

The use of Placement Request Forms in commissioning placements for Looked After Children

ICHA practice development library number 1.

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ICHA Chair Steve Lord

This report shows the complexity of 'matching' a child to a placement. It cogently identifies that the task has been underestimated. The ICHA seeks a momentum for change. This is the first step of many steps, partners are sought to make a STEP UP for RCC.

Each child has a unique set of needs and circumstances. Decisions taken with and for them will have an impact on their future. Report after report gives the same message, good matching brings good outcomes, life-time long-term effectiveness comes through efficient matching. It is absolutely critical to source the right placement for each child – stability, continuity and felt security all follow from this first step.

The 1989 Children Act places an obligation on Local Authorities to 'provide looked after children with the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and improve their outcomes'.

A Placement Request Form should be a key tool used by all Local Authorities and providers. It should be a key aspect of Ofsted inspection to see they are 'fit for purpose'. The key questions are:-

- Has the Local Authority sought to make the 'most appropriate placement'?
- Has the provider ensured the needs of the young person match the Statement of Purpose, as do the other young people in placement?
- Did the Placement Request Form provide necessary unambiguous clarity of information?

Not only is there no national tool in existence which enables commissioners and providers to undertake this critical matching exercise, but the key information is not included in the Care Planning and Placement Regulations. Care, Placement, or Funding Panel forms all have different purposes. They are not adequate tools to use for placement matching.

This report is an investment by the ICHA to change things for the better. Providers and commissioners must work in partnership to develop a form that is genuinely 'fit for purpose'. There is a wealth of experience and knowledge in both fields that could be used to develop excellent tools for placement matching. Having made this initial investment, we look to the LGA and ADCS to fund CICADA for further development and we would be pleased to open discussions.

In association with

Introduction

In June 2013, the Independent Children's Homes Association (ICHA) commissioned CICADA Services to undertake research on the effectiveness of various tools used by Local Authorities across England, to source placements for individual Looked After Children.

There are in the region of 68,000 Looked After Children in England at any one time. The majority of these children are placed in foster care or in residential care provided by either a Local Authority or by an independent provider. The Children Act 1989 requires Local Authorities to place a child in the 'most appropriate placement' to meet their individual needs. This requirement was further strengthened by the Care Planning and Placement Regulations in 2010.

Sourcing the 'most appropriate placement' for a child is a complex and difficult task. Those responsible for doing so need to have a good knowledge of the market, an understanding of the child's needs and effective tools for the job. The importance of effective matching should not be underestimated. Since 2000, there has been a plethora of research reports which conclude that intelligent and proper placement matching is one of the most important things to get right, to enable a child to fulfil their potential and to secure best value for the tax payer.

Note: It should be acknowledged that the placement matching 'tool', that is subject of this report, is not recognised in any Government guidance or in legislation, despite one being used by almost every authority in England. It has no formal title and, for the purposes of this research, it has been referred to as the 'Placement Request Form (PRF)'. However, the form has various titles across the UK.

Current Arrangements

Local Authorities across England have developed a variety of arrangements for sourcing placements for looked after children. Although many procedures are similar, no two Local Authorities share the exact same methodology to match vulnerable children to care placements.

In the majority of cases, when it is decided that a child needs to be accommodated, information on the child is shared initially with the Local Authority's in-house Fostering Team to see if a suitable 'in-house' placement can be found. If an in-house fostering placement cannot be sourced, the Local Authority will need to consider their own residential provision or a placement in the independent sector. There is a growing criticism of the widespread practice of restricting initial placement searches to Local Authority 'in-house' provision. This limits the range and choice of placements that are available which, in turn, hampers the matching process and impacts negatively on the chances of delivering the best outcomes for a child.

In some authorities, permission to look at placement options in the independent sector is only granted, when Senior Managers are satisfied that a search for a suitable in-house placement has been exhausted. In order to consider an external placement, the Local Authority will need to seek expressions of interest from independent providers, who may have a suitable placement match for a child. To determine this, the Local Authority will provide pre-qualified providers with information on the child and the type of placement required, so that providers can consider whether or not their particular services can meet the child's individual needs.

There is no national tool in existence which enables commissioners and providers to undertake this critical matching exercise. The Care Plan is not a useful matching tool and the Placement Plan can only be completed after a placement has been identified. Despite this being an essential tool that is used by all Local Authorities and providers in arranging care placements, it is not recognised in legislation and there is no schedule in the Care Planning and Placement Regulations to outline the key information that must be provided in this document.

Historically Local Authorities did not have their own placement request forms. Instead, the practice was for a Social Worker to complete the provider's referral form. Following the growth of the independent sector, particularly since the 1980s, Social Workers had to spend colossal amounts of time filling out various different referral forms which were provided by numerous placement providers. It was not uncommon for one Social Worker to complete up to fifteen different and lengthy forms to 'apply' for a placement, duplicating the same information on the child to each provider, albeit in a different format.

These forms were usually completed by hand and then faxed back to placement providers, who would consider their ability to meet the child's needs. The process was incredibly time consuming and inefficient. Advances in technology have had a significant impact on the placement process. Since the turn of the Century, Social Worker and Placement Officers were allowed greater access to the internet and the use of email with external agencies became more popular. The introduction of Choice Protects in 2002, highlighted the importance of there being a choice of placements so that there was a greater chance of securing a placement which best met the child's needs. This led to the conclusion that, rather than contact providers one by one until a placement was identified, it would be preferable to send the same information out to a range of providers, allow them to consider the detail and make an offer of a service. The Local Authority could then choose the best suited match from the available options. (There is growing opinion that, to identify the right match and to make the best use of limited time, the Local Authority's own placement services should be included in this commissioning process.)

To facilitate the matching process, Local Authorities started to devise their own placement request forms to send to placement providers. Whilst there has undoubtedly been a lot of effort and resource that has gone into developing these forms, there is a concern that, on the whole, many forms are not (a) in an appropriate format to be 'fit for purpose' or (b) being adequately completed by Social Workers so to provide the essential information that providers need.

As there is no defined responsibility for this form, some independent placement providers have also developed their own PRF for Local Authorities to complete. Some providers demand this is completed where they feel the Local Authority's own PRF is not adequate and does not provide the information they require to consider whether or not they are able to offer a service. The result is that there now exists hundreds of different referral tools across the country, many of which are not of sufficient quality to enable a robust matching exercise to take place.

Whilst their primary purpose is to enable robust and sophisticated placement matching, these forms also serve a second essential purpose. They provide a specification for a service. The provider offers a service on the condition that the information submitted is true, current and accurate. The tool forms part of the legally binding contract documentation between the commissioner and provider.

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to gain an overview of arrangements across England and to report on practice, both positive and negative, that impacts on the way that services are commissioned for children, and the outcomes they ultimately deliver. It included:-

- An analysis of Placement Request Forms used by Local Authorities across England.
- A survey of Independent Children's Homes providers and Fostering Providers on the effectiveness of the tools used and their views on how these tools could be improved to enable better placement matching.

Analysis of Placement Request Forms used by Local Authorities across England

129 forms were received, following a Freedom of Information Request to 152 Local Authorities at the beginning of May 2013. All 129 forms were scanned as to get an understanding of their purpose, content and format. It is fair to say that some forms were extremely well compiled and contain helpful prompts and instructions for Social Workers completing them. However, there were some forms which omitted essential information or which were not presented in a helpful format. There were some forms which, arguably, are not fit for purpose.

No one form could be held up as the 'perfect' Placement Request Form and likewise, some of the forms that could be considered as 'poor examples' occasionally contained an impressive element within them.

As the forms are all incredibly different, an analysis was undertaken to highlight good practice and poor practice that was identified.

Good Practice

- Most forms sought the child's views on their future placement.
- Some forms were 'joint' placement request forms and had been devised in partnership by Health, Social Care and Education colleagues.
- There were some good examples of matching tables. These were completed by both the Social Worker and the placement provider. The needs were identified by the Social Worker in one column and the Provider responded by completing the adjacent column describing their ability to meet each of the identified needs. This allowed the Placing Officer to easily ascertain which providers met essential and / or desirable criteria.
- Some PRFs included a risk assessment; some versions enabled a provider's response to describe their contribution to managing the risk, in partnership with the Local Authority.
- The majority of Local Authorities ensured that PRFs were anonymised before sending these out to placement providers.
- Most forms were 'fit for purpose'. They had been devised solely for the purpose of finding a suitable placement and as such, their content and format focused on providing relevant information solely for the purpose of effective placement matching.
- Some commissioners had ensured that the factors that determined the essential components of a placement were helpfully listed at the start of the PRF. This allowed providers to quickly ascertain if they were able or not to consider offering a placement.
- Some forms provided clear contact details for clarification questions.

Poor practice

- A concerning number of forms included a requirement for the Social Worker to detail the child's name and address. Many also required the identifying details of family members. The PRF is the initial document that is shared in the placement sourcing process and, as it is shared with a large number of providers, the majority of which will not be delivering the service required. It is completely inappropriate and unlawful for this personal information to be shared at this initial stage. The survey undertaken confirmed that 86% of providers had received identifying information on a child, along with highly confidential and personal information. A discussion with the Information Commissioners Officer advised that the sharing of personal information at this stage is in breach of both the Data Protection Act (the principle that information is shared on a 'need to know' basis), and the Human Rights Act (Article 8 - Right to private and family life)
- Some forms neglected to seek the child's views on their future placement
- Although many forms contained essential and helpful information, some neglected to include the actual purpose of a required placement.
- A worrying number of forms are devised to satisfy the needs of placement panels. Their content and format are set out in such a way that it enables evidence to be presented to justify the case for an independent placement. Once a funding panel has considered this information and authorised a placement search, this same form is then forwarded to placement providers. Whilst it certainly contains some helpful information on the child, these forms do not ideally serve their intended purpose. It is cumbersome for placement providers to sift through the form for relevant information and some important information is omitted.
- A number of forms were created to meet a multitude of needs. For example, one form served as a request for care proceedings, a Legal Planning meeting and accommodation and was also the form sent to placement providers. As the form is devised to serve a multitude of needs, placement providers are not the original intended audience and as such, the form may lack the relevant information to make a good placement match.
- Some forms were not laid out in a helpful way that enabled critical information to be detailed at the beginning of the form. One example being a 10 page form that asked for 'access requirements' on the final page. This meant that providers would have to read through the entire detailed request before realising that the child may require an adapted environment. If this had been made apparent on the first few pages, it would save valuable time.
- A disappointingly low number of forms contained a section for the Social Worker to enter information about a child's strengths and positive attributes.
- There were limited examples of forms that captured risk management effectively.
- Some forms did not seek the child's views on what they wanted from a future placement.
- On most forms it is not easy to see that the views of parents, connected people and other professionals could be well captured.
- Some forms did not ask for the author to be identified, which made it difficult for Providers when seeking clarification on some of the information.

Survey of Independent Providers

In May & June, consultation was held with a number of providers regarding their experience of placement request forms. This included some discussion over the telephone or face to face. 56 Independent providers also completed an online survey, which sought their views on the strategies and tools that Local Authorities have for commissioning individual placements.

The results of this survey were as follows:-

Q1. What are your views on the general quality of information that is provided about a child when a Local Authority is seeking a placement?

Excellent	0%
Good	8%
Fair	50%
Poor	42%
Extremely Poor	0%

Comments from providers:

- Local Authorities vary greatly on the level of information received. They are sometimes selective on info - especially if it is an emergency placement.
- None are good or outstanding. Some are adequate. Most are poor.
- This depends solely on the Local Authority - some provide very standard content which is often missing vital information. We deal with the East of the country and the best we receive is from County Council, that sends out a detailed email with the referral which gives us important detail on behaviour, location, needs and placement requirements. Another also provides a good quality of information. (Council name removed) often lack important information and the referrals are missing whole sections.
- It is rarely more than superficial in nature and often tells you very little about the young person themselves.
- Often the information supplied does not give you a good pen picture of the young person so you get no idea about personality. Often the information supplied is just the negative side of a young person. Although it is needed to know the challenging behaviours of the young person being referred, you often get no idea why these behaviours are happening; this then often means that foster carers will not accept a placement.
- Some Local Authorities better than others.
- Some Local Authorities provide better information than others, however we now request a wide range of documents before we will accept a child, which reduces the risk of an inappropriate placement being made.
- Often comes in dribs and drabs - have to repeatedly ask and often material is out of date.
- It is mixed from Local Authority to Local Authority - some are excellent, others very poor.
- Sometimes you get the very basic information and you have to ask for further information in order to make an appropriate match. Very often the Placing Officer does not have this information and they are not always able to get hold of the Social Worker in order to obtain this.
- Some authorities are more "up to date" than others.
- Very little consistency across authorities. Depends a lot on the individual carrying out assessment.
- We find it depends A LOT on the placement or contract officer handling the process. There are some excellent ones that won't allow Social Workers to send poorly filled forms out. A good placement officer is worth their weight in gold to a Local Authority and to providers.
- Information varies greatly, sometimes this is thorough and other times information is not detailed enough.
- The quality of the information varies greatly.
- This varies from authority to authority. Often focuses on risks and recent history, with little information about the child's early years history.
- Whilst basic information is there (e.g. assault or allegation against a carer), it is often difficult to obtain further information (e.g. severity of assault) as the person in the commissioning team does not know the answers, and may be unwilling to allow us to make direct contact with the relevant Social Worker, or s/he may not be available.

- As you will expect, differing Local Authorities have different approaches. Those that have gone through a tender and are working to a defined contract tend to adhere to a minimum expectation and provide better referrals for providers to consider.
- The information is inconsistent with some Local Authorities providing extensive information and others providing very minimal. Often we are required to submit more information about our company than we receive about the young person!!
- Should be able to speak to Social Workers, but sometimes limited.

Q2. In the past 12 months, have you received any initial placement requests that have included the child's name and/or family members name(s), when this individual was previously unknown to you?

Yes	86%
No	14%

Q3. Have you experience of a Local Authority knowingly omitting essential information about a child's needs and behaviours on a PRF?

Yes	31%
No	17%
No evidence	52%

(However reason to suspect important information had been withheld)

Comments from providers:

- This is by default rather than by design....usually through incompetence, weak case management and/or differences between commissioning and social work staff.
- The information is out of date and behaviours that may be a barrier are excluded.
- Sometimes when reading the referral, the Social Worker's request does not match the info provided and you are left thinking how did they get to the conclusion that they have with the evidence provided? What are they not saying?
- Sometimes inept not malicious
- In particular, when placements have broken down due to behaviour, it does not state on the form how many previous placements the Young People or Person has had and if the break downs are due to behaviour.
- We regularly receive old referrals, not sure information deliberately withheld but certainly not current.
- The more complex cases appear to have the least information, particularly risk based behaviours.
- We have experience of planning placements and placing children in our organisation and then finding out very significant information, which would have led to a different outcome if it had been shared earlier. However, we can state that this information has been 'knowingly' omitted.
- All too common and suspect reducing cost is a motivator for this.

Q4. Please rate your preference on the following arrangements

	Preferred	Acceptable	Do not wish to see
A 1 stage process - One comprehensive and detailed PRF containing all relevant information about the child with the essential information laid out at the beginning.	63%	34%	3%
A 2 stage process. Stage 1 - essential information is provided so that providers can determine whether or not they can potentially offer a placement. Stage 2 - Further in-depth information is provided to those providers who have offered a placement in principle.	66%	23%	11%

	Preferred	Acceptable	Do not wish to see
A 1 stage process for emergency placements (required in less than 48 hours) and a 2 stage process for other placements.	58%	8%	34%

Comments from providers:

- Even with emergency placements, (which constitute the majority of placements) as full as information as possible is needed to provide for the young person well. Once the child is over the doorstep, it is often twice as hard to get further background info or even essential paperwork like medical consents!
- We require full detailed information about all young people and will no longer accept placements without it.
- The more information provided can determine if a best match can be made.
- In my experience, emergency is needed that afternoon/evening.
- The assessment needs to be more evidenced-based and factual. Workers' opinions reflect their needs, which are not always useful to us managing a residential placement.
- 1 stage process definitely needs to take place for emergency placements, however with planned placements, a 2 stage process would be fine.
- Helpful to see the essential overview first and give providers opportunity to follow up and clarify detail. This also avoids sensitive information about young people being shared unnecessarily.

Q5. With regards to a template for a Placement Request Form, please provide your views on the following options

	Preferred	Acceptable	Do not wish to see
One common National template for all Looked After Children placements aligned to National Contract Documents.	90%	7%	3%
A common Regional / sub regional template aligned to a regional / sub regional framework contract / Dynamic Purchasing System / preferred provider list.	22%	74%	4%
Each Local Authority to remain free to develop their own PRF template, with no obligation to meet specific standards.	12%	21%	67%
No requirement for a specific PRF template, but the 2010 Care Planning and Placement Regulations should be amended to include a requirement for a Local Authority to provide specific information when seeking a placement.	29%	37%	34%

Comments from providers:

- One detailed template across the UK would enable easier assessment for providers.
- Again the more information provided at the first stage, makes sense to make a good match for any Young Person to meet their needs.

- A provider led assessment, which provides key assessment information. I feel there are lessons to be learnt from “Munro”, findings. In that the judgements made by individual workers, can affect the outcome for young people. As providers, we need to be satisfied that compatibility, safeguarding, and the needs of the young person are explicit throughout any assessment.
- Standardised referral would be much easier to progress in a timely manner. It would also be positive if Local Authorities standardised the way in which they securely send referrals. To ensure better security, yet also ease of opening.
- In the interest of standardising and streamlining the process, it would make sense to have a national template.

Q6. With regards to making a placement offer, Local Authorities are increasingly requesting that Providers submit their responses on a specific form. This enables Local Authorities to fairly compare placement offers. With this in mind, what is your preferred option?

	Preferred	Acceptable	Do not wish to see
One common National ‘Provider Response’ form aligned to a National Placement Request Form.	72%	19%	9%
A common Regional / Sub regional Provider Response form aligned to a regional / sub regional placement request form.	13%	65%	22%
For each Local Authority to develop their own ‘provider response forms’.	10%	10%	80%
For there to be no set template and for providers to be able to provide this information in their own format.	31%	23%	46%

Comments from providers:

- At present, each Local Authority ask for something different when we respond to referrals. Some like Expression of Interest forms others do not. Standardising this would also be helpful.
- A common national response form would be fine, but it must not be too prescriptive. It must contain space for the narrative.

Q7 – This concerned the nature of information provided

As part of the survey, providers were asked to rank, in order of importance, the information needed to determine whether or not they could potentially offer a placement. They were asked to contemplate the order in which they would like to see this information on a Placement Request Form, so that the most important information on which to base their decision was detailed at the start of the form, to ensure efficient use of everyone’s time. The results were wide and varied. It became clear that providers, dependant on their specialities, have different priorities. Nevertheless, there were some commonalities that emerged.

Providers wanted the following information to be made available in the early part of the form:

- An ID reference, if child is previously known to them
- Age
- Gender
- Language spoken / communication needs
- Legal status
- Type of placement required
- Preferred location of placement
- Date placement required
- Reason placement required

- Purpose of placement
- Pen picture and chronology
- Risks posed
- Risk factors to be avoided
- Social and Emotional Needs
- Factors to consider if placed with other children
- If their current school place needs to be maintained or if the Local Authority will consider a change of school (this is a major determining factor in the early stages of matching)

Information that providers felt was still essential, but which could be placed in the latter part of a placement request form:

- Religion
- Family composition (not names and addresses)
- Length of intended placement
- Young person's wishes
- Required and measurable outcomes wanted from the placement
- Specific information about a child's disability
- Child's achievements and aspirations
- Educational requirements
- Hobbies and extracurricular activities
- Cultural needs
- How many previous placements and reasons for breakdowns
- Use of alcohol, tobacco and / or drugs
- Specific detail about behaviours that are difficult to manage and tried and tested strategies
- Details of wider family and social functioning that may affect the young person.
- Contact arrangements (so distances can be calculated)
- Offending history
- Current involvement with other agencies e.g. YOT/CAMHS.

It was notable that a large number of providers wanted PRFs to include information on the child's behaviour and attitude towards pets.

Providers made some general comments about the Placement Request Forms and the processes that Local Authorities use for matching children to placements.

*"We need **detailed** information regarding risk behaviours (e.g. not just "sexualised" but clear indication of what this consists of - e.g. towards peers, younger children, adults, with coercion etc). Ditto for aggressive behaviour (pushing a foster carer, producing a knife etc) in order to assess the degree of risk, and whether this is manageable within a family context. Similar detail for allegations, (single instance, pattern, seriousness of allegation), arson etc. Info about addictions, criminal record, including pending charges."*

"The fundamental problem with referral forms is they are often glorified risk assessments which list the misdemeanours of the child as if children are defined purely by the things they have done wrong. What I want to know is who is the child really? What do they like, what do they find funny, do they like X factor, do they have a passion for something, what are they good at, who the bloody hell are they?!"

"We are increasingly seeing Local Authorities 'auctioning' their children to around 50 providers... looking for a yes response and the lowest price. eBay in reverse."

"Many of the Local Authorities do use good referral templates however one standard referral form would be easier to work with."

"We don't need to be too clever about this. Just be clear what you want and when you want it. Be honest about the young person's problems. Don't send to 200 plus providers and take the cheapest and forget the matching considerations – you are wasting a lot of providers' time."

“We specialise in therapeutic placements, so are unsure if a common national form would enable us to provide the detail required to demonstrate how, specifically, we would meet a child’s therapeutic needs.”

“I’m all for better information sharing. But Local Authorities really need to be more selective over who they send referrals out to. We’ve had to employ someone full time just to sift through referral forms as we are getting so many. Most of which are totally irrelevant for our specialist service. Unfortunately one of our best residential workers applied for the job and got it. So in effect, the Local Authority’s bad placement procedures are really having an effect on front line services.”

“If Local Authorities commissioned for needs, rather than for costs or geographical location then they’d have established lists of selected providers to whom they could send referrals. It’s not rocket science. They need to understand that different specialisms exist. If only they would listen to providers. Some of us have done their jobs and can really share our experience.”

“I have placed about 1500 children in 10 years. I am happy to be contacted further should you wish.... although if I’m doing another bloody tender I might be time restricted.”

“We still haven’t got partnership working right. To me, that’s the fundamental problem here if we are going to get matching processes right. I know some Local Authorities are saying that they are focusing on better consultation, but in these very difficult times when I need to protect my business, I don’t feel safe in raising any criticism about a Local Authority. We know that an ‘old school’ attitude still exists in many and I cannot afford to jeopardise the possibility of being eliminated from getting referrals if I’m seen as a troublemaker. Having worked in this sector for over 20 years, I just don’t trust many of them.”

“We have a much better relationship with Local Authority staff who we have met face to face. On the whole, most of them have good intentions and are doing a job that is very difficult. The difficulty is that many aren’t supported by effective governance and leaders who understand. Also, some commissioners don’t have enough real living and breathing experience of social care. I do think relationships are improving though and that’s the one critical thing if we are going to get things right together. More investment in facilitating joint events would pay dividends.”

Local Authority views

As part of the research, a small number of Local Authority officers were contacted. Views on the effectiveness of their PRFs were wide and varied. Some Local Authorities felt very proud of the tool they had developed.

“We realised that it was essential to get this document right and so consulted with providers in our region. I don’t think it’s perfect, but it’s much better than it was and we’ve seen much better stability and placements since we introduced it.”

“We’ve put a lot of effort into getting our referral form right. Ours works for us.”

“There were however, a number of Local Authorities that recognised that the documentation they were using was not effective as it could be.”

“We’d be very interested in exploring the possibility of a national form. Ours doesn’t do the job well and we’re looking to change it. But we recognise that, for an ideal form, we need to create one in partnership with providers.”

“Our form has been criticised quite a few times, we’re working now to try and get it right.”

“Unfortunately, even though we’ve worked really hard to get the tool right, our main problem is that Social Workers don’t complete them well. We’ve had to invest in getting our placement officers to train our Social Workers on how to complete the form. To get them to understand that they need to convey information in a way that is meaningful for providers. We’re really starting to see some good forms being completed now.”

“We have devised a response form for Providers to complete when replying with any placement offers. This is necessary for us to be able to compare the placements that providers are putting forward. However, even though we ask that it’s completed, we still have some providers that don’t fill it in, but they direct us to their website or marketing materials and these can be swamped with information. Sometimes trying to find particular information is needle in haystack stuff. In emergencies, we sometimes don’t have time to look through their information to find what we need, so we have to discount them. We’ve introduced the response form as we need easy sight of the precise information we ask for. Some providers don’t seem to get how important it is to fill it in properly.”

From discussions with Local Authority Officers, it was evident that the PRF was highly valued in some areas and there had been significant resource into creating the tool. However, some Local Authority officers gave the impression that the tool was not of great importance. A small number of authorities confirmed that they did not have such a tool and said it was left up to the Social Worker to decide what information to provide.

Conclusion & recommendations

There was little evidence of providers and commissioners working in partnership to develop a form that is genuinely ‘fit for purpose’, although there were some limited and commendable examples of this. Where tools are acceptable, there is still some concern about the way in which these are being completed by Social Workers. Providers have stated that the forms are often not completed in a way that provides placement providers with the information they need, to determine whether or not they can offer a placement. Terminology needs to be unambiguous, examples of behaviour need to be given and clarity is needed on identified risks and any proven strategies for managing these.

Data protection is a serious concern. Those responsible for commissioning placements should ensure that Placement Request Forms are anonymised and that their placement procedures meet the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Consideration should be given to developing a Placement Request Form template as an appendix to the National Contracts.

The 2010 regulations should be updated to include a requirement for Local Authorities to provide sufficient information when sourcing a placement for an individual child.

Whether a form is created nationally, regionally or locally, this needs to be created by both commissioners and providers working in partnership. There is a wealth of experience and knowledge in the provider field that could be used to develop excellent tools for placement matching.

Placement Request Forms need to be ‘fit for purpose’. Local Authorities need to ensure that there is a dedicated form used solely for sourcing placements. Forms that are completed for funding panels are completed for a very different audience. They are not adequate tools to use for placement matching.

Local Authorities need to provide training for Social Workers on how to complete Placement Request Forms. A number of Local Authorities claimed that by doing this, they had greatly improved the information that had been sent out and felt they were getting better placement matches as a result.

To aid placement matching, providers need to ensure that, when responding to enquiries, they provide commissioners with the precise information that has been requested and in the format required.

Next steps

A further survey is being conducted to seek your views on the findings in this report. This can be accessed on the following link <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TCCYHSF>

ICHA are seeking to gain support to host regional workshops to enable commissioners and placement providers to discuss how placement procedures can be improved. These proposed workshops will look specifically at how the sector can work together to improve Placement Referral Forms and the matching process. The workshops will also look at appetite for developing a national common PRF format.

The survey enables you to comment on your views on this. We invite you to complete this and to circulate the report to interested colleagues and partners.

Marie Tucker - CICADA Services

On behalf of ICHA (Independent Children's Homes Association)

August 2013

