



Name of meeting: Corporate Parenting Board

Date: 5th December 2023

Title of report: Update on Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ's)

Purpose of report: Details on the means of measuring on a regular basis the emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by looked-after children at a local and national level

Background

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ) were introduced in 2008 as a screening tool to assist in measuring the emotional and behavioural health of children and young people. All Local Authorities are required to provide information on the emotional and behavioural health of looked after children. The data is collected through the SDQ and a summary figure for each child (the total difficulties score) is the outcome measure used for tracking the emotional and behavioural difficulties of children looked after at a national level.

The SDQ is a clinically validated brief behavioural screening questionnaire for use with 4–17 year olds or 2-4 year olds. It is internationally validated and simple to administer. It exists in three versions: for parents or carers, teachers and children aged 4-17, and can be used to screen for any problems related to a child's emotional well-being. The SDQ comprises a series of statements that require a judgement on how well it describes the child by ticking one or three or four boxes for each question.

The SDQ provides information to help Social Workers form a view about the emotional well-being of individual children looked after. For the purpose of the Department for Education's SSDA903 data collection, the requirement is that Local Authorities must ensure that the looked-after child's main carer (a foster carer or residential care worker) completes the two-page questionnaire for parents and carers. This is a simple questionnaire that does not require any training to interpret and can be completed within ten minutes. In Kirklees, we currently only use the parents/carers form to measure the SDQ of the child looked after. See Appendix 1 for details of the parents/carers form.

The questionnaire can be completed at any point during the year, but to reduce the administration required it is recommended that it is completed around the time of a child's health assessment and this is the current practice in Kirklees. We require our carers to complete the SDQ for children who have been in the care of Kirklees Local Authority for at least 12 months. The current rate of completion and return of SDQ's for children looked after in Kirklees is around 65% (see table below).

The emphasis on completing SDQs is largely driven by the requirement for Local Authorities to submit SDQ data to the Department for Education as part of the children looked after at 31 March SSSDA903 data return. Because we are required to ensure that the main carer's version of the questionnaire is completed, the self-questionnaires are not currently completed by children looked after, and education perspectives are not currently sought. However, our Virtual School ask the Designated Teachers about the health and emotional well-being of the child looked after within the school setting and it is rated using a traffic light system and discussed as part of the child's personal Education plan meeting. Our goal is to understand the emotional and mental wellbeing of children looked after by triangulating the total difficulties score through collection and analysis of the SDQ forms from multiple perspectives and this is something we are planning on achieving in the future as part of the Kirklees SDQ working group action plan.

Key Performance Data

In Kirklees, the statutory SDQ is disseminated by the CLA Nursing team on an annual basis to carers of looked after children aged 4-17 years to screen for emotional and behavioural difficulties. A score of 0-13 is considered 'satisfactory', 14-16 is 'borderline' and a score of 17 or more (high) identifies a cause for concern'. More information is available about SDQ's at: sdqinfo.org/norms/UKNorms.html

All scores from completed questionnaires are shared with the looked after child's Social Worker and Team Manager so they can be discussed and explored as part of case supervision. For those where there is a high score, it is strongly recommended that the Emotional Well-Being Service is accessed to consider more targeted support and/or intervention for the child and/or carer (or both). This is with the aim of supporting and stabilising the relationship and/or placement.

Carer scores for 2021/22 (*National data not available for 22-23 yet*).

	Kirk.	Nat.		Kirk.	Nat		Kirk.	Nat.		Kirk.
	19-	19-		20-	20-		21-	21-		22-
	20	20		21	21		22	22		23

Average returned forms	74%	81%		69%	80%		59%	77%		65%
0-13 satisfactory	50%	49%		47%	51%		51%	50%		46%
14-16 Borderline	13%	13%		13%	12%		12%	12%		12%
17+ cause for concern	36%	38%		40%	37%		37%	37%		42%

The use of the SDQ can be subjective, as it does not factor in the beginning and ending of interventions and some children's emotional health can deteriorate before it gets better. Improvements in mental health can be slow and the scores should not be compared with those of their peers who have not been in care. The tool is used to alert services to children who may require support.

Our return rate is below the national average, and we have seen a reduction in the total number of returned SDQ over the past three years, with last year's being the lowest.

We have also seen a slight rise in the number of 'high' SDQ scores returned by our carers so far this year. This suggests that our carers are reporting more concerns on fewer looked after children. Our 'satisfactory' and 'borderline' rates remain largely consistent overall.

Next steps and timelines

The SDQ working group have been working towards the initial goal to increase our return rate of SDQ's collected from carers of children looked after to above 80%. A systemic mapping exercise has been completed identifying the factors contributing to the low return rate - see Appendix 2.

To achieve the initial goal of increasing the return rate of SDQ currently completed by our carers to above 80%, the working group have identified a process for practitioners and carers to follow – see Appendix 3. A digital SDQ form has also been created and is currently being tested and we hope to trial this next month with a small cohort of carers and if successful, we will roll this out by the end of the year, thus offering all carers the option and convenience of completing the SDQ form electronically. We are confident that our return rate will increase prior to the submission to the Department for Education for 2023/24 and more importantly, we will have a much better understanding of the emotional well-being needs of our children looked after and the support needs of our carers.

A further goal is to agree a process whereby completed SDQ forms with scores of 'borderline' and above receive targeted support/intervention by the Emotional Well-Being Service. The working group have set an expectation that professionals working with the child looked after and the carer will access the Emotional Well-Being Service for a Targeted Formulation Consultation in order to discuss the presenting issues that are linked to the high scoring areas on the form and to agree the next steps to address them. Our aim is to have this process in place by March 2024.

The collection and analysis of the SDQ forms from multiple perspectives (child looked after and education) is something Kirklees will look to achieving in the future once the above goals have been achieved – from April 2024 and based on a cost analysis, and to include all children in Kirklees who have social care involvement.

Contact officers

Noushin Mostowfi, Service Manager Emotional Well-Being Service
Rachael Johnson, MST Supervisor

Service Director responsible

Dr Kieran Lord, Resources, Improvements and Partnerships

Appendix 1

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

P 4-17

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months.

Child's NameMale/Female

Date of Birth.....

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many worries, often seems worried	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has at least one good friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often fights with other children or bullies them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally liked by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kind to younger children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often lies or cheats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Picked on or bullied by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thinks things out before acting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Steals from home, school or elsewhere	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gets on better with adults than with other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many fears, easily scared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any other comments or concerns?

Please turn over - there are a few more questions on the other side

Overall, do you think that your child has difficulties in one or more of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get on with other people?

No	Yes- minor difficulties	Yes- definite difficulties	Yes- severe difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered "Yes", please answer the following questions about these difficulties:

- How long have these difficulties been present?

Less than a month	1-5 months	6-12 months	Over a year
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties upset or distress your child?

Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties interfere with your child's everyday life in the following areas?

HOME LIFE FRIENDSHIPS CLASSROOM LEARNING LEISURE ACTIVITIES

- Do the difficulties upset or distress your child?

Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the family as a whole?

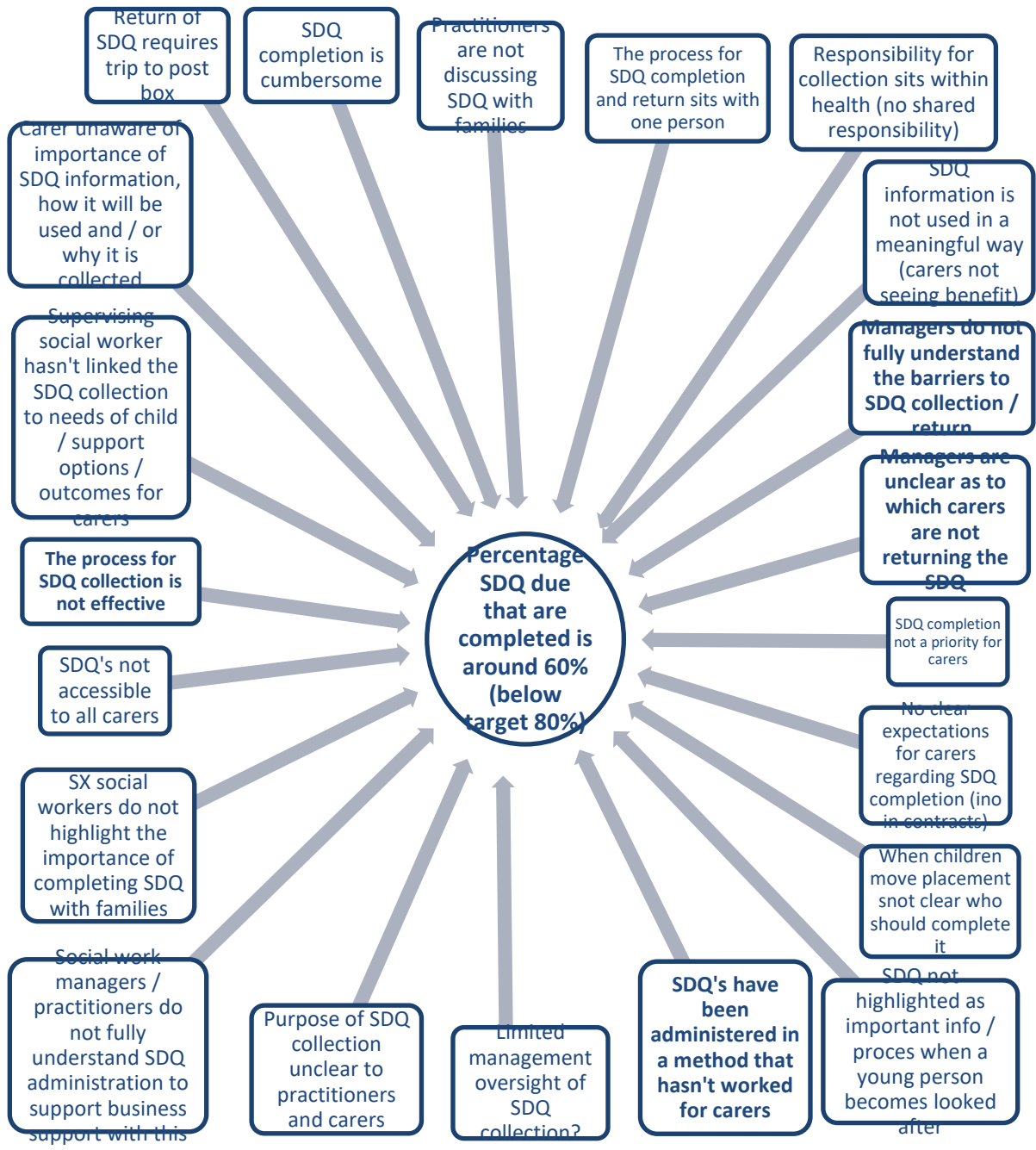
Not at all	Only a little	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SignatureDate

Mother/Father/Other (please specify:)

Thank you very much for your help

Appendix 2



Appendix 3

