

CASE FILE ANALYSIS - GUIDANCE FOR THE CASE MANAGER

Introduction

The joint review team analyses a sample of case files from each of the major service areas. They look at key aspects of social services provision to learn how needs are assessed and met. The case file analysis provides strong evidence about the way in which the local authority's policies and systems are experienced at the level of service users and carers.

Which cases are analysed?

The local authority makes available around 80 case files for examination by reviewers. Usual practice is that 8-10 cases are selected from each main client group. The selection is finalised no less than two weeks before the beginning of file reading.

The main purpose of file reading is to collect information that will assist the joint review team in reaching a valid judgement in respect of the key dimension *How well are people served?* This means reaching conclusions about performance in each of the domains or sub-headings associated with that dimension:

- access to services
- assessment
- care management and review
- range of services provided
- quality of services provided
- arrangements to protect vulnerable people
- success in promoting independence and social inclusion.

The reviewers analyse approximately 50 of the more complex cases in respect of all these domains. Depending on the size of the authority, another 3-5 cases for each services user group are scrutinised in respect of specific domains only.

Because of the powers to require information vested in the National Assembly for Wales by the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003, reviewers have the authority to examine any file/record connected with reviews and investigations. Permission does not have to be obtained from users or carers.

Why has one of my cases been chosen?

The selection process is intended to produce a sample that is both random and representative. It goes through a number of stages. The authority counts the number of cases on lists containing the names of all the users in each major service area then turns this into a random sample. The method for doing this is to tick every *nth* name on the list, depending on the size of the client group, to give 180-215 names. The lead reviewer then selects one in two or three, aiming for a balance in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, team, etc.

The review is of social services as a whole, not of individual practice. Reviewers are looking for themes and patterns that will help them to understand assessment and care management services across all the authority and for specific user groups. If reviewers find cases that cause particular concern, they will raise this formally with the senior manager (normally the Director of Social Services). It is then for the senior manager to see that appropriate action is carried out.

Next steps

Once the case sample has been agreed, you are asked to complete the case analysis pro forma and any relevant flowcharts. The reviewers will be interested most in recent and current work. The forms are designed to capture key events in the management of the case but the emphasis should be on setting out contemporary material. This is especially true of the flow charts. Any model of complex processes may be difficult to apply in practice; you are asked to complete what you can and not to worry if there are gaps. It may be best to start at the end and work backwards, stopping at the point where you are recording events that took place some years ago, unless this is especially relevant (e.g. where the child remains looked after).

You should also place markers in the file, drawing attention to significant documents. If a file is required by a social work team during the case file analysis period, reviewers will ensure that it is read and returned as soon as possible. Files will not be taken from the base used by the reviewers and will be returned to your team immediately after the case file analysis.

When reading files in the agreed sample, the reviewers may ask to:

- speak to key staff, seeking clarification or to explore possible concerns;
- scrutinise other files.

The lead reviewer might also request additional files for some users. This could include, for example, the file of the foster carer with whom a child is placed or the case records from a user's residential care home or day centre.

The file reading sample will be used to select a smaller number of cases for more thorough examination by means of interviews with individual users, carers, case managers and service providers. This part of the methodology (*case studies*) is explained in more detail in the section of the joint review handbook that deals with the detailed review phase.