



Buckinghamshire Multi-agency Information Sharing Protocol for Children and Young People

Nominated Representatives Report March 2008 – March 2009

Summary

The Protocol was last updated in March 2008. In March 2009 the Children and Young People's Trust was asked to agree that the protocol should become a Code of Practice to be read in conjunction with the DCSF updated guidance on information sharing, and in June the Board agreed new rules on ratifying changes to the protocol. All current signatories will transfer to the Code of Practice unless they ask to be withdrawn.

There are currently 35 signatories. This compares with 28 in March 2008.

The group has now been in existence 3 years and 650 practitioners have attended the multi-agency training course. In order for users to be accredited for access to ContactPoint they will need to be familiar with the government guidance on information sharing. This will be provided by an online course. The course has been purchased from MeLearning and information on how to access it will be circulated when available.

As the local delivery framework of services to children, young people and families, through which early intervention and prevention services are delivered, is implemented and ContactPoint and eCAF are deployed, all agencies must ensure that appropriate ways of sharing information are embedded in their working processes.

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1. Changes to the Protocol.

In line with the government information sharing guidance updated in October 2008, which defines the difference between a Protocol and a Code of Practice, the Children and Young People's Trust agreed that the Buckinghamshire Protocol is to be rebranded as a Code of Practice. The Trust agreed to the change of name but reiterated that this did not change the importance of the content or the significance of the document. All existing signatories remain unless they indicate that they do not support the code of practice.

An **Information Sharing Code of Practice** outlines the principles and standards of expected conduct and practice of the signatories and their staff. The Code of Practice establishes the organisation's intentions and commitment to information sharing and promotes good practice when sharing personal information.

Each individual organisation will have **Information Sharing Procedures**, which describe the chronological steps and considerations required after a decision to share information has been made, for example, the steps to be taken to ensure that information is shared securely. Information sharing procedures set out, in detail, good practice in sharing information.

- **Privacy, confidentiality, consent (service users).** Each organisation should have in place a range of processes and documentation for service users, such as 'Privacy/Confidentiality Statement', 'Fair Processing Notice', 'Consent', and 'Subject Access'. Relevant staff within the organisation must understand these processes and be able to access documentation when required.

- **Information Sharing Protocols (ISP).** Where the organisation is involved in pre-specified, regular or bulk sharing of personal information with other organisations then the framework would also be expected to include one or more Information Sharing Protocols. An ISP is a signed agreement between two or more organisations or bodies, in relation to specified information sharing activity and/or arrangements for the routine of bulk sharing of personal information. An ISP relates to a specific information sharing activity and explains the terms under which both (or all) organisations have agreed to share information and the practical steps that need to be taken to ensure compliance with those terms.

In the light of this decision the Code of Practice, will be drafted, shared with the Nominated Representatives for their comments and then agreed. There will be a time limit set for comment and a non response will be taken as agreement.

2. New arrangements for updating the Code of Practice from 2010

The original Terms of reference for the Nominated Representatives specified that 50% agreement was required for changes to the protocol and for any decisions made at the annual meeting to be adopted. As the numbers have grown, this percentage has not been reached. It is still desirable for all signatories to be involved, but the work of the group cannot be held up by organisations which are small or which cannot commit to active engagement. All changes will be circulated to all signatories with a time allocated for responses. Online discussion will take place but there will no longer be a set percentage of agencies required to agree in order to implement changes.

3. New Government Guidance on Information Sharing

The existing publication covering information sharing was updated in October 2008 and supersedes the guidance published in April 2006. It applies to both adults and children/young people, and specifically focuses on practitioners and their managers, who have to make case by case decisions. It does not provide guidance for those whose information sharing practice is governed by statute or specific policies or agreements, and it does not cover arrangements for bulk or pre – agreed sharing of personal information between IT systems or organisations other than to explain their role in effective information governance. This guidance, and the suite of additional documents which accompany it, provides support for any agency on how and when to share information.

4. Information sharing training

A product has been purchased from MeLearning Ltd by the ContactPoint Programme, and once user registration procedures have been agreed the online course will be made available. Completion of the course and passing the assessment will be recorded by the ContactPoint team and held against names coming forward for ContactPoint training early in 2010. Whilst this information sharing training is strongly recommended for users of ContactPoint, training is also part of the Common Core of Skills for the Children's Workforce. "This sets out the basic skills and knowledge needed by people (including volunteers) whose work brings them into regular contact with children, young people and families."

The online package is the only training recognised for ContactPoint but it is also recommended for all practitioners, alongside any agency-specific training.

In addition practitioners who complete Common Assessments (CAF) or take part in Teams around the Child as part of the Local Delivery of services to children and young people, need to be familiar with information sharing best practice. Appropriate information sharing forms the basis for all inter-agency work.

Once the MeLearning Package is available, and arrangements finalised for users to be registered, this information will be circulated to all Nominated Representatives and included on the Children and Young People's Trust website, School Bulletin and in the Local Delivery newsletter

5. Review of information sharing practice (a recommendation of the Laming report)

The Children and Young People's Trust requested position statements from all members in order to establish what steps were being taken to embed information sharing into work with children and young people, and this was presented to the Board in March 2009. All board members responded and are aware of the necessity to share information and the impact that this has both on safeguarding and on early intervention and prevention. The responses have been positive and most agencies have taken steps to ensure that all teams understand the importance of information sharing, when it is mandatory, and the role of information sharing and consent in early intervention and prevention.

There have been meetings with the Primary Care Trust, Mental Health Trust and Hospitals Trust to explore whether they have issues around sharing information. In order to establish the position within the County Council, meetings were held with representatives of all services involved with children and young people to ensure that a coherent approach is being taken. There is no evidence that information is not being shared and no complaints have been made about situations where this has been an issue with outside agencies. The situation is always fluid and we cannot be complacent. Ongoing monitoring and self assessment is required to ensure that the Code is honoured. If information is not shared when requested, or individual teams/services feel the protocol is not working, it is important to capture accurate data on the circumstances and to implement the procedures available to look into this and to achieve a resolution.

The point was made at the Children and Young People's Trust Board that this is an on-going challenge and in the absence of evidence that the Code is not working, we cannot be complacent and assume that it is. It is also worth noting that failure to share information is cited in the majority of Serious Case Reviews, whereas inappropriate information sharing has never been mentioned.

This is an excerpt from the most recent Laming report on "The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report",

"Every Children's Trust should assure themselves that partners consistently apply the Information Sharing Guidance published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Communities and Local Government to protect children."

"Those who have local accountability for keeping children safe should ensure that all staff in every service, from frontline practitioners to legal advisers and managers in statutory services and the voluntary sector, understand the circumstances in which they may lawfully share information about both children and parents, and that it is in the public interest to prioritise the safety and welfare of children. Agencies should regularly test their local information sharing arrangements to satisfy themselves that their procedures are understood and working properly to protect children."

6. Terms of reference for the Nominated Representatives Group

These have changed and will be circulated. They reflect the impact that the increased size of the group has had.

7. Membership of the Nominated Representatives Group

There are 7 new organisations which have signed up during the year. These are:-

Wycombe Women's Aid

Winslow and Buckingham Young Carers Youth Club

Longridge,

Marlow Opportunity Playgroup,

Thomley Activity Centre

Central and South Bucks Crossroads

Thames Valley Adventure Playground

8. Best practice

The contracts officer in the Buckinghamshire County Council's joint commissioning team includes sign up to the protocol as a requirement and this forms part of the monitoring of contracts.

The Common Assessment Framework, which is used across the range of children's services, relies on informed consent and the appropriate and proportionate sharing of information between professionals who are members of a Team around the Child. This is working effectively and has been introduced across all 8 local delivery areas.

The Community Safety team reports that using the Bucks Information Sharing Protocol to request information from a wide variety of partner organisations has given them a richer picture for the Strategic Assessment.

The Buckinghamshire Hospitals Trust has designed forms to accompany internal and external paediatric transfers to ensure the correct information accompanies the child/young person.

9. Agents and sub contractors

It is a good idea for all organisations which are commissioned to provide front line services to children and young people, to be aware of the guidance about sharing information and to sign the up to the Code in their own right.