
INFORMATION SHARING INDEX FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Chris McEwan, Children's Services Portfolio

Responsible Director – Margaret Asquith, Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the requirement to develop a children's index following publication of the Children Act (2004).

Information and Analysis

2. The Information, Referral and Tracking project was proposed by the Department of Health in 2002. It was part of an initiative to promote early intervention services for children through the identification of children and young people who were at risk of poor outcomes in life, i.e. children at risk of offending. Throughout 2003/04 all local authorities were required to undertake work that would improve levels of preparation across all agencies to implement the programme. During this time, the focus moved from tracking to assessment and the projects became known as Information Sharing and Assessment (ISA). In Darlington we created a project manager for ISA and we satisfied all the requirements to demonstrate preparedness. The 2004 Children Act included Section 12, Information Databases. This was permissive legislation allowing the Secretary of State to direct local authorities to implement a comprehensive data base concerning information about children in their local authority area. During 2005 there were national discussions relating to data protection, human and civil rights. In December 2005 the Minister of State for Children, Beverley Hughes, wrote to all Directors of Children's Services advising them of Government's decision to implement the index by a target date of 2008.

Objectives of the Index

3. To help practitioners to quickly identify a child with whom they have contact and determine whether they are in receipt of universal services.
4. To provide a tool to support better communication between practitioners, by providing basic information about the child and contact details of professionals/agencies involved with the child.
5. To quickly identify children about whom there are concerns.

The Requirements

6. There will be one single national index, the data will be partitioned into 150 parts with each local authority being responsible for maintaining the accuracy of data for children living in

their area.

7. Local authorities will be the key local delivery body for the index, with responsibilities for regulating user access and training users.
8. The index will hold the following information on all children: -
 - (a) Name, address, date of birth, and gender
 - (b) Unique identifying number (this may be the child's NI number, but is yet to be finally decided)
 - (c) Basic information about parent/carer
 - (d) School/GP
 - (e) Other agencies involved, where appropriate; and
 - (f) Ability for practitioners to indicate to others that they have information – to share or to undertake an assessment.
9. This level of information will not require the consent of the young person or their parent. The legislation allows for local authorities to include the above information in the index without consent. Children and young people and their parents, where appropriate, will have the right to see the information held about them and can challenge any errors of information.
10. Only practitioners who have been granted specific permission will be able to access the index. All such practitioners and system support staff will have relevant training and have undergone relevant checks, including CRB and any other relevant checks following implementation of the Bichard recommendations.
11. In addition to this, universal information; for some children and young people in receipt of targeted and specialist services there will be additional information included, e.g. Looked After Children, and Children accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS). Consent to hold this information will be required from the parent or young person and the information will only be available to essential staff with higher authorisation levels, e.g. social workers, consultant paediatrician.
12. The index will not provide an integrated case management system; will not replace health records or social care records and will not record statements of the child's needs, educational attainment nor clinical health observations. However, for example, it would alert the enquirer that the child is regularly seen by a Paediatrician. The enquirer can then request additional information as appropriate from other practitioners.
13. Nationally, the Index will be linked to the UAST (Unaccompanied Asylum Sector Register). One of the complexities of the system will be ensuring that movement of children between local authorities areas is recorded and fed through the national index.
14. In developing the project we will need to consider capture of information from: -
 - (a) Schools/education authority
 - (b) Early Years Service
 - (c) Connexions
 - (d) Health Service
 - (e) Social Care

- (f) Youth Offending Service
- (g) Police
- (h) Probation

Cost

- 15. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) estimates that the implementation of the index design nationally will cost £224m over three years, with operating costs thereafter of £41m p.a. It is also estimated that the child index will result in efficiency savings nationally of £88m p.a.
- 16. On 6th April 2006, we received notification from DfES that Darlington would receive a grant of £58,898 for 06/07. It is anticipated that the grant allocated will meet the cost of implication for Darlington. The funding is intended to support the authority in undertaking readiness assessment work. DfES anticipate the funding being used to employ a worker to project manage the work drawing on support from ICT and Human Resources. The allocation of funding also includes a resource to support communications with stakeholders.

Next Steps

- 17. The Department for Education and Skills have established a national Project Team to oversee implementation.
- 18. Regulations, statutory guidance and a national implementation plan will be made available to local authorities in due course as well as assessment tools to review their state of readiness for implementation.

Darlington Position

- 19. We propose to create within Children's Services, a Project Manager post for the development of the Child Index.
- 20. We are currently explaining the position of the project and the post and the role of the E-Learning Team and System Support and Information Team in managing them.
- 21. We need to ensure engagement of all key partner agencies in the development of the index. Likely areas of particular sensitivity will be health and the Primary Care Trust will need to take a key role in resolving issues of information sharing.
- 22. We will need to establish an Implementation Steering Group, which will require wider membership across the Council, e.g. Corporate IT, Housing, etc.

Outcome of Consultation

- 23. There has been no formal consultation in respect of this report. It is a statutory requirement for all Children's Services Departments to implement a Child Index.

Legal Implications

- 24. This report has been considered by the Legal Services Manager for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Legal

Services Manager considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

25. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. The development of a child index may assist on the early identification of young people who require early intervention to prevent them being involved in anti-social behaviour.

Council Policy Framework

26. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

Decision Deadline

27. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter

Recommendation

28. Members are requested to note the contents of this report

Reason

29. The Children's Services Department needs to implement a child index for the Darlington area to comply with legislation.

**Margaret Asquith,
Director of Children's Services**

Background Papers

Children Act 2004
DfES correspondence

author :Alison Walton Extension : 2861