

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 March 2009

INTEGRATED CHILDREN'S SYSTEM (ICS) IMPLEMENTATION

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to describe the implementation of Integrated Children's System (ICS) also known as *Protocol* in North Yorkshire and the subsequent problems encountered when the system was made operational
- 1.2 The report summarises the remedial steps which have been taken and the recovery plan which has been put in place.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Integrated Children's System (ICS) is a DCSF driven system, intended to regulate and shape social work process and information. Developed as a national requirement, ICS Protocol is an IT system designed to :
- Standardise social work practice - assessment, planning, intervention and review
 - Improve record keeping and data about children's needs
 - Provide a stronger framework for performance management
- 2.2 The development of ICS first began in the previous Social Services Department and the original emphasis was to provide an Electronic Social Care Records system for children and adults. The arrival of the Children Act 2004, the creation of the new Children's Services Departments and the Every Child Matters agenda appears to have accelerated the plans for a Children's Social work IT system, probably to coincide with Contact Point and eCAF.
- 2.3 The DfES at the time, produced a national specification for software providers based on a series of government *exemplars* that were intended to define best practice and standardised business processes in social work.
- 2.4 The original target date for ICS to be implemented across all Local Authorities was January 2007. This target has slipped for majority of authorities but DCSF have it monitored very closely.
- 2.5 Specific Grant funding for ICS has been allocated by central government since 2005/2006.

The value of the grant was;

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| 2004/05 | £61K |
| 2005/06 | £96K |
| 2006/07 | £94K |
| 2007/08 | £120K |
| Total | £371K |

- 2.6 The original software provider selected by the Council from the DCSF shortlist failed to deliver a workable product. The replacement provider was already operating in a number of Authorities but has introduced a later version of their product in North Yorkshire which, despite assurances, has proved to be incompatible with the SWIFT system here. The software is taking much longer to master than anticipated and, at

present, the system is unreliable for record or data retrieval. The current impact of implementation, therefore, has been to absorb significant additional time for front line workers and managers and to impair our record-keeping and performance management systems.

3.0 LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

3.1 Planning and implementation of ICS has been overseen by an ICS Project Board chaired by the Assistant Director (CSC). The group had wide representation of operational staff, senior management, IT support staff, Performance management and administrative staff and was led by a full time Project manager (band 15 post) plus support staff.

3.2 The 'Go-live' date for ICS was April 2008. A series of testing and training schedules were put in place with the initial plan for ICS to remain integrated to SWIFT until Christmas 2008. This was to enable a phased rollout across the county and give time to reconfigure reporting functions from ICS whilst still reporting from SWIFT. Full implementation across all the operational team sites was to be achieved by the end September 2008.

4.0 IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS

4.1 As with the implementation of any complex IT system it was anticipated that there would be some problems with the implementation of ICS. However it was also anticipated, given the government's assessment, that the system would produce high levels of functionality. By late July 2008 3 months into the 'Go-live' period, the Strategy and Performance team were unable to validate or publish Quarter 1 Performance Reports, as the data held within the system was clearly wrong.

4.2 The migration of data from Swift to Protocol had been problematic and it emerged that the on-going integration of data from Swift to ICS Protocol was flawed. For example, children subject to a Child Protection Plan we're not getting reliably reported in the system. Furthermore when data in SWIFT and ICS Protocol were compared they invalidated each other.

4.3 In addition to significant data problems, managers and practitioners were reporting problems in the day-to-day operation of the system which was increasing the bureaucratic burden on social workers. Operating ICS was taking up large amounts of staff time and restricting the time practitioners had with children and their families.

4.4 At the heart of the problem with ICS implementation appeared to be reconciling a highly prescribed and inflexible IT system and process with the complexities of day-to-day social work practice.

The range of problems with the implementation and operation of Protocol and the loss of key data in the system appear to have been caused or compounded by the interplay of a number of factors:

- Data in SWIFT not being of a consistently reliable standard pre data migration
- Insufficient testing of ICS on first and subsequent releases
- ICS Business processes and workflow creating a number of blocks
- Government practice exemplars being very difficult to follow in social work practice
- Data migration from Swift and integration into Protocol being problematic
- The level of IT and Management support required exceeding the original estimate
- Training needs exceeding the original estimate given the actual level of difficulty experienced

- Insufficient 'floor walking' support post implementation given the level of difficulty experienced
- A number of system 'bugs' needing 'fixes'
- Comparative under-development of IT systems for Social Care prior to ICS giving a low base on which to build

All of the above clearly hindered the effective rollout and implementation of ICS.

4.5 The national picture is that the majority of Local Authorities using ICS are having significant problems with implementation. These problems fall largely into four groups

- a) The amount of social work time being used on operating the ICS system, leaving less time to work with children and their families.
- b) The government exemplars being unwieldy and very bureaucratic
- c) The workflow being too rigid (by design) and not allowing for flexibility in day-to-day practice and management decision making
- d) Data problems in both inputting and retrieving data

4.6 Those who adopted the system early and have got on top of the IT are still reporting adverse impacts on front-line staff time, though there is also recognition of the improvements which successful implementation can ultimately bring.

4.7 There is growing awareness nationally of the emerging impact of ICS on capacity and on some aspects of practice. It is possible that this may lead to some national modifications to the current policy. It is impossible to know whether this will lead to changes in the stage 1 products currently in use, or will simply alter planned later stages of ICS further development. At this stage, therefore, we must continue to base our Recovery Plan on full implementation of the current phase of ICS in 2009.

5.0 REMEDIAL ACTIONS: – SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2008

5.1 In July the project team identified that on-going integration with SWIFT was not working, making data cleansing impossible. It was agreed to decouple from Swift sooner than planned. This course of action was supported by Liquid Logic and the systems were de-coupled in September 2008, moving to a stand alone ICS Protocol system.

5.2 A subsequent Data Validation 1 exercise revealed a large amount of data that required correcting. At about the same time teams began to report that the software system appeared to be failing, being slow to respond or causing problems in data retrieval. By October 2008 concerns were raised at the ICS Project Board about the quality of data and reporting issues for 2009 CAA. As a consequence a key recommendation was to establish a 'Data Validation Crew' to correct the data faults.

5.3 In order to evaluate what needed correcting in ICS data, it was agreed that one test site would be the focus of an effort to correct all the data in the system. The Assessment and Safeguarding Team at White Rose House was selected for a Data Validation 1A Pilot.

5.4 The review highlighted:

- The large amount of time taken by Social Workers to input

- The potential for errors to result in case information being difficult to trace or review
- The system was not flexible enough to allow sensible variations

6.0 IMMEDIATE AND LONG TERM RECOVERY PLAN

6.1 The Director led a high level review meeting in December as a result of which a detailed recovery plan has been developed which addresses how to:-

- Simplify some ICS requirements for initial implementation
- Retrieve and validate data for 2008/09 and establish parallel data systems
- Extend the training period and strengthen the team
- Provide increased support for data input

6.2 The aim is to release social work time, but resource has also been allocated for agency or sessional staff to support casework. Additional resources for training and support staff time have also been allocated

6.3 The recovery plan for ICS must also

- Evaluate what has happened in implementation
- Re-launch ICS with improved effectiveness and functionality

6.4 We are committed to achieving full implementation of ICS and will work closely with Liquid Logic to achieve this. High level corporate IT support has been allocated to assist us in this. The Directorate project team has also been strengthened from CSC, HR, Finance and IT.

6.5 The recovery plan is closely monitored by CYPLT with regular progress reports to the Director. At this point the two pilot sites which have tested the modified version of ICS are encouraging and roll out across the remaining sites is on target. Performance data capture will be via spreadsheets until ICS is completely reliable for this purpose. Arrangements for that are making good progress.

6.6 It is recognised that through a combination of increased referrals post-Haringey, and the fact that ICS makes each case more time-consuming even when the system is established, there will be increased capacity demands beyond the recovery plan period.

6.7 To take account of this, and the wider pressures on Safeguarding generally, additional, recurring resources are being allocated corporately and within the Directorate. At this stage the proposals are for additional Family Support Workers, Social Workers for Assessment and Safeguarding, Deputy Service Managers for Fostering, plus specialist posts for Domestic Abuse and Policy Development, and a senior post to oversee Safeguarding across the Directorate. Details are being finalised.

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| <p>7.0 Recommendation</p> |
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| <p>The Committee is requested to note the information in this report.</p> |
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Date: 11th March 2009

Background documents: None