

Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing

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

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 North East said they faced in protecting vulnerable children and families?

- The likeliness of partners sharing information was identified as being compounded by confusion over legislation, in terms of what can and cannot be shared.
- The fear generated by the perceived consequences of "getting it wrong" was also viewed as a key barrier to information sharing.
- Lack of integrated approach to identifying and managing risk to vulnerable adults and children.
- Building multi-agency relationships.
- A lack of common language between partner agencies can often present inconsistency in the way that a referral or case is recorded, resulting in a lack of trust.
- Issues tracking families across boundaries, especially when they move several times to avoid detection.
- Delegates said they often felt the impact of a fragmented or regularly changing workforce on their capacity to share information.

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

At a local level

- There was a strong emphasis on developing relationships within safeguarding partnerships. Delegates felt that strong relationships could be forged through agreement over uniformity on the terms practitioners use so that everyone is “speaking the same language”.
- Allied to this, delegates raised the issue of how communication methods support multi-agency sharing: they suggested investing in secure, technological solutions to make it easier for practitioners to engage in multi-agency meetings, e.g. video-linked conferences.
- Housing services host a great wealth of information about a family. Efforts should be made to ensure that information flows are improved between housing and partners.
- Delegates recommended building feedback loops into referral processes so that the right agencies are in the room, and information about vulnerable families is shared earlier.
- Building in stronger supervision processes and more time for professional reflection would help to overcome this barrier.

At a national level

- Delegates suggested that Academy Schools need to be fully aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding, despite their statutory autonomy.
- 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”.
- There is also a need for consistency not just in guidance but in the narrative and focus from a range of national agencies such as the Information Commissioner’s Office and Ofsted.

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

- There was a strong call for information sharing systems to be reflective of practice, rather than the practice being driven by the way these systems are designed. They believed that better commissioning would help to tip the balance in favour of concerns being shared earlier and more frequently, and were keen for support at a national level to help strengthen their commissioning processes in this area.
- Delegates wanted support to strengthen cross-border handover of information about families who move between different authorities / health / police boundaries.
- Delegates were aware that organisations staffed with workforces that are fragmented or poorly led are less likely to share than one where there is more investment in well-trained front-line staff. They called for support from Central Government to develop leaders that could develop their workforce to meet these challenges.
- Delegates said local multi-agency arrangements would benefit from co-ordinated guidance and support across Central Government – especially around the use of feedback loops throughout the system to ensure all agencies understood the bigger picture of risk to vulnerable children and families.

“Very interactive and engaging, having time to think about issues and provide feedback for national information.”

“Re-activated my concerns about woolly policies / professionals not communicating with each other.”

“Exceeded my expectations!”

North East delegates

What will happen after the North East 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:

- info@informationsharing.org.uk
- Jovian.smalley@informationsharing.org.uk
- Emma.hart@informationsharing.org.uk