

Online Safety remains a key priority as internet use rises

The Education Secretary Kirsty Williams has announced that online safety will remain a key priority for the Welsh Government with an extensive programme to enhance online safety practice in schools over the next two years, to continue to support young people to stay safe online.

The figures from the National Survey of Wales show:

- 95% of children aged 7 to 15 used the internet at home.
- The device most commonly used by these children was a tablet or similar (71%).
- 64% of children aged 7 to 15, who access the internet outside school, accessed a school learning platform and 67% used the internet to find other information related to schoolwork.
- 87% of parents felt that their child knew how to stay safe when using the internet.
- 56% of households with children aged 7-15 used parental control filters.
- Further analysis showed that the parents are more likely to use a parental control filter if they are more highly educated, if they also use the internet themselves, if they have more children, and if their children are younger.

Over the last two and a half years, the Welsh Government has strengthened online safety practice in education with:

- 63 online safety training days across all 22 local authorities, training approximately 2,300 educational professionals.
- An increase in take-up of the 360 degree Safe Cymru tool from 196 schools (19% schools in Wales) in 2014 to 1,375 (85% of schools in Wales).
- Production of the Online Safety Resource for Wales.
- A range of resources for learners, parents & carers and educational practitioners on online safety issues such as Cyberbullying, Online Trust and Social Media.

Last month the Cabinet Secretary for Education launched the Online Safety Zone on Hwb, the digital learning platform for schools in Wales. The Online Safety Zone provides young people, teachers, parents and governors with access to a wide range of bilingual online safety materials.

The Welsh Government is also supporting Operation Netsafe – a pan-Wales campaign led by South Wales Police in partnership with the Lucy Faithful Foundation, which aims to stop the creation, viewing and sharing of indecent images of children online.

Kirsty Williams said:

“Being online is increasingly part of all of our lives. Alongside the many benefits of the internet come very real risks and that is why we are taking action to safeguard our children and young people and preparing them to become safe and responsible digital citizens.

“We’ll continue to build on the progress we’ve made to date and drive improvements in online safety practice with an extensive online safety education and awareness programme across Wales. This provides schools with access to online resources and classroom materials to support learners in thinking critically behaving safely and participating responsibly online.”

[Speech: Social care monthly commentary: March 2017](#)

Creating an effective front door

In this commentary, I want to focus on what the important ingredients are for an effective front-door service – one that responds quickly and appropriately to children and child protection concerns. I want to dispel the myth that there is a certain ‘model’ that will solve the problems that this part of the children’s social care service faces.

Throughout the country, local authorities are struggling to get the front-door service right. While it is a hugely complex task, there are some basics that always need to be done well. Some authorities that are struggling to get the whole of the front-door service working well have shown good practice in certain areas, which is something I want to recognise in this commentary. We must praise and share good practice where we see it, even where authorities are less than good.

We need to move away from the idea that local authorities need to use a particular front-door model. What works in one place will not work everywhere. There are various names for different models in different places, such as multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) or contact and referral service, and they are not always used to describe the same thing. Some of these multi-agency arrangements work well, but providing a good service is about more than adopting a specific model or a name.

Every area will have different challenges around multi-agency working and ensuring that children and their families get the right help at the right time. The best authorities will continue to develop ways of working that best meet these local challenges as they change over time.

There are a variety of ingredients to an effective front-door service that,

when applied flexibly, will deliver what children and their families need. We know that each part of the children's social care system is reliant on the work carried out in other parts of the system. So getting it right at the front door makes a huge difference to children both in the short and long term.

What is the front door?

The 'front door' in a social care context is the arrangement that local authorities have in place to respond to an initial contact from a professional or member of the public who is concerned about a child. At the front door, local authorities provide advice and make decisions about how they will act on information about the health, well-being and safety of children.

The front door, therefore, is where professionals gather information and make decisions about which pathways to follow for different contacts and referrals. This may lead to an assessment by children's social care, early help or a response from universal services.

There are many different ways of organising work at the front door. Some local authorities have models run by the corporate call centre, while others have multi-agency hubs. Each can work well. And some have multiple front doors, for example in different locations or to allow for specialist teams.

It is not uncommon for a child to be referred to children's social care during their early childhood. It is estimated that 1 in 5 children will be referred before they start school. This gives a sense of the volume of work that local authorities and professionals at the front door have to manage.

All partners, including schools, health services, the police and others are responsible for providing their own high-quality initial response services. Other agencies need to know what information to share, when and with whom. Everyone involved in children's lives has a responsibility to identify and share concerns.

What are the important ingredients of an effective front-door service?

Advice

Partner agencies such as health services, schools and the police often have a lot of in-depth knowledge about children and families. Advice on making referrals helps them to distil the information needed and to keep thresholds consistent across agencies. Good-quality advice at the front door should also be available to individual members of the public and service users.

In Croydon for example, members of the public, including young people, can access and speak to a duty social worker at any time through the reception at council offices and the emergency duty team after hours. This service is particularly well used by young people who have accommodation issues. Croydon

also has an information and advice line for professionals. It allows anyone considering non-urgent referrals to discuss their concerns. This is improving the quality of referrals.

Gathering and analysing information

Leaders must ensure that the information systems that professionals use support them to do their work well. All relevant information about children, families and incidents has to be captured and analysed so that risks are properly understood and the right decisions can be made. Every effort should be made to ensure that collating this evidence is as efficient, quick and as easy as possible to allow staff to focus on their work rather than duplicating paperwork or 'feeding' unhelpful information systems. Leaders must ensure that this work is quality assured to maintain high standards over time.

Sharing information well

There has to be clarity about what information can and should be shared. Each agency and all professionals should have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, both separately and to each other. A significant challenge for local authorities is organising all agencies to share information. Only the most determined leaders can make sure that everyone involved understands how this works, that everyone is confident in sharing the right information and that there is a consistent approach.

Contextualising family strengths and risk

Historical factors about children and families have to be taken into account and fully analysed to understand families' strengths and risks. Inspectors commonly identify this as a weakness in their evaluation of cases. Where possible, staff should take a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach.

They should seek to understand the context in which children are living and the strengths of the family and their protective factors, as well as the risks children might be facing. In one family, an incident may indicate a more significant risk, but in another, evidence of strengths within the family may mean there is less concern.

Any incidents or events must be considered within that context if we are to build resilience in families wherever it is appropriate.

Using early help appropriately

Time and again, we hear that early help is critical. Helping families early prevents smaller risks from escalating, which keeps parents and children together. Families must receive the right help at the right time. The focus should be on an early, co-ordinated response.

But early help has to be purposeful and families must understand what they need to change. This means helping them to build resilience and resources,

rather than becoming reliant on services. Good front-door services know what help is available locally and in communities. They can signpost families to where they can get the help and support they need when the threshold for social care involvement has not been met.

It's worth bearing in mind though, that the best front doors are about getting families the right help and support quickly, rather than functioning as a 'gatekeeper' of services.

A culture that places the welfare of the child at the centre

Professionals should try and see through the eyes of a child. They should ask the questions: 'What is the experience of this child? What is daily life like for this child? What is the response that will most meet this child's needs?'

Valuing professional disciplines and expertise

Different agencies and professionals have a variety of expertise. Valuing that range of expertise and difference in perspective and focus, is important and bringing it together leads to better decision-making. This can happen virtually or through co-location.

However, simply sitting in the same room as one another is not enough. Inspectors have found instances of agencies located together, but still missing opportunities to share information and make joint decisions. All agencies, including probation, adult services, health, education and schools must understand their own and each other's roles. The best authorities work hard to ensure that they have a good relationship with their schools.

Making use of specialist knowledge in critical areas of child protection, such as domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation, can help to improve services. Care needs to be taken to root this knowledge in teams so that it is sustainable and helps inform thinking in the longer term rather than being a quick fix for difficult cases.

A responsive out-of-hours service

A good out-of-hours service is run by people who know the work well and are able to respond to a whole range of challenging circumstances. Crucially, this service is responsive and does not just act as a 'waiting area' for the next day.

In Wakefield, for example, out-of-hours social workers provide a wide-ranging service to both new and open cases. This includes welfare visits, follow-up on cases that have come through the duty team and timely completion of child protection enquiries, including strategy discussions.

Despite the service requiring improvement overall, Wakefield's co-location and good communication with the police supports multi-agency information-sharing and decision-making. Staff are timely in their response to children and families' needs out of hours.

Close working with health partners

This needs to be embedded and routine. In Central Bedfordshire, for example, the children's social care service works jointly with the safeguarding nurses at the hospitals, health visitors and school nurses. All GP practices have a linked social worker, and this is assisting communication, decision-making and understanding of each other's roles.

Multi-agency strategy discussions

Despite prioritising, and increasing their investment in, multi-agency working and information sharing, too many local authorities have weaknesses in the way they run strategy discussions. Not all partners are always present and this severely affects the quality of the discussion, the information that is shared and the decisions that are made. Risks around children and their families can be missed more easily if agencies that work closely with them are not at the discussions.

Managing the work

I can't emphasise enough how important good leadership is in ensuring that children and families get what they need. I discussed this in a commentary on practice leadership last year.

Robust management oversight of how children move through the system is vital. A blockage in one area can produce significant delays in efforts to help and protect them. At the front door, this oversight is absolutely critical.

Management of workflow is similarly important. Applying thresholds consistently is still a challenge. Children need the right help no matter what time the referral comes in, the quality of the referral, which staff are on duty, or the management arrangements.

Good leadership also includes:

- well-supported, confident and knowledgeable managers, who have an overview of the work through monitoring
- good systems for recording and sharing information
- a clear information-sharing policy that is understood by all staff
- performance monitoring, performance management and quality assurance arrangements that support managers in monitoring the work and taking action

Maintaining high-quality work

Quantitative measures are not effective by themselves in measuring the quality of the front door. The story of the front door needs to be told through qualitative measures as well. We know that some quantitative measures, such as low re-referral rates, can give false reassurance. Qualitative data is fundamental to understanding the quantitative information.

Regular 'dip sampling' of cases helps managers to understand the effectiveness of information sharing, information gathering, assessment and joint decision-making. Dip sampling is a valuable learning opportunity for front-door staff. It must account for different factors, such as different staff teams and managers, as well as decision-making on different days.

Local authorities need to make sure that they have enough regularly scrutinised quantitative and qualitative information. This can include themed audits, multi-agency audits and information from dip sampling. Learning identified should be disseminated and where necessary, action should be taken and monitored for impact.

Local authorities must have systems to identify if a particular agency does not understand thresholds or is not providing timely, good-quality referrals and information. Not only can this have an impact on the quality of decision-making, but poor-quality referrals can seriously hinder processes at the front door. A social worker can potentially deal with a higher number of referrals when they don't have to spend time chasing further information that could have been there from the start.

Taking care of frontline social workers

Although this is last in my list, taking care of our social workers at the front door is so important. As I discussed in my commentary in November 2016, 'the environment in which we work can help or hinder us to do the best job we can do'.

In Cornwall, inspectors found that leaders have created a culture of continual learning, support and challenge for social workers. Historically, these areas had been a real problem for Cornwall. But in recent years, these improvements have enabled social work, and social workers, to flourish. Leaders have ensured that their social workers at the front door have manageable caseloads and are part of a stable, knowledgeable workforce.

Indeed, a challenge for local authorities is workforce planning. How do you balance that mix of experience and a fresh view? If a professional works at the front door continually for a long period of time, they can potentially be desensitised to the seriousness of risks. This can happen due to the volume of cases, speed of decision-making, as a coping mechanism in dealing with distressing information, the responsibility of working at speed and getting it 'right'. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed by all agencies.

One way that this can be addressed is by rotating staff working in the front-door services. There are of course those who thrive well on the nature of the work at the front door. They should, naturally, be supported to remain there to provide stability and continuity of knowledge and understanding of the service.

Keeping hold of your good social workers and building the knowledge, skills and confidence of new social workers is critical. Supporting front-door staff well is integral to a good front-door service. Too often, caseloads are high, which impacts on the quality and timeliness of the work. Looking after your

staff and helping them to be skilled and confident in their decision-making is an important part of getting it right for children.

NHS pay awards show commitment to living wage

More than 7,000 of the lowest paid employees will see an uplift to £8.45 an hour, in line with the Living Wage Foundation's Living Wage.

In addition to the Living Wage uprating, other salary increases from 1 April for 2017-18 are:

- A 1% consolidated pay increase for all Agenda for Change staff in NHS Wales;
- A 1% increase for salaried doctors and dentists;
- A 1% increase will be applied to the value of Clinical Excellence Awards;
- A 1% increase will be applied to the value of Commitment Awards;
- A 1% increase to the value of the GP trainers' grant;
- A 1% increase for independent contractor General Medical Practitioners and General Dental Practitioners;
- A 1% salary increase for NHS Senior Executives, their first pay award since 2009.

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething said:

"I remain committed to tackling the issue of low pay in Wales and will ensure the lowest earners in NHS Wales are paid a fair salary, as recommended by the Living Wage Foundation.

"I am therefore implementing the uplift to the Living Wage – to £8.45 an hour – for all directly employed NHS staff from 1 April 2017.

"I am pleased that I am able to award pay increases in line with the independent pay review bodies' pay recommendations and to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to staff working in the NHS in Wales. I am also committed to working in Social Partnership with employers and those representing NHS staff to consider the way forward on the other issues the pay review bodies raised."

Health Secretary Vaughan Gething has accepted recommendations on pay by both the NHS Pay Review Body and the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration.

[Press release: Trustees failed to report sex abuse allegation](#)

The Charity Commission has criticised the trustees of the [Grail Trust](#) (the charity) over the handling of an allegation of child abuse in the main organisation it raised funds to support, the Grail Trust India (GTI) as inadequate.

The allegation involved a person connected with the charity at a children's home in India run by its partner GTI, which has now closed. The charity raised funds for and provided financial support to GTI to run the home and representatives of the charity periodically visited the home.

The Commission carried out an initial investigation after being notified of the allegation in August 2011. This led to a statutory inquiry, which examined how the trustees dealt with the allegation and the charity's procedures and approach to safeguarding.

The Commission does not investigate allegations of abuse but intervenes to ensure that trustees are protecting their charity and its users. The allegation is still being investigated by the appropriate overseas authorities and although the inquiry had been awaiting the outcome of the criminal case, given the time that has passed, the Commission has decided to conclude its own investigation.

The inquiry found that the initial response by the trustees to the allegation was inadequate as they did not report the allegation and were not impartial in considering the allegation, which they publically rejected. The inquiry found this was both inappropriate and risked damaging the charity's reputation. The inquiry also found that the charity's trustees had failed to take reasonable steps to ensure that safeguarding measures undertaken by GTI were adequate.

The inquiry concluded that there had been serious governance failures in the charity and that the trustees were responsible for misconduct and mismanagement due to their mis-handling of the allegation of abuse; their failure to ensure that there were proper safeguarding systems in place at GTI and their failure to fully understand that their safeguarding obligations extended to visitors from the charity to GTI.

As a result the Commission issued the trustees with a formal action plan to ensure the trustees understood their safeguarding responsibilities and put adequate measures in place to manage the risks to the charity's beneficiaries. The Commission is currently monitoring compliance with this action plan, and is satisfied that the trustees are acting on the regulatory advice given.

Michelle Russell, Director of Investigations, Monitoring and Enforcement, said:

This is very concerning. It is another case where trustees do not take abuse allegations seriously nor ensure there are proper safeguarding protections in place to protect children.

Trustees have a duty to act in the best interests of the charity and this includes having adequate safeguarding policies in place and fully implementing them.

Many charities deliver charitable work through other charities and partners both here in the UK and overseas. Where that work and those organisations are involved with children, it's important that the charity ensures the partner is not just capable of delivering that work, but has proper safeguarding measures in place. Trustees should therefore put in place proper monitoring of staff and volunteers and ensure safeguarding policies and procedures are in place at a local level.

Further information for trustees on safeguarding can be found in the Commission's policy on: [Safeguarding children and young people](#).

The [full report](#) is available on GOV.UK.

Ends

PR 23/17

Notes to editors

1. [The Charity Commission](#) is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
 2. Search for charities on our [online register](#).
-

[Quarter of a billion pound boost for Wales' rural communities](#)

Lesley Griffiths today confirmed she is fully committing the remaining tranche of funding under the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020.

The funding, a combination of Welsh Government and EU money, is an investment in key areas that will help rural communities to be more resilient during the post-EU transition period. It will provide Wales' farmers, food producers, landowners and others with a certain degree of assurance that they can start to make future plans and shape their business operations accordingly.

Clarity on future funding arrangements was a key issue raised during a number of Brexit Round Table meetings and workshops, involving representatives from across the Environment and Rural Affairs portfolio, set up by the Cabinet Secretary immediately after the outcome of the EU referendum.

Today's announcement means a wide range of important schemes can now open including Farm Business Grant, Glastir Advanced, Food Business Investment Scheme, Co-operation and Supply Chain Development, Glastir Woodland Creation and Rural Community Development Fund.

The Cabinet Secretary made the decision to fully commit the remaining EU element of the funding, totalling £126.3m, after the UK Government guaranteed funding for all projects signed before the UK leaves the EU. Previously, the Chancellor only guaranteed to finance projects signed before the 2016 Autumn Statement. The Welsh Government will also provide £96.4m.

The Cabinet Secretary's Round Table group, comprising representatives from across the portfolio, reconvened yesterday. In addition, a series of cross-sector stakeholder workshops, involving more than one hundred people have taken place at different locations across Wales between August and October 2016.

The Round Table meetings and workshops have enabled representatives from across the Environment and Rural Affairs portfolio to look at the implications of Brexit in a joined-up way, in particular the key risks, opportunities, and possible ways forward.

The Cabinet Secretary said:

"Tomorrow promises to be a significant day for Wales and the UK, when the prospect of a future outside the EU starts to become very much a reality. It also signals the official start of a period of uncertainty for all involved in Wales' rural communities. We still don't know what the future landscape will look like but we are pressing the UK Government to honour the commitment made during the referendum campaign that we will not lose out on money we would otherwise have received from the EU.

"I am pleased to confirm, therefore, we are committing the entirety of the remaining funding under the RDP, worth nearly a quarter of a billion pounds. I hope this provides reassurance to Wales' rural communities who have benefited greatly from the wide range of programmes under the RDP.

"Following the result of the EU referendum, I was keen to bring together representatives from across my portfolio to discuss in

detail the risks and opportunities that Brexit presents. The contribution by all involved has been very positive and there is a real commitment from them to work together.

“This engagement underlines the strength of the links that exist in Wales between areas like agriculture, communities and the wider environment. The discussions that have taken place have been invaluable in identifying how we should plan for a future outside the EU.”

Full details of upcoming scheme windows under the [RDP](#) will be available on the Welsh Government website in due course.