

Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing

Information sharing to protect vulnerable children and families regional roadshow summary reports: **Midlands**

What is the 'Information sharing to protect vulnerable children' programme?

Since January 2016, The Centre for Excellence in Information Sharing has been working in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) to explore information sharing issues around vulnerable children and families. This programme builds upon our previous review of Multi-Agency Sharing and Safeguarding Hubs (MASHs).

The initial research for the project consisted of an in depth analysis of 25 Serious Case Reviews (SCR) and several field interviews with local places across England. This research helped to shape five roadshows which ran across England for safeguarding professionals between February and March 2016. The objectives of the roadshows were to:

1. Share findings from the Centre's research about the development of multi-agency arrangements to protect vulnerable children and families.
2. Discuss common information sharing challenges with peers using a fictional case study created by the Centre.
3. Provide the opportunity to have a direct voice to Central Government about the support and guidance that is required at a local level, with the potential of shaping future policy.

Please note that the summary reports are a reflection of the views expressed by the professionals that attended the roadshows. Please see our final insights report (to be published late spring/early summer 2016) for an in-depth exploration of the themes and recommendations for improved information sharing within the early help environment.

What were the main information sharing challenges delegates in the Midlands said they faced in protecting vulnerable children and families?

- Understanding that information sharing agreements are not an encompassing solution to improved information sharing. Organisational culture and 'people' drive forward successful information sharing.
- Poor internal information flows within safeguarding partnerships – delegates were particularly concerned that concerns are not referred in a timely way through the 'Escalation Policy'.
- There are significant issues with tracking families across boundaries, especially when they move several times to avoid detection.
- Confusion over legislation and the fear of "getting it wrong".
- Having a shared understanding of risk thresholds.

What did delegates in the Midlands say were the best way of overcoming these challenges?

At a local level

- There was a strong call for information sharing systems to be reflective of practice, rather than the practice being driven by the way systems are designed. There was a particular request to acknowledge the voice of the practitioner within policy and design.
- Integrated multi-agency assessment referral processes.
- Information sharing across partners relies on a better understanding of what information should be shared. In order to achieve this, there is a requirement for further multi-agency training programmes for practitioners. Areas of concerns were identified as child sexual exploitation and domestic violence.
- Delegates were also keen to develop a stronger response to domestic abuse concerns and shared processes for supporting victims across the safeguarding partnership.
- Better review of stepped down cases and timeliness of follow-up procedures would lead to more confidence between partners that if they shared information in future, it would be acted upon promptly.
- Developing a common language to help support cross-border 'handover' of information about families who move between different authorities / health / police boundaries.

At a national level

- There is a need for more clarity and consistency of national messages about good practice in information sharing to protect vulnerable children and families to reduce "grey areas".
- Developing greater multi-agency capability for professional curiosity and challenge.
- Campaigns that promote information sharing to protect vulnerable children and families, such as family nurse partnerships.

What were the main asks of Central Government and national organisations?

- There was a call for a co-ordinated effort at the national level to raise the profile of safeguarding is 'everybody's business', and put more emphasis on explaining why information helps to protect vulnerable children and families.
- To complement the above, delegates stressed the importance of multi-agency safeguarding and information sharing training for all services that engage with children and families.
- Support to build routine feedback mechanisms for all relevant agencies working with vulnerable children and families, to help improve partners' trust and accountability in the handling of their information.
- Delegates also raised concerns that they needed better clarity through regional or national governance on processes for obtaining informed consent from the family to share information with a range of early help partners.

"Really good opportunity to share information and best practice across agencies."

"I will work with partners around understanding and developing the culture around information sharing and ensuring all our training is multi-agency."

"We're going to get this sorted."

Midlands delegates

What will happen after the the Midlands roadshow?

The Centre will use the findings from this and other roadshows to develop a draft summary of recommendations for the DfE. We will then publish an insights document at the end of May. This will include a detailed analysis of our findings and a full set of recommendations for future work in this area.

How can you be involved in the continuing conversation?

If you would like to share any information sharing barriers with the DfE and/or the Centre please do not hesitate to contact us before 13 May 2016:

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