

# Confident accountability for decision-making in the protection of children

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# The issue

- How best to test and demonstrate the quality of practice?
- Are we asking the right questions in the right ways?



# Overview

1. Role of performance indicators
2. Quality assurance processes & tools
3. Learning about what's behind good or poor practice - organisational factors that impact on performance



# The role of performance indicators

- Prevailing critiques
- Recent e.g. of negative impact; creating 'latent conditions' in which poor practice more likely:
  - 'workers consistently claimed that it was easy to lose sight of the primary activities of supporting families and safeguarding children, to the second-order activities of performance and audit'
- Broadhurst et. al. (2009) 'Performing 'Initial Assessment': Identifying the Latent Conditions for Error at the Front-Door of Local Authority Children's Services' British Journal of Social Work
- Untrustworthy or inherently limited?

# How to maximise their usefulness?

- How do you know if they are reliable?
  - Creating perverse incentives e.g. ‘work arounds’?
  - Scope for discretion
- What story are you making them tell about work in teams? Is it getting through to staff? Do they think it’s a relevant narrative?



# Local audit & quality assurance

- Increased focus on 'qualitative audit activity'
  - focus on the realities of safeguarding practitioners' day-to-day work
  - Case file audits, multi-agency audits,
- Are different layers of management suitably skilled in managerial QA models and practices?
- Is there any peer-review or support in place for managers at different tiers in their QA function?



# Available tools

- Section 11 Audit tools
- LSCB Challenge & Improvement tool
- Welsh LSCB Self-Assessment & Improvement tool
- Social care governance audit framework
- Sheffield Safeguarding Evaluation Programme



# What else is going on?

- need to surface and share current working practices and reflections
- ‘case file audits by LSCB a waste of time’
  - One-dimensional: about compliance with process and standards
  - Lacking contextual details to get underneath the issues
- Halton example: quarterly, cross-section of front-line staff (15) doing case file audits (70); invaluable for understanding the issues





# Extra dimension to incorporate

- Systems thinking in other fields
- Application to children's social care - case reviews (Fish, Munro, Bairstow 2009); full redesign (Seddon 2008)
- Implications for QA / audit
  - Beyond compliance check to a learning exercise: what does good practice look like in actual cases and how has it been achieved?
- Require talking to practitioners, and family members, as well as reviewing written records



# A typology of factors that interact and influence frontline safeguarding work

- human-tool operation
  - Structure of assessment forms
  - ICT systems
- family-professional interaction
- human judgement/reasoning
- human-management system operation
  - Performance indicators
  - Resource-demand mismatch
  - Capacity
  - Supervision
- communication and collaboration in multi-agency working in response to incidents/crises
- communication and collaboration in multi-agency working in assessment and longer-term work

# Summing up

1. Role of performance indicators
2. Quality assurance processes & tools
3. Learning about what's behind good or poor practice - organisational factors that impact on performance

