SOCIAL FINANCE

Leeds CITY COUNCIL

Recommendations Report

Information Capture for Children's Social Care

November 2023

Contents

1. Executive Summary

In this section, we provide a summary of the key findings in the report. The executive summary can be read as a standalone document.

This report presents final recommendations from a user research project to understand information captured in Children's Social Care, its usefulness, and areas for innovation

In 2020, social workers spent just 19% of their time on frontline work, with 40% consumed by administration[1]. High administrative burdens contribute to work stress and staff turnover.

The 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care recognized excessive recording as an issue and called for a reduction in bureaucracy and a reimagining of case management systems[2].

In response, DfE commissioned research by Leeds City Council and Social Finance to understand how information is captured in social care, its usefulness, and opportunities to reduce recording burdens and improve social worker wellbeing and retention.

This report outlines **3 system-wide principles** that underpin efficient information management for children's social care, and **6 intervention-level recommendations** that would ensure that these principles are adhered to. Recommendations are grouped by 3 themes: Information Capture, Information Retrieval and Business Intelligence.

Each of the six recommendations has a corresponding **service concept**, which has been tested with social workers to better understand recording needs and the potential impact of specific approaches to address the recording burden.

Service concepts have been assessed and **approaches to implementation** have been included for the 3 exhibiting most promise in terms of their impact and feasibility.

Our shared ambition is to ensure that social work recording is efficient, child-centred and supports evidence-informed decision-making.

[1] Four in ten social workers anticipate quitting profession within five years on back of high stress and caseloads - Community Care
[2] Independent review of children's social care - final report (publishing.service.gov.uk)

The report is the culmination of a four-part collaboration between Social Finance and Leeds City Council

Phase	Activities	Outputs
1. Pre discovery	Inception activities; secondary research to identify and test initial assumptions; identification of user groups for research.	• Secondary research summary • Purposive sample of user groups • List of assumptions to be tested in user research • Introductory overview of the Leeds Children's Social Care Practice Model • List of 678 information items captured by social workers at Leeds City Council
2. User research	Research with social workers, team managers, service delivery managers, heads of service, care-experienced young people, parents and carers	• A and B supplementary data lists • User research report • Insights from people with lived experience (Annex)
3. Service concept	Generation of a series of service concepts based on user research insights, and testing with social workers and reporting and performance staff	• 7 preliminary service concepts tested with users • 6 service concepts refined based on user feedback
4. Recommendations	Collation of learnings, refinement of proposed service concepts in line with practitioner feedback, and generation of recommendations.	• Recommendations report

Three system-wide principles underpin efficient information management while six intervention- level recommendations ensure that these are adhered to

Goal: Social work recording is efficient, child-centred and informs evidence-informed decision-making

System Wide Principles *What principles underpin efficient information management for children's social care?*	There is alignment on the purpose of information capture to support 'good social work'		
	Case management systems are navigable, coherent, and follow a standardised, user-centred design pattern		
	Social work recording prioritises the accurate representation of children and families' voices and experiences		
Intervention level recommendations *What should happen to ensure that service-wide principles are adhered to?*	**I. Information capture:** 1. Reduce the time spent recording at the point of capture 2. Support social workers to accurately represent children and families' experiences in case records	**II. Information retrieval** 3. Enable different user groups to extract information required for decision-making 4. Improve reliability of pre-population to reduce double work	**III. Business intelligence:** 5. Make information shared with Central Government stand out at the point of capture 6. Reduce time spent manipulating data to produce analysis
Tested Service Concepts *What service-level interventions could operationalise these principles?*	*Embed mobile recording & automatic transcription to capture the voices of children & families*	*Implement an advanced search functionality*	*Visually flag fields in the case record that are included in statutory returns*
	Embed prompts to reduce over-recording	*Communicate to social workers when information is pre-populated*	*Improve native reporting functionality to meet the needs of team managers*

We have identified three system-wide principles that should underpin efficient information management for Children's Social Care

Goal: Social work recording is efficient, child-centred and supports evidence-informed decision-making

System Wide Principles
What principles underpin efficient information management for children's social care?

There is alignment on the purpose of information capture to support 'good social work'

A shared understanding among system users of the purposes of information capture could enable:

- Reduced duplication – by streamlining and incorporating information types across multiple workflows
- Reduced cognitive load – by enabling those capturing information to easily switch mindsets when recording different kinds of information

Case management systems are navigable, coherent, and follow a standardised, user-centred design pattern

Standardised, user-centred design patterns could enable:

- Increased accessibility, predictability, and usability for social workers – through established style and design guides
- A more efficient recording experience for social workers

Social work recording prioritises the accurate representation of children and families' voices and experiences

Prioritising the accurate representation of the child's voice and experiences could enable:

- A practice where social workers can more easily capture information important to the child - even if it does not necessarily inform how a case progresses through the system
- Freed up capacity to record for other audiences and purposes

Our user research highlighted three intervention areas where recording practices could be changed to reduce administrative burdens

Our initial hypothesis was that recording burdens were influenced by central government requests for information, including within data returns. Early research quickly disproved this hypothesis and research pivoted to identifying the root causes of recording burdens on social workers, as well as exacerbating factors. These are categorised as relevant to the areas of information capture, information retrieval and business intelligence.

I. Information capture

Capturing accurate information is perceived as crucial to good social work practice, but social workers think they spend too much time on administrative tasks.

Usability issues are compounded by fluctuating and complex caseloads, which present a cognitive and administrative burden.

User needs include:

- Faster information capture;
- Increased accuracy and data quality;
- Social workers have more time with, children and families; and
- Greater self-reported confidence in recording practice.

II. Information retrieval

Social workers can struggle to interpret forms and identify information relevant to the task at hand, which adds to their administrative load.

User needs include:

- Faster information retrieval;
- Fewer clicks required to find information; and
- Faster access to aggregated reports and trends for business intelligence

III. Business intelligence

Statutory returns comprise a slim proportion of all information collected in the Child in Need and Child Protection Plan pathways.

However, the time spent collating and preparing for these returns could be reduced.

User needs include:

- Increased accuracy in the recording of information that is shared externally;
- Less time spent by the reporting team collating returns; and
- Greater comprehension among social workers of what information is shared and with whom.

Recommendations can be embedded through various routes, from the intervention level to a systemic level

Routes to Embed Concepts

How can we embed these recommendations in practice?

Intervention Level

Systemic level

Collaborate with one local authority as a 'testbed' for an intervention

Carry out additional, localised user-centred research and begin prototyping recommended service concepts with the aim to develop them further.

Collaborate with a consortium of authorities to prototype several approaches

Testing approaches should consider similarities and differences between Local Authorities including differences in practice, software and technical approaches, Ofsted inspection grade and feedback

Collaborate with providers to embed user-centred design principles in case management products

Understand and align priorities for system improvements with providers.

Collaborate with the Department for Education to embed user-centred design principles in standards or patterns for providers

Develop and share open standards and patterns for case management systems that can be accessed by Local Authorities and providers to guide local modifications

Recommendations centre on the need to reduce administrative burdens across the intervention areas of information capture, retrieval and business intelligence

Goal: Social work recording is efficient, child-centred and supports evidence-informed decision-making

Recommendations
What should happen to ensure that service-wide principles are adhered to?

I. Information capture

1. Reduce the time spent recording point of capture
2. Support social workers to accurately represent children's and families' experiences in case records

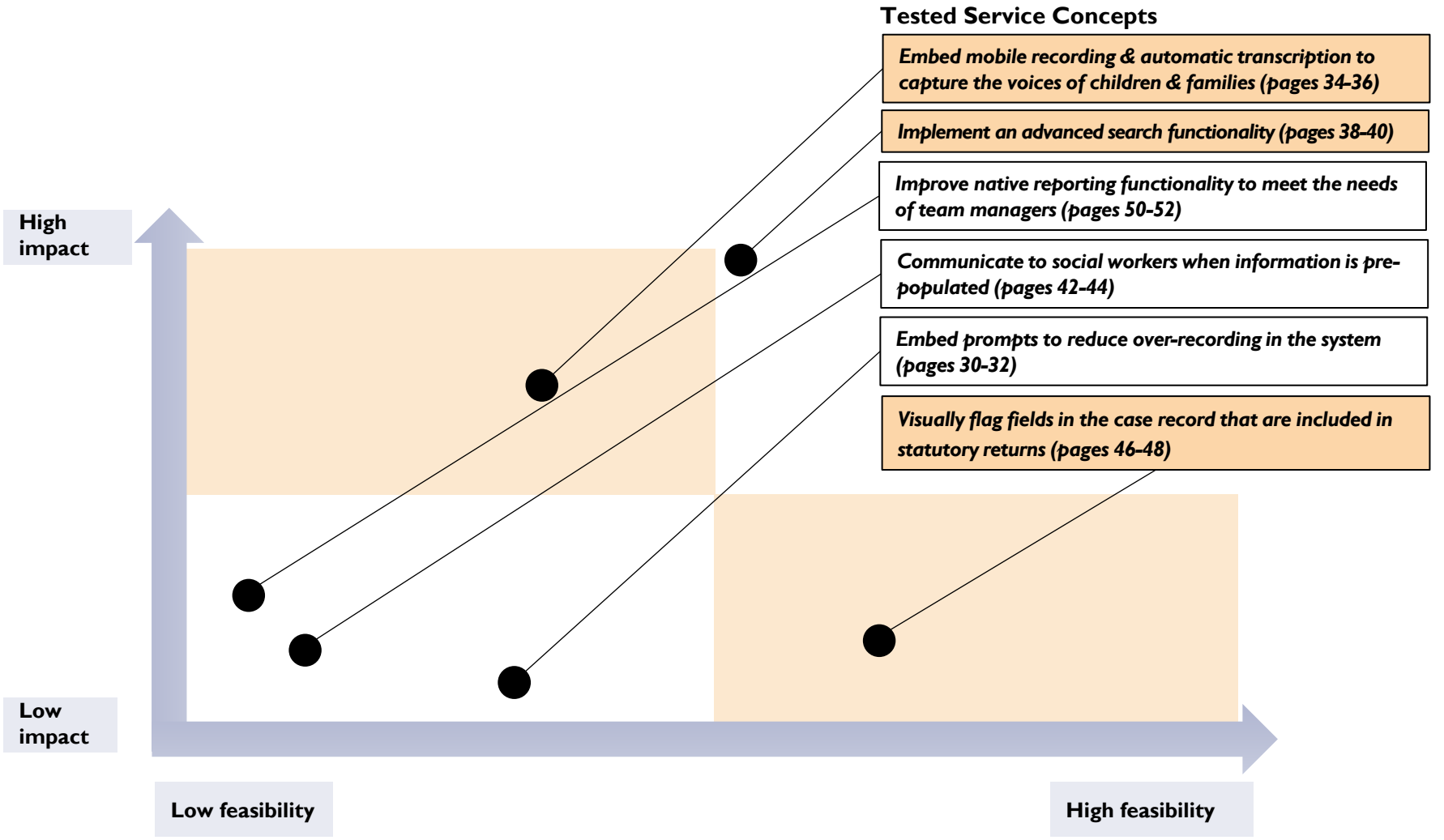
II. Information retrieval

3. Enable different user groups to extract information required for decision-making
4. Improve reliability of pre-population to reduce double work

III. Business intelligence

5. Make information shared with Central Government stand out at the point of capture
6. Reduce time spent manipulating data to produce analysis

Service concepts propose practical changes to case management and were tested with social workers to better understand potential impact and feasibility



2. Introduction

In this section, we outline the background to this collaboration, and the structure and aims of our work

Background to this collaboration

In 2020, social workers in England estimated they spent just 19% of their typical week on frontline work, on average, compared with 40% on administration, 25% attending meetings and 10% travelling.[3]

The 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care recognised the impact of burdensome recording practices on social workers: a high proportion of administrative work contributes to work-related stress, which is often cited as a reason for exiting the profession. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care calls for the reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy and the 'reimagination' of case management systems to reduce time spent recording.[4]

In response, DfE commissioned Leeds City Council and Social Finance to conduct user research to build a stronger picture of the information captured in Children's Social Care, its usefulness, and areas for innovation. Social Finance is a non-profit organisation with experience developing data and digital solutions in Children's Social Care.

[1] Four in ten social workers anticipate quitting profession within five years on back of high stress and caseloads - Community Care
[2] Independent review of children's social care - final report (publishing.service.gov.uk)

To meet DfE's overall goal, we structured our work in four stages, with distinct aims and activities

Goal: Reduce time spent by social workers recording information by identifying captured information that is surplus to requirement

Pre-Discovery

Aims:

- Devise a set of clear, testable assumptions that can be explored through explorative user research
- Identify areas where there is the greatest need to reform social work recording
- Identify a purposive sample of users to interview in user research

Activities:

Inception activities; secondary research to identify and test initial assumptions; identification of user groups for research.

User Research

Aims:

- Understand what information is recorded about children and young people, how it is perceived, valued practices and existing challenges
- Obtain a primary list of data items, explore whether these fields are helpful for children and families, social workers, or managers
- Obtain a secondary list of data items that social workers are not currently recording

Activities:

Research with social workers, team managers, service delivery managers, heads of service, care-experienced young people, parents and carers

Service concept

Aims:

- Develop a range of concepts to improve social workers' experience of case recording
- Gauge feasibility, utility and appropriateness of each concept through testing

Activities:

Generation of a series of service concepts based on user research insights, and testing with social workers and reporting and performance staff

Recommendations

Aims:

- Using feedback from social workers, refine our service concepts into a set of actionable recommendations for both the DfE and Leeds city council.
- Prioritised according to impact and feasibility.

Activities:

Collation of learnings, refinement of proposed service concepts in line with practitioner feedback, and generation of recommendations.

3. Methods

In this section, we describe our approach to:

- Secondary desk research
- Primary user research
- Service concept development
- Service concept refinement

We sought to answer the following questions through secondary desk research and primary user research

What information is captured:	• What information do social workers capture and retrieve in predetermined forms?
Value of information:	• How do frontline social workers and Children's Social Care managers at Leeds City Council perceive the value and usefulness of the data they record in predetermined forms? • How is the information that is captured used?
Challenges:	• What challenges do social workers experience when capturing information in predetermined forms?
Impact on relationships:	• What is the impact of information capture on the management of Children's Social Care? • What is the impact of information capture on the relationship between social workers, children and families?

Secondary desk research: We reviewed a range of journal articles, reports and opinion pieces to build understanding of information capture in Children's Social Care, and then identified the fields and workflows used in Leeds City Council

We reviewed and analysed literature on social work policies, practices and initiatives related to improving information capture, case management, data quality and timeliness.

We also carried out an analysis of information management and workflows at Leeds City Council, focusing on the case management system (CMS) and its users, and challenges associated with information capture.

Outputs included:

- Secondary research summary,
- Purposive sample of user groups,
- List of assumptions to be tested in user research,
- Introductory overview of the Leeds Children's Social Care Practice Model
- List of 678 information items captured by social workers at Leeds City Council, which provide the basis for the supplementary data lists submitted alongside this report.

Table 1. Summary of Resources

Resource Type	Summary
Journal Articles	Academic literature on issues including social care bureaucracy, time spent on recording by social workers, and defensive recording.
Reports	The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, as well as reports written by institutions including the British Association of Social Workers, the Centre for Public Impact and YouGov.
Local Analytics	Local Analytics reports produced internally at Leeds, which are used to aggregate, map and quantify the journeys users take through different workflows within Mosaic.
Workflows	Review of the different workflows, and forms within those workflows, in Mosaic. This review included exporting all the fields captured in Mosaic, alongside auxiliary information such as the number of instances of a field and categorisation of the information recorded in a field (e.g. free-text or tick box).

Methods

User research: We conducted qualitative user research with a wide range of social workers as well as parents, carers and care-experienced young people for a more person-centred understanding of how the challenges with social work recording are perceived.

Table 2. Summary of user research methods and aims

Method	Sample	Aims
13 interviews with frontline social workers	• 8 from area teams • 3 from Duty & Advice • 2 from Child Health & Disability (CHAD) Service Team	• Understand positive and negative attitudes towards recording practice • Identify areas of social work practice that are difficult to capture/record with currently available tools • Understand attitudes and perspectives of specialists working with children or young people with a Child in Need or Child Protection case status
3 focus group discussions with management groups	• 1 with 4 team managers • 1 with 10 service delivery managers • 1 with 5 heads of service	• Understand perspectives on how recording and the CMS impacts role & responsibilities • Identify challenges with interacting or engaging with recording and the CMS from contact to closure • Prioritise challenges/difficulties to be addressed
1 focus group discussion with data teams	• 2 members of the reporting team • 1 member of the performance team	• Identify forms/fields that are the least consistently completed or that have high rates of error • Understand attitudes around statutory returns
2 focus group discussions with people with lived experience	• 1 with 7 parents/carers • 1 with 4 care-experienced young people	• Understand how recording is perceived by care experienced young people and families and how this affects the decisions that are made about their lives • Understand how care experienced young people and families feel about how information is presented to them • Understand how the above can inform changes in recording practice that will result in better outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

Service concept refinement: We interviewed professionals for feedback on the seven preliminary service concepts, then made modifications accordingly.

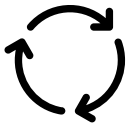
Testing

Participants were asked to:

- Check and challenge the problem statements against their experiences, modifying where needed
- Identify the most critical problem statements to address
- Review the service concepts corresponding to these prioritized problem statements, reflecting on impact, acceptability, appropriateness and feasibility
- Each concept was reviewed by at least two professionals

Show and tells:

- Presented preliminary service concepts at the DfE's Data & Digital Solutions Fund Show & Tell, and collected additional feedback here to help refine the service concepts.



Refining

We collated views and opinions about:

- how each concept might help
- any risks
- suggested changes

Where identified risks outweighed the potential positive impact of an approach, we considered whether certain elements of the approach could be modified or combined with another concept.

Where feedback was positive and there were little to no concerns from participants, suggested changes were incorporated into the service concept to better meet specific user needs.

Table 3. Summary of service concept testing methods

Method	Sample
6 interviews	3 from area teams 2 from duty & advice 1 from CHAD
1 focus group	1 member of the reporting team 1 member of the performance team

Service concept development: We generated a series of concepts based on user research insights to improve information capture, retrieval and reporting.

Defining

We focused on understanding how professionals, young people, parents and carers define the problems around social work recording.

We sorted these into **statutory indicators, information capture, or information retrieval** categories.

Within each of these categories, we defined the discrete needs of different users, and the problems or challenges associated with meeting those needs.

For example:

- **User need:** *Social workers need to record the right amount of information.*
- **Problem statement:** *Some social workers are concerned about recording too little about a case, and over-report information that does not inform decision-making, action or support a child*

Ideating

Next, we focused on generating ideas and potential solutions to address the problems surfaced.

We considered different approaches to the problems depending on varying levels of access to:

- Time
- Funding
- Technology

For each approach that was generated, we considered:

- How much **effort** would be required to build and implement this solution?
- What **challenges**, unintended consequences or backfire effects can we anticipate?
- What **impact** will this have?

Prioritising

Project partners from Leeds City Council helped refine and prioritise ideas by identifying those most feasible and most impactful in reducing the burden of social work recording.

These were developed into preliminary service concepts that included:

- **Context** from the user research – user needs and barriers to meeting them.
- **Expected impact**, both direct and indirect
- **Detail on the approach** – what elements of the information capture, retrieval or reporting process would look and feel different for target users
- **Possible outcomes and backfire effects** that the idea might have on distinct user groups

5. Recommendations

In this section, we introduce:

- System-wide principles that underpin efficient information management
- Recommendations for how to apply these principles across information capture, retrieval and business intelligence
- Service concepts tested with users for each recommendation

Recommendations focus on wide problem areas surfaced in user research and take a system-wide approach to reducing social work bureaucracy

Goal: Social work recording is efficient, child-centred and informs evidence-informed decision-making

System Wide Principles
What principles underpin efficient information management for children's social care?

- There is alignment on the purpose of information capture to support 'good social work'
- Case management systems are navigable, coherent, and follow a standardised, user-centred design pattern
- Social work recording prioritises the accurate representation of children and families' voices and experiences

Intervention Level Recommendations
What should happen to ensure these principles are adhered to?

I. Information capture:

1. Reduce the time spent recording point of capture
2. Support social workers to accurately represent children and families' experiences in case records

II. Information retrieval

3. Enable different user groups to extract information required for decision-making
4. Improve reliability of pre-population to reduce double work

III. Business intelligence:

5. Make information shared with Central Government stand out at the point of capture
6. Reduce time spent manipulating data to produce analysis

Tested Service Concepts
What service-level interventions could operationalise these principles?

Embed mobile recording & automatic transcription to capture the voices of children & families	*Implement an advanced search functionality*	*Visually flag fields in the case record that are included in statutory returns*
Embed prompts & real time feedback to reduce excessive information capture	*Communicate to social workers when information is pre-populated*	*Improve native reporting functionality to meet the needs of team managers*

There are three system-wide principles that underpin the recommendations for efficient information management for children's social care:

1. There is alignment on the purpose of information capture to support 'good social work'

2. Case management systems are navigable, coherent, and follow a standardised, user-centred design pattern

3. Social work recording prioritises the accurate representation of children and families' voices and experiences

The first principle relates to improving understanding of the purposes of information collection

System wide principle 1: There is alignment on the purpose of information capture to support 'good social work'

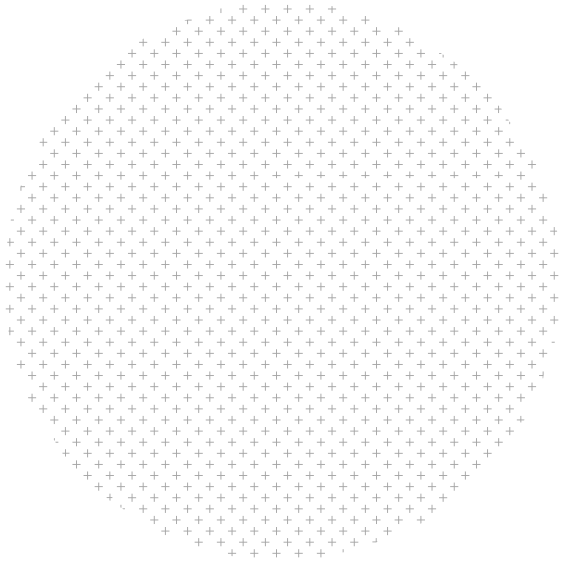
A shared understanding among system users of the purposes of information capture could enable:

- **Reduced duplication – by streamlining and incorporating information types across multiple workflows**
- **Reduced cognitive load – by enabling those capturing information to easily switch mindsets when recording different kinds of information**

Accessible, timely and accurate information to inform child protection and safeguarding is the overriding priority of recording practice. However, our user research has shown that social workers are also conscious of a number of other purposes for case recording:

1. For a child to understand the decisions made about their care
2. For social workers to undertake reflection, analysis, and synthesis to support their decision making
3. For leaders and performance and reporting teams to monitor service delivery
4. For organisations and social workers to evidence that good social care practice has been followed, including within court proceedings
5. To provide information for central government returns

These multiple purposes may contribute to over-recording due to lack of clarity around why information is recorded, how it is used, and the intended audience.



The second principle considers the role of standards and patterns in the development of case management systems

System wide principle 2: Case management systems are navigable, coherent, and follow a standardised, user-centred design pattern

A standardised, user-centred design pattern could enable:

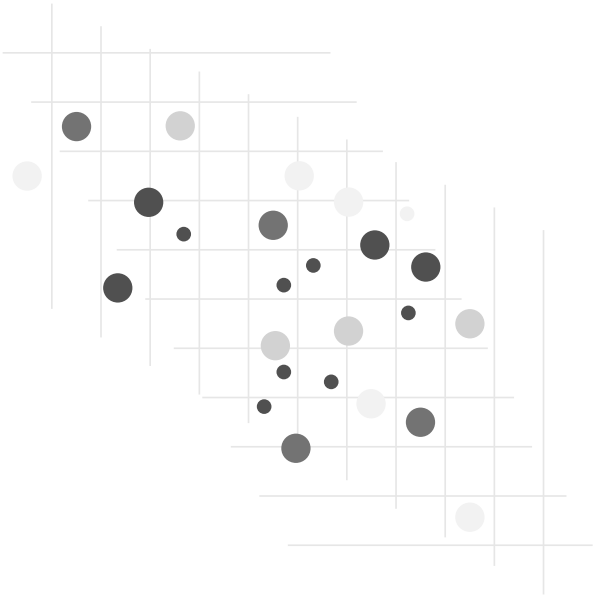
- **Increased accessibility, predictability, and usability for social workers – through established style and design guides**
- **A more streamlined recording experience for social workers**

Research showed the navigability and structure of case management systems significantly increases recording burdens. Usability issues raised included:

1. Outdated or missing pre-population of information
2. Repetitive data entry across workflows
3. Inability to have multiple records open at the same time
4. Lack of standardisation or guidance around where and how case notes and other documents are uploaded
5. Fixed size information boxes which may obscure content

These have a compound impact on social workers who are frustrated by the time needed to capture, retrieve and upload information.

Difficulties finding and cross-referencing previously recorded information may also diminish the quality of case recording, and therefore any decision making around a child's care that relies on a comprehensive understanding of their situation.



The third principle prioritises the voices of children and families in the process of case recording

System wide principle 3: Social work recording prioritises the accurate representation of children and families' voices and experiences

Prioritising the accurate representation of the child's voice and experiences could enable:

- **A practice where social workers can more easily capture information important to the child - even if it does not necessarily inform how a case progresses through the system**
- **Freed up capacity to record for other audiences and purposes - as described in System wide principle 1 (pg 25).**

Although accurate representation of the child's voice and experience is a professional and ethical imperative for social workers, care experienced young people and parents/carers do not feel records represent their experiences and circumstances.

Social workers recognise they are responsible for:

1. Ensuring that records are understandable to care experienced young people and adults, and contain the information they will likely be looking for, such as rationale for the decisions made about them;
2. Capturing granular information they perceive a care experienced adult would like to access, such as exact words used in a conversation

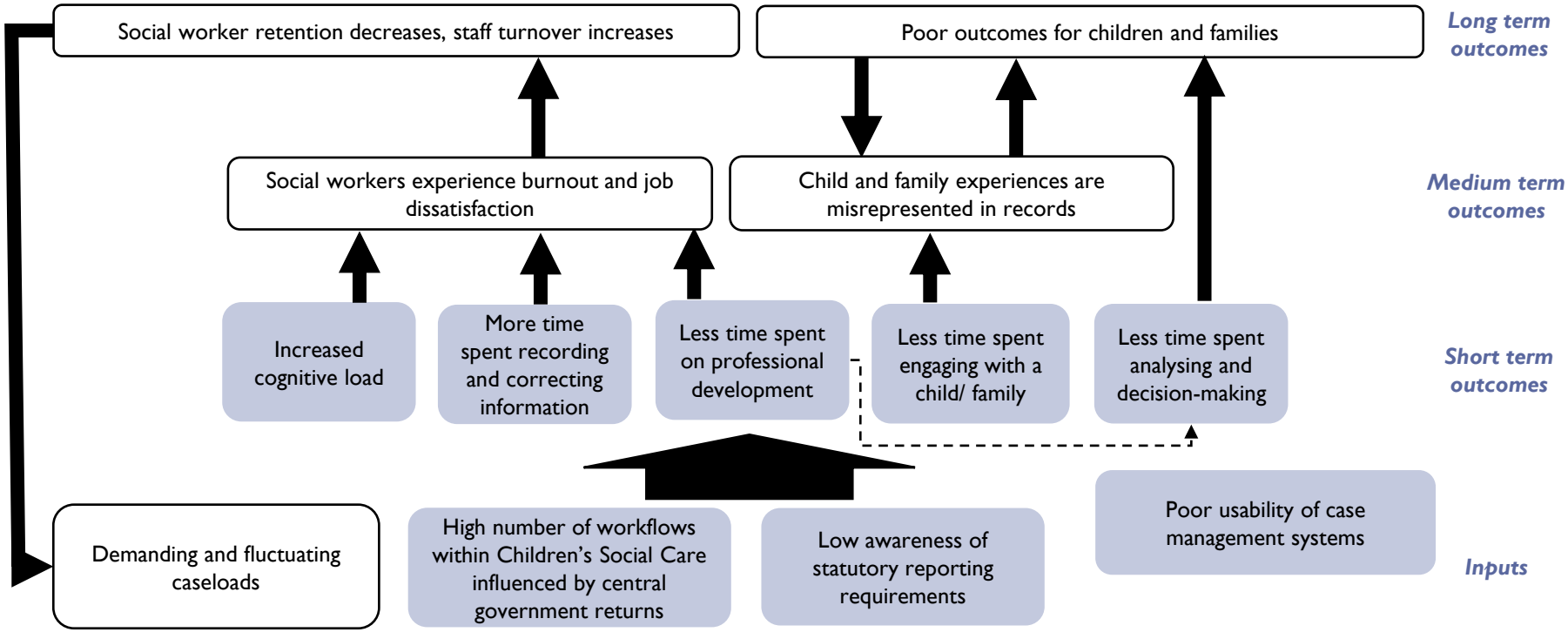
While social workers rely on their memory or notes from interactions and existing case management systems do not support them to do this.

Recommendations seek to reduce administrative burdens associated with information capture, retrieval and business intelligence

The recommendations in this report specifically address the burdens of social work recording, but also have wider long-term impacts, including the potential to improve social work social workers' job satisfaction and lead to better outcomes for children and families.

Figure 1 illustrates how the different factors that have a bearing on the burden of social work recording interlink, from inputs to outcomes. The blue elements are directly related to recording burden, whereas white elements show broader impacts. We recommend referring to this figure when reading the expected impact of each recommendation.

Figure 1. Causal Mechanisms Map



We have grouped recommendations by intervention area Information capture, Information retrieval and Business Intelligence

I. Information capture	II. Information retrieval	III. Business intelligence
1. Reduce the time spent recording point of capture 2. Support social workers to accurately represent children and families' experiences in case records	3. Enable different user groups to extract information required for decision-making 4. Improve reliability of pre-population to reduce double work	5. Make information shared with Central Government more salient at the point of capture 6. Reduce time spent manipulating data to produce analysis

Each recommendation presents:

- The **expected impact** in the short, medium and long-term
  Specific **user insights** from our research that the recommendation responds to
- A **service concept** developed to operationalise the recommendation
- **User feedback** on the anticipated impact of the service concept

Recommendation 1: Reduce the time spent recording at point of capture

Service Concept: Embed prompts to reduce over-recording in the system

Our first recommendation focuses on improving usability to support social workers' case recording

Recommendation 1: Reduce the time spent recording at the point of capture

Expected Impact:
Refer to Figure 1 on page 30

- **Short term:** A more intuitive recording experience that does not require reliance on workarounds to usability issues, reducing social workers' cognitive load.
- **Medium term:** More time dedicated to professional development, engaging with children and families, and case analysis.

User insights and challenges this recommendation responds to:

The existing case management system does not enable intuitive or efficient recording and prolongs the total amount of time social workers spend recording at the point of capture.

Social workers are concerned about recording too little about a case and tend to over-report information that does not inform decision-making, action, or support a child.

Social workers lack guidance on where to record and upload information on the system.

Service concept: Embed prompts to reduce over-recording in the system

We tested whether embedded prompts might support social workers' case recording at the point of capture

Service Concept: Embed prompts to reduce over-recording in the system

Service concept description: Build prompts into the case management system architecture to enable social workers to record with more confidence and accuracy.

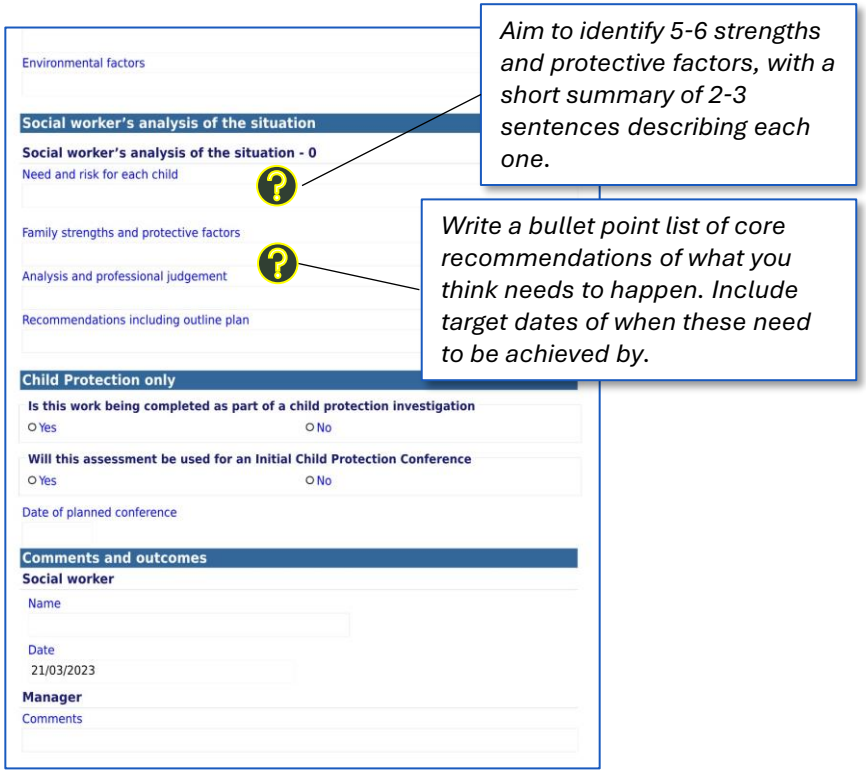
Tailored prompts would:

- Guide recording for fields that are frequently misinterpreted or cause confusion
- Provide structure for different subtypes of case notes (e.g. phone calls, texts, emails)
- Guide standardized uploading of documents into the appropriate 'categories' or folders within a case record

Prompts should be clearly articulated using words social workers recognise and use.

The prompts should be visually flagged on the system so the user cannot miss them, while not presenting a barrier to those who do not need to refer to the guidance.

Figure 2. Visual representation of prompts for fields in the Child and Family Assessment workflow



Embedded prompts might help to improve confidence in case recording, but should not be too prescriptive

Service Concept: Embed prompts to reduce over-recording in the system

Social workers feel that prompts would increase their confidence in recording the right amount of information.
It would also reassure them that they are not missing important information that someone might expect to see (refer to service-wide principle 1, on page 25).

Social workers believe that this will support newly qualified as well as more experienced social workers.
Social workers believe that newly qualified social workers would benefit from this approach when someone more senior is not available to offer guidance.

Senior social workers shared that prompts would be especially useful in forms that are infrequently used.

Social workers suggest that prompts should offer comprehensive and specific guidance but avoid prescriptive suggestions.
Prompts would need to be comprehensive enough so that no key information about a case is omitted, while also taking care not to add to the recording burden (i.e., by suggesting unnecessary analysis).

Social workers caution that the prompts cannot be too prescriptive and should only guide social workers to enter the right type and amount of information, rather than suggest a specific action.

"I support newly qualified social workers, this would help as I spend so much time teaching them and this would do the teaching for me."

"There's some documents you might go years without doing so regardless of how experienced you are, you may not know how to fill it."

Recommendation 2: Support social workers to accurately represent children and families' experiences in case records

Service Concept: Embed mobile recording & automatic transcription to capture the voices of children & families

Our second recommendation puts emphasis on supporting social workers to accurately reflect young people's experience

Recommendation 2: Support social workers to accurately represent children and families' experiences in case records

Expected impact:

Refer to Figure 1 on page 29

We hypothesise this recommendation will have the following impact:

- **Short term:** Reduced overall time spent recording, duplication of recording tasks and risk of misinterpretation of children's and families' experiences.
- **Medium term:** More time spent on professional development, engaging with children and families, and case analysis

User insights and challenges this recommendation responds to:

Social workers find it difficult to update case records in a timely manner, which has an impact on the accuracy of recorded information.

Care-experienced young people, parents and carers do not feel that case records are representative of their experiences.

Service Concept: Embed mobile recording & automatic transcription to capture the voices of children & families

We tested Social Worker's perceptions of recording functionality to help them capture the voices of children and families

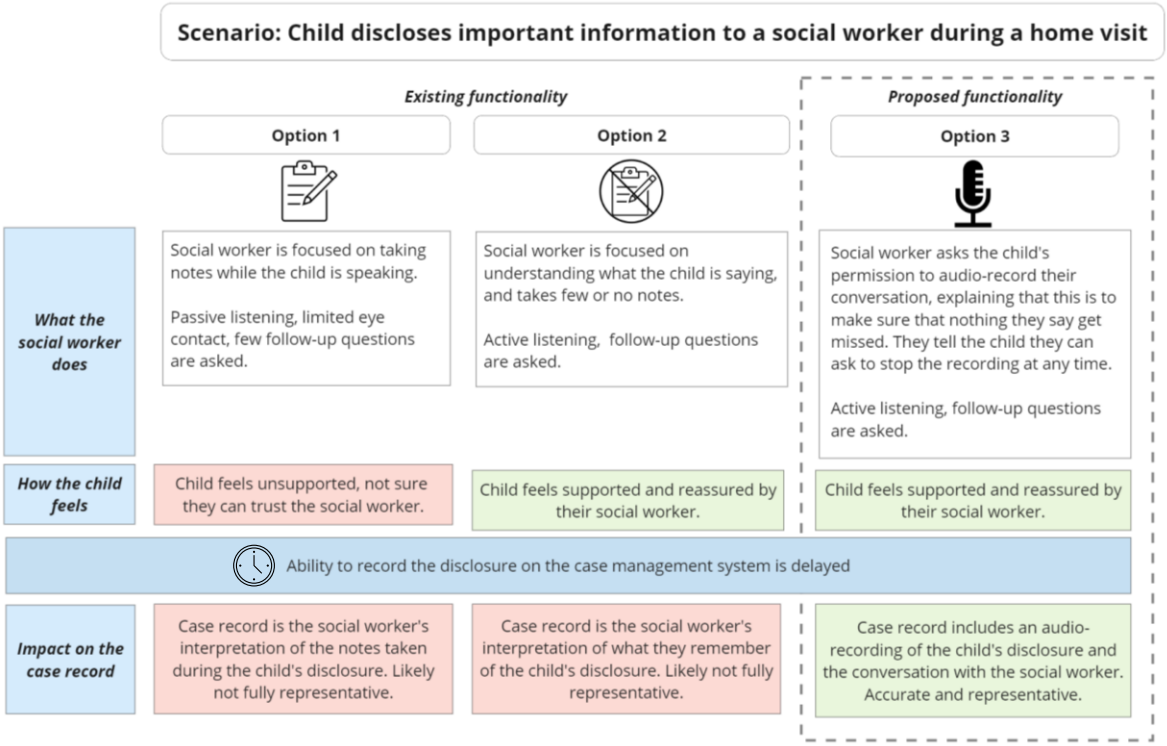
Service Concept: Embed mobile recording and automatic transcription to capture the voices of children & families

Enable social workers to record interactions with children or parents and carers that can be automatically transcribed when uploaded to the case management system.

Social workers offer voice recording during interactions with parents, carers and/or children. If accepted, standardised consent procedures are followed.

Recordings are captured and automatically transcribed upon upload to the case management system. Social workers may annotate transcriptions to support their analysis.

Figure 3. Potential implications of existing and proposed recording options during in-person interactions



Social workers welcome new recording functions that support their work, but want to use these with guidance

Service Concept: Embed mobile recording and automatic transcription to capture the voices of children & families

Social workers believe mobile recording will enable social workers to build trust with children and families.
It would allow for direct capture of their voices and allow for more natural conversation. However, some are concerned that that recordings would make families more nervous and self-conscious, presenting a barrier to natural conversation.

Social workers feel recording and transcription would support better analysis and decision-making
By separating analysis of a situation from recording the 'play-by-play' of what happened and what was said, the risk of information being missed is lower. Social workers feel they could strengthen their analysis by referencing specific quotes captured in the recording.

Social workers would benefit from guidance around when to and how to use recordings
Some social workers feel this approach would have a greater impact when used in a more structured scenario like a meeting, while others feel it would be more useful for case note recording, which tends to be less structured. Guidance and trainings are needed to support social workers to use recordings effectively and ethically.

"'"We could miss a key piece of information that then gets misinterpreted or we haven't had time to record. This would help us make more pertinent decisions, more decisions that are actually meeting the need of the family as we've actually captured everything they or the professional has told us as we make our recommendations for the next steps."

Recommendation 3: Enable different user groups to extract information required for decision-making

↳ **Service Concept: Implement an advanced search functionality**

Our third recommendation centres the need for improved findability to reduce effort and increase accuracy

Recommendation 3: Enable different user groups to extract information required for decision-making

Expected impact:
Refer to Figure 1 on page 29

We hypothesise this recommendation will have the following impact:

Short term:
- Reduced **social worker time** spent searching for previously recorded information pertinent to the recording of new information or completing new workflows, reducing overall recording time
- Reduced **team manager time** spent searching records to inform case analysis during supervision meetings with social workers
- Reduced **manager time** spent searching records to respond to external queries

Medium term:
- More social worker time allocated to engagement with children & families, case analysis, and professional development
- More time during supervision meetings between social workers and team managers dedicated to professional development and wellbeing

User insights and challenges this recommendation responds to:

Social workers can find it difficult to locate important information in a case record.

Difficulty locating information about a case can impact the accuracy of newer records and take up valuable time in supervision meetings with team managers.

Service Concept: Implement an advanced search functionality

We asked social workers to give their opinions on how enhanced search functionality for case files might work

Service Concept: Implement an advanced search functionality

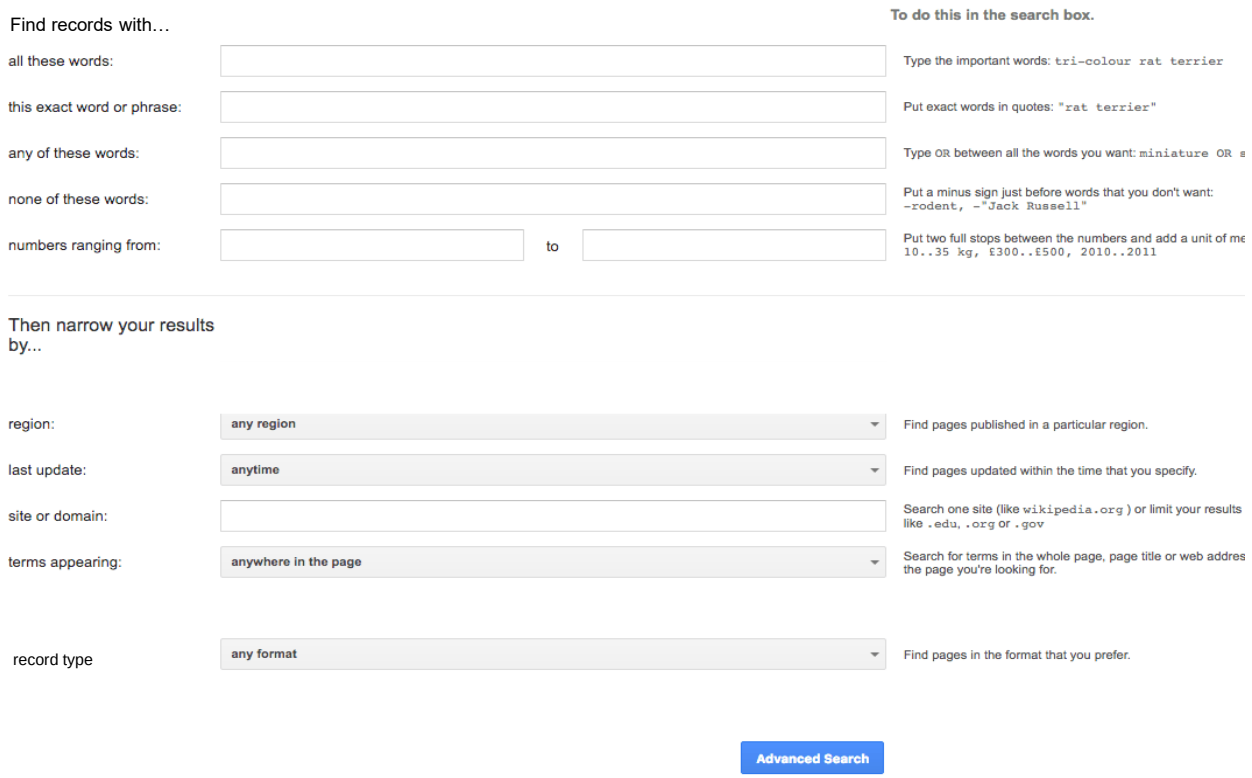
Implement an item-based search functionality with filtering capability that searches content within all record types.

The functionality would allow social workers to:

- Search by words, phrases and themes
- Define inclusions and exclusions
- Specify the type of record, and when it was created and updated

Search results should be organised by where and how the information was recorded (e.g case note, form, etc.), as well as when it was created or updated, to enable further filtering.

Figure 4. Example of the proposed functionality, based on Google's Advanced Search



Social workers felt that this approach would be very useful, particularly for finding information contained within uploaded documents

Service Concept: Implement an advanced search functionality

Social workers feel very positively about a search functionality, suggesting that it would substantially reduce the time spent recording and retrieving information.

Social workers variously described this approach as a '*gamechanger*'. One practitioner reflected that this functionality would be particularly useful for those in the Duty and Advice team, as they need to rapidly search for information during a triage to move the case along to the next right step.

Social workers suggested that search functionality would enable them to refer back to important information held in uploaded documents.

Since standalone documents are not currently uploaded to the system in a standardised way, this approach would make it easier for social workers to refer back to these documents, ensuring that information held within is taken into consideration during case analysis and decision-making.

Social workers believe this approach would support them to respond to external queries faster.

This could help social workers to quickly answer questions asked in court or to inform policework. For example, if a practitioner needs to find out how many times a home visit has occurred, the search results would output the number of home visit notes.

> *"This would be a gamechanger and would benefit everyone at all levels of the organisation who ever go into the case management system"*

Recommendation 4: Improve reliability of pre-population to reduce double work

- **Service Concept: Communicate to social workers when information is pre-populated**

Our fourth recommendation seeks to reduce time spent checking pre-populated information and duplications

Recommendation 4: Improve reliability of pre-population to reduce double work

Expected impact:
Refer to Figure 1 on page 29

We hypothesise this recommendation will have the following impact:

- **Short term impact:** Better access to previously recorded information pertinent to both new recording as well as case analysis and decision-making. Reduced cognitive load associated with searching for information.
- **Medium term impact:** Improved accuracy of records, increased efficiency of evidence-informed case analysis and decision-making.

User insights and challenges this recommendation responds to:

Social workers spend a lot of time searching old forms and case notes to copy and paste information.

The case management system's existing pre-population function sometimes pulls incorrect or outdated information into workflows.

Service Concept: Communicate to social workers when information is pre-populated

We tested an approach towards highlighting pre-populated content to understand Social Worker's views

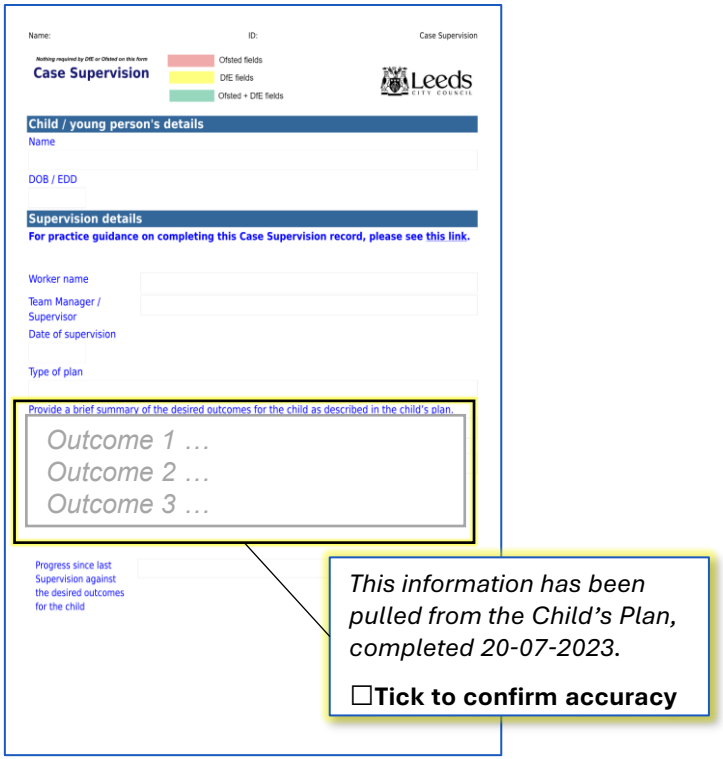
Service Concept: Communicate to social workers when information is pre-populated

Pre-populated fields stand out visually in the case-record, informing social workers about the source of the information and prompting verification.

The existing pre-population function is optimized so that:

- More fields are pre-populated
- Incorrect pre-populated fields are amended
- Pre-populated fields are visually flagged along with an 'information box' detailing the source of the information and when it was originally captured (see figure 5)
- Users are prompted to verify the accuracy of pre-populated fields via a tick box
- Social workers can correct pre-populated fields by going back into the records

Figure 5. Example of the how pre-populated fields would stand out in a Case Supervision form



While social workers were interested in this idea they were also worried about whether this would increase recording burden

Service Concept: Communicate to social workers when information is pre-populated

Social workers believe that improved pre-population would improve the accuracy of case records.
This would especially improve accuracy of records authored by newly qualified social workers who are more likely to assume that any pre-populated information is correct.

Social workers anticipate that this approach would be most beneficial to social workers in area and specialist teams.
Social workers from the Duty and Advice teams do not feel this approach will have much impact on their work, as they are responsible for completing forms at the first point of contact a child has with the service and there is less opportunity for pre-population.

Social workers have some concerns that this approach may create new recording tasks and add to the recording burden.
Social workers caution that prompting verification of the accuracy of this pre-populated information could add to the total time spent recording. The system should only require verification of fields that are particularly time-sensitive, so that social workers do not end up verifying every piece of pre-populated data.

Social workers have also fed back that information boxes should be visible, while also not interfering with other recording tasks.

Recommendation 5: Make information shared with Central Government stand out at the point of capture

- **Service Concept: Visually flag fields in the case record that are included in statutory returns**

Our fifth recommendation focuses on improving data quality for those fields that are shared with Central Government

Recommendation 5: Make information shared with Central Government stand out at the point of capture

Expected impact:
Refer to Figure 1 on page 29

We hypothesise this recommendation will have the following impact:

- **Short term:** Improved awareness of what data is shared with Central Government and for what purpose, reducing 'defensive recording'. Increased motivation to ensure those fields are completed accurately, reducing time spent retrospectively recording information.
- **Medium term:** Improved quality of data that is aggregated and shared with Central Government by the local reporting team, resulting in reduced requests for corrections/clarifications to social workers, reducing overall time spent recording.

User insights and challenges this recommendation responds to:

Statutory returns comprise a slim proportion of all information collected in the Child in Need and Child Protection Plan pathways – but social workers do not know which fields are collated for statutory returns, leading to 'defensive recording'.

The reporting team asks social workers to address data completeness and data quality issues on a monthly basis, adding to the recording burden.

Service Concept: Visually flag fields in the case record that are included in statutory returns

This service concept helped us to understand Social Worker's views on prompts about data used for Central Government returns

Service Concept: Visually flag fields in the case record that are included in statutory returns

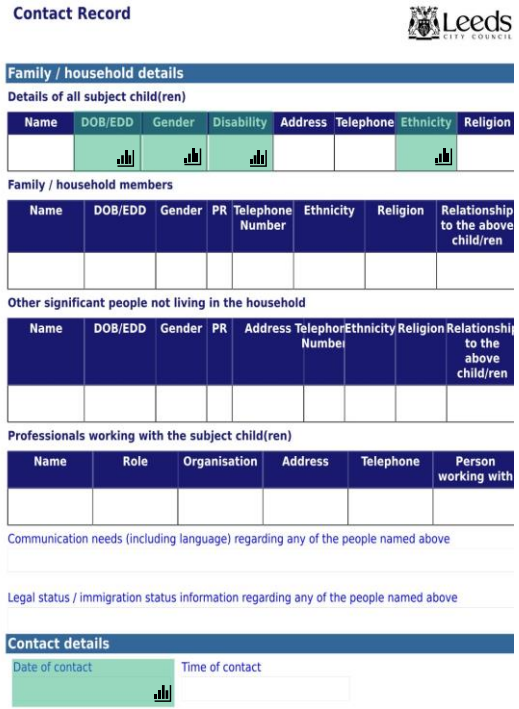
Fields that are included in statutory returns to the DfE or Ofsted are visually flagged as such on the case management system.

Fields in workflows as well as the system architecture are highlighted and denoted with a small icon that social workers easily associate with statutory returns.

By hovering over the icon, less experienced social workers can see an information box explaining which reports this piece of data is included in, and where they are sent.

Comprehensive induction and periodic training for frontline social workers (including team managers) around statutory returns and the data they require.

Figure 5. Example of the how statutory fields on the Contact Record would stand out to social workers



This is sent to the DfE as part of the CIN return. Please ensure this is recorded accurately and is up to date.

Social workers would not prioritise this data for a number of reasons and were uncertain if this would meaningfully improve data quality

Service Concept: Visually flag fields in the case record that are included in statutory returns

Social workers shared that visual flags would help them to understand why fields are important to fill in, and where they are sent.

Social workers suggest that mandatory fields should require filling in before they can move onto the next task.
A mechanism was suggested to prevent social workers from moving on to the next task or saving their work if those fields are left blank.

Social workers report that validating whether a mandatory field has been completed is easier for some types of data than others, and therefore this approach may not solve all data quality problems.
While some mandatory fields accept a certain information type, such as dates, they can be validated by the system; but not all mandatory fields can be validated if the information entered cannot be corroborated.

Social workers report that they will continue to prioritise capturing the voice of the child over individual required data items.
This is the case especially when the required information is difficult and time-consuming to track down. Even with improved understanding of which information is required for returns and why, improved data quality at the point of capture will likely only be achieved if implemented alongside approaches that will support more efficient information retrieval.

Recommendation 6: Reduce time spent manipulating data to produce analysis

Service Concept: Improve the native reporting functionality to meet the needs of team managers

Our final recommendation

Recommendation 6: Reduce time spent manipulating data to produce analysis

Expected impact:
Refer to Figure 1 on page 29

We hypothesise this recommendation will have the following impact:

- **Short term impact:** more efficient access to up-to-date metrics related to social worker performance, enabling managers to better support social workers in their teams in a timely manner.
- **Medium term impact:** social workers are better supported by their managers in terms of caseloads, case analysis, professional development and wellbeing.

User insights and challenges this recommendation responds to:

Team managers and senior social workers currently use bespoke tools and reports created by the performance and reporting teams to support service operations of their team.

The CMS itself does not highlight in an accessible way what has and what has not been completed regarding statutory function, for example visit records, or meetings. While there is a report library for granular operational information, visualisations presenting service dashboards and supporting detail are often produced weekly or monthly resulting in information that is less useful to team managers for managing their team's activities day to day.

As such Team Managers rely on reports from the performance and reporting team which can cause delays.

Team managers and senior social workers highly value the reports generated by the performance and reporting teams in Leeds.

Service Concept: Improve the native reporting functionality to meet the needs of team managers

Recommendation 6: Reduce time spend manipulating data to produce analysis

Service Concept: Improve the native reporting functionality to meet the needs of team managers

A live dashboard view of key business intelligence indicators that enables team managers to have greater visibility of what is happening within a team and enable future planning.

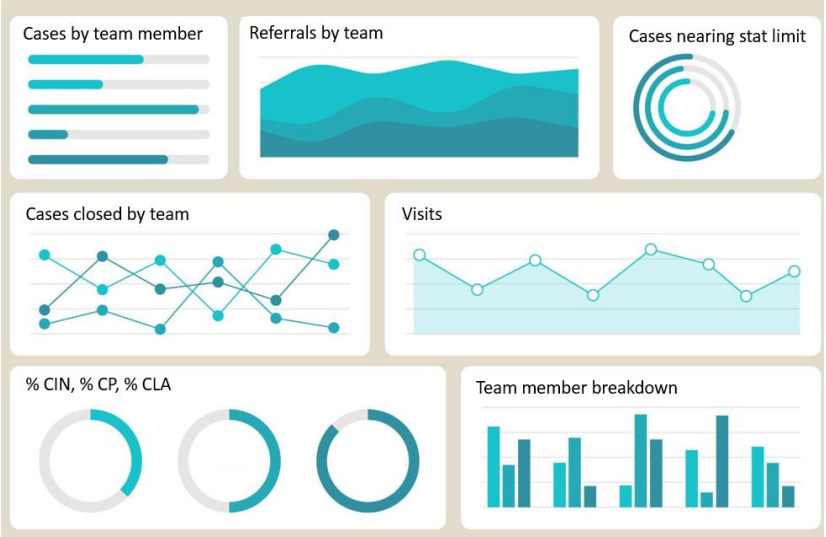
To develop the dashboard, engagement with team managers would be undertaken to identify:

- The key indicators that are most helpful to them when supporting their social workers
- How the indicators should be presented to them
- What comparisons they are interested in
- How the indicators should be aggregated or filtered

The dashboard should include functionality to:

- Alert users to upcoming visits and assessment reviews required to avoid missing deadlines
- Provide quick access to supervision meeting paperwork

Figure 6. Visual representation of the types of indicators that could be included in the proposed dashboard.



Recommendation 6: Reduce time spent manipulating data to produce analysis

Service Concept: Improve the native reporting functionality to meet the needs of team managers

Team managers believe this would improve the appropriateness of the support they offer to social workers.
Team managers have shared that although they greatly appreciate the reports the local performance and reporting teams develop for them, these are always somewhat out of date. A live dashboard would enable team managers to have access to updated, accurate data so they can support their teams accordingly.

Team managers feel that a dashboard that allows users to apply custom filters would make it easier to make sense of performance data.

Flagging upcoming deadlines on the dashboard is anticipated to be significantly helpful to team managers.
Some have used similar functionality in other local authorities and found that this prevents them from spending significant time searching individual case records.

The benefits of dashboards are anticipated to be larger for local authorities who do not have as strong performance and reporting teams.
The local performance and reporting teams in Leeds City Council respond to team managers' data requests as soon as possible. However, not all local authorities benefit from this resource.

"If we actually could access accurate live information within the system, that would be much more accurate than having to go through an extra layer of someone pulling it off the system for us"

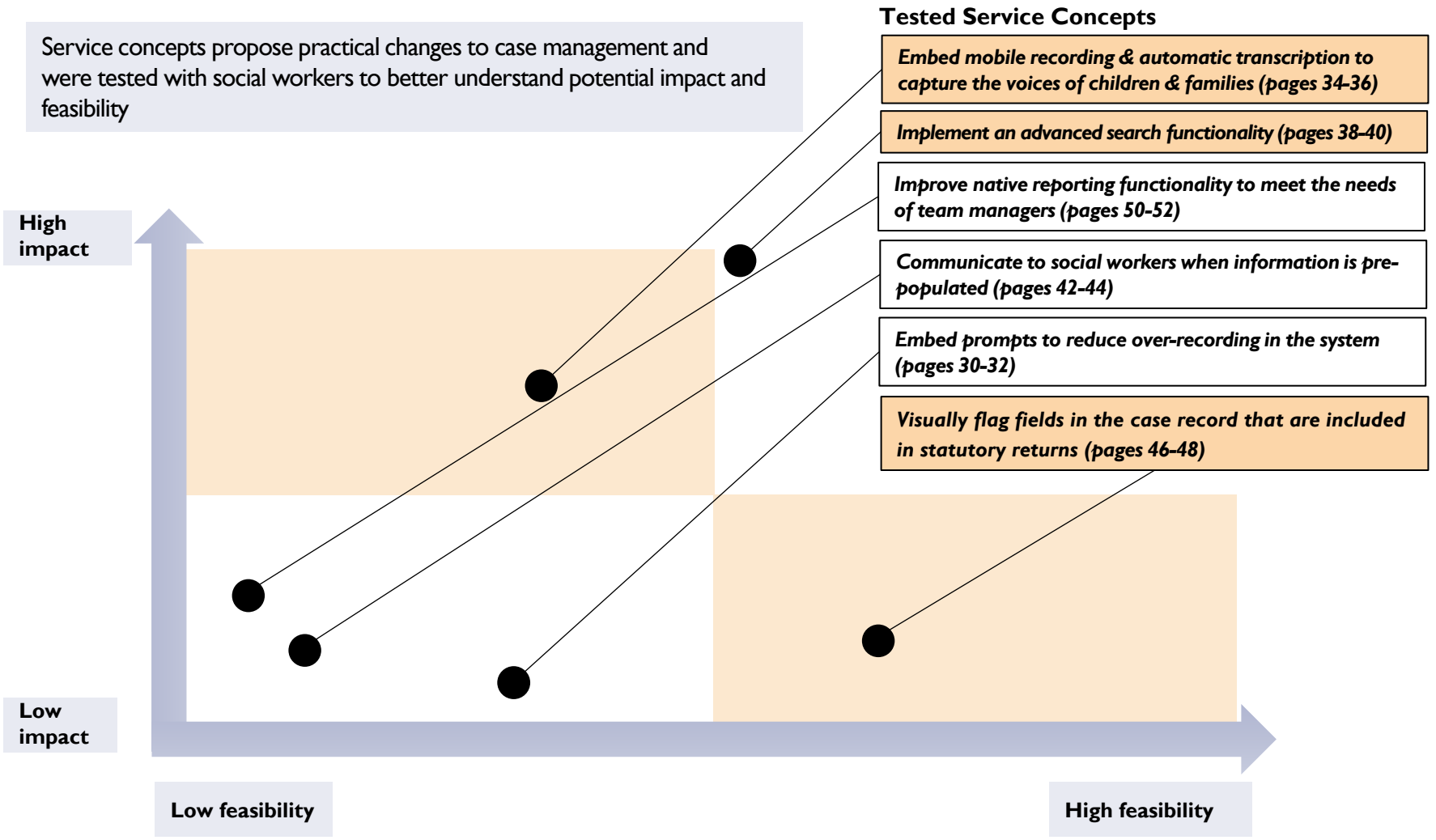
"It would be great if there was a filter format on it to break that information down and there wasn't five million things in a line, and you have to scroll all the way over to dates just to find out it's out of date."

6. Implementation

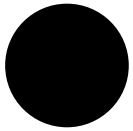
In this section, we present considerations for further testing, development and implementation of three service concepts considered to have highest impact and feasibility

The impact and feasibility matrix identifies service concepts that are most likely to reduce recording burden

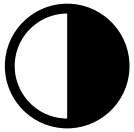
Service concepts propose practical changes to case management and were tested with social workers to better understand potential impact and feasibility



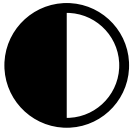
Three of the six tested service concepts are expected to have high impact and/or high feasibility of implementation.



High impact, high feasibility:
Implement an advanced search functionality



High impact, low feasibility:
Embed mobile recording & automatic transcription to capture the voices of children & families



High feasibility, low impact:
Make information in statutory returns stand out at the point of capture

Additional user engagement and testing is required to fully develop any of the six service concepts included in this report into implementable solutions. This is required to fully meet the needs of all social workers involved in information capture, information retrieval and business intelligence.

The 'Routes to Embed Concepts' suggest how to approach the implementation and scale-up of the three prioritised service concepts, from an intervention level to a national, or systemic level.

Implementing the mobile recording service concept would require more research and testing at the intervention level

Service Concept: Embed mobile recording and automatic transcription to capture the voices of children & families

Refer to pages 34-36 for detail

Routes to Embed Concepts

How can we embed this service concept in practice?

Intervention Level

Systemic level

Collaborate with one local authority as a 'testbed' for an intervention

The research undertaken as part of this work provides a good understanding of perceptions of this approach within Leeds CC

Now

Collaborate with a consortium of authorities to prototype approaches

Before understanding the usefulness of this approach, it should be tested with more Local Authorities to validate the findings. Participating organisations should include those with differences in practice, software and technical approaches, and differences in Ofsted inspection grade

Now

Collaborate with providers to embed user-centred design principles in case management products

Software providers have already made efforts to incorporate this kind of functionality into their offer. Collaboration would help to understand and test what is possible, feasible and useful to social workers.

Next

Collaborate with the Department for Education to embed user-centred design principles in standards or patterns for providers

Develop and share open standards and patterns for case management systems that can be accessed by Local Authorities and providers to guide local modifications

Later

Implementing the advanced search service concept would require more research and testing at the intervention and systemic levels

Service Concept: Implement an advanced search functionality
Refer to pages 38-40 for detail

Routes to Embed Concepts
How can we embed this service concept in practice?

Intervention Level

Systemic level

Collaborate with one local authority as a 'testbed' for an intervention

The research undertaken as part of this work provides a good understanding of perceptions of this concept within Leeds CC. Further research would help to identify more detailed specification of this functionality so that it fully meets the needs of all users.

Now

Collaborate with a consortium of authorities to prototype approaches

This concept should be further tested with more Local Authorities to validate the findings and uncover additional user needs. Participating organisations should include those with differences in information management practices, software and technical approaches to ensure compatibility of the proposed functionality.

Next

Collaborate with providers to embed user-centred design principles in case management products

Existing DfE initiatives (Project 2b) are currently working with software providers to develop a similar intervention. Collaboration across multiple local authorities is recommended to ensure user needs are met.

Now

Collaborate with the Department for Education to embed user-centred design principles in standards or patterns for providers

Once tested regionally, incorporate this concept into any open standards and patterns for case management systems that can be accessed by Local Authorities and providers to guide local modifications.

Later

Implementing the statutory information service concept would require more research and testing at the intervention and systemic levels

Service Concept: Make information on statutory returns stand out at the point of capture

Refer to pages 46-48 for detail

Routes to Embed Concepts

How can we embed this service concept in practice?

Intervention Level

Systemic level

Collaborate with one local authority as a 'testbed' for an intervention

Further research with a single Local Authority would help to understand the trade-offs between improvements in recording of data by social workers at point of capture, and the overall data quality improvements arising from this.

Now

Collaborate with a consortium of authorities to prototype approaches

Before understanding the usefulness of this approach, it should be tested with more Local Authorities to validate the findings. Participating organisations should include those with differences in practice, software and technical approaches, and differences in Ofsted inspection grade

Later

Collaborate with providers to embed user-centred design principles in case management products

Software providers have already made efforts to incorporate this kind of functionality into their offer. Collaborating with them to understand what has been tried, and its efficacy, would support this work

Later

Collaborate with the Department for Education to embed user-centred design principles in standards or patterns for providers

This service concept may dovetail with existing programmes currently underway for example the CSC Data Strategy and Metrics Team at DfE who are leading on more automated and timely data collections.

Next

7. Final remarks

In this section, we outline some final considerations about this work and its findings.

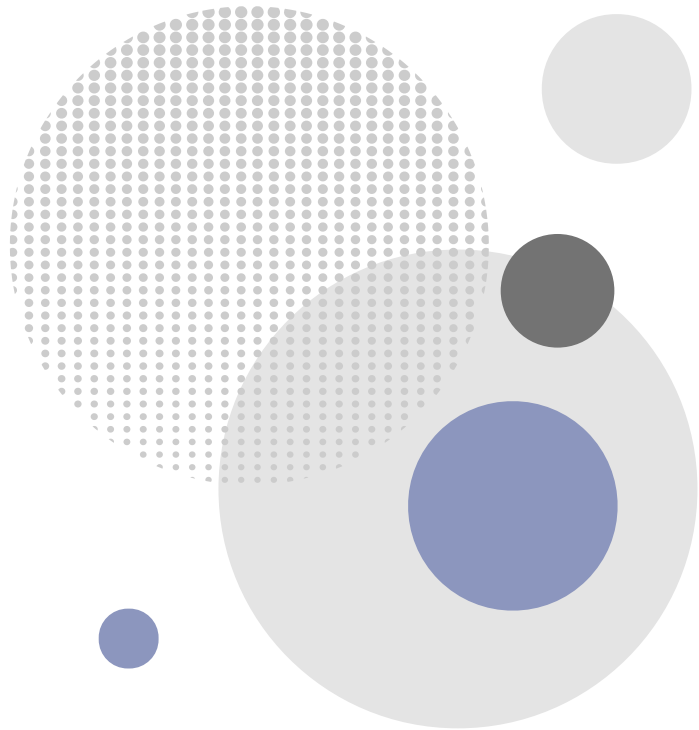
To ensure the applicability and usefulness of the recommendations outlined within this report, they should be tested more widely with those working in the sector

The recommendations in this report only respond to the research undertaken with colleagues at Leeds City Council. This is a complex area of work and makes up one small jigsaw piece of the overall picture of need within the sector. Where possible, we have referred to existing programmes of work that overlap with the recommendations made within this report.

The service concepts shared are for illustration purposes and do not represent an exhaustive list of potential ways to address the challenges identified within this research. Rather, they have been used to indicate the issues which matter most to social workers and Children's Social Care teams in Leeds CC which have, in turn, informed the recommendations outlined.

Other Local Authorities, social workers, leaders, software suppliers, those in receipt of care and others engaged in the delivery of social care service improvement will have additional ideas, thoughts, and opinions about how best to address these challenges and any further research or piloting should build on this work by testing these ideas more widely to develop a robust view of their efficacy.

Show and tell sessions, facilitated by DfE and attended by members of the community interested in making improvements in this space, have shown that there is a wealth of knowledge and experience that can and should be used in the design of improvements. We have also identified a particular interest in how emerging technologies may be brought to bear on the challenges we have outlined.

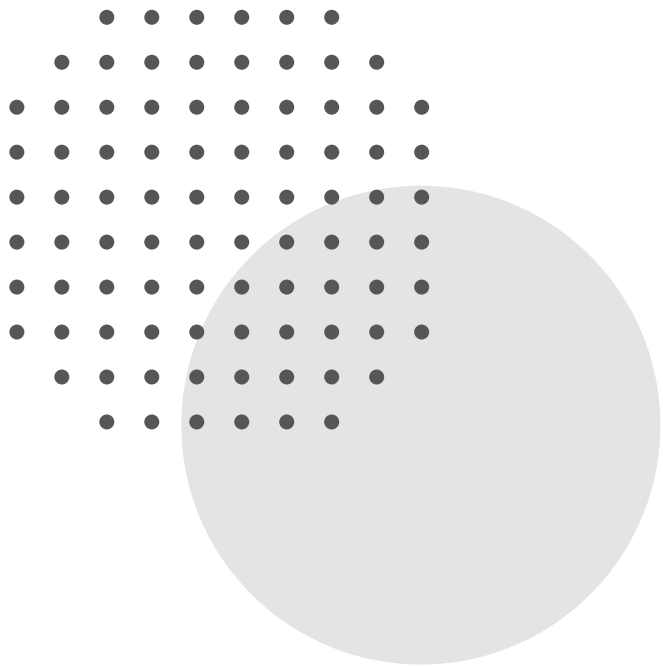


Other Local Authorities are likely to experience the issues outlined here differently depending on their service and practice

It is important to note that in 2022 Leeds Children's services were graded Outstanding by Ofsted.

The link between service and practice improvement and CMS systems in use by Local Authorities should be acknowledged. Where Local Authorities are required to make improvements to practice, CMS systems can offer a useful and effective way to manage and enforce change that improves practice, for example by using mandatory fields or enforcing workflows.

For Local Authorities that have made progress in improving their services and practices or are graded 'Good', the rigidity of case management systems may become more of a hindrance than a safeguard. In these situations, the systems create a "user experience debt" by not evolving to meet the needs of social workers who require more flexibility.



8. Supporting documentation

The following documents provide additional context this report:

- User Research Report
- Lived Experience Results
- Preliminary Service Concepts Note
- Refined Service Concepts Note

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