



Department
for Education

Introducing the Suspected Inflicted Head Injury Service (SIHIS) for children

A pilot to trial a new streamlined medical pathway.

May 2024

OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE

Agenda:

Brief intros – 5 min

**Meana Alneami: Setting the scene / background to this work
(reducing family court delay, Shared Outcomes Fund) 5-10min**

**Meana / Dr Fiona Straw: What the SIHIS pilot is, and the purpose?
5-10min**

Mr Justice Williams: Legal perspective and impact

All: General Discussion

All: AOB / close

Setting the Scene

Policy background and context

- The Family Justice system is one of the most complex and cross-system policy areas in Children's Services. The DfE holds responsibility for public law, covering all vulnerable children in England who require local authority (LA) intervention.
- The DfE is aware that unacceptable delays in the family courts have been a long-standing issue for over 10 years.
- We know that delays result in poorer outcomes for children and huge additional costs to LAs and the taxpayer. The estimated costs of the Family Justice system is **£1.2bn**¹, which equates to over 10% of all direct expenditure on the children's social care (CSC) system (2019/20)².
- Recent independent modelling suggests that each **one-week** reduction in average proceedings duration could generate a financial cost avoidance of tens of millions, when projected across all English LA CSC budgets³.

Drivers of delay

- **We want to create sustainable cross-system changes that bring down family court delays.**
- We have carried out research and other work with stakeholders to understand **key drivers of delay**, and this has informed development of our suggested changes, which are being trialled through 3 pilots. We found that the main drivers are:
 - ordering of additional assessments and/or changes to care plans throughout the case;
 - lack of availability of experts to complete reports and assessments;
 - complex fact-finding exercises being required;
 - lack of Judge availability; and
 - lack of court space and inconsistencies with court listings practice.

Shared Outcome Fund

Background

Following this research, in the summer of 2023, the DfE led a joint bid for some special funding from His Majesty's Treasury (the Shared Outcomes Fund) to trial some pilots to tackle some of the root causes of delays across the FJ system, from the beginning with the local authority, to pre-proceedings and proceedings.

Overarching aims:

- Enabling cost avoidance and savings to all English LAs, courts and the NHS.
- Ensuring action to bring a case to court is necessary, timely and above all in the child's best interest.
- Ensuring the best outcome for every child is at the heart of every decision made in the family court and supports their best possible long-term outcomes.
- Ensuring every child is placed in a setting that allows them to thrive and achieve their full potential.
- Ensuring practice in the family justice system is consistent across the country.
- Ensuring positive, effective, and collaborative working relationships across a complex and wide-ranging system

£10m from HMT's Shared Outcomes Fund:



A Suspected Inflicted Head Injury Service (SIHIS)

Overview of aims: To bring together a team of paediatric medical experts within three NHS Trusts, to provide a Suspected Inflicted Head Injury Service focussing primarily on the most complex cases. This will create a formalised pathway by a multi-disciplinary expert team from the point of assessing the child to providing expert assessments in court.

**Ways of Working:
Building on, not taking away**

SIHIS in practice

- Any child that is suspected of abusive head and/or spinal trauma by the initial treating clinician will be referred to the SIHIS to investigate. The SIHIS will assess the case and determine the necessity of further testing.
- An initial proforma document will be compiled by assessing clinicians within the SIHIS, signed off by the lead paediatrician.
- A meeting will then be held, led by the lead safeguarding paediatrician and will include relevant family justice stakeholders (such as the police, other healthcare professionals and social workers). This stage will determine whether wider safeguarding assessments need to be implemented and legal processes followed.
- If a case progresses to court, a cover page including a clinical narrative will be added to the initial court report. The final combined document will be submitted to the court to support decision-making. The new medical proforma will be a fluid document, subject to change, ensuring it is fit for purpose.

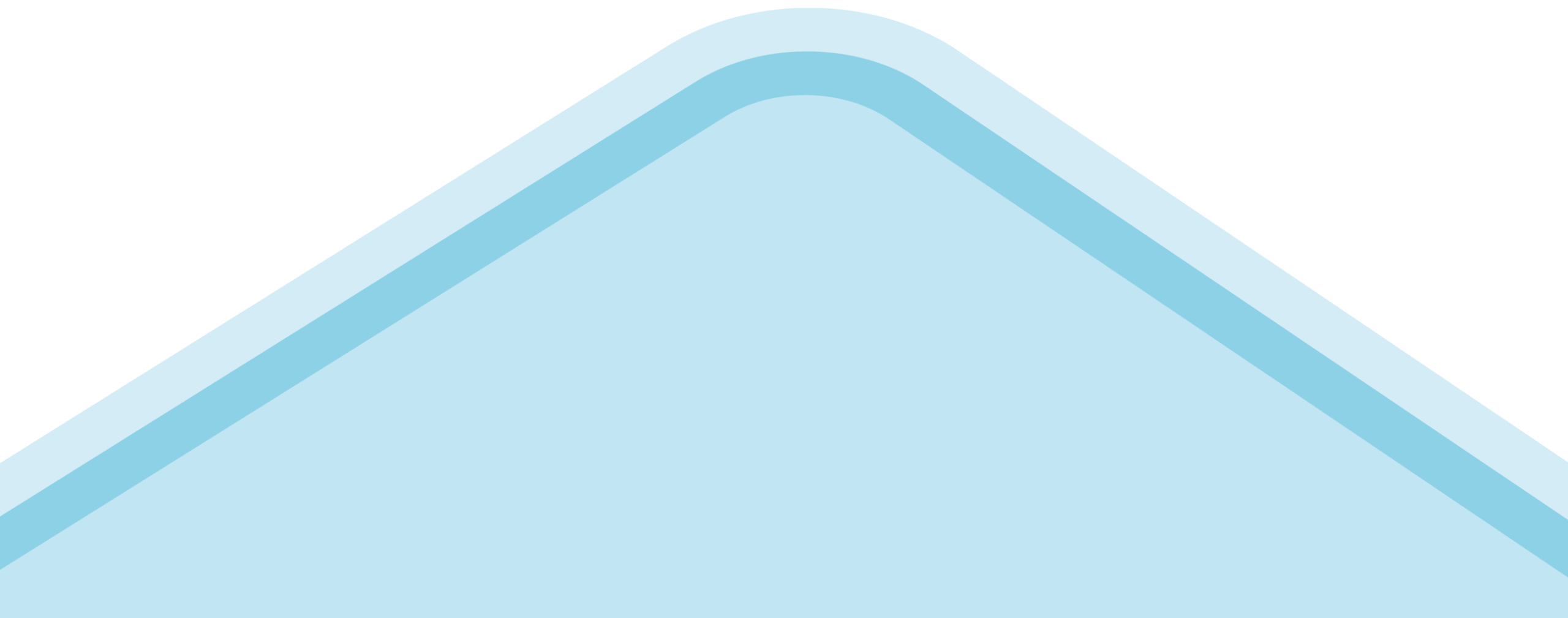


Drivers for the pilot

- Delays in report writing and lack of quality reports presented to the court.
- Putting the child and the family at the forefront.
- The NHS and courts are short of expert consultants working in this area. Taking on family justice work is difficult, and can be very emotionally taxing.
- In the long term, this work will increase the number of experts within safeguarding.
- The Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) within the SIHIS will create an environment for more robust and collective decision making.
- This work may also support junior clinicians to become involved in safeguarding work.
- Improving practice in consistency in investigation of inflicted injuries, so that fewer children have the wrong diagnosis.



Legal perspective



Department for Education

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