

# A GUIDE FOR LINK OFFICERS

This guide should be read in conjunction with the *Guide to Joint Reviews in Wales* and relevant sections of the Handbook.

## Introduction

Joint reviews are detailed and complex activities that require considerable preparation and planning. They are mutual enterprises between the local authority, SSIW and WAO. All these organisations will be seeking to work to the highest possible standards throughout the period of the review but they will be operating under considerable pressure. It is important that the rest of the authority's work is not disrupted and each phase of the review has to be done on time, as reviewers may be involved in more than one review.

Link officers have a crucial role to play in managing the whole project. This document is intended to provide helpful guidance on the main areas of work involved. The link officer will need to have sufficient authority to identify and resolve issues. They will need a broad knowledge of the authority and the locality. It has been found helpful for the link officer to have some identified administrative support during the review, to ensure that the day-to-day programme is administered in an efficient way without tying up expensive management time.

To assist the link officer in carrying out the tasks involved, many of which are necessarily complex pieces of work, detailed guidance for the local authority is set out in the joint review handbook

## **The role of the link officer**

The key tasks of the link officer are to:

- provide project management for the review process on behalf of the authority
- take responsibility for supplying the information needed for the review, including advance information and lists of service users for use in conducting surveys and case file analysis
- plan and arrange the fieldwork programme with the lead reviewer and brief those involved
- support the activities of reviewers during the fieldwork and help to resolve any difficulties in the timetable or with communication.

## **Phase 1 - The Broad Review**

### **Review planning meeting**

Soon after the local authority has received the notification letter, the lead reviewer and the joint review information officer will meet with the liaison officer and the person who will have responsibility for producing the information needed in Phase 1 of the review. The lead reviewer and the review support co-ordinator will be in regular contact with the link officer following this meeting.

### **Advance information**

The review requires advance information about social services. You will receive a copy of the advance information template in the preliminary meeting. This will be used to collate information from a variety of sources, including the local authority itself. Completion of the template is a joint responsibility; it will require dialogue and negotiation. There is also a standard list of documents that are needed to provide a context for the joint review. You will be informed which of these documents we hold already.

Please ensure that documents provided by the local authority are authorised and reflect agreed policies and procedures. Draft documents may be helpful but these should be labelled accordingly. It is helpful if you can indicate whether the material

can be accessed electronically. The authority is asked to produce two copies of all reference material. One copy of each reference should be submitted to the lead reviewer and one kept in the authority for the use of reviewers when they are on site. These documents should be given an index number.

### **Lists of service users and carers**

There is detailed guidance for the local authority about the information needed for obtaining the lists of those service users and carers who will be included in the sample for surveys and case file analysis. It is particularly important that service user information is provided on time. You are welcome to contact the lead reviewer, information officer or review support co-ordinator if you are unsure about any aspect of the information requested.

Please ensure that staff understand why their files are being inspected. Given the preparation time scale, staff will have ample opportunity to organise their work around the file examination. The reviewers' task will be easier if files are tidy and up to date. Files can always be returned to staff in urgent situations and inspected at a later time in the programme, if necessary. Please consider how files are to be transported to and from the review base and stored confidentially during the review.

It is important that staff are aware of the possibility that the reviewers may ask to see additional files on an ad hoc basis while they are on site. This is not intended to catch them out or to indicate particular concerns about the quality of work done by individual workers or teams. Please check that the files provided are relevant to the review. In many cases, this will be the fieldwork file but it may be that the files of specialist workers or service providers are also relevant to the review.

If you have an electronic file system you will need to discuss with reviewers how they can access this and whether a member of your staff may be needed to guide them through it.

## **Introductory meeting with social services and corporate managers**

This meeting is formally the start of work within the authority. It is attended by the lead reviewer and possibly by other members of the review team. For the local authority, it is expected that the director of social services, the first tier officer(s) with responsibility for social services functions and the link officer will attend. The director will usually invite other relevant managers in social services and corporate officers. The meeting is an important opportunity for the review team to learn more about the authority and to plan the detail of further work. The director and the management team will be able to highlight any critical issues that have arisen within the authority and discuss arrangements for ongoing communication during the joint review process. It is useful to put in diaries some informal meetings during the period when the joint review team is on-site, to allow for discussion of any emerging themes or to provide mutual feedback about how the review is progressing.

### **On -site work**

#### **1. Meetings with stakeholders**

During this week on site, there is an opportunity for a maximum of five group meetings with stakeholders. This is likely to include:

- senior elected members and managers;
- the social services management team;
- partner organisations;
- the service user and carer reference group.

The purpose of the meetings is to enable these groups to outline in broad terms what they regard as the key issues for social services. If requested to do so, the joint review team can provide a list of potential agenda items for the meetings with partner organisations and the service user and carer reference group. It is usual for two reviewers to attend each meeting. The lay assessor will decide with the lead reviewer the extent of their involvement, although they will usually take part in the meeting with the reference group.

## 2. Programme of visits by the lay assessor

The link officer is asked to plan a programme of visits by the lay assessor in this week so that they can:

- talk with people who use services;
- visit places where services are provided (including contact centres, day facilities and residential settings).

Although the lay assessor will need some briefing from the local authority about the facilities that are to be visited (especially if there are current issues such as plans for change of use or closure, refurbishment, etc.), this is not an inspection activity and some degree of informality is appropriate. The primary focus of the lay assessor will be on the experience offered to the public. Lay assessors may wish to prepare for visits, for example, by reading service information leaflets, recent inspection reports and other available written information.

### **Phase 2**

#### **Introductory meetings in the local authority**

We will wish to provide briefings to elected members, the chief executive, the chief officer management team, staff and other key stakeholders about the joint review (either at one of their regular meetings or at specially convened sessions. How these groups are organised will be a matter for local determination. It is an opportunity to give an outline briefing, introduce the members of the joint review team and engage in debate about some of the key issues within the authority emerging from Phase 1.

#### **Feedback to senior social services managers and site visit planning**

The lead reviewer will discuss with the director and senior managers the interim assessment that concludes Phase 1 of the review and any changes made since the set-up meeting. This is followed by more detailed planning for the main fieldwork programme.

## **The main fieldwork programme**

The fieldwork programme is an essential part of the review of your council. It is important that the programme is accurate and representative. An inaccurate or incomplete programme may well increase staff anxiety and frustration as well as reducing the effectiveness of reviewers.

The points listed below should be borne in mind when completing the programme.

- If you delegate the detailed programming to another officer, they should have sufficient authority to complete the task.
- Where possible, complete the first draft by the deadline agreed with the lead reviewer. If difficulties arise, advise the reviewer as soon as possible. The first draft often needs amendment so it is important that there is sufficient time to effect changes.
- Try to minimise travel. Arrange for all staff at a particular office to be seen on the one day. Please avoid arrangements that require reviewers to travel back and forth to the same location on the same day.
- If it is necessary to visit a number of locations in a day, plan for the time involved. You know your council's geography and how long it takes to get around. If parking close to the office is not available, build in extra time.
- Please avoid repeat bookings for individual staff. If the same team leader is involved in two or more cases, one interview is usually sufficient - but programme it after the social workers for that case have been interviewed.
- Avoid over-programming. Four interviews per day per reviewer should be the norm but more can be negotiated, if required. Reviewers are available for evening appointments, if necessary. They may well have long journeys to your council's area, so very early starts may not be feasible.
- The lay assessor has a distinct role. It is for the lead reviewer to decide on the nature and extent of their involvement. This may include: allocating work alongside other members of the review team; enabling the lay assessor to visit service settings and reception areas; ensuring that the lay assessor can follow the care pathway of an individual service user from the case sample. The joint review handbook contains a guide to the role of the lay assessor.

- It is useful to schedule regular brief meetings between the lead reviewer and the link officer, perhaps at the beginning or end of the day, to agree or to organise any changes to the programme.
- Please consider if the programme is representative. If you feel the programme does not include key staff, then discuss additions with the lead reviewer. We want to ensure a fair and reasonable perspective on your work from especially relevant sources of information in the time available for the review, so your suggestions will be welcome.
- Careful selection will be needed, to ensure that the joint review team visits a representative sample of services.
- The link officer needs to be ready to adapt the programme during the fieldwork, if necessary.

### **Information to staff**

Accurate and clear information about the review is essential, if unnecessary anxiety or uncertainties are to be avoided. Please pay particular attention to the following points.

- Make sure all staff understand the nature and focus of the review.
- All staff who are to be interviewed should be provided with a copy of the relevant joint review leaflets.
- Check that staff know when and where their interview will be held and how long it will last. If possible, please make sure that they know the name(s) of the reviewer(s) conducting the interview. Fieldwork time scales are usually tight, so punctuality is important for all those involved in interviews, including the joint review team. Delays may well impact on a number of other staff.
- Some reviews will involve group interviews as well as individual interviews. Ensure that staff are informed if they are to join a group interview and, if possible, advised who else will be in the group.
- Ensure that staff know why they are being interviewed. Senior managers are likely to be clear about this but operational staff may not be. If the interview is related to the file sample, social workers and team managers should understand that they will be interviewed about the particular case and

about their general awareness of other areas such as policy and procedures. Where possible, files will be available for them to consult.

When visiting teams and service settings, a programme for the visit is often helpful.

This might comprise:

- a short meeting with the manager and a tour of the premises *15 minutes*
- a look at processes *45 minutes*
- a meeting with staff (not including the manager) *45 minutes*
- a meeting with the manager *45 minutes*.

Each team may wish to provide some background information (such an outline of the work they do, staffing structure, budget, etc.), a SWOT analysis and copies of operational plans

### **Other departments or organisations**

The reviewers will want to interview representatives from other departments or organisations. Many of the points made in the preceding section will apply but the following specific points should be kept in mind.

- Ensure that representatives know the nature and focus of the review. They will need sufficient notice for them to undertake any necessary preparatory work or consultation. Organisations may wish to consult with their own staff to gain accurate and up to date information prior to interview.
- For some reviews you will be asked to nominate relevant organisations in your areas, particularly in the voluntary sector. Discuss the matter with the organisation in question, to ensure a willingness to contribute.
- If your council engages with the independent sector to provide services specifically related to the review, reviewers will want to interview representatives of the organisation involved. This will be in addition to examining your own arrangements for contract compliance or service agreement monitoring.

## **Involving service users and carers**

The local authority takes responsibility for arranging interviews between service users and reviewers, once the case sample has been agreed. The joint review team can provide a sample letter to service users for use by the authority and there is a guide for them about reviews. We expect to visit and follow up about twelve service users but will identify fifteen cases, to allow for a certain amount of drop out. If necessary, the lead reviewer will provide you with a list of other people involved in the selected cases who are to be interviewed (in addition to the case manager and their line manager).

We will be happy to make home visits to service users and carers, in the evening if necessary. It would be helpful for you to schedule 45 minutes for each service user and to ensure adequate interpreting/advocacy/personal assistance is available for the service user to make their contribution as effective as possible. There is a shared responsibility in respect of any health and safety issues that may arise.

We will wish to consult with a range of users and carers and will be guided by you about appropriate groups locally or arrangements for setting up particular meetings. Clearly we will wish to consult with the breadth of service users and carers but will also need to identify local priorities or services that have been subject to a recent reconfiguration. As an outline guide, it may be helpful to include:

- Looked after children (including care leavers)
- Children in need (including young carers)
- Mental health service users
- Older people
- Learning disability service users
- People with a physical disability and sensory impairment
- Parents of children with disabilities

Please invite a full range of service users. For example, a group of older people would need to have representatives who use day care domiciliary care, short breaks, etc.

It would be helpful if you could provide a list of people you expect to attend each meeting. Please keep the meetings to a reasonable size. Eight to twelve is helpful. Advocates and helpers should be arranged as necessary. You will want to make sure that service users and carers are comfortable and in a position to make their views known.

### **Practical Arrangements**

In order to make best use of the time available and to minimise the disruption to your staff, it is important that practical arrangements are clear. The following is an indicative list but there may be other items that are specific to your department or to the review:

- maps showing review base and/or interview locations
- car parking arrangements
- safety and security arrangements
- passes/entry codes for building
- provision of office space as a review base and interview rooms
- telephone, analogue sockets, e-mail address, confidential post-box.
- administrative support/contact points.

Tea and coffee facilities would be helpful but we will arrange and fund our own refreshments. We will be happy to have tea and coffee in meetings or participate in a sandwich where there is a lunch time meeting and your local arrangements would normally include this facility.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for your co-operation in helping to manage the review. We hope this guide has assisted. If you have any further queries or there are circumstances specific to your organisation, please raise these with the lead reviewer as soon as possible.