

| Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing

Information Sharing to Protect Vulnerable Children and Families Programme: Strategic Meeting 24 January 2017

What is the 'Information Sharing to Protect Vulnerable Children' programme?

The Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing (the Centre) has been working in partnership with the Department for Education (DfE) to explore the information sharing challenges that exist around vulnerable children and families.

The overarching aim of the work is to identify what can be done to 'support practitioners in understanding what approaches work best in information sharing and how to overcome real and perceived barriers'. These approaches include those used within the early help space, where information sharing practice has been less understood.

In order to examine the information sharing barriers that exist within multi-agency safeguarding, the Centre adopted a triangulated approach to its work. Firstly, a thematic review of 25 Serious Case Reviews was undertaken. Secondly, to verify the findings, a small sample of in-depth field interviews with safeguarding professionals was conducted. Thirdly, to develop a deeper understanding of the key themes, professionals from across the country were invited to attend one of five regional roadshows that took place during February and March 2016.

This work has identified three overarching factors crucial to the successful sharing of information by early help and safeguarding partnerships:

- Understanding vulnerability and risk
- Providing strategic leadership and communication
- Developing professional capability.

In January 2017, central government representatives and national partners were invited to attend a strategic meeting to take forward the recommendations that were identified in the report. Participants were invited to develop proposed actions in response to the following three questions:

1. How can we develop and communicate a shared vision for information sharing?
2. How can we develop skills and capability that will support better information sharing?
3. How can we ensure that risk aversion is not a barrier to information sharing?

Actions identified to develop and communicate a shared vision for information sharing:

- Professionals agreed that there is a need to ensure a collaborative approach to safeguarding with simple information sharing processes and guidance
- More specifically, professionals argued that there was a need to establish a single message: 'I must share information if my concerns are related to the safeguarding of children'
- Professionals expressed the need for further emphasis to be placed on the child's wellbeing and concerns as being a priority
- Professionals emphasised the need for safeguarding to be made legislative as opposed to featuring as part of statutory guidance
- There was a call for action and further clarity surrounding the 'Early Help' space
- Professionals suggested that Police, Social Care and Health should work together to identify current legislative gateways for sharing safeguarding information
- There was a call for improved methods of sharing 'good' safeguarding practice.
- It was also identified that inconsistent language was described as key barrier that needed to be addressed to improve ways of working.

Actions identified to develop skills and capability that will support better information sharing:

- On the one hand professionals suggested that there was a need to develop an information sharing process that is simple enough to reduce or even eliminate training requirements
- In contrast, other professionals stated that there was a requirement to make training on information sharing mandatory:
 - Consideration should be given to who the mandatory training priority groups are.
 - When training should be delivered (start of professional training, induction, throughout professional career)
 - The best approach to delivering training (multi agency/joint agency)
 - Professionals highlighted the importance of identifying opportunities in current and planned new training provision.
- Professionals stated that the training must ensure that the child is at the heart of all decision making, supports good professional judgement, uses a common language and forms part of a wider approach to developing professional practice.

Actions identified to ensure risk aversion isn't a barrier to appropriate information sharing:

- Professionals stated that the rules around record keeping must be clear and simple to alleviate concerns over sharing information
- It was suggested that leaders should invest time into creating a workforce that are confident within their information sharing decisions
- As stated previously, professionals suggested that 'information sharing' should be a statutory component of professional development both at the start and throughout their career lifespan
- Professionals stated that they must support the use of simple and unambiguous language when referring to vulnerable children and families
- It was identified that a crucial factor to successful information sharing is guidance that reflects 'joined up' working of partnerships.

Next Steps

We are currently in the process of presenting our round table feedback to the DfE and other central government departments, with the hope to take forward our learning in 2017.

If you would like to share any information sharing barriers with Central Government departments and/or the Centre, please do not hesitate to contact us using the following email address info@informationsharing.org.uk

If you would like to stay up to date with the progress of the work of the Centre, sign up to our newsletter www.informationsharing.org.uk/contact-us and you can download the full report from www.informationsharing.org.uk/safeguarding