



Information Sharing

A newsletter for those who work with children and young people

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What is Information Sharing?

The 'Every Child Matters' Green Paper outlined proposals for information sharing systems holding basic information on all children with practitioners able to indicate that they are providing a service to a child and, where appropriate, that they have a concern about a child. Direction on how this is to be applied is now provided in Clause 12 of the Children Act. Government guidance for practitioners in health, education, social care and youth justice is to be published in September 2005.

Information Sharing Protocol Signed

Over the past few months the Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) has been agreed and signed by the following organisations:



- Blackwater Valley/Hart Primary Care Trust
- East Hampshire PCT
- Eastleigh and Test Valley South PCT
- Fareham and Gosport PCT
- Hampshire Constabulary
- Hampshire County Council
- Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Mid Hampshire PCT
- New Forest PCT
- North Hampshire PCT
- South Central Connexions
- Wessex Youth Offending Team

Councillor Felicity Hindson, Executive Lead Member for Children Services, commented "This is yet another important step in fulfilling our commitment to achieving the best outcomes for all children and young people in Hampshire. The Protocol will enable us to work together with our partners to safeguard children and ensure they are protected from harm and neglect. Over the coming months we will be seeking sign up from other partners working with children, young people and families."

Has your organisation signed up?

It is important to be able to identify those children who may be at risk of social exclusion, whose needs are not being met, are not attending school, or getting involved in anti-social behaviour and then being able to work together to ensure the best outcomes for those children.

If your organisation has not signed the protocol, requests for information should be made and handled in accordance with existing arrangements and procedures.

Contact : Sue.M.Smith@hants.gov.uk to get more information, a copy of the protocol, and make sure your organisation is signed up.



Summary of Protocol

The Information Sharing Protocol is an agreement between the Chief Officers of Hampshire Local Authorities, public sector agencies such as the police and Connexions and their not-for-profit partners such as the Children's Trust. This protocol addresses the need for improved information sharing as defined in the Government's Green Paper "Every Child Matters" and the recently enacted Children Act 2004.

The Children Act 2004 provides a legal framework which will enable practitioners to promptly share information to ensure children and young people, their families and carers get the support they need. Consent of the child, young person or parent should always be sought unless one of the special exemptions applies.

The protocol has a two-tier structure.

- 1 **The first tier** defines the general parameters against which all requirements for information sharing are to be measured.
- 2 **The second tier** deals with particular work undertaken by the partners and specifies the information to be shared, the purposes for sharing information and their legal basis. There are two parts to the second tier:
 - For children and young people who are at risk of offending, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires information to be shared between designated officers. This information should be written, unless there is an emergency, within specified timescales and recorded and stored in a special file.
 - For children and young people who are in need, receiving health services, or at risk of harm or social exclusion, the information is only exchanged from staff member to staff member on a 'need to know' basis, it can be either verbal or written, and no set timescales are specified.

The ISP will be updated when regulations and powers to set up an information sharing index are issued later in 2005 after the results of public consultation on the index have been assessed.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives no right of access to personal information.

What happened in 2004

Workshops

The protocol, although developed in accordance with national guidance on the sharing of personal information, is also the result of a lot of work and consultation with children and young people and our partners in both statutory and voluntary bodies. Everyone involved has shown real commitment ensuring the protocol is drafted to suit the needs of service users as well as the various agencies involved.

This consultation process started in February 2004. 10 workshops across the county were attended by 236 children and young people, 103 parents and 259 practitioners from education welfare, health trusts, the police and social services.



Workshops with children

The children and young people worked in small groups of less than 10, and in order to ensure their full participation, entertainment was provided before and after the consultation session.

Along with other questions relating to their needs, likes and dislikes, they were also asked about Information Sharing and although they appreciated being consulted, it also caused them to ask their own question:

“Who is allowed to look at the information, and are they checked by the police so we know they are good people?”

Despite some concerns, they mostly recognised the advantage of information being shared, some comments were:

- I understand what “they” are talking about
- I only have to tell one person about me
- It will be better when moving schools

and one 11 year old said:

“ I think it is a really good idea because if one person is worried about a child, then all the people like Dentists, Doctors and other people involved can know so they can try and find out what the person is worried about and can do something about it. So I think it is a really good idea”

Parents and carers felt that the most positive aspect of Information Sharing was that it would help identify families in need of support and give them greater access to services. However, they were concerned that confidential information may be accessed by hackers. They felt that information could be shared as long as there were appropriate and robust checks and measures to ensure that information is accessed by the right people for the right reasons only.

The Practitioners welcomed Information Sharing, but expressed similar concerns to the parents and carers regarding security. More positively they felt that if all partners signed up and it was properly resourced, it could help to reduce bureaucracy and duplication. Most importantly, they felt that by improved partnership working, it would improve the quality of information and overcome the cultural differences which exist between the different agencies.

Making Links' – Multi-agency Conference and Workshops – 28 April 2004

This was an intense day of 15 workshops attended by councillors as well as a cross-section of senior management, front-line staff and service users from various organisations including the voluntary sector, education, youth justice, health and social services. The issues covered in the workshops, some of which were facilitated by young people, included :

- Supporting parents and carers
- Early intervention and effective protection
- Accountability and integration
- User involvement
- Workforce reform

The feedback from the delegates showed they valued:

- The opportunity to exchange ideas with such a wide range of other professionals, parents/carers and young people
- The contributions of the young people present
- The clarity about major national and local developments

Multi-Agency Awareness Workshop – September 2004

This provided management and staff from the pilot group, CAMHS (Children and Adults Mental Health Service), Connexions, Education Children Looked After support teams and Hampshire Education Welfare Service the chance to learn together how information sharing is being implemented in Hampshire. They worked on various scenarios, working out together how information sharing would work in practice. Those who attended felt that it helped challenge some of the myths around data protection and gave them a better understanding of the legal framework.

Pilot evaluation workshops have just taken place. These indicated a clear need for a consistent, multi-agency approach to training for practitioners and their managers from induction through to information sharing workshops.

Public Concerns about Information Sharing

There have been various news and magazine articles which have expressed fears about Information Sharing, with references to Big Brother, ID cards for children with fingerprints, etc.

For example, there was a recent article in Elle magazine by Peaches Geldof, **The new teen identity crisis**, which reflected some of the misconceptions stated in an article in the Times in August 2004

Misconception :The ID Card and Information Sharing as outlined in the Green Paper "Every Child Matters" are part of the same initiative.

This is not the case. The ID Card is aimed primarily at adults to combat terrorism, benefit fraud and identity theft. The Information Sharing Database will keep minimum information about children and young people until they reach 19, when the records will be destroyed.

Misconception : Details of school achievements, GP visits, parental marital status, relatives substance use and domestic violence will be recorded.

The Information Sharing Database/ Children's Index will not include any such details. It will include:

- Name
- Address
- Date of birth
- Gender
- Name and contact details of parent(s) or person with parental responsibility (but no further information)
- Name of school or educational setting (but no details about attendance, exams, etc)
- Name of GP/Health visitor (but no details about illnesses, visits, etc.)
- Contact details for any agency providing specialist services, i.e. Social Services (to be confirmed after consultation process), but not details as to reason

Misconception : Case notes will be available to all interested parties.

The Information Sharing database is not intended to provide a shared case management system and there will be no case information recorded. Case notes will remain on existing systems in the body(ies) or agency(ies) concerned. The fact that the various agencies involved will be using a Common Assessment Framework does not mean they will all share the information contained in the Assessment. The Assessment will not be held on the information sharing database and will be shared when necessary with the consent of the child, young person or family as appropriate.



Common Assessment Framework

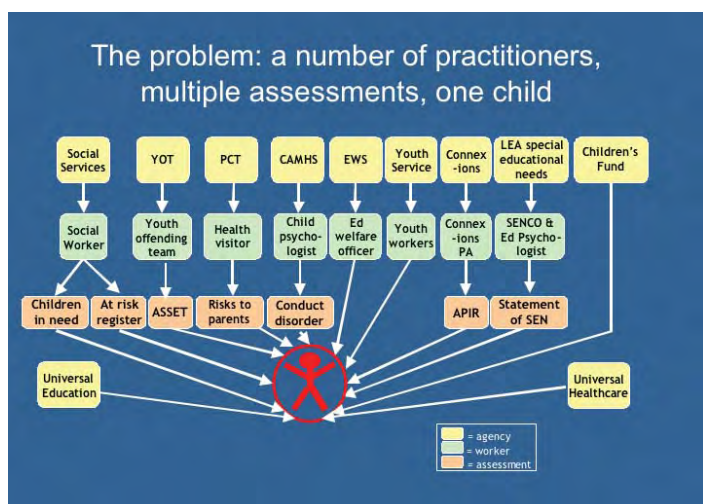
The Common Assessment Framework was proposed in the Green Paper:- *Every Child Matters*. It had been identified that the many people from different agencies who work with children and young people needed a common framework when conducting overview assessments for children and young people to enable them to identify needs and decide how these should be met earlier. By encouraging practitioners to operate according to a common standard, the quality of assessments across the board should be improved, and children should not need to undergo so many assessments as the information will 'follow' the child.

The proposed framework will consist of : general guidance on its use; a common procedure for assessment; a methodology based on the framework for the assessment of children in need and their families that includes considerations of child development and how to communicate with children and their parents or carers.

It will also provide guidance on gaining consent; how to record the findings and identify an appropriate response; how to share information when a child moves between local authority areas and an explanation of the roles and responsibilities of different agencies and practitioners.

Hampshire's multi-agency thresholds and assessment group have participated in the consultation on the draft Common Assessment Framework (CAF) which has been revised, the implementation guidance having just been published: www.dfes.gov.uk/commoncore/docs/CAImplementationGuidance.doc.

The CAF is being implemented incrementally. The first wave of local authorities will use the CAF during the year commencing 1 April 2005. In Hampshire we are aiming to start using the CAF from April 2006, with full implementation by April 2008.



What is going to be happening in 2005-06

March/April	Publication of Youth Green Paper
March/April	Publication of final version of draft statutory guidance on the new duty to cooperate to promote children's well being (Section 10 of the Children Act)
March /April	Expected publication of summary of responses to index consultation (on 'sensitive services' and 'flags of concern')
April	Expected publication of final version: Lead Professional Guidance
April	Expected publication of final version of Toolkit on multi-agency working.
April	Common Assessment Framework – start of testing in some Local Authorities.
March-June	Consultation on Children's Inspection Services Regulations
May	Expected publication of final version of statutory guidance on new duties to safeguard and promote well-being of children.
September	Expected publication of Cross Government guidance on information sharing
October	Expected announcement of Ministerial decisions on a timetable for implementing ISA Indexes
December	Deadline for all Local Authorities to have in place rigorous arrangement for identifying children who are missing education, so provisions can be made for them.
January 2006	Publication of final version of CAF for national roll-out from 2006-08.

Funding

It has been agreed that the Information Sharing and Assessment project will continue until 31 March 2006 as part of the Government Change Fund grant.

Training

Training for staff on the information sharing protocol and how to implement it is a requirement all signatories must fulfil. We have developed an initial training workshop package which we used for the pilot in October to December 2004. Evaluation of the workshops indicated that jointly training delegates from different agencies was valuable. Evaluation of the use of the ISP and the initial guideline documents supplied has just taken place. This evaluation is informing future training and guidelines.

In addition we are auditing existing practices and procedures on information sharing across organisations with the aim

of subsequently producing a template of operational guidelines to ensure consistency of practice across Hampshire.

Next steps are to set up a multi-agency training group to develop a training plan on how it will be funded and administered, how and where it will be delivered and by whom, as well as deciding on content and style of courses.

Please contact Sue Smith if you would like to suggest a nominee for a multi-agency Information Sharing training group e-mail sue.m.smith@hants.gov.uk

Phone 01962 847188



Children's Services Directory/website

Many of you, along with parents, carers and young people, have completed questionnaires to let us know what this website and directory should look like and what it should contain. From this survey, the most important features practitioners would like it to have are –

- Up-to-date information
- Easy to navigate and read, colourful
- Information about people's rights
- Employment opportunities

Phase 1 has been completed, and HantsFish (Family Information Service for Hampshire) went live at the end of March. There is still a lot of work to do but we hope to be ready for a wider launch in Autumn 2005 following the completion of Phase 2. In the meantime, visit www.HantsFish.org.uk and send us your comments and suggestion for improving the site.

