



Information Management  
**Model of Best Practice**  
For Outcomes and Indicators of  
Children and Families



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# **INTERREG IVA Outcomes for Children Cross Border Project Information Management Model of Best Practice in the use of Outcomes and Indicators**

## **1.0 Introduction**

This report provides an overview of current practice in planning children's services at regional, national and international levels and presents an Information management Model of best practice in the use of outcomes and indicators to improve the lives of children and young people. This includes best practice in relation to the identification of appropriate information flows, sharing and exchanging multi-agency information, analysing, presenting and measuring meaningful indicators against agreed outcomes.

This report was compiled by the Information Management Working Group as part of the Cross Border Children's Outcomes Project.

## **2.0 Background**

Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) is a partnership of health and social care services (Health Service Executive and Health and Social Care Board and Trusts) covering the entire land boundary between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland serving a population of over one million people.

CAWT has been successful in securing funding from the European Union INTERREG IVA programme for a two year project (2009-2011) to practically implement a model for integrated cross border planning for outcomes for children in the CAWT area. This project builds on tools developed in a previous CAWT project, i.e. the outcomes based planning tool and the supporting web-based information system.

The central plank of the Project's work to date has been to learn about and use outcomes as a foundation on which to build joint needs assessment and service planning for children and young people.

An Information Management Working Group has been set up by the Project Board to develop a model of best practice in information management, which

will assist in embedding the use of outcomes and indicators in practice, in particular in four pilot sites in the CAWT region as part of the practical application of the model developed from the previous CAWT project.

### 3.0 Review of Outcomes for Children in Northern Ireland and Republic Of Ireland

The use of outcomes is now international good practice to ensure that services make real changes for children as opposed to concentrating on outputs. This project has been working on how the use of high level outcomes and associated indicators can be used to support partnership working across agency at national, regional and local levels.

Both Governments in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have agreed outcomes for children in their Children’s Strategies which are very similar as shown below.

<b>NI Strategy: Our Children, Our Young People Our Pledge 2006</b>  <a href="http://www.allchildrenni.gov.uk">www.allchildrenni.gov.uk</a>	<b>Republic of Ireland Strategy: The Agenda for Children’s Strategy 2007</b>  <a href="http://www.omc.gov.ie">www.omc.gov.ie</a>
Healthy	Healthy, both physically and mentally
Enjoying, Learning and Achieving	Supported in active learning
Living in Safety and with stability	Safe from accidental and intentional harm
Experiencing economic and environmental wellbeing	Economically Secure
Contributing positively to community and society	Secure in the immediate and wider physical environment
And Living in a society which respects their rights.	Part of positive networks of family, friends, neighbours and the community. Included and participating in society

A comprehensive guide as to how to do integrated planning focusing on outcomes for children and families is available in a “Framework for Integrated Planning for Outcomes for children and families” published April 2008,

funded under the EU INTERREG IIIA Programme. This framework can be downloaded from the website [www.outcomesforchildren.org](http://www.outcomesforchildren.org).

### **3.1 Children's Services Planning (NI)**

Children's Services Planning (CSP) was implemented in Northern Ireland in July 1998 to plan and deliver services on the ground around the holistic needs and rights of children and young people through an integrated multi-agency model of planning and commissioning. Before the implementation of CSP in Northern Ireland, services for children and young people were planned and delivered in isolation by disparate statutory, voluntary and community bodies and agencies. However, it was more than likely that a vulnerable child receiving services from health and social care would also be in receipt of services from other agencies such as the police, court service, housing etc.. The underpinning aim of CSP was to address what was perceived to be a planning deficit. This would involve moving to a position where the planning and delivery of services on the ground would be designed around the holistic needs and rights of children and young people rather than in terms of professional or organisational silos (what McTernan and Godfrey (2006: 220) call "*a whole system planning approach*").

The delivery of services by stand-alone agencies operating in isolation from one another also meant that information was being collected separately by each of the agencies. This in turn resulted in information feeding a limited, organisation-specific view of the child's needs and service provision. The focus of information collection was also based on activity/service inputs and was not necessarily meaningful or used to inform decisions in relation to the needs of vulnerable children and young people. In the context of the development of CSP this silo-based approach to information and analysis could not support a collaborative, integrated model of service planning and commissioning.

#### **3.1.1 Current Information Management Practice (CSP) NI**

The development of a comprehensive information service to support Children's Services Planning collaborative working was established to identify and define routine information collected by each agency and to agree a common and consistent approach to the definition, compatibility, reporting and management of information. Furthermore, one of the key objectives was to identify new measurable indicators that could be used to assess the needs of children and young people. This involved a paradigm shift from collecting

activity data on an organisation by organisation basis to managing information on a multi-agency basis using indicators based on outcomes as part of an integrated information management system.

### 3.2 Children's Services Planning – (ROI)

The **2000 National Children's Strategy**<sup>1</sup> sets out the vision of an Ireland “where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential”. Six operational principles are utilised to ground this national strategy. One of the key principles is integration “measures should be taken in partnership, within and between relevant players be it the State, the voluntary/community sector and families; services for children should be delivered in a coordinated, coherent and effective manner through integrated needs analysis, policy planning and service delivery”.

**Towards 2016**, the 10 year social partnership agreement, includes a specific focus on the needs of children and young adults. Key areas to be addressed in relation to children include early childhood development and care, improving education outcomes, improving health outcomes, promoting recreation, sports, arts and culture, income support and children and their families.

Towards 2016 provides an ambitious vision and major challenge to the State. It focuses on the achievement of outcomes for each lifecycle and on the implementation of integrated service delivery and interventions at local level.

To advance the Towards 2016 vision, the partnership agreement made a provision for the establishment of a high-level group chaired by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). This became known as the **National Children's Strategy Implementation Group (NCSIG)** and involves relevant Government departments, the Health Service Executive (HSE), representatives of local authorities, the education sector and other key agencies as required. The primary purpose of the NCSIG is to drive the implementation of improved services for children based on agreed outcomes shared by a range of local statutory providers.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health & Children (2000) The National Children's Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives. Dublin: Stationary Office

The National Children’s Strategy Implementation Group was charged with establishing a **Children’s Services Committee (CSC)** under each City and/or County Development Board in the country. To date 4 pilot sites have established a local CSC with one being County Donegal, which is part of the Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT) geographical area and one of the counties involved in the EU Interreg IVA Outcomes for Children Cross Border Project.

All major organisations and agencies working on behalf of children and young people will be represented on the Children’s Services Committees. The Children’s Services Committees will be responsible for improving the lives of children and families at local and community level through integrated planning working and service delivery.

The **Agenda for Children’s Services**, published in 2007 by the Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, sets out the strategic direction and key goals of public policy in relation to children’s health and social services in Ireland<sup>2</sup>. At the core of the Agenda is the promotion of what we want for our children – good outcomes.

#### **4.0 Learning from Vermont and North Lincolnshire**

Thinking on information management within Children’s Services Planning was influenced by the work of Cornelius (“Con”) Hogan in Vermont (Hogan, 2001) and the application of Hogan’s ideas and approach by Mike Pinnock in North Lincolnshire (Pinnock, 2002). A study trip to North Lincolnshire resulted in learning and recommendations on a way forward on information management for Children’s Services Planning (NI) (Maxwell, 2001).

Hogan’s (2001) concept of “*results-based accountability*” is formulated in terms of shared ownership of an “*outcomes-and-indicator framework*” operating across programs and based upon mutual responsibility and a widely agreed-upon common purpose i.e. “*well-being for families and communities*” (Hogan and Murphey, 2002).

A Study Trip was organised by the CAWT Project Board for a number of representatives to visit Vermont as they recognised that work had reached a

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<sup>2</sup> Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs (2007) The Agenda for Children’s Services: A Policy Handbook. Dublin: The Stationary Office

point where it was necessary to observe the mechanics and practicalities, challenges and learning points of the outcomes work in practice. There were three main areas identified as particular areas of focus for the study trip in terms of learning about the practical application of outcomes based planning and information/performance management:-

- At state level – government representatives coming together to jointly plan work towards improving outcomes for children.
- At local level – communities are involved in driving forward such outcomes.
- Critically – information management, monitoring and evaluation has been central in enabling Vermont to use outcomes to not only plan services but to implement Results Based Accountability systems.

The overall objective of the trip was for the Project Board representatives to bring back learning on the practical application of outcomes based work. (Conway, Gillen, Maxwell, McCaffrey, 2007)

Con Hogan's thinking continues to influence the work of the partnership and he has been a regular contributor to workshops and conferences organised by CSP and CAWT.

## **5.0 Steps to an Information Management Framework**

The development of a multi-agency outcomes-based Information management framework can be broken down as follows:-

### **5.1 Establishing Multi – Agency Information Networks**

In order to support the information needs of Integrated Planning for Children's Services it is important to identify how to develop and establish a comprehensive information service through collaborative working across key agencies.

1. It is essential to identify who the key partners would be in relation to joint planning of services for children and young people.
2. Establish a joint multi-agency information forum/network.

3. Identify relevant baseline information currently collected by each agency relevant to the agreed outcomes and indicators.
4. Work towards sharing and exchanging information on a regional, local/community level (eg postcoded information where possible) based on agreed protocols, outcomes and indicators.
5. Establish a corporate database of multi-agency information/indicators.

## **5.2 Deciding on the Measures**

The Strategies published by the two governments have identified high level outcomes and the indicators that will be used to measure progress against these outcomes for all children. Local planning groups that aim to improve outcomes for specific groups of vulnerable children will be interested in identifying specific indicators that will illustrate if improvements are being made to the well being of these children and at what rate.

These Planning Groups should decide what changes are required to the outcomes for the children as a result of having assessed the local needs of particular groups of vulnerable children and young people under each outcome. The importance of this approach is that it ensures that those planning services are “outcome focused”, that is, every agency’s work is aimed at improving shared outcomes for children.

Identifying feeder indicators to measure each outcome is a key process in developing an effective and workable outcomes, indicator and information framework. Therefore good data collection from all of the agencies involved in Children’s Services is essential to effectively manage such a framework. Each agency can make a contribution to a holistic statistical profile that describes the overall state of health and well being of all our children and young people.

## **5.3 Development of the Information Infrastructure**

A significant part of planning Children’s Services is the development of a comprehensive Information Infrastructure to support the planning and commissioning and outcome monitoring of children’s services in collaboration with key agencies.

In order to provide the foundations for a strategic approach to planning Children's Services agencies need to work collaboratively to:-

- I. Identify and define routine information collected on Children and Young People by each key agency involved in Children's Services and established multi-disciplinary and multi-agency based information sources at local level;
- II. Establish an Interagency Information network, made up of key information personnel, to look at information relating to children and young people across all agencies, and agree a common and consistent approach to the definition, compatibility, reporting and management of information relating to children's services across agreed areas;
- III. Identify new indicators of need and undertake analysis of comparative data to support social inclusion and needs assessment;
- IV. Develop a central corporate database for the collation, maintenance, measurement and dissemination of data to meet agreed information requirements and ensure accessibility, user friendliness and security to all involved;
- V. Build on the meaningfulness, accuracy and relevance of existing information through the use of sophisticated analysis techniques to study local areas of identified need through a Geographical Information (Mapping) System;
- VI. Carry out a number of thorough analyses of need, demand and supply and ascertained the views of service users and local communities;
- VII. Develop and maintain a comprehensive website that offers local profiles of information as well as family support information directly to families, children and young people and professionals (see [www.outcomesforchildren.org](http://www.outcomesforchildren.org)); and
- VIII. Map out a detailed outcomes, indicator and information framework flowing from the high level outcomes, feeder indicators and

information flows to measure indicators. It also is important to identify links to children's rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

#### **5.4 Developing the Outcome Measurement Framework Regionally**

As indicators are most effective when comparable from place to place, a Children's Services Information Group should be convened on a regional basis to oversee, identify, share and adhere to a consistent approach to information collection from regional agencies such as Education, Housing and Police. This group also need to work closely with local networks.

### **6.0 Challenges and Key Success Factors**

Developing and implementing an Outcomes measurement approach within a partnership setting represents a continuous journey with many challenges and rewards along the way.

The primary challenge faced by a partnership in developing performance indicators is the need to gain the commitment of individuals and agencies as well as ensuring that key players have an understanding of their role, responsibility and authority to act on behalf of the agency they represent. This is an ongoing issue which requires a continual focus on the management of relationships and reinforcement of the importance of outcome measurement in assisting the partnership in delivering on its goals.

Some significant early challenges stem from the new approach to information and outcome measurement to be adopted across different, separate agencies. For example, different agencies work to diverse timeframes in data collection (financial year vs. calendar year vs. school year), different definitions and terminology are in use and initially there are fears about sharing information with other agencies. These difficulties can be overcome through the harmonisation of timeframes and development of agreed protocols for monitoring the required information (with tolerances for exceptions), working together to agree consistency and compatibility of currencies and definitions and overcoming fears by influencing through the senior management teams of each agency as well as building trust with agencies about the confidential, anonymised use of their information.

As well as addressing these basic issues it is also essential in the early stages of a partnership that an understanding of the idea and potential application of an outcome measurement approach is understood by all key stakeholders, planners and information staff. This can be achieved through the delivery of an intensive training programme on a multi-agency basis in which staff from the different agencies are trained together. Central to this learning process is a clear recognition that there needs to be a change of focus from information collected on services which is activity-based to outcome-based indicators.

The delivery of an outcome measurement approach within a partnership is heavily dependant on the availability of a dedicated information resource and expertise to drive and co-ordinate the whole process. Furthermore, tools must be in place to effectively disseminate, access and present information using, for example, web-based and GIS applications.

Of course gaps in indicators will always exist as information is not always readily available to support meaningful indicators. For example, there may be a reliance on information from surveys which by its very nature is out-of-date, or the use of information because it is currently available and the closest match as a measure of an indicator. Compromise is therefore inevitable in some instances until such times as it is possible to develop more appropriate and meaningful information flows.

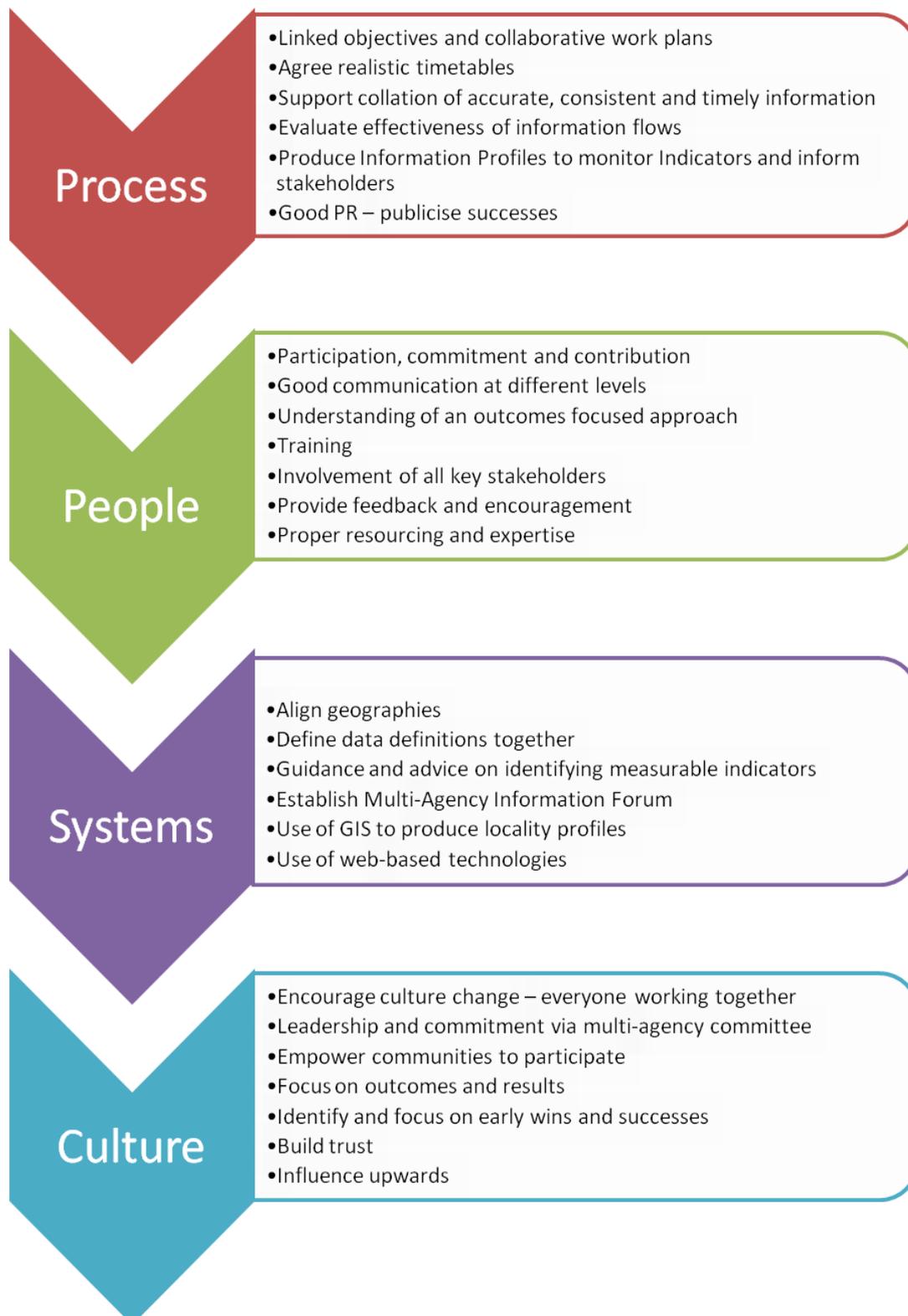
At a more strategic level, Children's Services has been influencing upwards so that government departments adopt an outcomes-based approach to planning services for children and young people, that this is cross-departmental and that each department supports their agencies in multi-agency working.

This type of influencing has been successful as reflected in the ten year NI Children's Strategy, but more work is required in influencing the use of more meaningful indicators to measure outcomes. Equally policy makers and planners need to build into an outcomes-based approach consideration of what is to be measured from the very beginning of the process, define measures in terms of meaningfulness rather than on what information is currently available and focus on a balanced suite of measures.

These challenges and how they can be overcome has informed the identification of key success factors (and by implication the associated barriers) to the development of a multi-agency outcomes measurement framework.

Figure 1 summarises these factors under the headings of Process, People, Culture and Systems.

**Figure 1: Key Success Factors (KSF's)**



## 7.0 Information Management Model in the Use of Outcomes and Indicators

This section presents a multi-agency outcomes measurement model that can be used by partnerships based on key success factors about how to develop and implement such a model.

### The Outcomes Measurement Model

The multi-agency outcomes-based model represents a continuous process and may be broken down into the following components:

- **Identification of Outcomes**

The first step in the process is the development of outcome statements. However, these are not expressed as statistical targets, but as statements of common purpose, of aspiration and intent, as laid out in the Northern Ireland Children's Strategy for example, "Living in Safety and with Stability".

- **Definition of associated Life Factors and Measurable Indicators**

A hierarchy of life factors, indicators and measures are developed associated with each of the outcome statements. Examples of life factors that relate to the above outcome statement are crime, death or injury, housing/environment, play/leisure and perception. These in turn are broken down into measurable indicators.

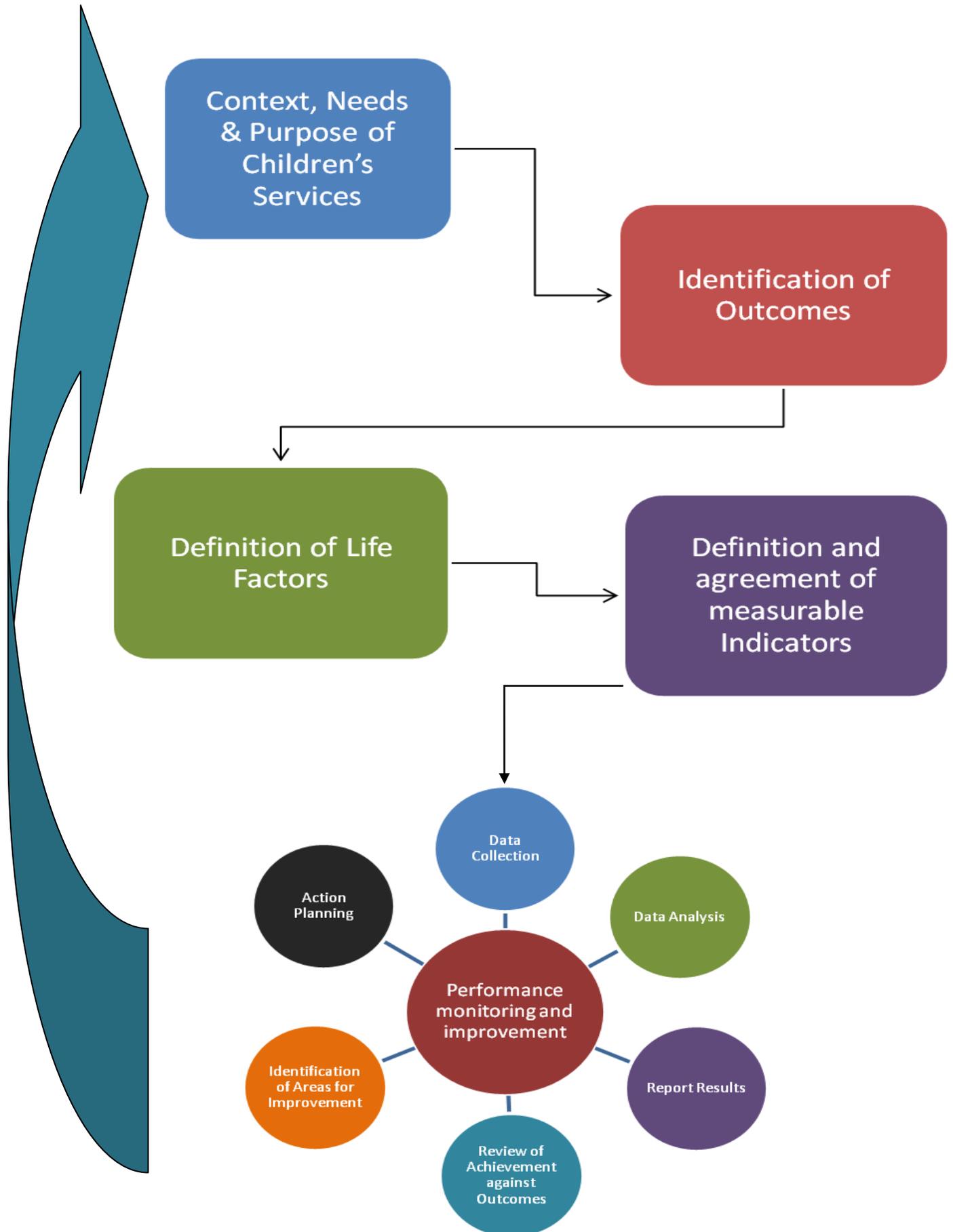
- **Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting**

Data is based solely on the measurable indicators and is collected across all of the agencies involved in the Planning process. This data is returned to a central point to be collated and analysed to provide a cumulative annual overview of progress towards outcome statements. These results are presented as an annual composite monitoring report. (See Appendix 1 - Report Template).

- **Review of Achievements Against Outcomes, Identification of Areas for Improvement and Action Planning**

The annual monitoring report can be used as a performance management tool to critically review progress against outcomes and to develop strategies for improvement and associated action plans. This may lead to the review of measurable indicators associated with outcome statements and life factors. The outcomes model is illustrated as a cyclic process in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Multi-Agency Outcomes Model



## 8.0 Conclusion

It is widely acknowledged that working in partnership is difficult. The complexity, the barriers to success, the involvement of multiple stakeholders and the need for accountability are all key drivers for the use of a robust approach to outcome measurement by a partnership. In addition to demonstrating achievements, outcome measurement also creates value and is integral to the operation of a partnership by acting as a tool to ensure a clear focus on shared objectives/outcomes, challenge and improve performance, review resource allocation, improve decision making and provide the basis for learning and development.

Appendix 1 – Example Template for use in Outcome Monitoring Report

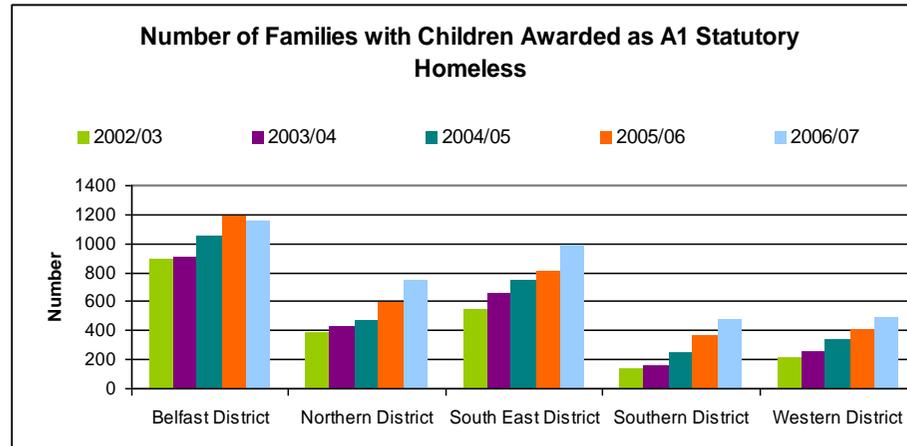
## Number of Families with Children Awarded as A1 Statutory Homeless

Data Source: NIHE

### Economic and Environmental Well-being

#### Why is it Important?

Homeless people suffer high levels of stress from their lack of control over their housing situation, combined with high levels of poverty and often poor living conditions. They often also feel very isolated, especially when temporary accommodation is provided at a distance from the household's local community and friends (Shelter 2009).



**The Story Behind the Trends** Similar to those presenting as homeless the number awarded homeless is increasing year on year apart from a slight dip in the Belfast District.

#### Key Homelessness Statistics

- Between 2000/01 and 2007/08 there has been an increase of 50% in the numbers of households presenting as homeless.
- The largest group presenting as homeless were single people who made up almost 50% of the total figure.
- The major reason given for homelessness was sharing, breakdown/family dispute.
- The number of households presenting due to loss of private rented accommodation has increased by 73% over the last five years (Northern Ireland Housing Executive Statistics, 2008).

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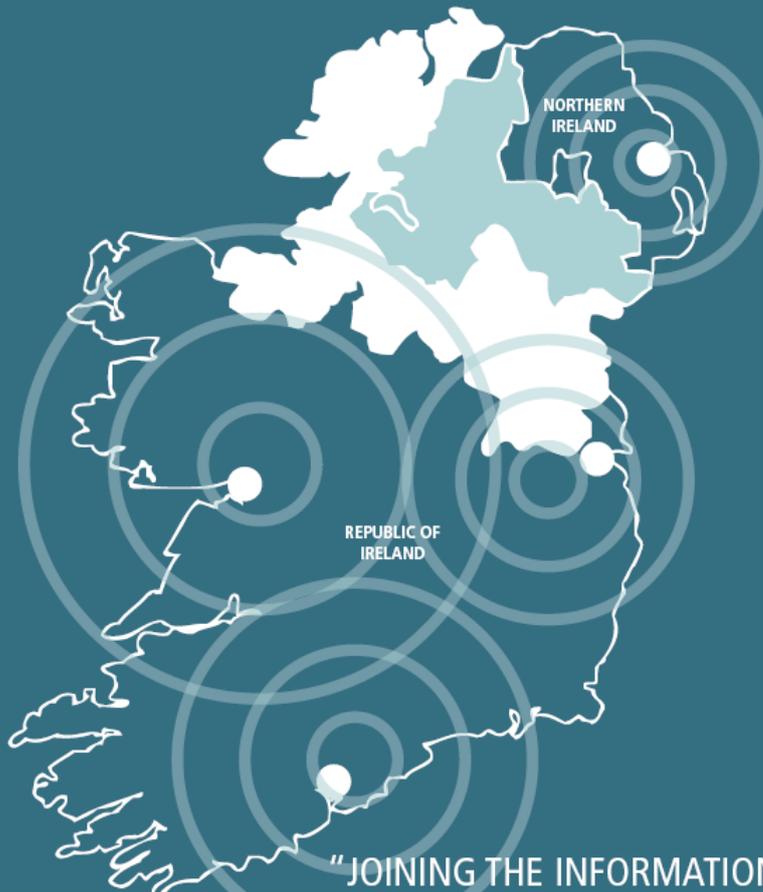
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“JOINING THE WORK  
TO MAKE THE DIFFERENCE...”



“JOINING THE INFORMATION  
TO MEASURE THE DIFFERENCE...”



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