How ICS, CAF and ContactPoint fit together
A short essay on Harnessing Information for ECM

Introduction

Every Child Matters aims to integrate services for children from 0 to 19 with agencies working across professional boundaries to co-ordinate support around the needs of children and young people, using common processes and language to meet those needs in the best possible way, focusing on prevention and early intervention and providing better support to parents and families.

This article describes some of the key tools that support these integrated services and enable more effective use of information to improve well-being and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. It describes how the Integrated Children's System (ICS), the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the ContactPoint fit together to help promote better outcomes for children, young people and their families. Although this article provides a brief description of these tools, it assumes a basic understanding of them and focuses on how they relate to each other.

ContactPoint

ContactPoint, previously known by the working title of the 'information sharing index', will be the quick way to find out who else is working with the same child or young person, making it easier to deliver more coordinated support. This basic online directory will be available to authorised staff who need it to do their jobs. It is a key part of the Every Child Matters programme to improve outcomes for children.

ContactPoint will hold a small amount of core demographic data on every child in England and contact details for practitioners providing services to the child (except for sensitive services, i.e. sexual health, mental health and substance abuse, where contact details are only held with consent and access to this information is tightly controlled). ContactPoint will not hold any details of a case or other more personal information about a child. Further information is available at http://www.ecm.gov.uk/contactpoint

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

Assessing needs at an early stage and deciding on what action to take is where the CAF comes in. We want practitioners to be able to gather and record information about a child or young person with additional needs in a systematic, holistic yet simple, way so that they can begin to work out what the needs are and what should to be done to address them. CAF is designed to enable practitioners across all agencies, after training, to follow the same process and achieve more consistent assessments that can be shared and understood by other agencies. Information is available at http://www.ecm.gov.uk/caf.

Work is underway to develop and implement a strategy for IT support for CAF (eCAF) to provide authorised practitioners throughout England with access to a system which allows them to store and retrieve CAF information electronically, across agency and geographical borders where necessary.

The Integrated Children's System

When children are or may be children in need as defined by the Children Act 1989, including those who have or may have suffered neglect or abuse or are looked after, it is necessary to assess their needs using the Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their families. This involves systematically collecting and recording information about the child and family. Where an in-depth assessment is necessary or children become looked after this involves significant amounts of information. This information should be gathered in such a way that it can be analysed for use in decision-making and presented in a number of ways for different purposes. The Integrated Children's System is an applied conceptual framework (based on the Assessment Framework domains and dimensions) and a practice tool for working with children in need and managing these detailed information requirements.

ICS supported by information technology is the core of the electronic social care record for children. The IT system is also known as ICS. Further information is available at http://www.ecm.gov.uk/ics.

Comparing objectives and scope of ICS, CAF and ContactPoint
The diagram below shows where ICS, CAF and ContactPoint provide support across a continuum of needs.
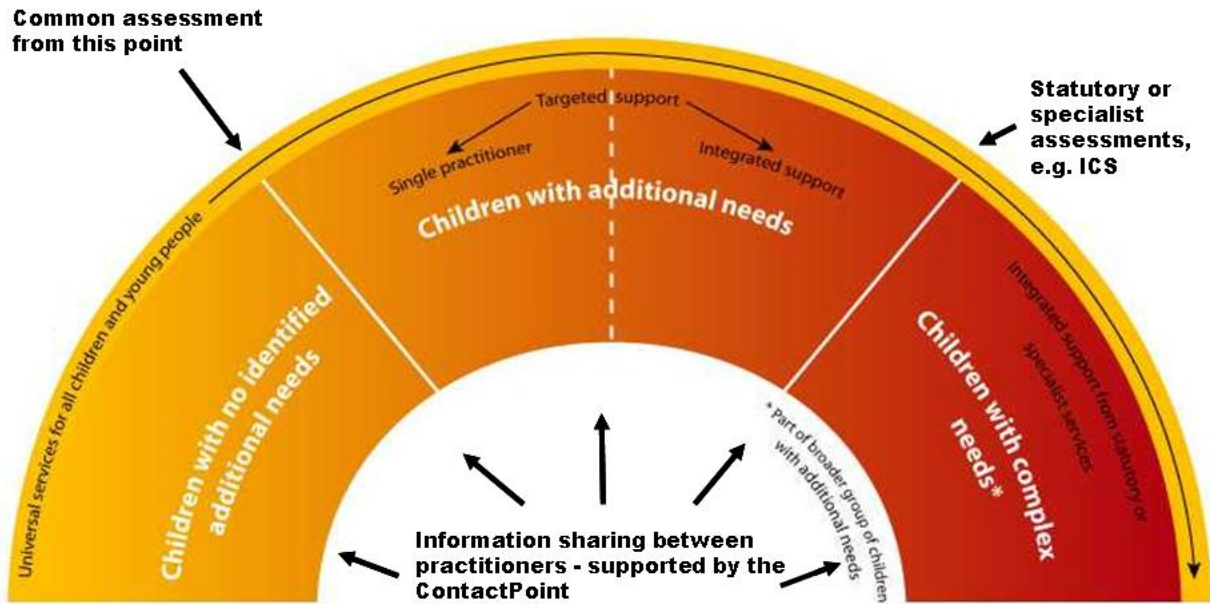
Both ContactPoint and CAF are designed for use across children's services: they are primarily concerned with getting *co-ordinated* help moving quickly for children with additional needs, i.e. children who need additional support over and above that provided by universal services (education and primary health care). ContactPoint and CAF are tools to facilitate early intervention and help deal with additional needs before they escalate into something more serious or more difficult to resolve.

Access to ContactPoint will be permitted to authorised users who need it as part of their work (as defined in regulations made under section 12 of the Children Act 2004). CAF can be used by any suitably trained practitioner.

ICS is a framework for managing the detailed information requirements related to work with children in need, children whose health or development would be impaired without the provision of services. It will contain information about children and their families who are known to children's social care.

ICS will be used by social care workers carrying out their statutory responsibilities within a multi-agency context. Limited access may be given to certain practitioners outside of social care who need to have access in relation to their work with a child, for example, a nurse for a looked after child.

CAF and ICS promote a common approach to assessment: they provide common structures for recording evidence-based information about a child or young person around three domains: developmental needs of the child; parental capacity; and family and environmental factors.

ContactPoint is fundamentally a technology solution, CAF and ICS are supported by technology.

How will the eCAF and the ICS system link to ContactPoint in the future?
The vision is that, in the future, when a common assessment has been logged in an eCAF system, it will automatically notify ContactPoint that a common assessment has been carried out, along with contact details for the practitioner who completed or updated it. There will be no access to the common assessment via ContactPoint. ContactPoint will display these contact details so that another practitioner

looking up the child will discover immediately whether a common assessment has already been carried out and whom to contact about the child. This will speed up communications, avoid duplication and facilitate contact between practitioners across a range of agency and organisational boundaries. It will also stimulate cross-agency working.

When a child is referred to social care services and a referral is recorded on an electronic case record system such as that supporting ICS, the existence (although <u>not</u> the case details) of children's social care involvement and the practitioner contact details will be automatically uploaded to ContactPoint.

In addition, if a common assessment exists for the child this will be used to support a referral to social care. The CAF information will easily be incorporated into the assessment sections of ICS, because the information on needs in each assessment is organised on compatible lines. If a child needs to receive social care services, the in-depth assessment required for children in need will be given a head start with the information incorporated from the common assessment. This speeds things up, builds on existing knowledge, and avoids the need for often distressed children or families to go over the same ground again.

ContactPoint will be updated by limited information extracted from the ICS system, eCAF and other case record systems, for example those held by Connexions and Youth Offending Teams. However this will be a one-way process. ContactPoint will not update the case record systems. Also there will be no access from ContactPoint to case records contained in ICS, eCAF and any other case record systems.

What is happening now, and what is for the future?
ContactPoint is in the development phase. The national ContactPoint system will be designed and built centrally, ensuring it is secure and as technically and operationally robust and as coherent as possible with other IT-enabled programmes (including Connecting for Health). The plan is to have ContactPoint operational in all areas in 2008. For the latest information on ContactPoint visit www.ecm.gov.uk/contactpoint.

The Common Assessment Framework is being rolled out. Guidance was issued in April 2006, building on the experience of trials held in 2005-06. All local areas should be implementing the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) from 2006 with a view to embedding it across the full range of relevant services by 2008.

A small number of pilots have been selected to develop fully functional eCAF systems, compliant with National standards, and to monitor the benefits of e-enablement of CAF. Several of the pilots involve groups of Local authorities, which will allow us to learn more about the important issues surrounding cross-border working. At the end of this pilot phase DfES will be evaluating the results, and this will be a major influence on our decision on whether to proceed with a national eCAF system in 2007. For the latest information on CAF and e-CAF visit www.ecm.gov.uk/caf

The Integrated Children's System is in the final implementation phase now. The Government's expectation has been that all authorities would have implemented an electronic system locally to support the use of the Integrated Children's System by the end of 2006. Some local authorities will not, however, have achieved this, and will therefore need to demonstrate compliance during 2007. When implemented, ICS will mean that children's social care staff will be using electronic case records routinely to help them in their work. It represents a major cultural shift from paper to electronic recording. For the latest information on ICS visit www.ecm.gov.uk/ics/.

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