

Understanding the costs of planning, assessment and decision making in England



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Policy and practice context in England

- Economic austerity
- Social care under public scrutiny after high profile cases reported in media
- Change of government May 2010
- Importance of accurate referral and assessment 'Tiered approach'
 - Initial and Core Assessments, Section 47 Enquiries, Common Assessment Framework.

The costs and outcomes programme at CCFR

- Initial study, 2000, on costs and consequences of placements for looked after children
- Methodology calculates costs from the bottom up
- Combines fee/allowance costs with the costs of social work support.
- Relates costs to children's needs
- Uses longitudinal data to track costs incurred throughout care pathways of children
- Calculates costs based on the actual care history of each child
- Analyses costs by outcomes

Social care processes for Children in Need

Case management activities for children not looked:

1. Initial contact and referral
2. Initial Assessment
3. Ongoing provision
4. Close case
5. Core Assessment
6. Planning and Review
7. Section 47 Enquiry
8. Public Law Outline

The studies

- Extending the cost calculator for all children in need
 - Commissioned by the Department for Education
 - Calculated the costs of providing support and services to all children in need incurred by children's social care
- The cost of short breaks
 - Commissioned by the Department for Education
 - Calculated the costs of different types of short break provision and the additional activity associated with providing short breaks
 - Particular focus on referral and assessment processes
- The cost and capacity implications of implementing Lord Laming's (2009) recommendations
 - Commissioned by the Local Government Association
 - Model the additional cost and capacity implications of some of Lord Laming's recommendations
 - Particular focus on referral and assessment processes

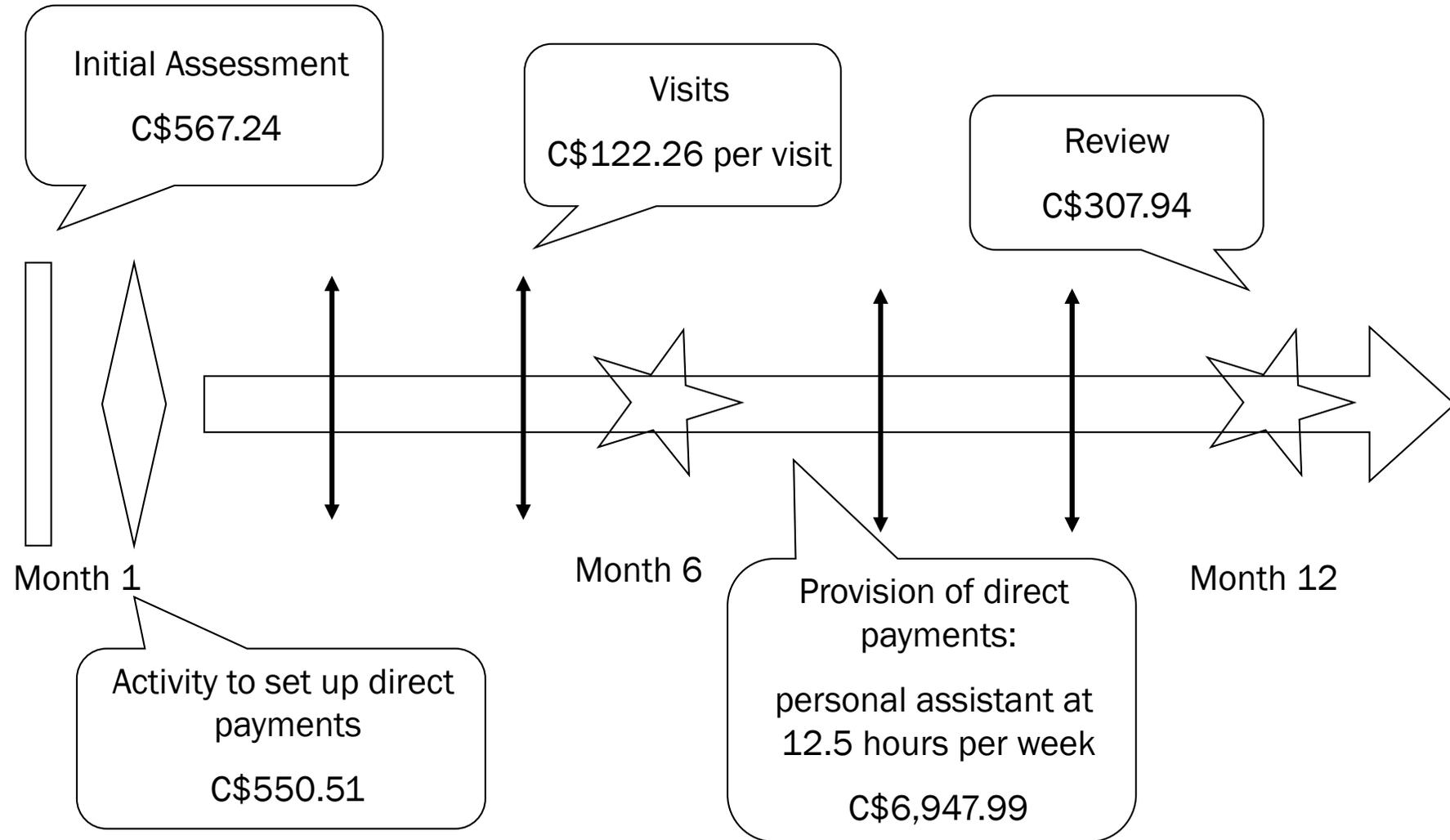
The costs of referral and assessment

- Costs increase with the type of assessment
- Costs increase with need
- Variations identified for
 - Initial contact and referral
 - Initial Assessment
 - Section 47 Enquiries
- Variations in the proportions of different types of activity
 - Direct contact between 14 – 32%
 - Liaising with other professional between 10 – 44%
 - Indirect contact between 24 – 76%

Taking a tiered approach

- Short breaks study found that levels of assessment reflect levels of presenting need
 - Local core offer
 - Nominal cost in two local authorities
 - Panel discussion in one authority C\$19.20
 - Panel supported integrated working and joint commissioning
 - Common Assessment Framework
 - Initial Assessment
 - Core Assessment
 - Panel
- Variation between authorities

Example: Direct Payments



Comparing different service packages

Service package	Costs of social care activity (C\$)	Costs of services (C\$)	Total cost (C\$)	Activity cost as percentage of total social care cost
Local core offer	19.20	6,295.94	6315.14	0.3%
Direct payments only	2,192.16	6,293.25	8,485.41	25%
Child with complex health needs	1,814.44	22,928.24	27,742.68	7%

Understanding costs and outcomes

- Research evidence suggests that timely and accurate assessments lead to the provision of services to achieve better outcomes.
- Children who move in and out of care or social care thresholds most costly over a six month period
- Children previously known to social care
 - Additional activities to read case file
- Re-referrals
 - Additional activities to support referrers

Common Assessment Framework

- Implemented in 2008 under early intervention and prevention strategies
- Blurring of boundaries between ‘vulnerable’ children and ‘children in need’
- Underestimation in numbers
 - Variation in recording
 - Children may not be known to social care
- Evidence of increased concerns around safeguarding
 - Increase in referrals
 - May impact number of CAFs undertaken
- Impact on social care

Conclusion

- Increase in referrals impacting costs and capacity of referral and assessment teams
 - Quality of assessments
 - Ability to undertake all necessary tasks to a sufficient level
- Importance of taking a system's approach;
 - Do costs of referral and assessment reflect needs?
- Increasing importance of CAF

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