

Rough Guide to Planning & Review



Introduction

The *Rough Guide to Planning and Review* is one of a series of practice guides produced by Hartlepool and Stockton-On-Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSSCP) which have been designed to be read and used by the range of practitioners and professionals working across children's services in the borough.

All of the *Rough Guides* have been developed to support the valuable work that is carried out with children and young people¹ and families by identifying the key elements which underpin good practice and incorporating significant messages from research.

It should be noted that *Rough Guide to Planning and Review* does not replace, provide the detail of or interpret legislation, policy, frameworks and procedures, which are all subject to change, but focuses more on the 'how to', offering advice, suggesting ideas and providing signposts to sources of information and further reading.

Planning happens at many different levels, both in and across organisations. This *Rough Guide* focuses on planning at the front line, on those plans practitioners develop for individual children following assessment of need (though the key principles and processes will be applicable to planning at other levels).

Overview of the planning and review process

Planning and review are the processes which follow assessment of need and involve a number of key elements, an overview of which is presented in fig.1 below:

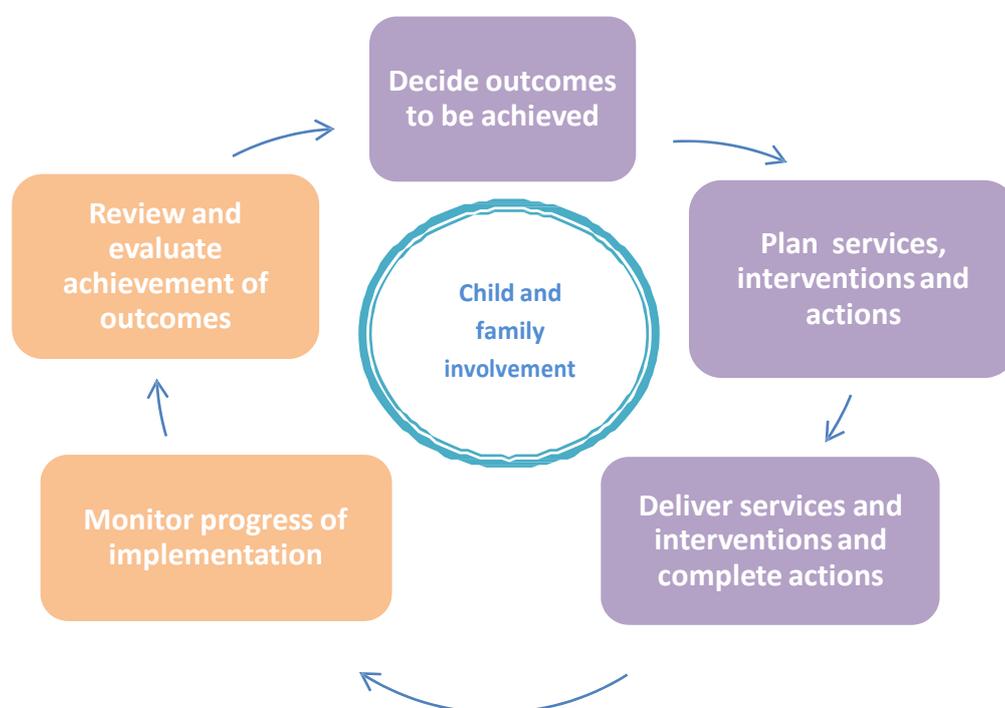


Fig.1

¹ To avoid repetition in subsequent sections, child or children are the terms used to refer to children and young people.

What is planning?

In the simplest terms, planning refers to the process of deciding what needs to be done, how it needs to be done, when it needs to be done, by whom it needs to be done, and what resources or inputs are needed to do it. Following assessment of need, there should be a clear and comprehensive understanding of a child's unmet needs. Planning is the next stage which focuses practitioners on what needs to be done to address those unmet needs and improve the child's outcomes (See *Rough Guide to Outcomes*).

Planning is a process which:

- Specifies the results or outcomes to be achieved
- Provides a clear understanding of what practitioners need to do in order to achieve improved outcomes for a child
- Guides practitioners in prioritising and making decisions
- Provides a coherent guide and schedule for day-to-day implementation

What does planning involve?

Generally, planning involves the following:

- **Deciding who should be involved in developing the plan:** Who should participate? How will they participate? As a general rule, participants should include those people who will be impacted by the plan (the child and parents: see *Rough Guide to Participation*) and those people who can impact on the plan and help achieve the aimed for results
- **Deciding the results or outcomes to be achieved:** Planning should always start with the desired outcomes. (See *Rough Guide to Outcomes*.) Outcomes are what interventions should lead to. Outcomes are the reason why services, interventions and actions are planned. Deciding outcomes involves developing the statements of the end results being aimed for which should be based on the findings and conclusions of the assessment in relation to the child's unmet needs. You will also need to agree how you will know outcomes have been achieved, that is, agree the outcome indicators, and specify the information which will need to be collected in relation to the indicators
- **Prioritising outcomes:** Not all outcomes will be of equal priority so you will need, with the child, parents and other involved practitioners, to prioritise, focusing initially on achieving those which are the most urgent in relation to the child's current situation. As it's unlikely you will be able to do everything at once, prioritising outcomes also helps with scheduling actions and interventions

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Planning without action is futile; action without planning is fatal”.
Source unknown

- **Agreeing the actions that need to be taken to achieve the desired results:** This means, for each outcome, listing the steps and actions necessary to achieve the outcome. Before you can detail the steps or actions, you will need to reach agreement with others involved (the child, the parents, and other practitioners) about what will work to achieve the desired result. An easy way to do this is to brainstorm possible options, write them up on a flip chart, and then decide which is most appropriate (based on evidence of what works) or makes the most sense. You will then have a general idea of how you are going to get the required results. Next you need to break the work involved down into specific steps or activities and then to sequence the actions or steps in a logical order

- **Clarifying any inputs or resources needed to complete the actions:** When actions have been agreed it should then be possible to identify any additional resources which will be needed. These are usually:
 - Finances
 - People
 - Materials or equipment
 - Transport

You should also identify who will be responsible for obtaining the resources and by when

- **Deciding timescales:** You should now be in a position to decide by when an activity must begin and by when it must be completed. Where practitioners are reasonably familiar with how long certain tasks usually take, you can be fairly definite about time needed. Where they are less familiar, allow for some flexibility. Some tasks may be dependent on the completion of other tasks which will need to be considered when scheduling and deciding timescales. Once you have worked out how long each activity is likely to take and scheduled each activity roughly into a period of time, you need to put all your activities together and make sure that there are no significant clashes

- **Deciding who will be responsible:** Unless responsibility for carrying out an activity is specifically allocated, it is very likely that nothing will happen. With responsibility must go some degree of authority. For example, it is no use saying that someone is responsible for putting together a report by a certain date unless she or he has the authority to insist that contributors give him/her their contributions by a certain date. You can only hold someone accountable if they have both responsibility and authority to get the job done. In deciding who should be responsible for a particular activity, you may need to take the following into account:
 - The experience, skills, capabilities, confidence needed to do the task
 - Who has time to do the task when it needs to be done
 - The willingness of someone to do a job

In your action planning process, you need to establish who is responsible for getting a task done, but this doesn't necessarily mean that other people won't also be involved. At the planning meeting, you may need to spell out exactly what this means in more detail.

- **Deciding the information which will be needed to monitor the plan and check progress:** This will involve asking and answering the following questions:
 - What sort of information will we need?
 - How can it be collected?
 - Who will collect it?
 - Who will analyse it?
- **Implementation:** This means transforming a plan into action, bringing the plan to life. It means taking steps to ensure that desired outcomes are actually achieved by carrying out planned actions. All the planning in the world is worth nothing if there is no implementation. However, there is no magic formula to ensure that implementation takes place. Robust and rigorous planning practice should ensure that everyone involved is absolutely clear about what is expected of them in relation to implementation. Regular monitoring should identify any problems in implementing the plan which will then need to be addressed
- **Collecting information throughout implementation:** There is no point in just collecting information randomly. Planning involves deciding from the outset what information will be needed for monitoring and reviewing progress. You should focus your information collection process around the questions you want answered about the progress of implementing the plan, and from a review perspective, the questions you will want answered about achievement of outcomes or results. When you do your planning, you need to identify the outcome indicators (See *Rough Guide to Outcomes*) around which information should be collected and information which will confirm that the plan is being implemented within agreed timescales or not. Usually, when you are looking for evidence that will show progress in implanting the plan, you need information that tells you how well you have done in terms of completing what you planned to do, when you planned to do it. This means looking at deadlines and outputs regularly so that you can take corrective action. You also need to monitor progress towards achieving outcomes and begin to gather the information in relation to the outcome indicators, and at the progress indicators you developed for those

Remember.....



- Planning is only useful if people are committed to implementation.
- Implementation of a plan is a joint effort between the practitioners involved and the child and family.

Principles underpinning effective plans

Good planning requires a methodical and robust approach to be able to clearly define the steps that will lead to the achievement of desired outcomes. The process should reflect the following principles:

- **It is comprehensive** – it addresses unmet needs and considers all options
- **It is efficient** – the process of planning should be timely to avoid delays in implementation
- **It is inclusive** – the children and parents affected by the plan have opportunities to be involved
- **It is integrated** – all involved agencies and practitioners collaborate and contribute
- **It is logical** – each step leads to the next; actions, interventions and services are clearly linked to outcomes
- **It is transparent** – everybody involved understands the outcomes the plan aims to achieve and the actions to achieve those outcomes

Remember.....



Plans are only beneficial if they are realistic and achievable.

What makes a good plan?

It is fit for purpose and complete

We can't look at plans as being generic, as all looking the same. One template or format won't fit all. Some plans will be more detailed than others. But all plans need to be complete, readable, clear, understandable, logical. Any plan must be able to accomplish the goal of achieving desired outcomes or results. It's entirely possible to have a well written, thoroughly researched and beautifully presented plan that's useless.

It is realistic. It can be implemented

The second measure of a good plan is realism. It has to be 'doable'. Yes, be creative and innovative but remember you won't get points for ideas and actions that cannot be implemented. For example, a brilliantly written, beautifully formatted and highly detailed plan which is based on 'blue sky thinking' is worthless. A plan that ignores a fatal flaw is not a good plan.

It is specific. You can track progress and results against the plan

Every plan should include specific tasks or actions, deadlines, dates. Every plan should be measurable. Ask yourself as you develop a plan: How will we know later if we followed the plan? How will we track progress and compare what we've done against the plan? How will we know if we are on plan or not? How will we know if we achieved the outcomes we set out to achieve? Good planning depends on being able to answer what, when, who, and so what.

It clearly defines responsibilities for implementation

When developing plans, accountability is vital. You have to be able to identify a single person who will be responsible for every significant task. A task that doesn't have an owner isn't likely to be implemented. You can easily go through a plan and check to see whether or not you can recognise a specific person responsible for implementation at every point.

It clearly identifies assumptions

An assumption is something we take for granted or presuppose. Any plan contains a number of assumptions, upon which actions and interventions and services are then agreed and scheduled, though these assumptions are often not explicitly stated or recognised or acknowledged. For example, when planning a dinner party we might assume that everyone likes meat or fish and plan the menu accordingly. But if this assumption isn't considered, it could have disastrous results if any dinner guests turn out to be vegetarian or have a food allergy. Recognising assumptions helps plans to be much more specific, and monitoring the assumptions that have been made makes it easier to make adjustments to the plan if circumstances change (rather than being blindsided and ultimately running the risk of having the plan fail). Good practice in planning identifies any assumptions and keeps them visible during the planning process (a simple way to do this is to record assumptions at the end of the plan). For example, you might make assumptions that grandparents will continue to provide support to the child in the ways that they previously have and decide interventions based on that support. You might make assumptions about involved services and practitioners eg that a voluntary organisation will continue to receive funding and therefore exist throughout the process of implementation. When planning additional support for a child in school, you might make assumptions that the child, parents and staff will be prepared to sustain attending earlier or later than normal school hours. Or we might develop a plan based on the assumption that a child is too young or too sick to be involved in decision making. Recording and regularly revisiting assumptions makes it easier to adjust the plan if those assumptions change.

It is communicated to the people who have to implement it and who are affected by it.

Good practice in planning ensures that the plan is communicated to everyone involved - to practitioners, professionals and to the child and parents. Plans in files or on a computer only work when it's a one-person organisation or project and nobody else has to know the plan. Good communication results in strong buy-in from those involved in implementing it and those affected by it, and additionally, communication improves clarity on expectations, roles and responsibilities. If people are expected to take responsibility for completing actions in the plan within specified timescales, this has to be communicated. Everyone needs to understand what is expected of them, everyone needs to understand the implications of not doing what was planned, everyone needs to understand that their actions are critical to the successful achievement of outcomes or results.

It motivates people and gains their commitment.

When everyone involved is focused on and understands that planned actions are about improving outcomes for a child, they are more likely to maintain their motivation and commitment to implementing the plan.

It is kept alive by monitoring and review.

No plan is good if it's static and inflexible. Planning is about steering and managing and checking. It involves a process of regular monitoring, review and adjustment when required.



- Avoid thinking of planning as just being the process of coming up with a list of tasks to be completed. Before developing a plan, you need to have a clear idea of the results you want for the child, the difference you want to have made as a result of your interventions and others' actions. It is not enough to do something because it seems like a good idea or because it's what you think you're expected to do or because you can't think of anything else to do. The 'doing' must be related to the aimed for results or outcomes.
- Be very specific in relation to the what, who and when. Some plans are so vague, abstract, and general they're meaningless to the people who have the responsibility for implementing them.

Monitoring a plan

Developing a plan is only half the battle. Implementing it is the other, and generally the tougher, half. And an important part of implementation is **monitoring** – taking a periodic look at 'how it's going'.

Monitoring the implementation of a plan is important for a number of reasons:

- It helps to assure that you and others are actually performing the action steps you intended, that you're 'on track'
- You've got to be sure the results or outcomes you achieve align with what you set out to accomplish, that you're accomplishing what you intended to accomplish. Monitoring helps here too
- It helps to identify any problems or unexpected occurrences in implementation
- It enables you to assess how likely it is that the next milestone will be completed on time
- It allows for adjustments and corrective action, for making the necessary changes along the way, to 'fine tune' the plan so that you are more likely to achieve the desired results
- It enables you to determine whether the resources you have available are sufficient and are being well used, whether the capacity you have is sufficient and appropriate, and whether you are actually doing what you planned to do

- It reminds everyone that the plan and its implementation is about making a difference to a child and helps keep everyone focused and committed
- It provides a useful base for a full review of the plan

There are many ways to monitor the implementation of a plan. Sometimes formal monitoring meetings, e.g. core groups, will be required; in other planning contexts, practitioners will just make informal inquiries to get information and feedback from everyone involved. But the focus will always be:

- How are we doing in relation to planned actions?
- Has everyone done what they were supposed to do?
- If not, why not?
- Are we on track?
- Did something unexpected come up?
- Do we need to make any adjustments to the plan?

Remember.....

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Plans are essential but they are not set in concrete, i.e. they are not totally fixed. If they are not working, or if the child's circumstances change, then plans need to change too. Monitoring and review are both tools which help practitioners know when plans are not working. Active monitoring is vital in making the plan a working tool that is regularly reviewed and modified as appropriate.

Reviewing a plan

Whilst monitoring is primarily focused on the progress of implementing the plan (checking actions have been completed and making any adjustments as appropriate), review is more concerned with effectiveness, that is, the difference made to the child as a result of implementing the plan. It looks at what you set out to do, at what you have accomplished, and how you accomplished it.

Review is therefore focused on results or outcomes and:

- Looking at what the plan set out to achieve – what difference did it want to make? What are the desired outcomes?
- Considering if the desired outcomes are still appropriate – have there been any significant changes in the child's situation which render the outcomes being aimed for no longer relevant?
- Assessing progress towards what the plan is aiming to achieve, i.e. progress towards achievement of outcomes, using information gathered in relation to the outcome indicators identified at the beginning of the planning process.

- Once the plan has been implemented, looking at what worked, what didn't work, were desired outcomes actually achieved, were there any unplanned outcomes?

Reviewing a plan involves analysing the information which has been collected throughout implementation in relation to the outcome indicators , i.e. the measures which were selected at the very beginning of the planning process to provide evidence of achievement of outcomes, to decide whether or not:

- The desired outcomes are still relevant
- There is evidence of progress towards achieving the desired outcomes
- The plan requires adjustment
- The desired outcomes have been achieved and the plan has been successful

This part of the process should always involve the child and parents, not least because some of the information will be in the form of child or parent reporting eg the child reporting how safe (s)he feels, how happy, how confident.

Remember

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Build information collection and analysis into the planning process.

*The Rough Guides
have been written
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