



executive summary **information sources for the local children and young people's services sector: a mapping study**

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The LG Group is currently developing its online offer for local authorities (LAs). The offer will consist of: the Knowledge Hub (K-Hub), a new information, advice and guidance hub; 'Inform', a web-based collection of data and data tools; and the esd-toolkit, which provides tools to help LAs deliver services to residents more effectively. It will provide a repository of higher-level information covering all aspects of local government and support LAs to understand their areas and improve services. The LG Group commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to carry out this mapping study to inform the development of the K-Hub and Inform.

Aims

The aims of the study were to identify:

- the national data, research, policy and practice sources targeted at, or of relevance to, professionals, LA officers and elected members in children and young people's (CYP) services
- any gaps or areas of duplication in the information available to the sector
- what sources of information are used by LA officers and elected members, and why
- any challenges that LA professionals have encountered when searching for or using information
- the key features of good information sources, from an LA perspective.

Methods

The NFER carried out interviews with ten LA officers and two elected members working in CYP services from 10 LAs in England. It also carried out online searches to identify relevant sources of information for the study, which were then reviewed.

Findings

The study found that there is a wealth of different types of information on all CYP subject areas available to the sector and there does appear to be a case for rationalising sources further. Interviewees did not identify the large amount of information available to them as an issue, perhaps because they tended to use only a small selection of sources, which they are familiar with and trust.

There is a far greater appetite for data among interviewees than policy, practice or research, with the exception of the elected members interviewed who wanted a full range of information types. Had we interviewed front-line practitioners the findings may, of course, have been different. There was some indication that the use of research would be higher if outputs were considered by users to be robust, concise, accessible and free. There is a need to find a way to maximise the use and impact of the large amount of information available to the sector.

There is a demand for guidance in specific areas and data on specific subjects, some of which the LG Group might be able to produce or lobby for. Furthermore, interviewees would appreciate having a single comprehensive source of information from a brand they trust. The LG Group would seem to be well placed to capitalise on its positive brand reputation among the sector and deliver a trusted one-stop shop for the sector's information needs.

LA officers are able to access information online, which is their preferred mode. If content could be compatible with Blackberry smartphones, this would help senior staff.

The degree to which sources are tailored to meet LAs' needs varies considerably. Interviewees reported issues when looking for information sources, and frustrations with websites that are difficult to use and have poor search functionalities. Developing a source which avoids these issues, while providing robust data, would be an incentive for users to migrate to a new source.

The key features of a good information source are:

- accuracy
- timeliness
- accessibility
- ease of use
- ability to meet the needs of different types of users

- data that can be manipulated (including the ability to drill down into local areas, link datasets, benchmark against statistical neighbours, LA averages and national averages, and view trend data)
- a one-stop shop.

Conclusion

Interviewees' issues with finding robust information that meets their needs, and their enthusiasm for a one-stop shop suggests that a central information hub would be well received. Interviewees were generally positive about the role that K-Hub and Inform could have, if the key features identified in this report are incorporated.



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