, altered and removed in response to changing practice, guidance and circumstance.

4.21 It should be possible for the user to designate a contact or visit record, case note, or diary record as a warning, ensuring that thereafter that note or record will appear in a list of warnings for the given child, until such time as it is removed.

4.22 Despite the great potential of alerts to improve practice and co-operative working, considerable restraint is required in the numbers and the way in which they are drawn to the user’s attention. Too many pop-up messages, dialog boxes or requirements for immediate action will almost certainly be counter-productive. It is easy to imagine the response of the social worker returning from holiday to be confronted not only by a bulging e-mail in-tray, but by a spate of warnings of the obvious: that they have been absent and that therefore certain processes have not been completed or have been completed by others.

Notifications

4.23 Notifications are messages exported from the system, usually in the form of e-mails or letters to persons or organisations who are not direct or regular users of the information system. They usually include at least basic details of the child (name, date of birth, etc.) but may include other characteristics, specific alerts or warnings, and relevant events recorded on the child (e.g. dates of referral and assessment, child protection registration, legal status, schooling history, looked after placements, etc.)

4.24 Notifications encompass such messages as:
• a list for the independent reviewing officer of reviews due in the next month;
• an e-mail to the education department, copied to the Headteacher of a school to notify that a pupil has become looked after;
• postal or e-mail invitations to individuals to attend a case review.

4.25 Notifications can greatly facilitate routine tasks such as organising reviews or managing a change of placement.

Task list/Diary

4.26 Case management in children’s services involves a great deal of planning, scheduling and completion of tasks, for many of which there are established deadlines: assessments, visits, child protection conferences, court proceedings, reviews, supervision, children’s birthdays, medical examinations, immunisations, recurrent appointments for courses of treatment, SATS and GCSE dates, school parents’ evenings, leaving care and adoption procedures and many more. Future dates, for instance the due date for completing an assessment or conducting a review, can often be calculated from the recorded date of the previous step in a process or event in a series. In addition, there will be other ad hoc tasks and dates, typically recorded in case notes, of such things as holidays, school trips, contact visits, important anniversaries, and so on. These future tasks and dates can be collected and presented to the user as an output in the form of a task list and/or diary. Tasks are also clearly related to alerts, and the EIS should ensure that the two interact and avoid duplication.

4.27 There are well-established formats for task and diary outputs in personal information manager (PIM), scheduling and e-mail software applications such as Microsoft Outlook and Lotus Notes.
Where users are already using such software, it should be possible for the EIS to be linked to it for this purpose. In addition, it should be possible for the user to set a flag and target date when recording a case-note in the EIS so that the note item will appear in the task list and/or diary output.

**Chronologies**

4.28 Much information about children and the services they receive is event or episode-based. All these share common characteristics: they are events with a date or a start and finish date, there may be one or many for each child, they are of a certain kind and there are likely to be details specific to each instance. Such events are typically presented in chronological order (see screenshots on next page).

4.29 Among the chronological event types for children are: contacts with social services; referrals; visits; assessments; reviews; allocation to a particular social worker; child protection register episodes; placements; schooling; exclusions; SEN stages; examinations; health-related events, including immunisations and illnesses; use of health and mental health services; life events; family contacts; case notes; legal events and legal status episodes; use of other services. Once the data is recorded, an output similar to the ICS chronology exemplar can easily be obtained.

4.30 Social work practitioners often need to construct single chronologies drawing together some or all of these different types of event in order to gain a better understanding of what is happening to the children assigned to them. In addition they often have to present annotated chronologies when handing over a case to another practitioner, at case closure, for case review and for legal purposes, especially care proceedings.

4.31 In some cases it would be extremely useful to view events effecting several children (especially siblings) as a single chronology.

4.32 Chronologies therefore represent a particular type of useful output which it should be possible to derive from an EIS.

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A powerful and flexible Chronology output (see Gatehouse & Ward 2003, p.33 and Appendix E) was developed for the Centre for Child and Family Research and used to analyse case histories of babies and very young children looked after by social services. The resulting output could be in the form of a text file that the user could annotate, edit and add to by word processing. Copies of a demonstration database containing the chronology can be obtained from Mike Gatehouse at mike@keen.clara.co.uk.
**Web-pages**

4.33 Many local authorities are developing or testing methods of publishing outputs, especially reports, to their own intranet. As well as the obvious advantages of uniformity (based on .html or .xml page templates), intranet publishing can solve many of the problems of distribution and updating which afflict reporting systems based on printed documents. However, information displayed on an intranet need not be static, published information, containing a snapshot of data taken at a particular time and date. It can also be both dynamic and interactive — each instance of a particular web-page being accessed can update the information prior to displaying it so that it always reflects the most up-to-date data contained in the EIS. In addition, web-forms can be used for data input as well as for displaying outputs, so that some or all of the recording of information on children could be conducted through a web-based system residing on the local authority’s intranet.

**Text-rich documents and ‘populating’**

4.34 Computer databases are, in general, good at displaying discrete data — numbers, classifications, etc. They are much less suitable for storing qualitative data expressed in long texts. Much of the content of review and assessment documents cannot easily be recorded in a database. The same is true for case notes which exceed a sentence or two. These documents can be described as ‘text-rich’. Most existing EIS for children’s services therefore exclude such text-rich documents.

4.35 Generally, such documents contain a mixture of information: the key identifiers for the child (name, date of birth, case number, etc.); some classifications (ethnicity, sex, disability, etc.); some administrative information (dates when the form was started, completed, checked, authorised, etc., and by whom); and some tick-boxes recording tasks completed or yes/no answers to particular questions (e.g. ‘Does young person smoke?’). In addition, though, there will be large boxes to fill with description, comment and analysis. Most of the forms in LAC, the Assessment Framework and the ICS follow this pattern.

4.36 Some EIS provide templates for generating copies of such documents with information such as children’s names, key identifiers and classifications filled in. This is sometimes called ‘populating’ a form. The populated documents may be printed off for completion by hand and/or presented to the user on screen for completion in a word-processing application. Elsewhere local authorities are experimenting with screen-based forms (for instance using Adobe Acrobat forms technology) to enable practitioners to complete such forms on the computer, and some of the information captured may be extracted by the EIS from the completed form (e.g. dates and tick-box information) and transferred automatically to the database.

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*Ten local authorities in Wales have jointly commissioned such a system for both Adult and Children’s Services.*
4.37 Where the text-rich documents themselves are not included within an EIS database, it is important to include references to them and to perform document management tasks from within the system. For instance, the screen-form for a child should show which assessments and reviews have taken place, by whom they were conducted and on what date. It should be possible to click on a particular review and call up the text of the review to the screen (without the user needing to know where or in what form it is stored). Similarly it should be possible to print a copy of the document without the need to locate a unique copy filed in a paper case file.

4.38 Documents such as the LAC Care Plan and Review of Arrangements and the exemplars of the Integrated Children’s System are laid out as paper forms to be completed by hand. Commonly they occupy many pages and a typical form, when completed, contains a high proportion of white space. Where an EIS provides for printed output of completed text-rich documents, these can be ‘condensed’, making for a much shorter and more readable document.

**Exportable outputs**

*Spreadsheets*

4.39 Administrative staff and managers in social services are increasingly familiar with the tools in spreadsheet software for analysing and charting data. An EIS should be capable of exporting data to a spreadsheet for this purpose.

*WP documents*

4.40 In addition, managers and practitioners often have to annotate and comment on information. An example of this is a case chronology, perhaps for a court report, where the date and bare details of each event could be provided by the EIS, and exported to a word processor document where additional headings, details, commentary and conclusions may be typed in by the social worker. An EIS should be able to export data to whatever word-processing program is used by social services staff so that they can add to and edit it without the need to re-key.

*Electronic data files*

4.41 Government departments and other agencies to which local authorities make statistical returns nowadays provide files or lay down file formats for data collection. PAF indicators, the SSDA903 return and data for the Children First MAP reports are often collected in this way. The EIS for children’s services should be capable of deriving and exporting data in the required form.

*Porting to laptops & PDAs*

4.42 Finally, a number of local authorities are developing or testing methods of porting information from an EIS held on their central server computer to laptop or handheld computers that staff can carry with them on visits to clients and when away from the office. Such ported information may consist of details about particular cases, lists of appointments, tasks and contacts, and forms to be filled in with client details. On return to the office, the user may
‘synchronize’ the data with that held in the EIS on the authority’s central file server.

**GIS mapping**

4.43 Many local authorities are investigating the use of their GIS systems (usually administered by planning departments) to provide geographical mappings of social services data. This can be used to analyse, for instance, the home locations of children in need and foster carers; the organisation of services by area and team; and the problems of organising transport for looked after children to school, family contact, and so on.

**Traffic lights and dashboards**

4.44 Several local authorities are using or developing systems for displaying high-level outputs for management and performance review which use screen metaphors such as traffic lights or instrument dashboards to display and compare results. These or similar techniques can be used at lower levels, from the team upwards, and even to display alerts on the records of individual children.

4.45 Traffic lights are simply a visual warning device linked to the level of a particular indicator, to indicate whether action or attention is required. Dashboards, modelled on the instrument control panel of a car or aircraft, are a means of presenting together in a single screen or sheet of paper the levels on a number of different indicators, often adding other specific pieces of information (perhaps exception lists which identify individual cases) and, at least implicitly, providing an overall structure to the information and some inter-relationship between disparate indicators.

4.46 The screenshots on the following page show an example provided by one of the many commercial suppliers of dashboard software. Below it are two examples of dashboard-style presentation routinely used by North Lincolnshire Council in its Quarterly Performance Reviews. Dashboard software is produced by the developers of at least one reporting software suite widely used by local authorities.
Help screens

4.47 Although they are not strictly speaking outputs, help screens are presented to the user as such. While they will not normally contain data, they contain guidance and knowledge built into the EIS. The aim is to provide, as an integral part of the EIS, context-sensitive help screens similar to those available in any Windows program. While recording information the user should be able to press F1 or click on a Help button.

4.48 A set of windows (or a single, tabbed window) would appear presenting, successively:

- guidelines for recording the particular data field and prompts to undertake any associated paperwork;
- details of the particular procedure and wider process (this would in effect be a link to the relevant part of the department’s childcare procedure manual, perhaps with a process diagram);
- details of any local policies regarding the particular process;
- details of national guidance relating to the procedure;
- links to research findings whether local surveys, user feedback, national or academic research related to the procedure.

4.49 A model of this (see screenshot above) was developed for Gwynedd Council and similar ideas are embodied in several intranet systems, notably that in use in Cheshire. However, the idea suggested here would bind the information to the specific EIS by context-sensitive  

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Footnote: Such 'Help' outputs could in fact use the well-established technology, formatting and behaviour of a Windows Help file, and there are several software applications which can construct such files from word processor documents. However, the specific technology is unimportant. In a web-based EIS they might simply be web pages or Acrobat documents easily accessed and cross-referenced from the main pages of the application. (See Gatehouse and Ward 2003, Appendix F.)
links rather than having it as part of a separate suite of reference information.
5. Locating and selecting information

5.1 It is just as important to determine the content of outputs as to decide which type of output to use. Content is of two kinds: the information items which will be included and the records which will be selected. In database terms these are respectively the columns and the rows of a data table. Requests for outputs are commonly expressed in terms such as: ‘I need a list of all children with out-of-county foster placements and I would like the list to include the name, date of birth, ethnicity and home address of each child.’ This implies a selection both of child records and specific data fields.

5.2 The following section mainly concerns selection of records. However, selection of data fields is not trivial. Users often express frustration because the reports available to them omit fields of importance (for instance, child’s ethnicity) or include fields that are not required. It should be possible for an EIS to provide users with some choice of fields, though as noted above (see ‘configurable reports’, p.20) there are severe formatting constraints.

Selecting records for output

5.3 Record selection is an integral part of an information system and its output facilities. There are various techniques:

Searching by identifiers

5.4 Every EIS includes some facility for searching records. In those systems which provide or are linked to a client index, searching and locating a record (usually that of a particular child or related person) is one of the most basic functions in the system. Often, however, search facilities are very limited. At the very least it should be possible to search on last name, full name, date of birth, any part of the address and postcode, and to use ‘sounds like’ and ‘wildcard’ searches to obtain approximate matches where exact spelling or full address may not be known.

5.5 However, it should also be possible to search by other types of record than the child service user — for instance by carer, school or GP, and to see a list of all the children cared for by that carer or registered with the school or GP. If ‘cross views’ (see below, p.37) are implemented and include lists and browsing screens, then it should be possible to search and filter records in the same way as for children.

Which children have suffered bruising?
The EIS of one fieldwork authority has a powerful word-search facility: in the course of research into physical abuse of children, for instance, they were able to search across all case notes for words such as ‘bruise’, ‘bruising’, ‘hit’, ‘beat’, etc. and identify all children affected.

Word-searching

5.6 Internet users are now familiar with the astonishing power of search engines such as Google, which make it possible, usually in a few seconds, to locate almost any information amongst the vast information store of the world-wide web. Yet local authority staff put up with EIS where only the most simple searches are possible. There is no technological reason why this should be so. It is possible,
for instance, for an EIS to implement word-searching of electronically stored case-notes.

5.7 Even where case notes, assessments, plans and reviews are stored as text documents separate from the EIS database, it is possible to implement full-text word-searching and indexing. Document management software often includes such facilities.

Browsing

5.8 Every user of a library, book, music shop or Internet search engine such as Google is familiar with the concept of browsing: you are not certain at the outset what you want, so you look though the titles in a section or shelf or through a Google list of search results. You may in the end select an item quite different from the one you were originally looking for, yet it is a highly effective way of pursuing knowledge.

5.9 A common limitation in electronic information systems is that they constrain users to some extent to examining only one record at a time, making it hard to make connections and comparisons or to search for individual records by characteristic rather than identity. The only means provided to extract lists, counts and summaries is printed reports. Such systems may make it very difficult for users to use information reflectively, for purposes of analysis.

5.10 It is possible, however, to provide computer screen forms bound to the complete set of relevant records, which permit the user to view the data in the following ways:

- Browse through a scrolling list of records where each row shows summary details (usually just the key identifiers and status fields) of a single record.
- Browse through records one at a time, using a form which presents selected information on a single record at a time (for instance, you might wish to view children’s school examination results). Often ‘VCR’-style buttons (Go to First, Go to Last, Previous Record, Next Record) are used to control browsing.
- Sort records in various orders and browse them.
- See a count of the number of records in the recordset.

5.11 Such browsing screens can provide the electronic equivalent of a paper case file, containing all the relevant data on a single child, perhaps spaced across a number of ‘pages’ or ‘tabs’ and naturally divided up according to the functional divisions of the child’s life and relationship with social services (basic data, the family, life events, education, health, child protection history, legal status and events, placements, and so on). Linked, event-based data such as placement, schooling and life-event histories can be provided as sub-forms in which each row represents a separate event or episode. For instance a form or form tab relating to the child’s schooling might contain sub-forms for the child’s episodic schooling history and exclusions, with a further tab with sub-forms for examinations, other activities and achievements, and SEN registrations (see screenshots on following page).
5.12 Case-file screen forms\(^{11}\) of this type can be used for recording events as they happen and will provide the electronic version of the ICS Chronology exemplar. The chronology, in turn, becomes an output on screen or paper, which collates all or selected events within a given date range and presents them in a single time-series (see p.25).

**Filters**

5.13 Browsing facilities can be greatly enhanced by enabling users to set ‘filters’ which narrow down the set of records being examined\(^{12}\). For instance the user might set a filter to examine such common groups of records as:

- girls aged between 11 and 16;
- children due for case review in the next month;
- the children assigned to a particular social worker;
- children who have been excluded from school in the past year;
- children who have a history of offending;
- foster carers with current vacancies for children under 2.

5.14 It is possible to construct much more elaborate queries: for instance, ‘select all children who have had at least two foster care placements with agency carers in the last three years and who have either committed one or more offences or been excluded from school’. In practice, however, the logic behind such queries can be very complex and it is difficult to provide non-expert users with a means of building them which they will be able to understand and use effectively. It is likely that there will always be some requirement for expert assistance.

5.15 Software to generate printed reports, whether built into an EIS or a separate application such as Business Objects, relies on queries to extract information from data tables. What is less well-known is that exactly the same queries can be used to select information for display on screen with the added advantage that the selected information can be browsed through and changes made to the data.

5.16 Filters and browsing screens are therefore just as much a part of the outputs of an information database as printed reports. In general they are much quicker and more flexible. The EIS should also incorporate the means of naming and saving filters so that those required for particular tasks can be easily retrieved.

\(^{11}\) The screen shots shown here are taken from the DAN Placement & Essential Information Model, a demonstration database in Microsoft Access developed to demonstrate recording techniques (Gatehouse & Ward 2002).

\(^{12}\) In database parlance these are ‘queries’, which select a ‘recordset’. Queries are statements which specify to a computer how it is to select or carry out certain actions on records from one or more tables containing data. Relational database management systems such as Oracle, Sybase, Microsoft SQL Server, Access, Ingres and others use a common language called SQL (Structured Query Language) to construct queries, while some (e.g. Microsoft Access) hide the SQL code behind a graphical ‘query-builder’ interface.
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<th>No Longer LA Since</th>
<th>On ORT?</th>
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**SCHOOLING**

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<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>2000/01/01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchester Towers G/E Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>2000/01/01</td>
<td>Supervised move up I.T.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXCLUSIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01/01/2000</td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>Missing and delaying Headteacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CURRENT PLACEMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01/01/2000</td>
<td>Smith</td>
<td>Family setting</td>
<td>Birth mother</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PARENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HEALTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol abuse in past</td>
<td>Nowhooping cough immunation due to family medical problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LAST VISIT**

01/01/2000 by Jacobs, J.K.
Groups

5.17 Just as filters can be used to select records with similar characteristics, it is possible to assign individual records (of children, carers, and so on) to groups on a temporary or permanent basis. Groups will tend to be useful to designate and select individuals with persistent or permanent characteristics, such as:

- the siblings in a given birth family;
- children related directly or indirectly in a wider kinship network;
- children who were the victims of abuse in a particular case;
- the children placed with a particular foster carer at any time in the past three years;
- children whose families live in a particular geographical area;
- children who have had 3 or more placements in the past 12 months.

5.18 Once a group has been created and its members assigned, a filter can be used to select the group members for browsing or reporting.

Cross-Views

5.19 Most EIS for children’s services are based on a client index system where the fundamental data entity is the record of an individual child. Single characteristics (date of birth, ethnicity, and so on) are recorded as well as multiple events or actions affecting the child (placements, changes of school, hospital stays, registration on the CPR, assessments, family support services, legal orders and so on). The child is related to such events on a one-to-many basis. For instance, if a child is looked after, s/he will go through one or more placements. Each placement is recorded in the EIS, usually with a start and end date, the identity of the carer (or residential home) and the reason for the placement ending.

5.20 In creating these placement records, data has ipso facto been recorded on a different set of entities, carers. Without the need for any additional recording, that data can be viewed. Just as users can browse through child records and see the placement history of each child, they could (if the EIS provides the facility) browse through carer records and see the caring history of each carer (identifying all the children the particular carer has cared for, with dates and reasons for the placements ending).

5.21 This is what we term a ‘cross-view’ and the various outputs (screen forms, reports, etc.) available for child records should, in principle be available, in cross-views, for carers, schools, GPs, and a multitude of services such as family support, CAMHS, enuresis clinics, occupational therapy and so on, where the referrals of the children are recorded.

5.22 The fieldwork for this project confirmed that there is very little provision for cross-views in most EIS and hence much simple analysis of referrals, services and outcomes is placed beyond the reach of children’s services managers and staff.
6. Outputs for different users

6.1 In the following sections we list some of the outputs that are required by staff at different levels of children’s services, and by other departments and agencies. Most of the items were either observed or suggested to us during the fieldwork. This list is not comprehensive, and every local authority would be able to compile its own variant. It is one of the recommendations of this report that each local authority should do so, using the Framework outlined in Table A.

Outputs for practitioners

6.2 Practitioners need information outputs, both on screen and paper, which help them to do their daily work with the children allocated to them, those identified in new contacts and those who are the normal responsibility of absent members of their team. They need information about the carers and other services which the children use. They need to plan and manage their work, to report to their manager in supervision, and to analyse particular problems or areas that require attention. They need both to be able to follow established processes (e.g. in child protection or to make a placement) and to respond to numerous unplanned events, contacts and phone calls. Among specific needs are:

- Task/diary based ‘desktop’ screen including system-generated alerts (assessments, reviews due, pending or incomplete processes; changes/inputs to own allocated cases made by other workers, such as duty team, after-hours team, others covering during absence or sickness).
- Simple list of all children, searchable by name, alias names, family member names, address, phone number, date of birth, etc.
- Filters to narrow list to own allocated cases, cases allocated to any other worker or team.
- Filters to narrow list on single or multiple criteria (e.g. age, ethnicity, legal status, care status, carer, school, geographical area, reasons for referral, assessed needs, health, disability, SEN, school and exam status, offending status).
- Click-on facility to progress from list screen to detail screen for any name in list.
- Electronic case file screen: complete detail screen form for single case, perhaps as a tabbed form, constituting an electronic case-file and divided into separate functional areas (e.g. basic details, aliases, family, legal status and process history, life events, child protection status and history, health characteristics and history including illnesses and treatments and mental health, education history including SEN status, exams and exclusions, offending history, social services history including contacts, referrals, visits, case notes, case history, assessments, plans, interventions, including family support, reviews).
- An ICS case progress monitoring screen, structured around the assessment framework triangle, showing for each domain and
dimension the referral reasons, assessed needs, planned interventions, actual interventions received and outcomes revealed in review. Choice to view by domain or dimension or as a single list of all needs, interventions, outcomes. The triangle itself could be presented on screen. Clicking on any of the dimensions (e.g. Selfcare Skills) would bring up a list of needs, planned actions, actual interventions and outcomes for that dimension. Also outcomes met at key transition points in child’s life.

- Pre-populated forms including forms to fulfil the role of the ICS exemplars where paper versions are necessary.
- Alerts on electronic case file and ICS progress monitoring screens linked to key indicators (national or local): e.g. case has 2+ placements; review overdue; child due to sit exams; immunisations due.
- Generic reports for simple list, brief summary and full detail reports on any selection of children made using the filters (thus, able to produce lists by allocated worker, team, geographical area, age or care category). Ideally there should be facility for user to have some choice of specific fields to include, limited to what can feasibly be formatted automatically in the report.
- File front-sheet: printing of front-sheet triggered automatically whenever essential details changed.
- Case essential details report: ability to print out key details, identifiers, associated names, addresses, phone numbers, current status, etc., for any child, for use when away from the office.
- Case transfer report: a summary and chronology for use when case is transferred to another worker, team (e.g. adoption or leaving care) or authority.
- Chronology: ability to produce and view a chronology with choice of start and end dates and the types of item to be included. The chronology to be either printed or exported to a word-processing file for further editing.
- Group chronology: ability to designate a sibling or other group of children and produce a single chronology comprising events occurring to all members of the group.
- Activity list: a screen and report to list all activities (e.g. contacts, visits, assessments, reviews) by child, by allocated worker, by team, etc. Practitioner could use to monitor own activity and thus in supervision and team meetings.
- Diary and task list: a screen (with facility to print) with lists of visits, assessments, reviews, court appointments, etc., due and planned, plus meetings, supervisions, training sessions, holiday leave and other planned events. To encourage pro-active planning and make movements and appointments visible to other team members and team manager.
- Cloning facility: ability to ‘clone’ a case note, visit or other record to two or more children (e.g. when, as often occurs, two or more siblings are seen in the course of a single visit; or when referrals, assessments, care plans or other records are commenced at the same time for several siblings).
• Case notes: ability to view and print case notes in a succinct and structured format.

**Outputs for administrative staff**

6.3 Improved EIS and introduction of the ICS are likely to change the roles of administrative staff to some extent. Some of the outputs detailed above for practitioners (e.g. case file front sheets) have traditionally been the responsibility of administrators. However the latter are likely to retain at least those related to data quality and costs. Their specific needs include:

• All of those available to practitioners, plus:
• Outputs based on filters, to produce lists of children by team, school, ethnicity, legal status, care location, etc.
• Outputs related to placement change to transmit to the carer payment system.
• Data quality checklist: activity list showing data changed, new cases taken or transferred, changes to addresses and other essential data — so that Admin staff can act as quality controllers for all data.
• Inter-system data checks: outputs to flag when data held in different systems (e.g. Children’s EIS and authority financial system) is inconsistent.
• A complete audit trail for all records so that the date, time and author of all changes can be tracked where necessary.

**Outputs for team managers**

6.4 Team managers are the key first-tier managers who require child-level information outputs for monitoring work and managing caseloads, alerts to flag up pending or missed deadlines, cross-views to analyse service delivery and deficits, and aggregate information for checking performance and reporting to service and departmental management, together with the exception reports to identify specific cases for action.

• All those available to practitioners, with data at team and allocated social worker level and ability to pull up details of individual child.
• Case allocation, activity and status screen report by practitioner, as a fundamental tool for balancing workloads.
• Use detail screens for child, allocated practitioner to record supervision decisions and notes. These could perhaps be linked to child plans.
• Key indicator alerts and reports: to monitor performance on review compliance, assessment completion, data items such as ethnicity and immunisations.
• Audit screens and/or reports to trace who has made particular changes to the data, especially where questions of accuracy arise, or there are questions of responsibility.
• Data quality auditing outputs, especially for use in supervision, to flag incomplete recording (e.g. of a child’s ethnicity, family details, educational attainment).
• Screens and reports to list:
Information Outputs for Children's Services

- all children in need including those looked after with dates of contacts, assessments, plans, case conferences, reviews completed/due, services received/pending.
- looked after children with number and dates of placements in current care episode and reasons for movement.
- care leavers with category, accommodation needs, pathway plans due/completed, timescales met/not met.
- lists of cases closed and reason.

**Outputs for senior managers**

6.5 Senior managers require aggregate and exception reports, cross-views of the various services and frameworks into which to place outputs for interpreting overall performance and identifying areas of concern.

- Activity and caseload reports.
- Service performance report: to use in meetings with team managers and in reports to assistant director.
- Cross view screens and reports to examine particular services and interventions, numbers of referrals, delays and outcomes — for use in service planning, budgeting and partnership meetings with other agencies.
- Links to GIS system for mapping of locations of carers, facilities and services.

**Outputs for other sections/departments**

- File transfer summaries (e.g. when case is transferred from child to adult services)

**Different agencies, different boundaries**

A common difficulty of inter-agency work, much discussed in the context of IRT, is that different agencies have different geographical boundaries and catchment areas. Health authority areas, for instance, rarely coincide neatly with social services ones. Even with education which is under the control of the same body, London authorities report difficulties owing to the large number of children enrolled in schools in the area of a different authority.

Outputs need to be designed to take such factors into account. For instance, if the EIS contains a list of schools, it should also record the LEA responsible for the school so that output lists of names can be broken down where necessary by LEA. Such lists might be used to obtain data on attendance, exclusions, SEN and examination results.

- Finance outputs (e.g. dates and details of placements for foster care payments, where these are not built into the EIS but are processed by the authority’s finance department).
- Summaries of social work time use linked to unit costs of activity.
- Links to transport expenditure system
- Links to family placement system so that cross views can be developed
- Links to adult services provided to/pending for other members of child’s family
- Lists of children for exchange with education departments.
Information Outputs for Children’s Services

Outputs for/from other agencies and partners

- Case referral summaries (e.g. when child is referred to CAMHS, YOT, or to another local authority)
- Statistical returns to government
- Lists of services pending/received from other agencies; outcomes of services
- Personal Education Plans
- Lists of children excluded from school
- SEN data
- Predicted exam grades
- Lists of children not entered for SATS/GCSE/AS/A level examinations and reasons
- Individual Health Plans
### Alerts, diary prompts and related notifications

6.6 The list below comprises a number of examples identified during fieldwork. It is not necessarily comprehensive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Type*</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 2 CPR enquiries</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 2 in 12 months C39 forms from police</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP Conference due</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S47 core group meeting overdue</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S47 investigation overdue for completion</td>
<td>A,</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching 2 years on CPR</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 2 weeks since last visit to child on CPR</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching 6 weeks since last statutory visit to looked after child</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 LAC placements in last 12 months</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child absconded from placement (date)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age for SATS or GCSE</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusion from school</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of school</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immunisation due</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birthday</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching 16th birthday —arrange NI number</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placement Change</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open or incomplete assessment</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory review due date</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory review overdue</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review date set —issue invites by e-mail and/or letter</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review report overdue for recording</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due date for completion of Initial Assessment</td>
<td>A, D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due date for completion of Core Assessment</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due date for completion of Assessment &amp; Progress Record</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaint registered</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data (e.g. Ethnicity, Address, etc.)</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data changed by person other than allocated SW</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>SW TM Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A = Alert; W = Warning; N = Notification; D = Diary

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**Information Outputs for Children’s Services**

**CCFR & TCRU**

**Version 1.0a February 2004**
7. Outputs and the Integrated Children’s System

7.1 The Integrated Children’s System is the most recent and comprehensive attempt to set out and codify the practice of social work with children and families, the information that needs to be recorded at each of the key stages in the social work process and the ways in which that information will be used to evaluate and improve outcomes. It brings together the Looking After Children (LAC) system and the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (AF).

Forms and exemplars

7.2 The authors of these earlier systems found it necessary to design a set of paper forms for recording the information collected during the key processes of referral, assessment, planning, intervention and review. With LAC and the AF these were regarded as requisite recording tools with the general expectation that they would be filled in by hand on paper and the information transferred later to an EIS.

7.3 The LAC and AF forms have come to be used systematically for recording in almost all authorities, and their use has, as intended, brought significant changes in practice and, in particular, introduced much-needed uniformity into assessment and care planning based on a clear model of child development and a decided emphasis on outcomes. However, the subsequent use of the information thus recorded has been much less consistent. For instance, it is doubtful whether most practitioners use or refer to the LAC forms during routine case management, except when they need to prepare a new form (e.g. a revised care plan or a new placement plan). In other words, information is being recorded, forms are being used as inputs, but the information they contain is un- or underused as outputs.

7.4 Detailed work with six Welsh local authorities established that the LAC forms are rarely cited as a source of information. In part this is due to physical constraints: the length

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and bulk of the paper forms, where and how they are filed and so on. In part it is because few local authorities were able to implement electronic versions of the forms, to hold at least some of the data they contain in their EIS, to link such data to information still recorded as free text and to provide effective document management for easy and rapid retrieval of stored text documents (Gatehouse & Ward 2003, pp.4-5). In other words, forms such as those in the LAC and AF systems tend to be perceived and used as inputs, not as outputs.

7.5 In the documentation for the ICS the forms are described as ‘exemplars’, intended to illustrate the kind of information required and how it might be viewed, but without the requirement to complete, file and present specific paper forms for inspection and review. There is a general expectation that much recording in the ICS will be directly into the computer and that the exemplars or their content may be made available as printed outputs.14

7.6 This distinction between pre-determined forms and layouts (as in the LAC system) and what are now described as exemplars in the ICS is not trivial. The ICS Core Assessment exemplar for a 16-year-old is 28 pages, the Assessment and Progress Record 42 pages and the Child/Young Person’s Looked After Review exemplar 28 pages. Much of the space on the page is taken by boxes large enough to record a paragraph of text, many of which, for particular children, will remain empty or contain only a few words. Whether the information is recorded on paper onto the exemplars or directly into the computer, it should be possible to print out the information in these records in a much more succinct and readable format and to present it on screen in such a way that recording, viewing and extracting information will be much easier and printed versions will not always be required.

7.7 Evidence gathered during the fieldwork for this project and in other work suggests that both local authorities and software developers will tend to implement the ICS exemplars ‘literally’, imitating the full paper formats both for data input to and printed output from the EIS. If this is the case, it may be harder to use the information effectively, whether in screen or paper form.

7.8 However, even if literal implementation of the exemplars is avoided and screen forms and recording are streamlined, there is no guarantee that the information thus recorded will be used effectively. In great part this is a question of practice and organisational culture. Nevertheless, a well designed EIS can greatly assist. Much will depend on whether the information in an assessment, for instance, is broken down into items that can be manipulated separately (irrespective of whether these items are

14 “[the exemplars] are designed for use within an electronic information system, which supports single data entry ... and will require the development of relevant software to support their use. Stored information can then be extracted for a variety of reporting functions... Within an IT system, information would be electronically updated and transferred between records, minimising the need for manual replication.” (ibid) —However, strictly speaking in a relational database, information is not ‘transferred between records’, but held once in a single table to which controls on forms and reports can be bound for input or output purposes.
fixed-length database fields or chunks of free text). A key test, discussed in more detail below (see below, p.47 and Table C), is whether the elements to be considered at review\(^\text{15}\) (assessed needs, planned actions, services provided, planned and actual outcomes) can be assembled and viewed together within the EIS.

7.9 A second limitation of paper forms concerns updating and repeating, especially of assessments. When an assessment, or aspects of an assessment are repeated, will a new paper form be started, or will additions be made to the old one? In the former case, will information that remains valid be transferred to the new form, and if so will the EIS perform this chore by ‘pre-populating’ a blank form? If additions are made to an existing form, will there be space for them and how will they be distinguished from the original entries?

7.10 In an EIS these problems can be dealt with much more effectively. Instead of an assessment (or review) being regarded as a necessarily finite process leading to the completion of a paper form, it can be treated as a set of information (embodied in data tables, screen forms and, where necessary, printed reports) which is infinitely extendable. Items can be added when appropriate and their date of entry logged and made apparent. Checkpoints can still be applied to ensure that recording is complete at a particular point in time. Whenever necessary a summary or full report can be printed which includes the current information, all or elements of the history, and condenses it into a format always likely to be shorter, more compact and readable than pre-printed or hand-filled exemplars which are obliged to leave large tracts of white space to accommodate potential information.

7.11 What is true of the assessment exemplars holds true also for reviews and plans.

ICS Summaries

7.12 There are numerous stages in a child’s contact with social services at which a summary of information is required. For instance, in Chapter 8 of this report we suggest that summary information about a looked after child will be needed: to provide the duty officer and family placement officer with information necessary to do their work; to ensure that the foster carer knows enough about the child at the time of placement; to assist the social worker in care planning; to inform the development of the Personal Education Plan, the Individual Health Plan and the Pathway Plan; to assess developmental progress; to support the transfer of a case from one team or department to another. Different data items are likely to be

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\(^{15}\) See the Review exemplar tables, e.g. Child/Young Person in Need Review, p.4 (DH 2003.3)
required for each of these purposes. A well-functioning EIS should be able to select and bring together almost limitless configurations of data items, to produce whatever summary documents are required. In addition, the format in which the information is output should enable the practitioner to add headings and explanatory text: an EIS can output range of data and records of events, but it cannot construct a narrative. A range of different summaries, capable of being word-processed, is likely to be one of the most valuable outputs from the ICS.

ICS Needs to Outcomes Rolling Record

7.13 The above considerations led us to identify what we have called an ‘ICS Needs to Outcomes Rolling Record’ which would make it possible, on screen or paper, to juxtapose reasons for referral, identified needs, planned actions, actual interventions and the outcomes as assessed at review. This output should show the complete history, including successive referrals, not merely the fixed time period between an assessment and the next review. A sketch of what such an outlook might look like is given in Table C.

Recording text in the ICS

7.14 However, if outputs of this kind are to be possible, the EIS has to be capable of storing or at least managing textual information, either in full, as it might be hand written in a core assessment or review record, or at least in brief summary fields. Decisions need to be taken about storing lists (e.g. of common needs, types of service and outcomes) which can then be attached to combo boxes (drop-down lists) on screen forms, where the user is constrained to pick one item from the list. (see above pp.14 and 27)

Chronology

7.15 The LAC EIR-2 form records much of the chronological information for looked after children. In the Integrated Children’s System this is replaced by the Chronology exemplar. Our previous research (Gatehouse & Ward 2002, p.7) found that although it was often well and thoroughly maintained, the EIR-2 form was little used in practice to construct the histories of looked after children. Not least of its shortcomings is that as a paper form, it could not be used to write the chronology documents required for court proceedings, case transfer summaries, and so on.

7.16 The ICS Chronology exemplar may well suffer from similar neglect if it is implemented as an input, a paper form used for recording. However, almost all its content would naturally be recorded as part of an electronic case file in the course of conducting the key social work processes (cf the discussion of chronologies at p.25, above). Once records of the various events exist in electronic form they can be displayed on screen for an ‘instant appraisal’ of a case, and used in supervision and at team meetings; or collected together in a printed report that could be used to give a complete chronology-to-date at any given time, or to select a particular time period and print a list of all the events which occurred between two dates. Lastly, the EIS
could export the chronological events list to a word processor where a social worker could edit the list, add headings and commentary and adapt it to whatever style of report is required.

**Costs**

7.17 As the development of unit costs becomes more sophisticated it should be possible to bring together certain data items that can be costed, such as social work processes and provision of specific services to produce a total cost for a specific period of intervention, and to relate this to outcome (see Ward, Holmes, Soper and Olsen, forthcoming).
8. Outputs to address key questions from research

8.1 In order to identify whether they are meeting the broadly defined Government Objectives for Children’s Social Services (see DH 1999) local authorities need to answer a number of specific questions. Similar questions are also posed by the findings of recent research studies into child welfare and service delivery and by the spotlight of a series of inquiries into shortcomings, notably those by Waterhouse (2000) and Laming (2003).

8.2 In this chapter, eight key questions for childcare practice posed by recent research are used to illustrate some of the outputs which could help local authorities to analyse and improve their performance and thus to meet Government Objectives for Children’s Services. In most cases we have listed under ‘Returns’ the specific performance indicator(s) or statistical returns related to each objective, with those for the Welsh Assembly Government being given in brackets.

8.3 The outputs proposed are identified at case management, team leader and strategic planning levels. Even with this limited selection of research questions, it is evident that there is substantial overlap, thus reducing the total number necessary. Moreover, it is clear that what is required is not the single output (usually a management report) which attempts to provide a direct answer to the key question, but rather a complex web of many outputs at each organisational level which not only contribute to the answer but comprise the means of affecting and improving practice. Further work with a more comprehensive list of key questions would make it possible both to refine the list of common outputs and to identify more of those required to answer specific questions.

8.4 The eight key questions are:

A. Are family support services meeting children’s needs?
B. Are procedures to protect children from harm working effectively?
C. Are there sufficient staff with the necessary skills and resources to provide an effective service to children and families?
D. Is adequate support available for disabled children?
E. Is there a choice of appropriate placements when a child needs to be looked after?
F. Are looked after children experiencing placements that improve their sense of stability and security?
G. Is the education of looked after children being adequately addressed?
H. Are young care leavers receiving adequate support as they make they move from care to independence?

8.5 The following points should be noted.

- Questions such as these cannot be answered without a flexible system that can analyse data in numerous different ways. A system which is pre-programmed to produce a fixed set of
reports will not be able to respond to changing needs and circumstances.

• We have only given a number of examples of the type of questions that agencies might need to answer. Systems need to be sufficiently flexible to produce different outputs required to answer new questions that may arise, or indeed additional outputs that might be important in answering the questions so far suggested. No map of outputs can be sufficiently comprehensive to meet all needs.

• Many questions about outcomes, such as those identified here, explore similar problems from different perspectives. The result is a substantial overlap and hence a reduction in the total number of outputs that will be required.
A. Are family support services meeting children’s needs?

Relevant government objectives:

(1.1) To support children in need and their families in order wherever possible to prevent family breakdown and promote better life chances for the most vulnerable children.

(7) To ensure that referral and assessment processes discriminate effectively between different types and levels of need and produce a timely service response (including sub objectives such as promoting interagency working, reducing proportion of repeat referrals, completing initial and core assessments on time).

Research shows that[^16]:

- Providing a range of appropriate support services to families at an early stage can improve outcomes for children.
- However, families are often offered too little support, too late.
- There are particular shortfalls in services such as short breaks for disabled children and appropriate services to meet the needs of minority ethnic children and families.
- A ‘revolving door’ situation may occur when children’s needs are not met, cases are closed and then re-referred.
- Many children are in need because of problems affecting their parents such as alcohol or drug misuse, mental illness, domestic violence or disability. Yet appropriate links are often not made between adult’s and children’s services. Adult services may fail to consider whether service users are parents and therefore whether children’s needs should also be taken into account.
- Adult services tend not to consider children’s timetables, for example the impact of a long wait for a parent to receive treatment for substance misuse.
- The response from social services departments to a request for family support differs depending on the source. Cases referred by non-professionals are less likely to progress to an assessment than other cases, and are more likely to be re-referrals.
- There is little evidence of formal planning and review in the family support area. Information is rarely collected on outcomes and effectiveness, either for individual children or for types of service.

Outputs required[^17]:

- Case management level
  - Individual child case history and chronology, including:
    - Referrals


[^17]: Here and for each of the Key Questions from Research the Outputs are presented in discursive text and are categorised only loosely by type and level. A more schematic presentation in terms of the Outputs Conceptual Framework is given for the first Question only in Table B.
• Assessed needs (and sequences of assessments)
• Services received and awaiting
• Delays and incomplete courses of service/treatment
• Reviews
• Outcomes identified at review

• Screen forms and reports to list (ICS Rolling Record):
  o Assessed needs on each of the domains of the Assessment Triangle
  o Plan: services identified
  o Interventions: referrals to and services provided, with dates
  o Review:
    ▪ outcomes for each of the services actually provided (for child, related adults, community wellbeing)
    ▪ Unmet needs
    ▪ Delays in/waiting lists for service provision
    ▪ Incomplete services and (especially) courses of treatment

• Alerts:
  o Re-referral
  o Assessment due
  o Review due
  o Failure to provide/complete planned service
  o Long waiting time for planned service

• Notifications:
  o Of needs, plans and referrals:
    ▪ to service managers
    ▪ to service commissioners
    ▪ to other agencies and providers
  o To team managers, reviewing officers, etc.
    ▪ Assessments due dates & overdue
    ▪ Reviews due dates & overdue

— Analysis

• Ability to browse lists and obtain aggregate statistics and analysis of all children in need by:
  o Postcode
  o Source of referral
  o Reason for referral
  o Ethnicity
  o Age of child

— Service management & strategic planning level:

• Aggregate reports on:
  o Identified needs (following the domains of the assessment triangle), and including:
    ▪ Parenting capacity and factors inhibiting
    ▪ Parental mental health problems
    ▪ Learning disabilities
    ▪ Alcohol and substance abuse
    ▪ Domestic violence
  o Services planned/requested (for child, adults, community)
  o Services received (with reasons for delay and failure to access)
- Outcomes obtained (child, adult, community wellbeing)
  - Cross-views
    - By agency (e.g. CAMHS):
      - Referrals to
      - Referrals from (with reasons and concerns)
      - Service provisions (e.g. day care)
    - By individual service providers (e.g. child minders used for children in need, family centres), showing:
      - By provider:
        - Capacity
        - Take-up
        - Waiting time
        - Amount & frequency
      - By child:
        - How often?
        - How long?
        - Did it make a difference?
    - Analysis (for further commissioning):
      - Unit costs
      - Costs related to outcomes
      - Effects of delays and failed uptake/completion
  - Returns:
    PI E44 relative spend on family support
    PI E45 proportion of children in need from ethic minorities
B. Are procedures to protect children from harm working effectively?

Relevant government objective(s):

(2) To ensure that children are protected from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect.

Research and inspections show that:\(^{18}\):

- Child protection registration is often still seen as the gateway to accessing services. Many councils have found it difficult to shift their practice from identifying whether or not harm has occurred, to considering the impact of this on children and to respond by providing services to promote their development.

- A substantial number of child protection referrals do not progress to an initial assessment, but there is little follow-up of these cases.

- Good information sharing between agencies is vital when there are concerns about a child, yet research and child protection inquiries consistently point to deficiencies in this area. Systems to keep track of when enquiries are made of child protection registers often do not work well.

- There is considerable variation between councils in child protection registration rates and rates of re-registration. Councils with lower rates of registration and re-registration seem to have a wider range of family support services and good interagency working (e.g. agreed common threshold for taking action, regular attendance by all key agencies at CP conferences, regular audits of random sample of S47 enquiries which are then discussed by all agencies).

- Registration and re-registration figures require analysing and interpreting in order to produce useful information (for example, there may be good explanations for a high level of registrations, and re-registrations can occur for a variety of reasons. Some councils use register as a dynamic record of risk and move children on and off as circumstances change, others keep children on it).

- An absence of case chronologies and summaries, and in some cases a failure to review past work with families, can lead to delay in intervening decisively to safeguard children especially in families where there are longer-standing concerns about the adequacy of parenting

Input & recording:

The recording deficits noted earlier (see above, p.12) should be noted. It will be difficult to ensure adequate child protection unless these are addressed.

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Information Outputs for Children’s Services  

Outputs

— Case management level
- Case history and chronology (including dates of registration and re-registration on CPR)
- Assessed needs on all domains of the Assessment Triangle, including factors inhibiting parenting capacity
- Summary of assessed needs, plan (services identified), review (services provided), outcomes
- Groups — screen forms and outputs which allow inspection of
  o All siblings of child on register;
  o Any other children (whether or not related) at same address.
- Alerts to social worker/child protection register custodian:
  o when child protection review is due
  o when child has been on register continuously for 18 months
  o when a check is made to see if a child is on the CPR
- Email - invitations to child protection conferences to all relevant agencies

— Team leader level
As above, plus lists of:
- children on CPR without an allocated social worker
- child protection reviews overdue
- All children currently on CPR for 2 years or more (existing PI only records this when children come off the register)

— Strategic planning level (senior manager / Area Child Protection Committee)
Aggregate reports on:
- Child protection referrals
- Child protection registrations
- Referrals that didn’t proceed to registration (and what happens to them)
- Re-registrations
- De-registrations
Analysis by:
- postcode
- characteristics of child (age, sex, ethnicity, disability etc.)
- assessed needs (including parental capacity)
- source of referral
- services requested and provided, and outcomes (as recorded at review)
Local authorities also need to be able to look at trends over time (e.g. in reasons children are at risk) and to make comparisons between teams and with other authorities.

— Other useful analyses:
- Comparison of services offered to families with children on CPR with those offered to other families in contact with social services
- Analysis linking re-registration rates with length of time on the register and reasons for re-registration (e.g. was this because of
change in child’s circumstances or because earlier action failed to protect child?)

– Cross-agency information
  • Ability to check with police if someone in contact with child is on Violent and Sex Offenders Register (VISOR)
  • Depending on inter-agency arrangements and IRT protocols, other agencies may need to be able to check whether a child is on the CPR.

– Returns
PAF A3 (PM1: CPR2) Proportion of re-registrations on the CPR
PAF C20 (PM1: CPR13) Reviews of child protection cases carried out on time
PAF C21 (PM1: CPR10 is similar) Duration on CPR (proportion of children de-registered during the year after being on register continuously for 2+ years)

CPR3 Referrals, assessments and child protection

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19 Return items in brackets denote Welsh Assembly Government performance indicators, which are detailed in the PM1 Return issued by the Local Government Data Unit in Wales.
C. Are there sufficient staff with the necessary skills and resources to provide an effective service to children and families?

_Relevant government objective(s)_

(10) To ensure that social care workers are appropriately skilled, trained and qualified, and to promote uptake of training at all levels.

(11) To maximise the benefits to service users from the resources available, and to demonstrate the effectiveness and value for money of the care and support provided, and to allow for choice and different responses for different needs and circumstances.

_Research shows that^20^:_

- A stable and experienced workforce with manageable case loads improves the ability of local authorities to offer a good service and protect children from harm.
- Service users dislike frequent changes of social worker. Consultation exercises with children, young people and parents consistently identify continuity of worker as very important to them.
- Most councils are experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, and use of agency staff is rising.
- Frequent staff turnover can lead to important information about children being lost, and create problems for continuity of recording and monitoring outcomes.
- When staff have heavy caseloads, the emphasis is on ‘fire-fighting’, with less time available for supporting families to prevent the need for children to be looked after, or to work with families so that children can be safely returned home.
- There is considerable variation between and within councils in the caseloads of staff working with children and families.
- Data from the Children in Need census shows that some councils keep relatively large numbers of cases open and see children and families less frequently but over a long period of time. Others choose to work intensively over a comparatively short period of time and then close the case. It is not clear which is most effective.

_Outputs_

- _Team leader level_
  - List of:
    o cases by social worker (ideally including measure of intensity)
    o children without an allocated social worker
    o children experiencing multiple changes of social worker

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Information Outputs for Children’s Services

CCFR & TCRU

- Social workers who have not yet completed PQ1
  - Time spent on cases (broken down by type of activity)
  - Training available and undertaken

- Alerts
  - Child’s social worker is on leave

- Notifications
  - Information about forthcoming courses, training

- Strategic planning (senior manager) level
  - Staff turnover and vacancies
  - Number of agency staff, trends over time
  - Activity to caseload ratio (number of children receiving a service at a given time as proportion of open cases)

- Analysis
  - Comparisons with other local authorities

- Returns
  QP PI 14: proportion of residential child care workers who have achieved NVQ level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People
  QP PI 15: Proportion of social workers and residential managers working with children who need to obtain the new PQ award in child care and who have obtained the PQ1 award in child care
D. Is adequate support available for disabled children?

Relevant government objective
6: To ensure that children with specific social needs arising out of disability or a health condition are living in families or other appropriate settings in the community where their assessed needs are adequately met and reviewed.

Research shows that:\

- There are high levels of unmet need among some families of disabled children, especially poor families, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, families of children with very severe impairments or with more than one disabled child.
- The needs of disabled children and their families need to be identified early and a range of support services offered including respite care, home visiting, daycare, CAMHS, holiday provision, aids and adaptations, support groups and information about what is available including welfare benefits and tax credits.
- Many disabled children need support from health and education as well as social services. Agencies need to have good ways of sharing information and undertake joint assessments to avoid duplication for families.
- A ‘key’ of ‘link’ worker can act as an effective gateway to a multi-agency approach.
- Disabled young people need access to high quality multi-agency transition services into adulthood, including education, training, employment and leisure opportunities.
- Family-based short term care services are highly valued by parents of disabled children, but demand often outstrips supply especially at weekends and school holidays.
- Disabled children are more likely to be in local authority care, especially residential care, than non-disabled children, and are more likely to be placed out of their own authority. They are particularly vulnerable to abuse.

Outputs

- Case management level
  - Individual child summary information and chronology
  - Summary of assessed needs.
  - Multi-agency Family Support Plan (services to be provided, including direct payments and services provided by other agencies)
  - Review
  - Outcomes
  - Lists of those working with a child and their contact details

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- Lists of:
  - short-term respite carers with vacancies,
  - holiday play schemes with places for disabled children
  - childminders approved to care for disabled children etc.

- Cross views
  - Families with more than one disabled child
  - Disabled children using respite care, CAMHS, after-school clubs etc.

- Flags
  - Child is on Disability Register
  - Child has a statement of Special Educational Needs
  - Child has particular medical needs/allergies
  - Name and phone number of child’s key worker

- Alerts to social worker:
  - When statement of special educational needs is due for review
  - When child is hospitalised
  - When transition plan is due for disabled care leavers

- Team leader level
  - Lists of:
    - Children on the Disability Register
    - Cases where services requested but not received/on waiting list
    - Disabled children with complex needs who do not have a key worker
    - Disabled children in residential and foster care, in and out of the authority
    - Disabled care leavers/transition plans/agreements with other agencies

- Strategic planning level
  Aggregate reports on:
  - Numbers of disabled children and main need categories
  - Disabled children receiving services from SSD and costs (including transport, services provided through pooled budgets)
  - Disabled care leavers moving to adult services

- Analysis
  Incidence of disability by geographical location, ethnic group, child’s age, nature and location of services provided/requested etc.

- Cross agency information
  - Lists of children with statements of special educational needs
  - Educational attainments of disabled children
E. Is there a choice of appropriate placements when a child needs to be looked after?

*Relevant government objectives:*

(11) To maximise the benefits to service users from the resources available, and to demonstrate the effectiveness and value for money of the care and support provided, and to allow for choice and different responses for different needs and circumstances.

This research question also relates directly to the aims of the *Choice Protects* initiative.

*Research shows that*²²:

- A well-resourced and well-supported range of temporary and longer-term foster placements is an essential dimension of an effective family placement service.
- The proportion of children in foster care who exhibit challenging or difficult behaviour has risen. They and their carers need access to support and services (including child and adolescent mental health services) to prevent placements breaking down.
- Most councils are experiencing problems in recruiting and retaining foster carers, especially for older children, sibling groups, those with difficult behaviour and disabled children.
- Successful recruitment policies tend to be associated with well-targeted schemes, for example directed towards particular neighbourhoods or specific groups of carers. Local authority management information systems need to be able to assemble accurate profiles of their existing carers and match these with the needs of the children they are placing, in order to pitch their recruitment campaigns.
- Not enough attention is paid to support and remuneration of carers. Whilst payment is not the main motivation for foster carers, adequate and efficient payment systems have been shown to keep them going during difficult times.
- Foster carers often complain of receiving inadequate information about children placed with them. This lack of preparedness can contribute to placement breakdown.
- As many as one in five registered foster carers are not currently fostering.
- Councils have little understanding of the costs of providing foster care services, or the comparative costs and benefits of in-house services compared to independent fostering agencies.

*Outputs*

- *Case management level*

  - Individual child case history and chronology including:
    - assessed needs

Information Outputs for Children’s Services

- Services received and awaiting
  - Number of different foster carers child has been placed with
    (could link to placement stability indicators - distinguish repeat placements with same carer)
- Summary of key information on child (for foster carer at time of placement)
- Child case summaries and carer profiles need to be available to duty social worker/family placement worker as well as child’s social worker

  - Notifications
    - To finance when child is placed or moved, to trigger prompt payment

  - Cross views
    - List of carers with vacancies, by type and geographical location
    - Summary of carer histories (including placement breakdowns
    - Payment history and delays

  - Team leader level (family placement team)
    - Caseloads: numbers of foster carers per link/support worker
    - Information on training courses available to foster carers (email notification?) and take up
    - Number of carers leaving each year and reasons
    - List of dormant carers (no child placed with in last 6 months)

  - Strategic planning (senior manager) level
    - Aggregate reports on:
      - Number and characteristics of children requiring care (and analysis by postcode, age, sex, ethnicity etc.)
      - Needs of children requiring care, services provided
      - Out of county placements (or placements over a certain distance from child’s home?)
      - Number of foster carers of different types (short-term, respite, specialist, long-term, friends and family etc.)
      - Profiles of carers (age, sex, ethnicity, employment status, location, length of service etc.)
    - Analysis to compare:
      - Trends over time
      - Needs of children requiring care with profiles of carers and placements available (for commissioning and recruitment campaigns)
      - Children placed with independent fostering agencies with those placed in-house (needs, costs, outcomes)

  - Inter agency information
    - Independent fostering agency placements and costs
F. Are looked after children experiencing placements that improve their sense of stability and security?

Relevant Government Objectives

(1) To ensure that children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood

(1.2) To reduce the number of changes of placement for children looked after.

Research shows that:

• Many children in care or accommodation have experienced frequent changes of carer and household before they become looked after.

• A substantial proportion of children continue to experience constant changes of placement, carer and social worker after they enter care or accommodation. The majority of moves occur in the first twelve months after admission, but a small proportion of children and young people experience multiple moves throughout their care career.

• Constant change is damaging to children’s ability to form and sustain attachments, their educational progress, emotional and behavioural development, their ongoing health care, and their emerging sense of self.

• On the other hand, not all changes of placement are negative moves. Moves from temporary to permanent homes, or to placements where children can be with siblings are positive changes.

• Some social workers are reluctant to move children from unsatisfactory or inappropriate placements for fear of increasing the amount of instability.

• More than half of all first placements are unplanned or made in emergencies. Many of these are made by duty workers without first-hand knowledge of the child or the carer, leading to a high risk of placement breakdown in the first 12 months.

• Insufficient support for carers or their children; failure to inform carers of key information about a child; placements far from home away from the child’s networks; problems with contact from relatives; the child’s behavioural problems, particularly when leading to exclusion from school; stress in the carers’ own lives; overriding carers’ preferences or ignoring registration criteria concerning ages, number and gender of children to be placed together with length of placements, are all reasons why some foster placements fail.

• Residential placements break down more frequently than foster placements.

• Adequate support from social workers; good working conditions and remuneration; access to specialist help from CAMHS, health professionals and educationists; the child’s positive view of the placement are all protective factors in preserving the placement.

• Children experience instability of placement at all ages. Placements of infants with own parents are sometimes made inappropriately and frequently break down, particularly if insufficiently supported.

• The majority of moves are due to planned transitions, not placement breakdowns. Planned transitions occur because a more appropriate placement has become available, because a foster carer goes or comes back from holiday, because funding for a more expensive out of authority placement is no longer available and so on. These moves might be reduced with more proactive planning or a wider choice of placements.

Outputs

– Case management level:

• Individual child summary information and chronology including reason for being looked after; experiences of change of household, carer and domicile prior to becoming looked after; dates duration and reasons for all care episodes including current one; types of placement, dates, duration and reasons for all changes in current and previous care episodes; dates, duration and reason for all changes of school

• Chronology of social care support provided to child and carers

• Summary of assessed needs, plan (services to be provided) review (services provided, outcomes during current care episode

• Personal Education Plan, Personal Health Plan

• Summary points from Assessment and Progress Record indicating strength of relationship with current carers

– Alerts to social worker
(with particular emphasis following a change of placement)

• When next visit to child and/or carer and/or parent is due

• When dentist/ outpatients appointments etc are due

• When additional payments to carers for school trips, extra clothing allowance etc are due

• When arrangements for appointments with CAMHS, extra educational support, additional professional services to child or parents agreed at the review have not yet been made

• When next review is due

– Notifications

• To finance department following a change of placement

• To school following change of placement

• To GP/hospital outpatients/ CAMHS etc following change of placement

– Team leader level:

Lists of:
• Children and young people looked after with number, duration and reason for leaving placements in current care episode, together with length of current placement
• Children and young people whose placements have disrupted in previous twelve months and reasons for disruptions
• Children and young people currently in temporary or transitional placements, with length of placement and age of child
• Children looked after with no allocated social worker
• Children looked after waiting for professional support from other agencies

— Strategic planning level:
Aggregate reports on:
• Types of placement in preceding year by length and reason for ending
• Numbers of children looked after by age, length of current care episode and duration and type of current placement
• Length of care episodes and frequency of readmissions
• Children looked after by numbers of placements in preceding twelve months/ in current care episode
• Foster carers leaving service with reasons for leaving
• Changes of school for looked after children with reasons given
• Numbers of children looked after with no allocated social worker
• Professional support from other agencies for looked after children (including practical support such as taxi services to school)
• Numbers of children looked after waiting for specific specialist services (eg CAMHS)
• Exception report: list of children/young people with three or more placements in previous year – with complete number of placements, identifying those with exceptional numbers of moves

— Analysis
• Reasons for temporary placements (eg those lasting less than two months) related to availability of more appropriate placements (eg with siblings; with carers of similar ethnicity; with carers able to provide specialist support)
• Types of placement most likely to disrupt and reasons
• Frequency of placement changes within specific age groups and reasons
• Extent of social work support offered to foster carers whose placements disrupt/ who leave the service
• Changes of placement related to continuity of support from other agencies
• Changes of placement by number of looked after reviews completed on time
• Comparison of trends over time
— Cross-agency information:
- Changes of school related to changes of placement and evidence of support provided to maintain educational continuity
- Changes of GP/hospital consultant related to changes of placement and evidence of support provided to maintain continuity

— Cross-views:
- Carers who experience more than one disruption
- Carers registration criteria (eg number and ages of children, length of placements) by their current experience (eg number and ages of children actually placed; duration of current placement. Exception list of carers working beyond agreed capacity.

— Returns:
CLA 100 Children Looked After in England
SSDA903 Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England & Wales
PAF A1 (NAWPI 3.1) Stability of Placements of Children Looked After
PAF B7 (PM1: LAC9-10) Children Looked after in Foster Placements or Placed for Adoption
PAF C22 Young Children looked after in Foster Placements or Placed for Adoption
PAF C24 Children Looked after Absent from School
PAF D35 Long Term Stability of Children Looked After
G. Is the education of looked after children being adequately addressed?

Relevant government objective(s)

(4) To ensure that children looked after gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care.

(4.1) To bring the overall performance of children looked after, for a year or more, at key stage SATS and GCSE, closer in line with local children generally.

Research shows that:

- Children who receive intellectual stimulation and encouragement from their earliest years are most likely to achieve good educational outcomes.

- Many children have had poor educational experiences, including numerous changes of school, and/or exclusions and frequent absences before they enter care or accommodation. Some, though not all, will therefore need extra help if they are to reach their potential.

- Many looked after young people are disengaged from education and leave school without taking GCSE exams.

- A high proportion of looked after children have mental health problems which inhibit their educational performance.

- On the other hand school can be a very positive experience, particularly for young people who have difficulties in other areas of their lives.

- However in some placements there are very few books or other educational materials; in some there is no access to a computer; it is also difficult to find a quiet place to do homework.

- In spite of many difficulties some young people in care or accommodation do very well at school. However they need continuing practical and emotional support if they are to succeed in higher education.

- Changes of placement often entail a change of school, with consequent loss of educational continuity. Some children and young people who move are out of school for several months while they wait for a new school place to become available.

- Changing school can have adverse academic, social and emotional consequences for children. They may find that they have to repeat parts of the curriculum they have already studied, while there are other parts that they have missed. They may have trouble making new friends. It is common for new students to be bullied. Looked after children are often stigmatised at school.

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Some teachers (and social workers) have low expectations of looked after children and unconsciously discourage them from trying to succeed academically.

Against a background of frequent change, when children are looked after there may be too little attention given to educational planning (e.g. organising SEN statements; applying to secondary schools; selecting GCSEs; making sure coursework is completed on time).

**Outputs**

- **Case management level**
  - Individual child summary information including age, reason for being looked after, type of school attended, relevant information concerning SEN assessment at entry to care
  - Chronology showing complete educational history (dates, duration and reasons for changes of school throughout childhood; dates, duration and reasons for school exclusions), experiences of changes of domicile prior to becoming looked after; dates, duration and reasons for changes of placements while looked after; changes of school due to changes of placement highlighted.
  - Personal Education Plan including baseline information about academic performance at entry to care and individual educational targets
  - Personal Health Plan including assessment of emotional and behavioural development
  - Summary points from Assessment and Progress Record indicating educational progress and emotional and behavioural development since entry
  - Summary of assessed needs, plan (services to be provided) review (services provided, outcomes during current care episode

- **Alerts**
  - Final application date for secondary school/sixth form college/FE college/university
  - When SATs, GCSEs, AS and A levels are due; dates by which GCSEs, AS and A levels need to be selected; dates by which GCSE, AS and A level coursework needs to be completed
  - When GCSE/AS/A level results are due
  - When review of SEN statement is due/when looked after review is due
  - When arrangements for appointments with CAMHS, extra educational support, additional professional services to child agreed at the review have not yet been made

- **Notifications**
  - To school following change of placement

- **Team leader level**
  Lists of:
• Children and young people looked after with number, duration and reason for changing schools in current care episode
• Children and young people looked after with changes of school related to changes of placement
• Children and young people looked after with baseline information about educational performance at entry to care/accommodation
• Children and young people looked after with no Personal Educational Plan
• Children and young people looked after not attending school with reason and duration
• Pre-school children looked after with/without nursery school places
• Children and young people looked after with no allocated social worker
• Children and young people looked after receiving/waiting for extra educational support; CAMHS support
• Children and young people looked after achieving/failing to achieve individual educational targets
• Children and young people looked after reaching school leaving age with/without GCSEs
• Children and young people looked after moving on to further/higher education

– Strategic planning level:
Aggregate reports on:
• Children and young people looked after with baseline information about educational performance at entry to care/accommodation and individual education targets
• Looked after children not attending school (including nursery school), reasons and duration
• Looked after children with SEN statements pending
• Children and young people looked after with number, duration and reason for changing schools in current care episode
• Numbers of children looked after with no allocated social worker
• Children and young people looked after requiring and receiving/not receiving professional support from other agencies to improve educational performance (eg literacy schemes; extra support in GCSE/ A level years; practical support such as taxi services to school; educational psychologist/ CAMHS)
• Educational outcomes for looked after children (SATS, GCSEs, A levels, higher education)
• Care leavers in higher education, amount of financial support provided and expected duration
• Care leavers who drop out of higher education and why

– Analysis
• Educational progress: baseline information on educational attainment at entry by individual targets achieved, SATS and GCSE results
• Individual education targets achieved/ not achieved and why
• Educational attainment by length of time looked after
• Educational attainment by extent and nature of professional support provided
• Educational attainment by SEN, looked after children reviews completed
• Changes of school related to changes of placement - and evidence of support provided to maintain educational continuity
• Examination results/ completion of education by changes of placement
• Care leavers with 5GCSEs Grade A*-C who do not continue education and why
• Trends over time

– Cross-agency information
• Educational attainments of looked after children
• Children and young people looked after with baseline information about educational performance at entry to care/ accommodation and individual education targets
• Looked after children not attending school (including nursery school), reasons and duration
• Looked after children with SEN statements pending
• Changes of school related to changes of placement - and evidence of support provided to maintain educational continuity
• Children and young people looked after waiting for support from eg educational psychologists/ CAMHS

– Cross views
• Connexions support and looked after children

– Returns:
OC1: (PM1: LAC29, NAWPI 3.2)Educational Qualifications of Care Leavers

OC2: Outcome Indicators for Looked After Children
H. Are young care leavers receiving adequate support as they move to adulthood?

Relevant government objective(s)

(5) To ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens.

Research shows that:

- Young people who leave care are often ill-equipped both socially, emotionally and educationally, to cope with independence.
- It is rare for foster carers to continue to offer continuing support to young people for more than a few months after they have left their care.
- Young care leavers are frequently expected to cope with the challenges and responsibilities of major life transitions – setting up an independent home, entering employment, becoming parents – at a much earlier age than their peers. They may have little support in doing this, either from social services or from former carers.
- While their peers may cope with one transition at a time – e.g., starting work while they are still living at home – young care leavers sometimes have to cope with them all together.
- Finance, budgeting and accommodation are major issues for young care leavers.
- While some young care leavers are able to move on, others survive with difficulty or become victims of their circumstances.
- Care leavers who succeed in entering higher education sometimes have inadequate financial or social support to help them complete their course.
- Personal and professional support from specialist leaving care workers, key workers and mentors, as well as from family members, can help ‘survivors’ make successful transitions, often from a very poor starting point.
- Even those young people who are experiencing severe difficulties in making the transition to adulthood, who may be struggling to cope with homelessness, unemployment and isolation, nevertheless value support.
- Disabled care leavers may encounter abrupt and ill-planned transitions, with poor co-ordination between children and adult’s services.

Outputs

– Case management level:
- Individual child summary information and chronology including reason for being looked after; dates, duration and

reasons for changes of placements while looked after; types of placement; dates, duration and reasons for changes of school; chronology of assessed needs and services eg CAMHS provided while looked after; reason for leaving care

- Chronology of type of accommodation since leaving care; financial support provided; social care support provided
- Personal Education Plan; Personal Health Plan
- Currently identified needs on all domains of the Pathway Plan (Health and Development; Education Training and Employment; Emotional and Behavioural Development; Identity; Practical and other skills necessary for independent living; Financial arrangements; Support including arrangements for maintaining contact; Family and environmental factors; Accommodation)
- Summary of assessed needs, plan (services to be provided, including financial support), review (services provided), outcomes

- **Alerts to social worker:**
  - When sixteenth birthday is due
  - When multi-agency assessment of needs/pathway plan is due (eligible children: not more than three months after sixteenth birthday/becomes eligible; relevant children: not more than three months after date of becoming relevant child)
  - When transition plan is due for disabled care leavers
  - When pathway plan is due for review
  - When nineteenth birthday is due
  - Dates of exams (eg GCSEs) and results
  - When accommodation arrangements are due to end

- **E-mail notifications:**
  - Invitation to reviews

- **Team leader level:**
  Lists of:
  - children and young people who are care leavers within the definition of the Children (Leaving Care) Act, 2000, with indications as to whether eligible or relevant children.
  - Care leavers with pathway plans overdue/ reviews overdue/ care leavers waiting for support services from housing, connexions, CAMHS/ care leavers in touch/not in touch with leaving care team/workers
  - Disabled care leavers/transition plans/agreements with other agencies

- **Strategic planning level**

Aggregate reports on:

- Numbers of children and young people who are care leavers within the definition of the Children (Leaving Care) Act, 2000, with indications as to whether eligible or relevant children.
- Care leavers receiving financial support from SSD and amounts
- Care leavers in accommodation type by age
- Care leavers in full-time education/employment
• Educational attainments of care leavers (including higher education)
• Care leavers in higher education, amount of financial support provided and expected duration
• Care leavers who drop out of higher education and why
• Disabled care leavers moving to adult services

— Analysis:
• Care leavers by age/ length of time looked after/ number of placement moves/ outcomes (education/employment/offences/stability post care)
• changes of school related to changes of placement
• examination results/completion of education by changes of placement
• Care leavers with 5 GCSEs Grade A*-C who do not continue education and why
• continuing provision of services (eg CAMHS, education) after move to independent/semi-independent placements

— Cross agency information:
• Educational attainments of young people leaving care
• Changes of school related to changes of placement – and evidence of support provided to maintain educational continuity
• Young people approaching leaving care likely to require support from housing/CAMHS
• Young people leaving care with ongoing health conditions/disabilities

— Cross views:
• ConneXions support and care leavers/ YOT team support and care leavers

Returns :
OC1: (PM1: LAC29 & NAWPI 3.2) Educational Qualifications of Care leavers
OC2 Outcome Indicators for Looked after Children
OC3 Care leavers on their 19th Birthday
9. **Using outputs to improve performance**

9.1 As the above chapter demonstrates, detailed answers to a number of questions are required if local authorities are to find solutions to the key problems in the child welfare field, meet broad government objectives and improve performance for the children, families and communities they serve. The aim should not only be to discover whether specific outcomes are being achieved, but how and why: in short, what works?

9.2 The outputs required for government returns give some indication of what performance is like in key areas, but they do not explain it. The outputs which provide Government returns are not on their own sufficient to detail how performance can be improved. Ideally, an information system should provide: indices of performance including both government targets and locally identified objectives; the means of analysing the data and conducting research into particular topics of concern; and flags to identify specific areas requiring remedial action.

9.3 However, research for this project suggests that the ability of an EIS to supply directly high-level outputs of this kind is much less important than an organisational culture and practice which promotes analysis, learning and improvement. As one fieldwork authority noted, ‘the challenge of unlocking the kinds of functionality described is increasingly less often technical and more often one of organisational context/culture, including re-engineering business processes.’ Another mentioned, among methods used to overcome these obstacles, ‘Develop and maintain sound working relationships between information and practice staff. This encourages a flow of information about needs, issues and problems.’

9.4 It was notable that, of the authorities visited, the two which appeared to have the most comprehensive and sophisticated performance management systems (in terms of the information presented, the framework in which it is presented and the organisational culture around its use) were the two with the oldest and in many respects the most primitive database software.

9.5 The key to a performance management framework is not the number of separate indicators it may provide, but the structure which enables those indicators to be interpreted and interrelated and the extent to which it promotes specific research into cause and effect, team-work to find solutions and decision making to effect change.

**Analysis**

9.6 Social work requires its practitioners to use large amounts of disparate information effectively and to analyse what they are doing and need to do. Therefore the outputs of the information system they use should provide them not only with operational facilities (for instance the means of making a referral, conducting an assessment, placing a child, and of planning and scheduling this work) but also with tools for analysing what they are doing. This is the kind of
perspective embodied in the notion of the ‘learning organisation’, in which users of the information system at every level can learn from it by asking their own questions and tailoring their own outputs to answer them rather than being confined to outputs specified and designed by others remote from the daily practice of their work (Gould 2003). Above all the analysis should be in terms of the outcomes for the children concerned.

9.7 The outputs available from the information system should enable social workers to see the history of their cases and interventions, to list and compare other similar cases, even to compare their work with that of other practitioners and teams, perhaps to consult related research findings and examples of best practice from elsewhere. In one sense this is management information at the level of the practitioner and team. The information and many of the questions asked of it are the same: only the level of analysis and aggregation is different.

**Subsidiarity**

9.8 The availability and routine use of such analysis tools would make it possible for each member of staff to be responsible for not merely recording but summarising and analysing information on the children or area of work for which they are responsible. This would reinforce an information subsidiarity principle whereby practitioners, team leaders and other first-level managers would be enabled and expected to generate, analyse and present the information that describes their own work and be ready contribute the analysis to higher (e.g. service) level meetings. By doing so they will own the results more than if these are generated remotely as ‘management reports’ by an information officer. Such reports can always be cross-checked for accuracy and consistency against a management report derived centrally.

9.9 For instance, in order to discover how many children are having frequent changes of placement, each practitioner in a looked after team should report to the team leader whenever a child crosses the threshold of three or more placements in the previous 12 months. For regular team meetings, and at quarterly and annual intervals, the practitioners should compile lists of all the children assigned to them who have had excessive placement changes. The team leader, in turn, would compile the figures from each social worker and report to the service manager on the number of children allocated to the team who have had excessive placement changes. The service manager would compile similar reports from each team to arrive at a departmental figure.

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26 This is measured by counting the number of children who have three or more placements within a twelve month period (PAF A1/WAG PI 3.1) and is an indicator for Government Objectives for Social Services for Children, Objective 1, ensuring ‘that children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood’ and, in particular, sub-objective 1.2, ‘to reduce the number of changes of placement for children looked after’. In Wales, Children First Objective 4.1 is ‘to reduce the number of changes of main carer for children looked after’.
9.10 Once such a change of working culture becomes accepted, individual practitioners would be encouraged to make their own interrogations of the data to identify cases where, for instance, there has been a second placement change in a six month period — with a view to proactive review and intervention to prevent or minimise further instability.

9.11 At each level the member of staff reporting and the line manager will therefore know the frequent placement figure for those children for whom each is responsible and be motivated to investigate immediately any problems or short-comings. A department-wide figure could, of course, be derived directly from an electronic information system by an information or policy officer, and delivered to the service manager or head of children's services. But there would not be the same knowledge and sense of responsibility shared among staff at all levels. The outputs relating to this example are listed in Table H.

**Exception reports**

9.12 Reports containing department-wide aggregate figures typically omit the names of the children. Yet it is by identifying the individual cases that common factors and exceptional circumstances can be identified and suitable remedial action be planned both for the children directly affected and for all children by means of improvements to the department’s resources, deployment, policy and practice.

9.13 One way to resolve this short-coming is the exception report. Wherever possible, reports that provide aggregate statistics should include or be accompanied by reports which list the individual cases which fall below desired targets or norms. Sometimes this is described as, and may be implemented as ‘drill-down’ capability: the facility to home in on a particular aggregate statistic and see which were the cases which counted, and which did not count towards the given figure.

9.14 An example from the fieldwork: one authority found that its performance indicator for review compliance exhibited major variance in a particular quarter. Examination of the exceptions (those children whose reviews had not been completed on time) revealed that all the variance was accounted for by a single family with several children which had temporarily left the area, making review completion impossible. In the event, therefore, the variance was case specific, no general remedy was required, but a note could be made to check that when the particular family returned, the reviews were rescheduled promptly.

**Supervision**

9.15 Supervision meetings between manager and individual staff member should be based upon and have ready access to the information which describes the staff member’s work. The EIS should provide outputs (screen forms, lists and reports) for practitioners, so that they can demonstrate their work load (not
merely in numbers of cases, but in the levels of activity on each case, tasks pending and particular problems. During the fieldwork we found only one authority where the EIS was being used in this way (see box, below). At the very least, the EIS should provide a screen form through which a child’s case can be viewed in sufficient detail to facilitate discussion.

Using the EIS in supervision
In only one fieldwork authority did team managers routinely use their EIS during supervision meetings with individual social workers. Service managers in this authority also use the EIS in supervision meetings with team managers, looking on screen at caseloads and individual problem cases. This seemed to reflect both the merits of the EIS itself (especially the usability of its screen forms for case management), and staff attitudes towards it.
The service manager reported that the electronic case files held in the EIS were perceived as belonging not to the social worker, as the old paper files were, but to the Department. This led to quite a different attitude to information and made managers much more knowledgeable about individual cases.

Team Meetings
In most local authorities each childcare team will have responsibility, at any one time, for a considerable number of cases. Any serious analysis of caseloads, activity levels and problems is likely to require some accurate figures — anecdotal discussion is unlikely to be sufficient.
For team meetings, therefore, the EIS should provide basic statistics on the particular children for whom the team is responsible, and the actions that team members undertake (contacts, visits, assessments, reviews, assignment of services, court procedures, onward referrals, etc.). There should be exception reports or drill-down capability to identify the individual children and social workers concerned.

9.18 During the fieldwork we found examples of reports and statistics on team activity which team managers were required to draw up for senior management, but little evidence that such information was being used during the team meetings themselves.

Management information bulletins
9.19 Most local authorities produce a monthly or quarterly management information bulletin or digest for children’s services. These bulletins generally include a number of statistics on activity levels (numbers of referrals, assessments, looked after children, children on CPR, etc.) together with the levels on some or all of the performance indicators from the various frameworks introduced by government (Best Value, Performance Assessment Framework, Quality Protects/Children First, Policy Agreements, and so on). The bulletins are generally distributed to the senior management team or to all managers and may be copied to cabinet members and councillors. Sometimes they are published on the authority’s intranet and are accessible to all social services staff. These bulletins may be thought of as the highest level output from the Children’s Services EIS. In practice they are seldom produced directly from the EIS, but are compiled by performance management/policy staff, often with the aid of spreadsheets and various intermediate stages of data extraction and preparation.
9.20 The problem with such bulletins is that even where they include trend figures and comparisons (e.g. between teams; or with similar local authorities), on their own they explain very little. What is required is analysis of the figures, levels and trends, often by introducing additional variables. Such analysis often requires additional research. The staff responsible for compiling them strive to supply such analysis but often lack the time and resources to do so on a regular basis.

9.21 Examples of apparently dramatic changes in performance could be explained by relatively trivial or temporary phenomena might include:

- A sudden deterioration in review date compliance due to a reviewing officer leaving and a delay in recruiting a replacement.

- Poor educational outcomes for a cohort of looked after children explained by variations in the numbers who have special educational needs.

- The arrival or departure of a single family with a number of children making a large percentage differences to child protection or looked after children figures.

9.22 Performance indicator statistics present each measure in isolation and therefore provide ‘single-factor’ analyses which fail to explain why particular aspects of performance are poor and what remedial action is required other than a general ‘we must do better’ imperative.

9.23 One example of this is provided by experience from the Data Analysis Network in Wales. It was found that some authorities fail to meet the 100% target for care plans to be in place before a looked after child is placed. The performance indicator signals the problem but does not explain it. Further research suggests that different team structures and responsibilities are partly to blame: in some authorities the first placement of a newly referred child is made by an assessment team, with responsibility being transferred to the looked after team only after some time, usually at first review. The assessment teams have not been trained to draw up care plans. Remedies might include more training for assessment teams; the involvement of at least one worker from a LAC team when a child is being placed; or a change of procedure so that all children requiring placement are transferred immediately to a LAC team.

9.24 Dissatisfaction with performance indicators and the kinds of digest and bulletin that present them is generally on the following grounds:

- They are often imprecise measures which in reality tell us little about outcomes.

- Taken singly, they provide single factor explanations which do not correspond to reality.

- They omit questions of local context, cost, personnel and resources which are known to have a major impact on the work of children’s services.
• They tell us very little about preventive work (for instance the role of family support services).
• They tell us very little about which remedies might be effective.

Ensuring outputs are used

9.25 The fact that an EIS provides a particular output is no guarantee that it will be used. Users can and often do fail to see what is displayed on screen, dismiss warning dialog boxes, ignore, lose or delete e-mail messages, fail to print reports, file them without reading and so on. An effective information system must not only provide outputs but provide them to the right audience, at the right time and in a context where they will be willing and able to use them.

Conversely, procedures, guidance and training must all be in place and sustained efforts made to change the working culture to one where the EIS is consistently valued and used.

USING AN INTRANET

Two of the authorities visited during the field work for this project had invested significant efforts in producing Intranet sites to display Children’s Services performance information. Cheshire has a Business Information Gateway, produced by their Performance Assurance Service. It produces performance activity information at county, locality and team levels, includes a very impressive Team Manager Resource Page, with a news digest, team meeting agenda templates, policy and procedure manuals and staff training materials all available via hyperlinks. Social worker resources include templates for preparation for supervision meetings, practice guidance and the scales and questionnaires for use in Assessment, etc. The site is maintained by a dedicated team known as The Enquiry Bureau.

North Lincolnshire has created an Intranet site called WEBI (Web Intelligence) to provide information for team managers, and as a framework for presenting various performance reports (see screenshot below). WEBI compliments the existing Quarterly Performance Review (QPR) by presenting information on a continuous basis.

9.26 It is therefore very important that staff are involved in defining the outputs they need and are able to obtain them. Information systems should be sufficiently flexible to provide specific outputs without the need to refer continually to expert users, IT staff or outside developers, where delays, other pressures and budgetary constraints make it highly unlikely that the desired outputs will be delivered in time to be used.

9.27 The actual and potential audience for an output should ideally be identified and the medium and means of dissemination and delivery assured. At present Intranet systems are particularly prone to be poorly used because developers often assume that posting
information on an internet or intranet website magically ensures that it will be read and used.

9.28 Intranet systems usually attempt to be much more than a set of unrelated documents placed together, like books on a library shelf. They are dependent on sign-posting, summaries and graphics and require considerable editorial and design skill to assemble and keep up-to-date. Links must be continually tested and reviewed to ensure that they point to the correct and most up-to-date information. As every Internet user knows, we all very rapidly lose patience with sites where links are broken and the front page displays last year’s information.

9.29 In order to increase the use and hence the value of an EIS, it is important to encourage staff users to be involved both in the original design and implementation and in the continued improvement and development of the system. User groups, expert or ‘super-users’, newsletters, audits of use (e.g. an audit of outputs) and wish-lists (for bug-fixes, improvements, new features and specific outputs) are all useful tools. However, they will only succeed if budgets, IT staffing and the contract with the system supplier clearly provide for ongoing development. A system which is not continuously developed rapidly withers and dies.

9.30 Outputs will only be defined, designed, provided and used effectively where there is a culture for their use. A knowledge-based culture is based not on recording and storing information but on using it (Gould 2003).

Performance Management Frameworks

9.31 A more comprehensive approach is to adopt one of the performance management frameworks which have been developed for business but adapted for public sector work. The two in most common use among local authorities are Balanced Scorecard and the European Foundation for Quality Management.

9.32 Each, in slightly different ways, attempts to locate simple measures of performance or output within the wider context of the whole organisation and its ‘business’. In general, they admit, and in the case of Balanced Scorecard, seek to balance outcomes with processes, structures and resources.

9.33 It is beyond the scope of the present project to consider these frameworks in detail. In effect they are not themselves outputs, but frameworks within which outputs can be presented and understood. Usually, they are not derived directly from the EIS, but must be assembled from reports and spreadsheets extracted from the EIS, with a good deal of careful interpretation required. In addition, they will often require one-off research to make sense of particular results.

9.34 Moreover, it became clear from the fieldwork that as important as the framework itself and the outputs on which it is based is the organisational culture in which it is applied, interpreted and
understood. A learning organisation requires not only good learning tools but staff who are eager to learn, are encouraged and have time to do so and are provided with the time and appropriate forums (whether in supervision, team meetings, planning sessions, away days, etc.) in which to do so.

9.35 All local authorities in England are required to complete a Delivery and Improvement Statement (DIS) each spring that provides a self-assessment of their progress in delivering against the Department of Health’s national objectives and targets and local improvement plans and targets including action plans following inspections and joint reviews. These DIS statements include most or all of the PAF and other required performance indicators and to some extent they provide a framework within which these can be interpreted. Each authority’s EIS should certainly provide most of the statistical data on which the DIS are based.
10. Conclusions & recommendations

10.1 In this study of information outputs for children’s social services, ‘outputs’ are defined as whatever is retrieved or extracted, in whatever form, from an information system. They include not only printed reports, but information viewed on the computer screen, alerts that may appear on screens, e-mail and other messages and notifications. The fact that information systems used by children’s social services are generally designed more for recording information than for retrieving and using it, severely limits their usefulness.

10.2 This study has identified a number of other obstacles which currently prevent outputs from being obtained and used to improve social work practice. Although technical issues are a part of the problem, including inadequate computing infrastructure and lack of access to personal computers for all social workers, attitudes to recording, using and sharing information are equally important.

10.3 All users of an EIS should be able to obtain the outputs they require to make their work more effective and to exploit the information ‘capital’. These outputs are the ‘dividends’ that reward users for the investment of time and effort they make in information recording.

10.4 Timely and well-designed outputs, geared to the work processes in which users are engaged, become the triggers for further information recording and for correcting and completing that which has been recorded previously, thus creating a ‘virtuous circle’.

10.5 Staff at all levels of children’s services need to be encouraged to analyse their own work, make comparisons with others and contribute data to service-wide performance evaluation. They must be provided with the output tools that will enable them to do this.

10.6 The critical outputs for improving services for children in need, based on research evidence about what leads to good outcomes, are in most cases the same outputs that would be required for effective day to day operation, administration and management at case, team and service level. They include:

- alerts built into the EIS to give advanced warning of actions required, shortcomings or failures in service delivery;
- notifications to improve communication between teams, departments and agencies;
- exception reports to identify, flag and follow-up the cases of individual children who have specific needs which are not being met.

10.7 The study suggests that, in order to realise their potential to produce useful outputs, electronic information systems need to provide a series of capabilities for their users. These are detailed in recommendation 13 below.

10.8 The Outputs Framework (Table A) developed for this project provides a tool that could be used by local authorities to audit their own information systems, and to specify what would be required
from any new system. The recommendations which follow provide further examples of actions local authorities could take to improve their ability to obtain useful outputs from their children’s information systems.

**Recommendations**

10.9 In order to ensure that more effective use is made of the information held by children’s services:

*local authorities should:*

1. .. undertake an audit of their IT hardware and networks that includes an assessment of the availability of computers to all children’s services staff. To use an electronic information system (EIS) effectively and obtain outputs from it, each member of staff needs a computer connected to the authority’s network via a reliable, high-speed link that provides them with access to the EIS, e-mail and the internet and from which they can easily print documents.

2. .. ensure that their EIS has at least the following capabilities:
   to locate and select cases flexibly, by using a number of variables singly or in combination (name, date of birth, address, postcode, case number); to clone cases; to pre-populate text forms; to store at least summaries of assessed needs, planned interventions and outcomes; to record interventions as service provisions, with dates; to set flags or alerts; to link or send notifications to other systems such as those of finance and education.

3. .. audit their existing information systems (both paper-based and electronic) to see what outputs are produced, how they are disseminated, to whom, and how they are used. The Outputs Framework provides a tool for the audit (see Table A). Such an audit should be a requirement for specifying and commissioning any new information system.

4. .. when specifying and implementing electronic systems, audit all existing procedures for authorisation and signing off of childcare actions and decisions. Many of these can be modified or eliminated in favour of electronic signing and post-hoc authorisation using the audit trails, flagging and notification of changes (to managers and other staff) which a well-designed electronic system can provide. Failure to evaluate existing procedures can significantly reduce the gains in speed and efficiency that an electronic system offers.

5. .. consider the question of who has permission to change or update data, and whether, with better use of flagging, this could feasibly be extended more widely without detriment to the data quality.

6. .. include lists of required outputs when drawing up specifications for new electronic information systems (EIS).

7. .. ensure as far as possible that outputs, including printed reports, are provided within the structure and screens of the EIS and that the user is not required to launch and learn to use a separate ‘reporting’ application.
8. .. as they implement the Integrated Children’s System, identify the specific outputs they require. They may find it useful to locate these on the process flow diagrams (see Table E).
9. .. use the outputs framework to negotiate IRT protocols, focusing on the specific information to be exchanged between agencies, rather than the more difficult technicalities of direct access to one another’s systems.
10. .. in developing existing computer-based information systems or commissioning new ones, give careful and detailed consideration to the user interface because this largely determines whether and how easily users will obtain outputs.
11. .. make outputs available to all users of the system to enable them to analyse their own work and caseload and to make comparisons across time, teams, geographical areas or groups of children with particular characteristics. As far as possible there should be a ‘subsidiarity principle’ for outputs whereby each member of staff is responsible for not merely recording but summarising and analysing information on the children or area of work for which they are responsible.
12. .. provide staff with the tools to use information intelligently, trust them to use it correctly and provide them with the audit and data quality tools to enable them to check their own work and that of others.
13. .. aim to develop their electronic information system (EIS) until it can provide the following capabilities:
   • to locate individual cases and other records and select sets of records flexibly, by using a number of variables singly or in combination;
   • to browse selected sets of records on screen and produce generic list and summary reports for them;
   • to ‘clone’ cases and certain kinds of record (e.g. visit notes);
   • to store and be able to manipulate longer bodies of text, especially those recorded during assessment and review;
   • to pre-populate text forms;
   • to manage the storage and retrieval of text documents (possibly core assessments, review reports, assessment and progress records) which are saved outside the EIS;
   • to record actions, interventions and services detailed in care plans and assessed at review as provisions of service (whether provided by social services directly, or by other agencies or partnerships, and including the many forms of family support). This is essential if outputs are to relate interventions to outcomes and costs;
   • to record unit costs of all service provisions and hence, as cost data becomes available, calculate the costs of interventions and plans and relate costs to outcomes;
   • to store summaries of assessed needs and outcomes;
   • to provide case-level outputs in screen or paper form that relate needs to interventions and outcomes as these are itemised in assessments, care plans, records of actions, assessment and progress records and reviews;
• to store details of service providers, including carers and schools;
• to provide cross-views of services so that the use and performance of services such as foster care, family support and CAMHS can be monitored;
• to set flags or alerts;
• to enable users to designate tasks and the dates for their completion and present these in a task list;
• to provide each user with a calendar-style diary to enable them to schedule tasks, visits, reviews, supervision and other meetings;
• to add to the diary automatically certain tasks, deadlines and appointment or action due alerts, based on specified rules (e.g. ‘review must be held within one month of new placement’);
• to enable the local authority to add, alter or delete rules for alerts and notifications;
• to enable the user to designate a warning, appointment or task from a case or visit note;
• to link or send notifications to other systems such as those of finance and education;
• to provide a chronology output, user-configurable to select particular types of event between any two specified dates, and able to be used, for instance, in supervision, case transfer and preparing cases for court and to fulfil the functions of the ICS Chronology exemplar;
• to produce outputs such as care plans that meet the specifications of courts in care proceedings;
• to export outputs in a form which allows users to do further work with information: (e.g. chronologies in the form of files that can be word processed to add headings, commentary and additional material; aggregate data exported to spreadsheets where the user can add other comparative data, produce graphs and create PowerPoint slides);
• to include context-sensitive help which assists users with recording of specific items, indicates correct procedures to follow, provides process flow-charts, relevant departmental policies, national legislation and guidance and links to relevant research and useful contacts.
11. Future directions

11.1 The present project has been a first attempt to address a significant aspect of the information systems in use in children’s social services. The feedback from the consultation process and many detailed discussions during the fieldwork confirm our belief that in considering core information requirements it is at least as important to consider how information will be retrieved and used as to specify which information should be collected and recorded.

11.2 This is work in progress, and we hope that it will be further developed in future. We have identified a number of aspects which merit further attention:

- Provision of a practical tool (most probably a simple database in Microsoft Access or an Excel spreadsheet) which local authorities could use:
  - To audit the outputs they already obtain from their existing information systems.
  - To identify outputs when drawing up specifications for a new EIS and in evaluating supplier tenders.
  - To identify outputs that may be required in order to implement the ICS.

- Provision of a spreadsheet tool, similar to the one developed in Cheshire, to map individual data items and aggregate statistics to the specific outputs, reports and returns in which they might be used.

- Consideration of the outputs required for multi-agency work and IRT, and how the Outputs Framework could be used as an inter-agency negotiating tool.

- Provision of an output overlay for each of the Process Flow Diagrams in the DH Core Information Requirements Process Model, charting the outputs that could be generated at each stage in the processes. These would be indicative, not mandatory.

- Detailed design of the ICS Needs to Outcomes Rolling Record to depict and track the relationship between reasons for referral, assessed needs, planned actions, actual interventions and reviewed outcomes (see Table C for a rough prototype).

- Detailed examination of the exemplars in the Integrated Children’s System, especially the assessments, reviews and chronology, and designs for outputs (both on screen and paper) to implement them.

- Detailed consideration of outputs in the crucial stage between first contact and initial assessment, and the specific form in which referrals arrive from other agencies (police, health visitors, etc.) in the light of the Laming Report (Laming 2003) and the Green Paper Keeping Children Safe (DfES 2003).
• Further detailed charting of outputs in relation to specific childcare processes, to complement those included as examples in this report, and in response to a number of specific requests made during the fieldwork and consultation.

• The development of the Electronic Social Care Record and the implications for outputs.

• Further work on the various performance management frameworks and how outputs can be incorporated into these and the results, in turn, fed back into trend graphs, alerts, and other devices which would appear in lower level outputs available to social workers and team managers.

• Work to sketch a simple system of rules for alerts and a user interface by which they can be constructed by children’s services staff, without the need for high levels of IT skill (see p.43).

• A sketch design for a diary and task-list for children’s services staff, to be implemented as part of the EIS, with links to case notes, tasks, alerts, notifications and e-mail.

• Much of the work in the present study assumes that the task is to identify and obtain outputs from a single electronic information system. However, changes in technology, increased multi-agency and partnership working, IRT and the advent of Children’s Trusts all make it likely that system integration software will be used in future to extract information from multiple separate information systems. The outputs framework should still be valid, but it would be useful to reconsider and, if necessary, extend it to cover the new reality.

11.3 We hope that readers of this report will contribute additional suggestions and requests.
References


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http://www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects/info/publications/coreinformationreq.htm


http://www.doh.gov.uk/integratedchildrenssystem/exemplarsdocs.htm


http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/outcomes%20for%20children/publications/DAN%20Annual%20Report%202002%20Final.pdf


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Appendix A. Using the Outputs Framework as a planning tool

Outputs for Case Reviews of looked after children

A.1 Table E shows a practical example of use of the Outputs Framework. An additional column is added to the framework grid and used to list the processes identified in the Department of Health Process Model (DH 2003.1) in relation to reviewing the care plan of a looked after child.

A.2 In each case the top-level output will be a report containing the overall performance indicator(s). Below that, however, will be a web of other outputs for use at each level of the organisation, which collectively should support best practice to promote the objectives.

A.3 The outputs identified in relation to the processes ‘Reception and Initial Contact’, ‘Receive Referral’, ‘Review Care Plan’ and ‘Monitoring compliance with Reviews of Children’s Cases’ neatly illustrate some of the uses of the framework.

A.4 In this example, the management process for reviews reflects a concern that children are likely to have poorer outcomes if their cases are not reviewed regularly. Review frequency is defined and laid down by government regulation. Local authorities are therefore required to return to government a statistic (for children on the Child Protection Register this is PAF C20 in England, in Wales PI 3.12) showing the proportion of reviews conducted within the statutory time limits. Similar returns may be required in relation to the statutory reviews of all looked after children.

A.5 The relevant data — child records and review dates (most recent and next due) — is likely to be included in almost every EIS in current use in local authorities. It is a relatively simple matter for an EIS to monitor the due date for each relevant child record, and it could do so automatically (e.g. every time the child’s record is accessed; or daily at a particular time, etc.).

A.6 So the EIS should ‘know’ when reviews are due and overdue. What can be done with this information – or to put it another way, what outputs could be derived from that knowledge? In this example, applying the dimensions of the Outputs Framework to the reviews process suggests a comprehensive range of possibilities.

A.7 Some of the outputs thus identified may already exist or be easy to implement in the council’s EIS while others might require considerable and perhaps costly changes. Some will be judged to be more important than others. Managers, understandably, may be most concerned with the set of outputs that are ‘core’ to their responsibility to monitor and improve service delivery and report to government on progress. Taking these limitations into account it should be possible to arrive at a set of the most important or core outputs.
A.8 It would be easy, for instance, to add columns to the framework grid:

- to indicate whether the output is already provided by the EIS;
- to rate specific outputs according to the MoSCoW scheme (Must/Should/Could/Won’t provide);
- to assess the difficulty of providing such an output in terms of time and cost and/or developer involvement.

A.9 Use of the Outputs Framework should make it easier to determine both what is possible and what is most effective.

---

### Potential outputs for the Review processes

1. Post an alert on a screen form used by the practitioner (the child’s assigned social worker) that a review is pending. The same alert should go to the team manager if the child’s case is currently unallocated or the assigned social worker is absent, on sick-leave, etc. Possibly the team manager should receive all review due alerts or else have the choice to view a list of reviews due.

2. Provide the practitioner with a screen containing the list of those who should be invited to the review and means of recording whether they have been contacted.

3. Provide mail-merge facilities to generate letters or e-mails containing invitations to the review.

4. Provide similar facilities for notifying postponement or cancellation of a review or change of venue.

5. Add an item to a list of reviews pending for the practitioner so that s/he can plan and schedule work.

6. Add an item to a task-list or diary of future date-specific actions which the EIS can prepare for the practitioner.

7. Provide the Reviewing Officer with a screen to record the review outcome (corresponding to the LAC Review of Arrangements or ICS Review Record).

8. Provide either the Reviewing Officer or practitioner with a screen containing the list of those invited to the review with the means of recording whether they were present.

9. Post a more insistent alert on the practitioner’s screen when the review becomes overdue.

10. Send a notification by e-mail or on-screen alert message to the practitioner’s team leader that a review is overdue.

11. Send a notification by e-mail or on-screen alert message to the reviewing officer.

12. Compile a list for the service manager of all reviews pending and overdue and the reviewing officer(s) and social workers responsible for the cases.

13. Produce a statistic and an exceptions report (detailing the individual cases where reviews have been missed or are late) for a regular in-house performance analysis meeting or quarterly performance review.

14. Produce the figures for the PAF or PI return to government and output the data in the appropriate electronic file format.

A.10 This list illustrates how outputs can be useful at different levels of the organisation. Items one to eleven relate to the practitioner, team leader and reviewing officer levels and are essentially ‘proactive’ — other things being equal, they should serve to improve review compliance without the need for intervention by senior managers. Also, they should expedite communication between practitioner, team leader and reviewing officer. Should these methods fail, however, the important production of an exceptions report and the
regular discussion at a performance analysis meeting provide the means of identifying problems and also looking for explanations. For example, several overdue reviews may relate to a single large family that is unable to attend the arranged review date.

A.11 It is also noteworthy that as users begin to consider outputs at a detailed level (for instance in the processes around scheduling, holding and reporting on a review), the distinctions between output and input begin to blur.

A.12 This hypothetical example illustrates what might be called a ‘virtuous cycle of outputs’, where by providing outputs which help to circulate, share and promote ownership of information, performance is improved or, if it fails, the locus of failure is easier to identify.

**Mapping tools**

A.13 The case reviews, above, shows one way in which the Framework could be used by authorities as a planning tool to identify outputs and their uses. A number of different uses are sketched in Tables E-H, where a few sample rows of each table are filled in for purposes of illustration. It is important to stress that these tools can be used selectively — to examine those outputs required by particular members of staff or for particular processes. They do not have to be used to carry out a mapping of the entire information system, which would be a potentially vast and time-consuming enterprise. Similarly, it was decided at an early stage that the present project could not and should not attempt to map all outputs, but rather provide the framework and tools for local authorities to use in their own work.

A.14 The tables are:

**E** The Framework provides the means of identifying outputs required at different points in the various processes that comprise the activity of Children’s Services. It could be used either in conjunction with the process maps and diagrams drawn up by local authorities themselves (often included in childcare procedure manuals), or with the Department of Health’s Process Model (*DH 2003.1*). That model includes a comprehensive set of process flow diagrams and it is possible to envisage an ‘outputs overlay’ which would show the various outputs generated or required at each point along the process flow diagram.

**F** Particular, usually external, events can trigger particular processes (e.g. a phone-call to the Social Services front-desk can trigger a contact record, then a referral and lead, for instance, to initiation of child protection procedures). It is often useful to identify specific triggers, the data recording and then the information outputs that they set in train.

**G** The Framework can map the outputs required by specific members of staff, their teams or sections. This is a useful tool to enable staff to articulate and specify their needs.
It is possible to take the key objectives of children’s services (either those agreed locally, or those embodied in government objectives (DH 1999; WAG 2002) and identify some of the outputs that would be relevant to determining whether the objectives are being met.\footnote{An exercise along these lines was attempted at the Exploratory Workshop for this project in May 2003. It became clear that there is a vast gap between specifying specific outputs and determining whether high-level objectives are being met. This gap is discussed in greater detail above, in Chapter 9.}

13.1 The suggestion is that a local authority might use these output mapping tools in a number of ways:

- To analyse the outputs they currently obtain from their EIS and consider how these are disseminated and used.
- To identify outputs which are currently obtained, if at all, by specific research or arduous manual methods but which could, in principle, be obtained from an EIS.
- To match outputs to processes.
- To identify the outputs appropriate at each level (practitioner, administrative officer, team leader, service manager, etc.).
- To provide a tool for discussions with specific members of staff and teams so that they can identify the outputs they use and those they require.
- To identify which outputs are most important and most likely to contribute to improvements in service delivery and outcomes for children.
- To prepare for implementation of the Integrated Children’s System by analysing the outputs required or desirable from each of the Processes identified in the DH Process Model (DH 2003.1).
- To help in drawing up the specifications for a new EIS and as a practical means of dialogue with software suppliers.
- To identify likely difficulties in implementing an EIS and/or to specify improvements and adaptations, especially as the Integrated Children’s System is adopted.
- To identify uses for outputs in order to improve organisational culture so that existing or planned outputs are more effectively used, known and owned by staff.
### Table A. The Outputs Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Dissemination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case management</td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Screen form</td>
<td>Selected details</td>
<td>Single child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case review</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Printed Report</td>
<td></td>
<td>Selected children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td></td>
<td>All children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Team meeting</td>
<td>Warning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-view of...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team management</td>
<td>Service management</td>
<td>Notification</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Carers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Internal Performance Review</td>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team meeting</td>
<td>Department management</td>
<td>Task list/Diary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service management</td>
<td>Inter-Agency work</td>
<td>List</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Performance Review</td>
<td>Returns to Government</td>
<td>Text-rich document</td>
<td></td>
<td>• CAMHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Export to...</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-Agency work</td>
<td></td>
<td>• spreadsheet</td>
<td></td>
<td>Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returns to Government</td>
<td></td>
<td>• WP document</td>
<td></td>
<td>• etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• electronic file</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Laptop or PDA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>GIS mapping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Traffic lights and dashboards</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Help screens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name/Description</td>
<td>Record type</td>
<td>Universe</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Department/Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Case review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team management</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal Performance Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-Agency work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returns to Government</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other dimensions to consider:

- **Time period** — whether the output presents data for a point in time or over a defined period.
- **Frequency** — whether the output is one-off, occasional, triggered by a specific event or condition, or would be produced weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.
- **Generation** — whether the output is generated automatically by the EIS or initiated by the user and, if so, by whom.
- **Confidentiality** — the nature of the information contained, especially whether it includes the names of individual children; whether the content is confidential and, if so, who may view it, in line with Caldicott principles.
- **Consent** — whether the consent of the service user, family or other party must be sought before the output is generated or disseminated.
- **IT requirements** — whether any additional IT resource is required, e.g. network capacity or routine access for particular members of or all staff to a computer
- **Training needs** — specific needs for training to use the output (whether in IT or practice aspects)
Table A.1

Outputs by function
An alternative way of classifying outputs is by function. The list of desired outputs would probably be similar, but the perspective is different.

Process
The outputs required for each of the processes in the ICS Process Model.

Operational management
Tools for day-to-day management: a combination of the alerts, warnings, notifications etc., that give immediate help and feedback to the user with the reports of all kinds (lists, caseload reports, deadlines, exception reports, etc.) that operational staff require in their daily work.

Performance measurement
Tools for measuring results: the routine performance reports that the local authority requires in order to review progress towards desired outcomes; with reports also on the work covered by partnership arrangements and other agencies.

Data management
Tools for managing data quality: exceptions reports, internal validation reports, inter-agency validation (e.g. of the education data held by the LEA with the data held by social services) — all the reports that administrators require to check and maintain data quality and to prepare for returns such as the CIN census, SSDA-903, etc.

Research and evaluation
Tools to support research: the tools for analysis and evaluation (cf. Analysis, p.74) and hence the means to conduct local research or contribute to national research into particular groups of children or aspects of their needs or care. It could include queries (‘filters’ in our usage, see p.35) used by researchers to investigate specific processes, saved in the EIS for future re-use.

Knowledge Management
Tools to help manage knowledge: the authority’s own local surveys, service user consultations, complaints analysis, etc. This would include internet references to research findings, reports, consultations and best practice on specific aspects of child care and development. These aim to equip staff to use the results of research in their practice.

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28 This alternative method was proposed by Mike Pinnock of North Lincolnshire Council, in a presentation to the exploratory workshop held in May 2003 to consider the consultative draft of the outputs conceptual framework.

29 This is implemented to some extent in Cheshire’s intranet system. It could also form part part of a context-sensitive ‘Help’ system in an EIS, see the section Help Screens, above page 31.
### Table B. Outputs for Research Question A (Are family support services meeting children’s needs?)

The outputs listed for the various research questions can be presented schematically in terms of the Outputs Framework. This is demonstrated here for Question A only but could easily be extended to cover all the research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Case management &amp; supervision</td>
<td>Details: single child</td>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>Detailed chronology including referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Assessment: Assessed needs on each of the domains of the Assessment Triangle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Plan: Services identified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Interventions: Referrals to and services provided</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Review: outcomes for each of the services actually provided; unmet needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>ICS Needs to Outcomes Rolling Record, <em>(see Table D)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Re-referral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Assessment due</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Review due</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Failure to provide planned service</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Long waiting time for planned service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Team management</td>
<td>All or selected children: Aggregate statistics</td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Identified needs (following the domains of the Assessment Triangle and including:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Selection by:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Postcode</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Source of referral</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reason for referral</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Age of child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Services planned (children, adult, community)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Service provisions (actual interventions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Outcomes (for child, adult &amp; community)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notification</td>
<td>Of needs to service managers &amp; commissioners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Management</td>
<td>All of those outputs available to Team Managers, plus:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Management</td>
<td>Cross-View by agency List</td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Referrals to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Referrals from (with reasons/concerns)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-View by service provision List</td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Planned actions</td>
<td>Actual interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Capacity, take-up, waiting times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-View by individual service/provider (e.g. child minder, family centre, etc.)</td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Quantity and frequency of service provisions</td>
<td>Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggregate statistics</td>
<td>Screen Printed report</td>
<td>Unit costs or provisions</td>
<td>Costs related to outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Return to Government</td>
<td>Aggregate statistics</td>
<td>Printed report</td>
<td>PAF on assessment &amp; review compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Export file</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Information Outputs for Children’s Services**

**CCFR & TCRU**
Table C: ICS Needs to Outcome Rolling Record

This outcome (screen or report) presents a continuum of assessments, interventions and outcomes, collecting together the items from each of the ICS dimensions, aiming to show the overall history and progress of intervention with the child and family. It is difficult to present in a single page grid, but with a series of sympathetically designed computer screens this could be done. The aim would be to reduce the fragmentary vision imposed by both the number of dimensions and the stochastic processes of review and thus enable the social worker, team manager, reviewing officer, family and young person to see both the 'big picture' at any one time and the way needs are (or fail to be) addressed over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referral (reasons for)</th>
<th>Assessment (needs)</th>
<th>Dimension of Need*</th>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Intervention history</th>
<th>Review (outcomes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} referral</td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Initial Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sequence of reviews</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Core</td>
<td>Child’s Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Re-assessments</td>
<td>Adjustments to plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Core</td>
<td>Child’s Plan</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Case closed</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} referral</td>
<td>Initial</td>
<td>Initial Plan</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

* Dimension of need = the ICS dimensions (Health, Education, EBD, Identity, Family & Social Relationships, Social Presentation, Selfcare Skills, Parental Capacity, Family & Environmental Factors)

This approach would work for:
- Practitioner’s case management
- Supervision with team manager
- Review – it could be the main document on the table at the review meeting, accessible to all parties
- Service manager analysis
- Monitoring of service provision and effectiveness
• Planning and commissioning of services

Related outputs would supply cross-views to analyse:
• Specific needs which are not being met effectively
• The availability of specific interventions/services
• The effectiveness of specific interventions/services
### Table D: Outputs for Case Review Processes (taken from the DH Process Model[^30])

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Level</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Content</th>
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<td>Case</td>
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<td>Reviews pending and overdue for Practitioner</td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Casework</td>
<td>Screen</td>
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<td>Case</td>
<td>Casework</td>
<td>Screen</td>
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<td>Team</td>
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<td>Case</td>
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<td>Casework</td>
<td>Screen</td>
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<td>Screen identifying review invitees, perhaps with boxes to track 'Consulted', 'Invited' and 'Accepted' — with phone no details.</td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Casework</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Review invitees for child</td>
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[^30]: The processes shown here are based on version 3.0 of the Process Model.
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<th>Output</th>
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<th>Context</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<td>Diary</td>
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<td>Case</td>
<td>Casework</td>
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<td>Tm Mgr Rvw Ofcr</td>
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</table>

- Review compliance
- Review compliance exceptions report
- Review compliance PI/PAF

Having compiled a list of outputs such as this, a second stage should be to consider other dimensions, including:

- **Generation** — whether the output is generated automatically by the EIS or initiated by the user and, if so, by whom.
- **Frequency** — whether the output is one-off, occasional, triggered by a specific event or condition, or would be produced weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.
- **Dissemination** — how the output is to be distributed.
- **Confidentiality** — the nature of the information contained, especially whether it includes the names of individual children; whether the content is confidential and, if so, who may view it.
- **Consent** — whether the consent of the service user, family or other party must be sought before the output is generated or disseminated.
- **Time period** — whether the output presents data for a point in time or over a defined period.

Finally, the outputs might be scored according to:

- How easily they could be generated from the EIS and/or the cost of obtaining them.
- Their priority for day-to-day operations.
- Their importance as a means to improve service delivery and outcomes for children.
### Table E: Mapping Outputs to Processes (taken from the DH Process Model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Level</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Use Context</th>
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<th>Confidentiality</th>
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<td>1.1.1</td>
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<td>Contact Record</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
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<td>Prac</td>
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<td>List</td>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter(day)</td>
<td>Auto</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>local authority</td>
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<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter(day, SW)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Screen</td>
<td>TmLdr</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter(SW)</td>
<td>Vol</td>
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<td>Report</td>
<td>TmLdr</td>
<td>local authority</td>
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<td>Mgmt</td>
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<td>local authority</td>
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<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
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<td>Notification for case opening procedures</td>
<td>Notification</td>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
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<td>Alert to new case</td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>local authority</td>
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<td>Auto</td>
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<td>Case file cover sheet</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1.1.3         | Undertake Assessment | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ...
|               |                  | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... | ...
| 1.4.8         | Review Care Plan | Review due date | Alert | Prac | local authority | Item  | Cswrk | Child | Single | Auto | *Med  |
|               |                  | Reviews pending for Practitioner | Screen | Prac | local authority | List  | Cswrk | Child | Filter (dates, SW) | Auto | *Med  |
|               |                  | Reviews due dates diary entries | Screen | Prac | local authority | Task list/diary | Cswrk | Child | Filter (dates, SW) | Auto | *Med  |
|               |                  | Reviews pending for team | Screen | TmLdr | local authority | List  | Cswrk | Child | Filter (dates, Team) | Auto | *Med  |

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*The processes shown here are based on version 2.0 of the Process Model, but will be revised in line with the new version expected to be published shortly.*

**Version 1.0 February 2004**
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Process Level</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Content Type</th>
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<td>Screen</td>
<td>All local authority</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter (due dates)</td>
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etc., etc.

| 3 | MANAGE SERVICES |
### Information Outputs for Children’s Services

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<th>Output Description</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Use Context</th>
<th>Unit of Analysis</th>
<th>Universe</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Confidentiality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1.3</td>
<td>Monitoring compliance with Reviews of Children’s Cases</td>
<td>Review due date</td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reviews pending for Practitioner</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter (dates, SW)</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reviews due dates diary entries</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>Task list/diary</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter (dates, SW)</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reviews pending for team</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>TmLdr</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter (dates, Team)</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review overdue alert</td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review overdue notification</td>
<td>Notification</td>
<td>TmLdr</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review overdue notification</td>
<td>Notification</td>
<td>Other (Rvw Officer)</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All Reviews pending list</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter (due dates)</td>
<td>Vol</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review compliance</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Srvc Mgr</td>
<td>Agg</td>
<td>QPR</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter (due dates)</td>
<td>Reg</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review compliance exceptions report</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Srvc Mgr</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>QPR</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter (due dates)</td>
<td>Reg</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review compliance PI/PAF</td>
<td>Report or e-file</td>
<td>Govt</td>
<td>Agg</td>
<td>Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter (due dates, year)</td>
<td>Contrib</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**

Having compiled a list of outputs such as this, a second stage might be to score them according to:

- How easily they could be generated from the EIS and/or the cost of obtaining them.
- Their priority for day-to-day operations.
- Their importance as a means to improve service delivery and outcomes for children.
Table F: Mapping Outputs to Trigger Events
This is an alternative to the ‘process view’ of Table E. The results should, in general, be very similar. However ‘processes’ are the formalised response of Children’s Services to events in the lives of families and children and their interaction with the department. In real life, however, things are often not so clear cut: processes may be interrupted, postponed or cancelled. Unforeseen events take place. There may be events which do not directly involve social services (and are therefore not part of a process) but which should be known and in some way recorded by social workers. All these events are potential ‘triggers’ for information recording and output.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trigger event</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Use Context</th>
<th>Unit of Analysis</th>
<th>Universe</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Confidentiality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DUTY OFFICER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receives phone call reporting concern about a child</td>
<td>Contact Record</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacts Day-sheet</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter(day)</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter(day, SW)</td>
<td>Auto</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>TmLdr</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter(SW)</td>
<td>Vol</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>TmLdr</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filter(Team)</td>
<td>Reg</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

etc., etc.

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32 Such events are themselves covered in the Process Model under the P1.2 Level 2 Process ‘Request, Receive and Evaluate information’
### Table G: Mapping Outputs to Staff by Team or Section and Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team or Section</th>
<th>Staff Member/Role</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Use Context</th>
<th>Unit of Analysis</th>
<th>Universe</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Confidentiality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duty Team</td>
<td>Duty Officer</td>
<td>Contact Record</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contacts Day-sheet</td>
<td></td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Admin</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flag matters pending for</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Key IDs</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Vol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>existing case</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Key IDs</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Vol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Leader</td>
<td>Consolidated Contact Day-sheets</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Team Ldr</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filtered (Day, SW)</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Protection Coordinator</td>
<td>Consolidated Contact Day-sheets</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filtered (Day, Concerns)</td>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>*Med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral &amp; Assessment Team</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>Referral &amp; Initial Information Record</td>
<td>Screen</td>
<td>Prac</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Cswrk</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Auto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table H: Output Requirements Planning Tool 4—Mapping Outputs to Government Objectives

This table shows how the relevant outputs can be mapped not only to particular processes but to the overarching government objectives for social services for children such as ensuring that children are securely attached to carers (Objective 1) and that they gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care (Objective 3). These outputs should help local authorities both to meet these objectives and to determine which areas require additional attention in order to improve performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Sub-objective</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Use Context</th>
<th>Unit of Analysis</th>
<th>Universe</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Confidentiality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0 to ensure that children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood</td>
<td>1.1 To support children in need and their families in order wherever possible to prevent family breakdown and promote better life chances for vulnerable children</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>local authority</td>
<td>Aggreg Count</td>
<td>Return</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filtered (LAC, dates)</td>
<td>Vol</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>List of Children with unstable placements</td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>CSS</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>CSS Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filtered (LAC, dates)</td>
<td>Regular (quarterly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>List of Children with unstable placements</td>
<td>Screen Form</td>
<td>Service Manager LAC</td>
<td>CSS LAC</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>CSS Mgmt</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filtered (LAC, dates)</td>
<td>Regular (monthly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>List of Children with unstable placements</td>
<td>Screen Form</td>
<td>Team Leader LAC</td>
<td>CSS LAC</td>
<td>List</td>
<td>Team Meeting</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Filtered (LAC, dates, Team)</td>
<td>Regular (monthly or weekly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3+ Placements Warning</td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Team Leader LAC</td>
<td>CSS LAC</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Team mgmt, Supervision</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single record</td>
<td>Automatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3+ Placements Warning</td>
<td>Alert</td>
<td>Practitioner</td>
<td>CSS LAC</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Case-work</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Single record</td>
<td>Automatic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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33 These are the Government’s Objectives for Children’s Social Services, (DH 1999)

Version 1.0 February 2004