



One minute guide

Cluster working

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What are clusters?

In a city the size of Leeds, it would be unmanageable to run all of our services on a city-wide basis. In Children's Services, we have responded to this challenge by organising our services across twenty-five local clusters.

Clusters were initially organised around universal services such as schools and children's centres, and have developed in recent years to incorporate the range of services available to families in each local area. Cluster working arrangements are designed to ensure that families are offered the right intervention at the right time, as early as possible in the life of a problem, to prevent issues escalating which may result in poor outcomes for the family.

How do cluster arrangements work?

Clusters bring together managers from a range of universal, targeted and specialist children's services in each local area, including schools, children's centres, police, social work, the third sector, elected members and some relevant services for adults, such as housing. The configuration will vary in each cluster, depending on the services available and the needs of families in the local area.

Each cluster has a Targeted Services Leader (TSL), whose role is to promote and monitor effective integrated working. Again, the exact nature of the work of the TSL will vary between clusters, with some clusters employing their own and some TSLs being appointed by the local authority.

What do clusters do for families?

Through clusters, children's services and our key partners aim to provide a local model of support for children and families. They link high quality schools and early years provision with social and health support for children and their families, to improve outcomes wherever they live in the city.

The two main ways in which clusters work to achieve this are:

- **Guidance and Support meetings** - at these meetings, representatives from the services outlined above come together on a regular basis to discuss cases where agencies have been working with families, and may need some additional help from partners in order to progress. The meetings are also forums for the appropriate sharing of information, ensuring that those working with families have all of the relevant facts from each service to enable them to make a safe judgement with regards to risk and next steps.
- **Top 100 methodology** - this term describes a way for staff in clusters to identify and prioritise those families most at risk of poor outcomes, and to ensure that: an up-to-date assessment of need has been carried out; an appropriate lead professional is holding the case; the relevant services are engaged in a Team Around the Child or other multi-agency support arrangements; that a plan is in place for addressing the needs of the child, young person and family; and that appropriate review mechanisms are in place. 'Top 100' is a nominal term reflecting the importance of prioritisation; there may be more or fewer than 100 families identified in any one cluster.

What are the benefits of cluster working?

The cluster model provides a way for practitioners to secure the help and support that families require for improved outcomes. For example, when requests for service are made to children's social work but the level of need does not require a social work response, these cases are passed on to the relevant cluster for a targeted services response.

Cluster working enables local practitioners to build good working relationships in order to provide effective integrated services for the families in their area. Organising services around a cluster model raises practitioner awareness of the resources that are available in each cluster for responding to specific needs. This awareness allows clusters to organise their resources more effectively by being able to identify the agencies that are best placed to offer a service, thus reducing duplication. This should ensure that families receive the right support at the right time at the earliest opportunity.

The building of effective working relationships helps to facilitate information sharing where appropriate, and also provides forums in which issues of risk can be discussed and responded to. This is a key aspect of safeguarding, and something which it is important for us get right; many Serious Case Reviews across the country have found that a failure to share information in an appropriate and timely manner between practitioners and services can contribute to very poor outcomes for children.

What are the priorities of the clusters?

Each cluster contributes to the three 'obsessions' of children's services - to reduce the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET), to improve school attendance, and to reduce the need for children and young people to be looked after. In addition to these city-wide priorities, clusters identify their own additional local priorities and develop action plans to address them.

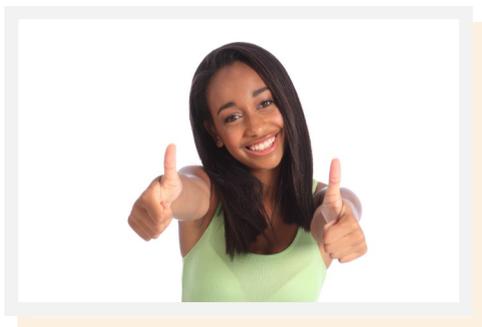
Clusters receive detailed performance data each month to track how well they are performing against a number of indicators, relating to both city-wide and local priorities.

How do staff in clusters know what families need?

A good holistic assessment - which considers all of the aspects of a child's life - is the basis of all support provided to families. There are a number of assessment tools that practitioners can use to identify the needs of a child, young person and family, for example the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) or the Common Internal Record. These tools provide a consistent way for practitioners to record and share assessment information across the city, and the assessments will determine the services the families need from their cluster.

Where can I find more information?

For further information about clusters, or to find out who your Targeted Services Leader is, you can contact the Integrated Processes Team on 0113 24 76830 or cafteam@leeds.gov.uk. Your TSL can give you more information about the resources available within your cluster.



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