

Reimagining Child Welfare for the 21st Century

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Summary

**Why do we need to 'reimagine'
child welfare?**

**How can we reimagine child
welfare?**



Why do we need to reimagine child welfare

- One contact every **four** (point eight) seconds ...
- Referrals up **19%** between 2008 and 2020
- S47 investigations up **162%** between 2008 and 2020
- One in **sixteen** children are the subject of a s47 investigation before their 5th birthday
- No. of children with a child protection plan up **76%** between 2008 and 2020
- No. of children looked after up **34%** between 2008 and 2020

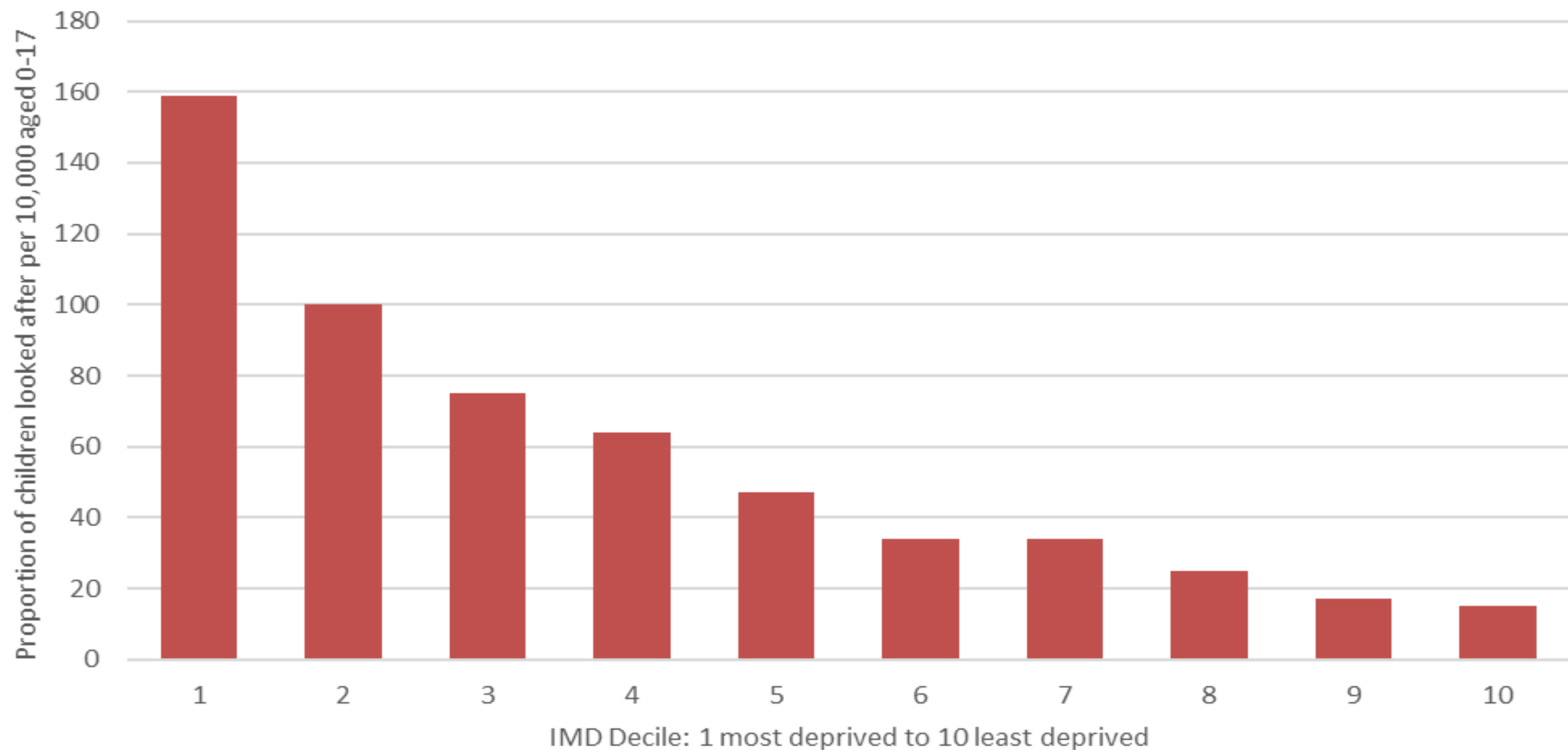




WARNING:
Steep
(social)
gradient

Proportion of children looked after per 10,000 by IMD decile

Source: CWIP, Bywaters et al



Why do we need to reimagine child welfare

- One in **three** children living in poverty;
- **200,000** extra children likely to be living in poverty after removal of £20 UC uplift;
- No. of people receiving a 3 day food parcel up **9,797%** between 2008 and 2021;



Why do we need to reimagine child welfare

- One in **nine** children looked after had three or more home moves in a year
- One in **five** care leavers homeless within two years of leaving care
- One in **two** care leavers not in education, employment or training
- One in **six** social work posts vacant



'Taming the risk monster'

We need to rebalance everyone's thinking about families and 'risk':

- Families facing problems not problem families
- Start with strengths – what's strong, not what's wrong
- Contextual not individual
- Relational not transactional
- 90/10



How can we reimagine child welfare

- **Some thoughts and ideas**



Some thoughts

- The majority of children become looked after because of the behaviour of adults.
- Only 10% of cases involve significant abuse – the majority are parents struggling with problems and challenges many of us, normally worsened by poverty.
- Families are the most under-used utility of the 21st century.
- Services are more effective if service users and staff are involved in their design.
- Relationships are at the heart of change.



Some thoughts...

Families may have many advantages over the state when it comes to parenting

- Staying power – family involvement does not end at 18/21/25
- Understanding of the child and their history
- Understanding of the family's strengths and challenges
- Strength of relationships
- Love



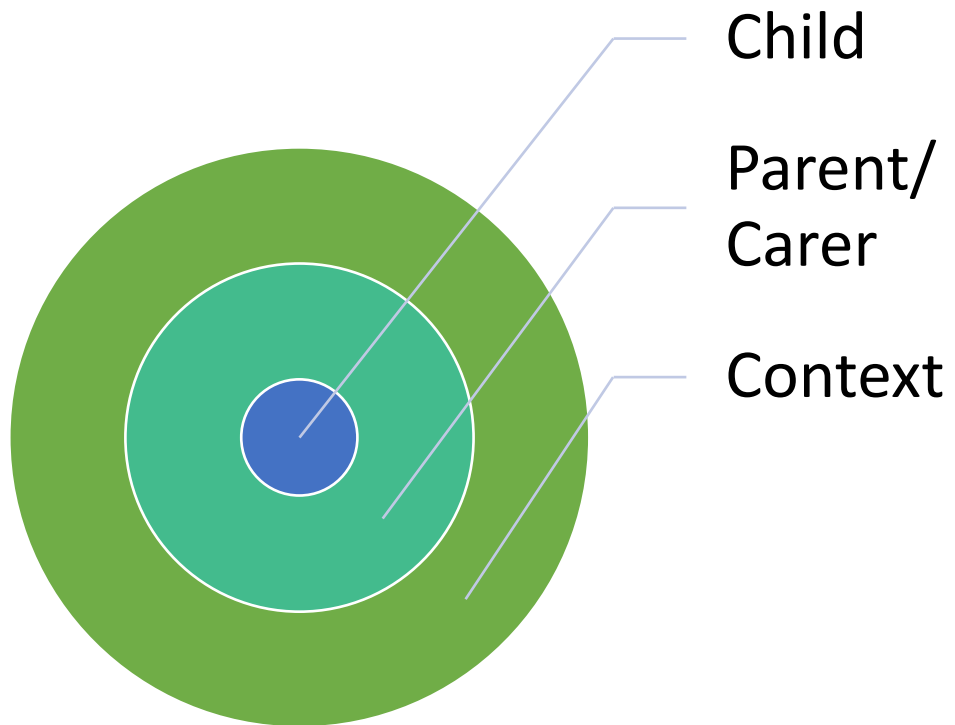
Some thoughts

- Our conception of childhood and child welfare are not static.
- Unlike the professions where many of our partners work, we do not work in an area that has clearly defined boundaries.
- It involves both legal and moral frameworks and judgements.
- Much of our work is based around what will happen in the future, so we cannot work with certainty;
 - It is not about coming up with the right decision, it is about coming up with the decision that is least likely to be wrong.
- Pressures and processes, however, can lead us to focus purely on the present.

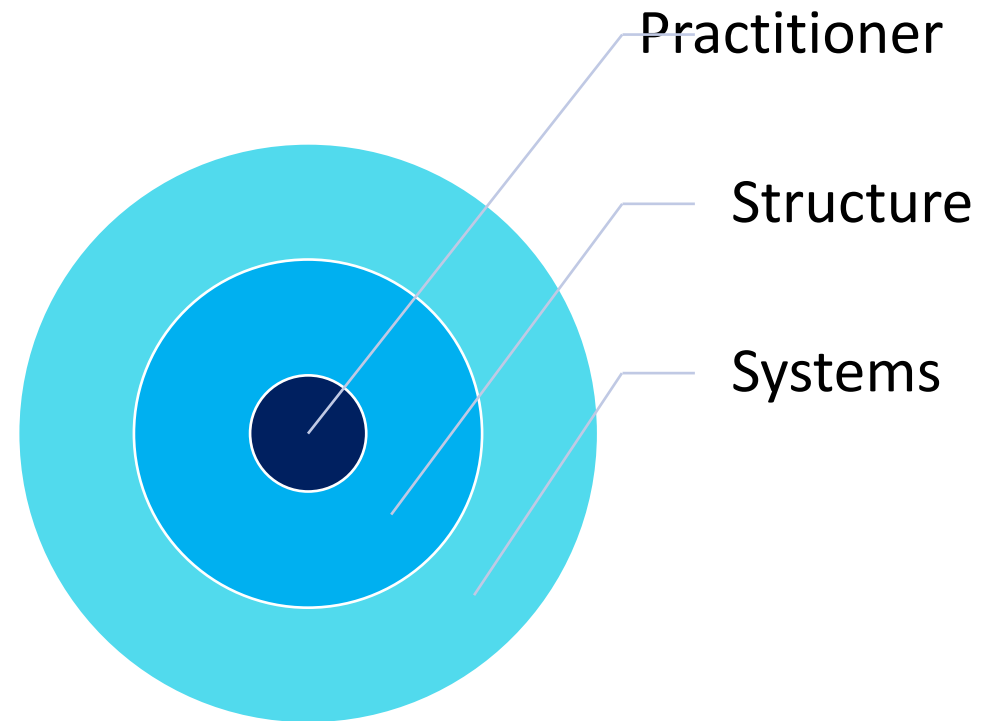


Some thoughts

The Child in Context



The Practitioner in Context



Some thoughts...

- How do we create a framework through which to rebalance?



Some thoughts...

- Good outcomes are dependent upon good partnerships and good practice;
- Good partnerships and good practice need good foundations;
- Good foundations are established by good principles;
- The Children Act 1989 is a principled piece of legislation.



Reimagining or remembering?

- The Act is universal - it applies to all children and young people equally.
- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- The wishes and feelings of children are central.
- There must be an understanding of the impact and consequences of interventions ('no order' principle).
- The intervention used must be the least intrusive possible, and provided at the earliest possible opportunity (S17).
- Family is at the heart of the legislation.
- Significant harm and need.



Some ideas

Relationships

Social work is essentially about relationships: first and foremost with service users; but also with social work colleagues and colleagues from other professional backgrounds – health, education, police, to name a few; with the organisational context and wider policy context of practice; and finally with ‘the self’, or oneself. These relationships do not exist in isolation from each other; they are interrelated and exert influences on each other.

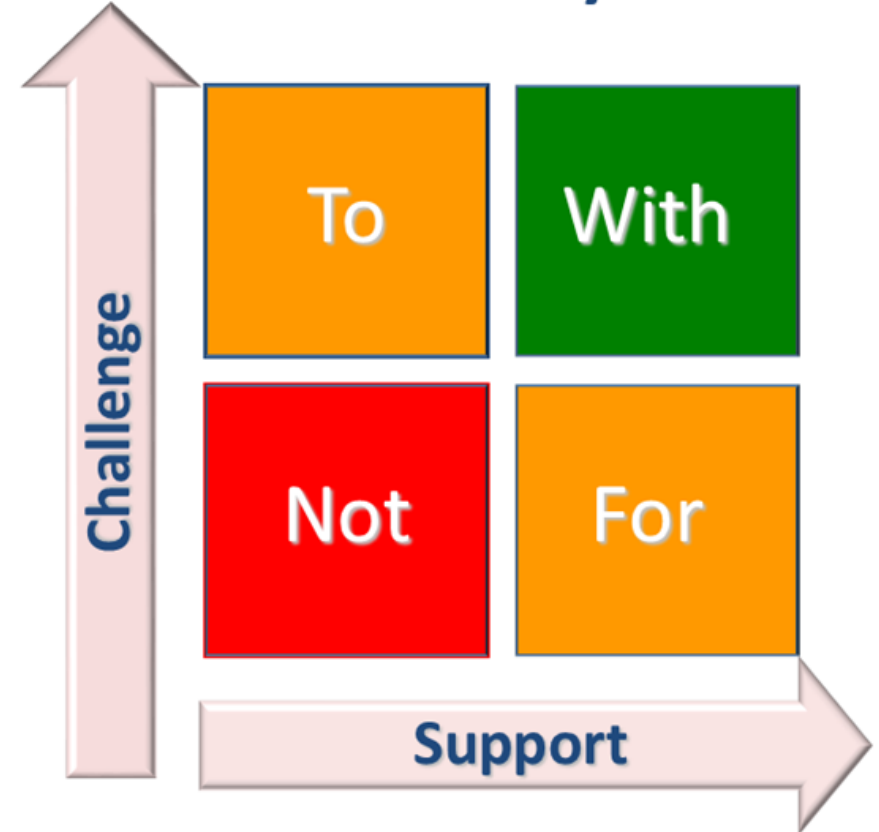


Some ideas

Relational Practice

- Strengths based
- Value driven
- About building, maintaining and restoring relationships
- Not a model or a tool, it is a way of being
- High support and high challenge.

Four ways...



Adapted from: Wachtel T & McCold P in Strang H & Braithwaite J (eds), (2001), Restorative Justice and Civil Society, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge



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Some thoughts...

- **It really isn't rocket science:**
 - Shared Language and Values
 - Shared Vision and Outcomes;
 - Shared Culture
 - Create the 'conditions for success'
 - Shared Approach/way of working;
 - Children at the heart of regeneration
 - Hold our nerve!



Keep it simple...

What's it
like to be a child
growing up in
Leeds?



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Some ideas

An Authority Vision for and belief in children

- To be successful as an authority, you must be successful for children.
- Social regeneration alongside economic regeneration.
- Children do not live in cities or local authorities – they live in families and communities.

How

- Establish a vision for all children that everyone can buy into and signs up to;
- A focus on outcomes and 'entitlement'
- Make children and young people visible and provide them with voice and influence
- Build relationships with all sectors including business and VCFS
- Build a network of ambassadors
 - Provide venues and support for awards/meetings/groups
 - Fostering friendly employment policies
 - Employment and apprenticeship opportunities



Some ideas

- Practice and leadership is underpinned by an understanding of and commitment to relationships;
- Practice and leadership is focused on delivering good outcomes for children rather than process;
- Families and the issues that they face are viewed within their wider social and community context and there is an understanding of how this context can affect the caring role;
- There is a commitment to working *with* families;
- Relationships with children and families are : authentic, respectful, resourceful, reliable, accessible, flexible, truthful, empathic, under pinned by a genuine interest, responsive in thoughtful ways – this is reflected in both interactions and recording;
- Practitioners and leaders have positive relationships with local partners and communities.



MV – Family Valued Learning Session Breakout Rooms

- Three Questions
- What is your local authority doing to change the way you work on a day to day basis with children and families? What has worked, what hasn't?
- What do you think works best in changing the methods and mindset of family facing practitioners?
- How do we best work with children and families to promote change in children's services?

