

Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing

Information sharing to protect vulnerable children and families regional roadshow summary reports: **North 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 North West said they faced in protecting vulnerable children and families?

- Delegates identified that in some circumstances partners are less likely to share information due to a lack of shared understanding over risk thresholds.
- It was identified that a lack of understanding about what to share, a fear of the consequences of sharing or a lack of trust between partners presented clear barriers to information sharing.
- A lack of opportunities to communicate with vulnerable children and families so that greater awareness of their safeguarding needs leads to better information sharing to protect them.
- Getting informed consent from families to provide joined-up early help support.
- Schools being able to access further training and support to spot the signs of harm and neglect.
- Delegates indicated that a lack of integration between adult and children's safeguarding services was impeding the flow of information about vulnerable families and preventing professionals providing holistic support to those families.

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

At a local level

- To understand that Information Sharing Agreements (ISAs) are not an encompassing solution to improved information sharing. Organisational cultural and 'people' are also the vehicle to successful information sharing.
- Delegates stressed the importance of regular multi-agency safeguarding and information sharing training for all services that engage with children and families, as knowing what to look out for and what to share will improve the information flow between partners.
- Participants suggested swifter sharing of domestic abuse incidents could be supported by embedding Police Officers with a domestic abuse focus in in Multi-Agency information sharing arrangements.
- Involving parents earlier and obtaining informed consent to share their information with a range of agencies.
- 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.
- Good practice was highlighted in the strategic delivery of safeguarding functions across four local authority areas in the region, to improve the information flow that is commonly experienced across geographical borders.

At a national level

- Championing better feedback mechanisms so partners are kept aware of vulnerable families' circumstances, and understand the benefits of sharing information.
- Developing greater multi-agency capability for professional curiosity and challenge.
- 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 (CSE) and Prevent.
- 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?

- The issue of whether practitioners should rely on implied consent from families to share their information versus, or seek informed consent directly from family members, was still an area that participants wanted to develop more clarity and consistency of approach at the national level.
- Sharing learning was identified as a key enabler to improving service delivery; this included building peer networks and learning from the experiences of the private sector. Delegates felt that there was a role within this for Central Government to support learning and to improve methods of disseminating good practice.
- Delegates expressed an interest to coordinate information sharing guidance across Central Government departments. This was specifically made in reference to providing feedback to all partners about the status of referrals and cases.

“I will be more open-minded and pragmatic towards culture or partner agencies and to make an effort to understand their practices and boundaries.”

“I appreciated the opportunity to network with other professionals from different agencies.”

“Loved the materials!”

North West delegates

What will happen after the North 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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