

By email: informationsharing.consultation@education.gov.uk

Wednesday 6 September 2023

ADCS response to updates to information sharing advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people, parents and carers

1. The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd. (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services (DCSs). Under the provisions of the *Children Act (2004)*, the DCS acts as a single point of leadership and accountability for services for children and young people in a local area, including children's social care and education. ADCS welcomes the opportunity to respond formally to this important consultation on updates to information sharing advice by the Department for Education.
2. As with planned updates to the Working Together guidance, the language and terminology used in the updated guidance remains rooted in local authority (LA) parlance and social work practice despite this being aimed at a much wider audience. The term practitioners rather than frontline professionals is used throughout, for example. It is unlikely a childminder, police officer or volunteer sports coach would either see or refer to themselves as practitioners.
3. Updates have sought to expand and provide clarity to readers on the knotty issue of information sharing, what to share, when and how. Comments received from ADCS members largely related to the section headed *How early should I share information?* While well intentioned, some clarification is needed to ensure the quality of contacts and referrals are not compromised and children's social care services are not overwhelmed with insufficient or incomplete information.
4. Frontline professionals should absolutely be proactive in sharing their concerns about new or evolving risks impacting on a child or young person's safety and welfare, however, their responsibilities do not start and end with passing information to LA children's services. It is necessary for this information to be relevant, timely, of sufficient quality and accurate.
5. Partners should also consider the range of help and support a child or family could access in the local area to address evolving concerns before there is an impact on the child's overall safety and welfare and refer the family to those early help support services. These services may or may not be provided by the LA.
6. When receiving information of concern, our teams must be clear on what is fact and what is opinion in order to do their job as effectively and efficiently as possible. Linking back to the seven golden rules here would be helpful as would inclusion of the clarification or caveats suggested.
7. Various ADCS members have shared examples of a local police force or school having a poor inspection outcome, particularly in relation to safeguarding, which has then resulted in a significant jump inappropriate referrals to children's social care which may not be relevant, of poor quality or incomplete. Such actions will not keep children safer and arguably could have the opposite effect. It is of course still the case that any immediate concerns about a child's health, safety or wellbeing should be shared with the LA.
8. To discuss the points raised in this response further, please contact the relevant policy officer in the first instance via katy.block@adcs.org.uk