

► Case study

Multi agency working in Bath & North East Somerset

Bath & North East Somerset (B&NES) council is working with its partners on four interconnected areas of transformation: Domestic Violence, Sustainable Work, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and their Troubled Families (Phase 2) programme.

Through the Transformation Challenge Award, the council has been awarded £300,000 to share and analyse data more effectively between local services and agencies, through the Connecting Data project. The Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing is supporting them with the practical implementation of a range of activity across these policy areas.

The overall aim of B&NES' approach is to use local data more intelligently, in the way services and agencies share information. Having already had success with this approach in early projects it endeavours to continue to use residents' data safely and ethically for innovative purposes. This directly influences local decision making, ultimately aiming for a 'golden record' of residents' information.

For B&NES, this is not simply about collecting more data: it is about what you do with that data which makes a real difference to the lives of local people in Bath and North East Somerset. As Jon Poole, the council's Research and Intelligence Manager says: "The value comes from the point where we're genuinely jointly producing intelligence with our communities". Through this process, the authority hopes to become a leader in the field of information sharing and an exemplar for other areas wanting to be "intelligent places".

B&NES recognises that to support the great work that already exists, and to be able to build a coherent case for transformational change in the policy areas they are focusing on, there needs to be a "changed culture around information sharing, to enable staff to share appropriately and proactively". To support this cultural shift, the council will be working closely with the Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing, so it can both learn from the experiences of others and be able to share its findings with other areas at a national level. Ultimately, the intention is that successes from the council's Connecting Data programme and other information sharing initiatives can be replicated in other areas.

Domestic violence

Bath and North East Somerset averaged 70 domestic abuse crimes a month in 2012, costing public services over £17 million. A review by the area's Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Strategic Partnership (ISVASP) identified that very little was known by any of the key agencies.

As a result of their review, the council and Clinical Commissioning Group commissioned the Identification & Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS) model in order to record and report domestic violence incidents more effectively, in turn helping victims access the support they need faster. This work helped to build a successful case for greater investment by both the health service and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Sustainable work

B&NES also participated in the Universal Credit pilot, as part of a wider effort to reduce the welfare bill locally. The council partnered with Curo, a local social housing provider, to look holistically at the issue of financial vulnerability. This has led a local partnership of agencies to commission just under £500,000 of services, and will inform a more joined up approach to sustainable work. Frontline services are already co-located in a 'one stop shop', so that debt issues and other barriers to work can be dealt with in the same appointment as benefit claims. A trial to use a coordinated 'Troubled Families'-style approach with a cohort of 80-100 vulnerable families is underway.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Serious Case Reviews, both nationally and locally, have highlighted the need for closer information sharing between agencies, particularly local authority, health services and police teams. Complementing the work to tackle domestic violence, described above, agencies are also concerned that "low level intelligence" on domestic abuse is not currently shared effectively.

In June 2014, the B&NES MASH steering group commissioned a consultancy to help them to develop a bespoke model that would improve information sharing and joint decision-making in safeguarding adults and children. Whilst there are concerns about the implications of adopting a MASH model, there is consensus across the partners that "whatever model is used, staff must use professional judgment in responding to risk in a way that is person-centred and proportionate to the level of risk". The steering group is also considering the effectiveness of the MASH as a brand and will be looking to other mechanisms to define and market this work.

Connecting families (Phase 2)

Government has estimated that there are about 215 families experiencing multiple problems (known nationally as Troubled Families) in Bath and North East Somerset. By April 2014, the council's 'Connecting Families' team was in contact with 43 of these families. The multiplicity of problems they are struggling with means that this policy area touches all the others. For example, national research on the Troubled Families programme has shown that three out of ten families experience domestic violence.

B&NES' Connecting Data programme intends to develop learning from the Connecting Families programme in order to build the case for better use of data about families experiencing multiple problems, and be able to turn more of these families around in future.