

Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing

Information sharing to protect vulnerable children and families regional roadshow summary Report: **South West**

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 South West said they faced in protecting vulnerable children and families?

- Delegates were concerned that, where information sharing takes place in an uncontrolled environment (i.e. non statutory safeguarding meetings or informal conversations), practitioners do not always ensure that the information that is shared by partners is recorded and actioned appropriately.
- Engaging successfully with vulnerable families to build their confidence in information sharing arrangements.
- Ensuring that multi agency relationships are robust enough to meet their intended objective of improving information flows and breaking down cultural barriers to information sharing.
- Delegates reported a lack of regional or national clarity and direction on information sharing issues.
- Delegates also suggested that practitioners sometimes experienced barriers to sharing caused by poor or inflexible system and process design. For example, limited opportunity to make information systems more accessible and inefficient processes delaying routine information sharing.
- Delegates also emphasised the need to focus on practitioners as the facilitators of better information sharing in addition to information sharing systems and agreements.

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

At a local level

- Integrating multi-agency assessment referral processes.
- Developing more robust information sharing systems and harnessing technology that supports the cultural aspects of integrated working .
- Joined up working across partners relies on a thorough understanding of information sharing principles and practice . In order to achieve this, delegates highlighted a need for further multi-agency training programmes targeted towards practitioners. Areas of concerns were identified as child sexual exploitation and Prevent.
- There was a strong emphasis throughout the day on listening to and capturing the needs of vulnerable children and families to ensure that interventions were targeted appropriately and information shared early to support these needs.

At a national level

- Strengthened guidance and support on listening to vulnerable children and families in order that they are at the centre of the safeguarding partnership to improve information sharing.
- Developing greater multi-agency capability for professional curiosity and challenge.
- More clarity and consistency of national information sharing messages to reduce “grey areas” in the early help space.

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

- Participants 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.
- Delegates were keen for continued national effort to develop early help Multi-Agency information sharing models which prioritised the needs of vulnerable people so that risks to children and families could be identified before the point of crisis.
- At the same time, there was a call for a co-ordinated effort at the national level to raise the profile of safeguarding as ‘everybody’s business’, and put more emphasis on explaining why information helps to protect vulnerable children and families.
- Finally, delegates asked for Government Departments to prioritise and develop a more joined-up approach to information sharing policy. In turn this would help places to “step away from fragmented local procedures.”

“I will make it as simple, transparent and rapid as possible for my staff to share information easily.”

“I enjoyed the case study activity as my table did this as a role play which worked very well.”

“I appreciated the emphasis on collaborative thinking and working together.”

South West delegates

What will happen after the South West 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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