Linking Up Directories of Children’s Services

Helen Barrett,
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction
This research, carried out between September 2005 and March 2006, focused on the ways in which and the extent to which Local Authorities (LAs) are meeting requirements 3 and 4 set by the Information Sharing and Assessment (ISA) Division to meet the requirements of Every Child Matters: Change for Children (ECM: CfC) to provide comprehensive, up-to-date local information in the form of a directory which is accessible to parents, professionals, children and young people. It also examined how Children’s Information Services (CIS) provide information to parents on childcare available in their local area. The research looked at directory location and content, and practices relevant to directory development. ISA and CIS managers were surveyed, with the aim of eliciting key messages for practitioners and policymakers about how best to improve links between ISA directories and information provided by CISs on childcare and related services. The Childcare Bill 2006 proposes a duty on local authorities to provide information on services for parents of children aged 0-19 and so the research was required to show existing good practices on the development of service directories and the problems arising from their development.

Key findings

- Responses obtained from managers in 85% of LAs indicated that:
  - there is considerable variability across LAs both in respect of stages of directory development, their delivery and form and in the processes through which they are being developed; although
  - there was a degree of agreement about the most effective practices and LA contexts

- Fewer than a quarter of CIS managers and less than a third of ISA managers stated that their directories were linked with these links varying from:
  - the relatively rare cases where two separate directories were developed and subsequently linked; to
  - the somewhat more common situation where some information already held by CIS is being duplicated in a separate location

- The most serious concerns about sustainability appeared to be associated where:
  - directories were developed as ‘quick fix’ solutions in response to time constraints;
  - CIS had been involved either only minimally or not at all; and
  - no long term plan was in place to fund a dedicated post to populate or maintain a directory.

- Where a multi-agency approach had been adopted from the outset and in particular where CIS was more involved there tended to be fewer concerns.

- Where explanations were given for lack of online directories these tended to indicate:
  - the decision processes were delayed due to organisational restructuring; or
  - no ISA manager was currently in post; or
  - responsibility for maintenance of directories was under review or currently being transferred; or
  - time had been taken to weigh up alternative options; or
  - directory development had not been seen as a priority

- There was general agreement that keeping directories up to date is labour-intensive and problematic. National Organisations frequently do not have the capacity to respond to requests from individual LAs while voluntary organisations can often lack both resources and motivation.

- Buy-in from senior managers to the development of directories is more likely if they recognise the importance of the directory as having a key role in effective multi-agency
work. This buy-in is important for development and long-term sustainability of a directory of services.

**Key Principles**

In authorities where priority has been given to creation of a directory and where its function as a preventative tool is appreciated, an impressive array of practices that support and facilitate its development as a powerful and valuable resource emerged. Twelve key principles appeared to govern good practice in the development and sustainability of service directories:

1. **Preparation**: Identify, audit and build on existing sources of information to develop a comprehensive directory.

2. **Networking knowledge and understanding**: Develop a good understanding of the work of organisations offering services to children, young people and families; share skills and knowledge; recognise the complementary and essential roles of actual and virtual information exchange.

3. **Collaboration**: Identify relevant skills and strengths across and within counties/boroughs for IT resources in database creation and maintenance; maximise opportunities to share resources and so reduce costs and minimise duplication.

4. **Integrating information across separate databases**: A database that integrates information across a wide range of provision can also capitalise on shared functionality.

5. **Updating the directory**: An out of date directory will not be used, investigate the various ways of keeping the information up to date and accurate.

6. **Flexibility - ‘horses for courses’**: Good practice reflects the need of the local population and their social and geographical context; no one solution fits all.

7. **Flexibility - coping with change**: LAs need to keep up with changes in policy and funding possibilities and constantly seek ever more cost-effective solutions.

8. **Mainstreaming**: Ensure sustainability by tying the directory in to mainstream services and associated funding.

9. **Consultation**: More attention needs to be paid to the views of diverse groups of parents and individuals with special needs.

10. **Creativity and problem-solving**: Use the directory to offer information in an attractive way to all users increasing the likelihood of use; effectively involve user groups in creating websites or pages.

11. **Education, publicity and outreach**: Unchampioned directories are often unused directories, work to publicise the directory needs to be ongoing.

12. **The need to optimise access**: Make use of any authority-wide services for people with special needs and take the requisite steps to make these facilities sufficiently visible.
Aims and objectives

The original aims of the research were to examine the development of service directories giving particular attention to requirements 3 and 4 of Every Child Matters: Change for Children, with special consideration of how CIS and ISA managers had worked together, and to consider questions of directory sustainability and maintenance. During the course of the research it became clear that the phrase ISA directory was inappropriate and that LA s were using information from a wide variety of sources. The research then altered in recognition of this.

Specific questions included:
1. What is the picture across England in relation to the links between ISA service directories and CIS?
2. Where are ISA service directories and CIS linked?
3. Where ISA and CIS are linked, what lessons are there from how this is done? Are these transferable? If so, what are the best/ most robust ways of linking CIS and ISA to achieve the best service offer and the best value for money?
4. What are the local and national financial costs, problems, difficulties and barriers with linking ISA service directories with CIS? Should all service directories be linked with CIS?
5. Does linking service directories with CIS improve sustainability/ usage of service directories? What else improves sustainability/ usage of service

Methodology

The project comprised five elements:
1. An initial literature review focusing on recently published research and policy guidance
2. A website trawl to map the coverage and characteristics nature of online service directories and the ease of finding them.
3. A ‘mystery shopper’ exercise in which three people sought online information about children’s services for the range of information available and its accessibility to the general public.
4. A survey to all ISA & CIS managers, to gain a broader picture of linkage between services, of the processes by which this is achieved, and of how service directories have been promoted to users.
5. Case studies of ‘good practice’, selected to reflect a range of different organisational and social contexts and strategies, including large and small boroughs, rural and urban populations, differing levels of affluence and ethnicity, as well as partnership work within and across counties.
Recommendations

1. More guidance should be provided from central government to assist LA managers to meet obligations with respect to the provision of a Children, Young People and Families Service Directory for practitioners, parents, children and young people. While information in this report may form part of this complementary strategies and targeted intervention may also be useful. For example:
   - Seminars and discussion fora are encouraged in order to build upon and disseminate more widely the good practices that have emerged from the process of developing directories of Children, Young People and Families Services.
   - An audit should be kept of difficulties associated with the funding of directory development and maintenance, with a view to keeping track of problems that may benefit from guidance based on common (as opposed to unique) experiences.

2. More attention might be given to the problems experienced in linking information to child and family services contained in the national ICHIS database and local databases, if necessary by making grants available to LAs that need assistance around issues of software non-compatibility. For example:
   - Any grants should be conditional upon LAs having systems and strategies in place to ensure an optimally integrated approach to data management and maintenance and to harmonising projects.
   - This might include a ‘whole-authority integrated approach’ to new project development, to extension and modification of existing projects and directories, as well as the establishment of accessibility policies, particularly in relation to the use of web-based resources that enable free access to all council services, as is the right of all individuals and groups of people with special needs.

3. Local Authorities identify funding or funding requirements to ensure that systems are in place to monitor user interaction in order to ensure that these directories can be used as effective preventative tools.

4. Where authorities have chosen to reduce the administrative costs of developing and maintaining a directory by working across county, district or borough boundaries, research is carried out to monitor and evaluate this way of working, and to explore possibilities for replication and extension of these models.

5. Where government directives are given for important and far-reaching changes, capacity is built into time frames for completion so “bite-size chunks” of work can be carried out enabling managers working within tight funding constraints to proceed cautiously, testing usability at each stage, allowing time for sound, multi-agency approaches and avoiding ‘quick fix’ approaches that rarely provide adequate long-term solutions.

6. A review of methods of information exchange between local and central government, with the aim of ensuring that centralised records are maintained to greater levels of accuracy so central government departments are in a strong position to provide guidance that is well-informed, relevant and appropriate.

7. One centralised repository of information should be set up to hold information about National Organisations offering support, advice and services for children, young people and families, and ways of funding this should be sought to ensure accurate and up-to-date information and nationwide accessibility.
INTRODUCTION - THE BRIEF

The study reported here was designed with the aim of discovering key lessons to be learned about how best to join up directories of children’s services under Information Sharing and Assessment and information held by Children’s Information Services on childcare and related services.

BACKGROUND

In 2002, fifteen Local Authorities were chosen as Trailblazers to develop Information Sharing and Assessment systems. In addition, all other 135 top tier Local Authorities in England were given £100K funding to develop improved Information Sharing and Assessment arrangements in children’s services within their area over the next three years (to March 2005).

As part of the Information Sharing and Assessment (ISA) project, embedded in both the Green Paper Every Child Matters: Change for Children (Cm 5860 2003) and in the Children Act 2004 (Children Act 2004), all 150 Local Authorities (LAs) were given a list of nine requirements they had to fulfil. One of these was to have an online directory of children’s services providing comprehensive information on local providers, geographical location, eligibility criteria and referral procedures. Another was that the directory had to be available to practitioners and to include a broad range of preventative services. One of its main functions was to reduce the number of inappropriate and misdirected referrals. The directory was to include all statutory and some voluntary organisations, though inclusion might be via links to existing directories. Future work was to ensure that the directory was accessible to children, young people and their families.

In developing and improving links between directories of children’s services, LAs were required to ensure that any new directories took into account the development of other national service directories, such as those provided by Children’s Information Services and Connexions. This was in line with the government’s recognition that, in order to achieve the five key outcomes considered to be desirable for every child in the UK (Cm5860: Being healthy; Staying safe; Enjoying and achieving; Making a positive contribution; Achieving economic well-being), it is absolutely essential that there is effective communication and collaboration between all partners involved in delivering services for children and their families.

In addition, each Local Education Authority (LEA) was required by the Education Act (2002) to provide information to the public about childcare and related services. Each Local Authority therefore has a Children’s Information Service (CIS), which can be in-house, or contracted out to voluntary or commercial organisations, and which can be variably named: some CISs emphasise their early years and childcare specialism whereas others reflect a wider remit. All are required to provide information to the public in respect of services to families with children aged 0-14, or 0-16 in the case of children with special needs. Increasingly, this information is being extended to services for families and children aged 0-19. From 2008 Clause 12 of the Childcare Bill 2006 will place a legal duty on local authorities to provide information to parents or prospective parents on childcare and other services, facilities or publications, which may be of benefit to parents, prospective parents, children or young people. Many local authorities are developing their services along these lines ahead of the implementation of the duty.

Each Children’s Information Service holds details of childcare provision in its area on a database. CISs use either the centrally provided iChIS database or bespoke systems purchased by their local authority. The databases contain data provided by Ofsted on registered childcare supplemented by locally gathered information. Irrespective of which database they use, CISs
are asked to upload their data to the ChildcareLink Website. In addition, as part of the system, each CIS has the facility to include local news and items of interest on a local bulletin board. A proportion of home day care providers exercise their right not to disclose contact details on the internet. The organisation which provides the iChIS database and ChildcareLink also runs a service in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which includes facilities for disseminating information about local support services for parents and additional information for working parents such as grants and tax benefits.

Among Children’s Information Services nationwide, therefore, there is considerable variability along several dimensions, including:

- a) the nature, contractual basis and name of the service
- b) the relationship between CIS and any other LA information service ‘shop front’
- c) the range of information provided to the public
- d) how and where information is delivered
- e) how and where information is stored.

Further, evidence from previous research on the development of service directories and implementation of Information Sharing and Assessment projects indicated that there was great variability among authorities, with some taking a ‘head-down, drive on’ and others a ‘wait-and-see’ approach to compliance with government directives. Barriers to implementation were perceived as coming from a variety of sources, including the complexity of the task of identifying relevant services and of eliciting their cooperation in compiling directories, the need for culture change in order to establish and support multi-agency work practices, concerns about use of information, and the sense that until clearer guidance came from central government, it would be difficult to obtain sign-up from high level managers; also that, without this, the drivers for development would be ineffective and funding may not be sustainable (Cleaver et al. DfES Research Reports 521, 566, 597).

The overall aim of the study reported here was therefore to examine the development of service directories giving particular attention to requirements 3 and 4 of Every Child Matters, with special consideration of how CIS and ISA managers had worked together, and to the questions of sustainability and maintenance. Specific questions included:

1. What is the picture across England in relation to the links between ISA service directories and CIS?
2. Where are ISA service directories and CIS linked?
3. Where ISA and CIS are linked, what lessons are there from how this is done? Are these transferable? If so, what are the best/ most robust ways of linking CIS and ISA to achieve the best service offer and the best value for money?
4. What are the local and national financial costs, problems, difficulties and barriers with linking ISA service directories with CIS? Should all service directories be linked with CIS?
5. Does linking service directories with CIS improve sustainability/ usage of service directories? What else improves sustainability/ usage of service directories?
6. How does the information held in service directories feed into national information systems, e.g. telephone help line and web sites, and where it does not, what scope is there for the information to be used in this way?
7. How have service directories been promoted? What are the best means of disseminating information about service directories to children, young people, parents and practitioners?
METHODOLOGY

Summary
The project comprised five elements:
1. An initial literature review focusing on recently published research and policy guidance
2. A website trawl to map the coverage and characteristics nature of online service directories and the ease of finding them
3. A ‘mystery shopper’ exercise in which three people sought online information about children’s services for the range of information available and its accessibility to the general public.
4. A survey of all ISA & CIS managers, to gain a broader picture of linkage between services, of the processes by which this is achieved, and of how service directories have been promoted to users.
5. Case studies of ‘good practice’, deliberately selected to reflect a range of different organisational and social contexts and strategies, including large and small boroughs, rural and urban populations, differing levels of affluence and ethnicity, as well as partnership work within and across counties.

1 WEBSITE TRAWL AND DIRECTORY SEARCH

1.1 WEBSITE TRAWL
Since the initial location of Children’s Services Directories on the web is likely to depend on the organisation and structure of the Local Authority website as a whole, it seemed important to examine this context.

Local Authority websites were accessed via the DfES LEA gateway, as this, with only one or two exceptions, gives immediate access to the home page of each Local Authority website. Each website was examined to check its overall organisation and ease of navigability using a number of criteria. It should be noted that these results refer to the period October-January 2005/6 and that even within this period changes are likely to have taken place. Nevertheless, it seems possible that the lessons learnt then may still have some relevance.

First, the ‘shop front’ of each Local Authority website was examined as set out below, then a more specific search was made for the directory of services. This preliminary examination of websites suggested that there may be room for improvements across a number of Local Authority sites as ease of navigation varied considerably. Frequently, there appeared to be problems around access for non-English-speakers, people with limited access to Internet, and people with visual impairments. Even where facilities for interpreting and translation existed, their presence was often not obvious without considerable effort to hunt them out. As these sites are likely to be the first point of contact for a substantial proportion of visitors, it seems important that they should provide as ‘clean’ an interface as possible if visits are to be productive. Across all the local authority sites, a number of helpful ‘front end’ features emerged.

These are listed below, along with information about some of the websites where examples of helpful practices were found. In respect of some aspects, there were too many websites where helpful practices were illustrated for all to be mentioned. It should not therefore be assumed that the websites mentioned here are the only or even, necessarily, the best examples available.

Accessibility tools and advice
- Online tools and advice, in a prominent place, e.g.
o Advice on text re-sizing and how to change contrast features
o Advice on and capacity to use keys instead of a mouse

• Information about availability of alternative formats for those with impaired vision
  o Information about or availability of on-site tools such as Browsealoud, Readspeaker
  o Information about facilities for conversion to braille or audiotape formats
  o Information about existence of relevant services, such as signing

• Awareness of the needs of people for whom English is not first language
  o Clear signposting of translation and interpreting services, including cost
  o “Welcome” in appropriate languages, on the home page
  o Webtools for translation (e.g. Babelfish, Alta Vista), with appropriate advice on use
  o Information about existence of relevant services, such as signing

Websites on which helpful practices were found with respect to accessibility include Barnet which signals the presence of its signing service in sign language (this possibly would not be compatible with all home-user computers but should be compatible with computers in public places and so seems to add a pleasant user-welcoming touch). Although most authorities provided some information about accessibility, sixteen gave particularly clear and user-friendly advice. Examples of some of these include Warwickshire, West Sussex, Surrey, Devon and Torbay, Cambridgeshire, Calderdale and Hertfordshire. Thirty-four LA websites gave no advice. Thirty-one websites provided information and access to text conversion aids such as Browsealoud and Readspeaker. Warwickshire supplied particularly helpful advice on how to use these tools.

Well over half of the LA websites (96) showed that efforts were being made to meet the needs of people for whom English is not the first language. However, translation and interpreting services, where they were signalled, were often only found on a free text search, even in some authorities that had language line services. Nor was it always clear who was eligible for free services or if these were on offer. Ten authorities gave translation and interpreting services a high profile. These included Leicester, East Sussex, Devon and Torbay, Lambeth and Richmond upon Thames. Authorities giving these services a high profile are likely to be considerably more successful at enabling visitors to access both these and other services. Twenty-six authorities provided access to free translation webtools while Richmond upon Thames and Waltham Forest gave additional helpful advice on their use. Twenty-seven authorities had words on their home pages welcoming visitors in languages other than English. Rochdale and Kirklees are good examples here.

Organisation, style and layout
The overall appearance of websites varied tremendously, with some seeming much better organised and easier on the eye than others. As it is now well established that unattractive sites can deter visitors from persevering with searches, several questions were asked with regard to overall appearance:

• Has the website met recognised standards of excellence with respect to website accessibility?
  o Does it meet standards set by the Website Accessibility Initiative (http://www.w3.org/WAI)?
Does it reach level AAA Bobby approval (Bobby is a webtool that analyses and assesses the accessibility of websites for people with certain disabilities: more information can be found at http://accessible.org and at http://apps.em.doe.gov/OST/mainbobby.asp.

- Is there evidence of any attempt to use Plain English, for example, evidence that the site has reached the Plain English Campaign Crystal Mark standards, or that overly bureaucratic, tedious or 'preachy' language has been avoided?

- How 'busy' are the pages?

- Are there any useful 'extras', e.g. icons or signposts on the home page that clearly signal the presence of a directory, a point where all external links are listed, a jargon-buster, site directories arranged in the form of a list of expandable higher-order categories as opposed to long lists of low-level descriptions, information about site security or reliability, etc.

Most of the local authorities mentioned in the section on accessibility, above, provided evidence of having had their sites tested. Their sites tended to have cleaner, clearer interfaces with options to alter font sizes and to adjust colours and contrast settings. However, overall, there seemed to be enormous room for improvement across the majority of Local Authority websites in this respect. Many sites were cluttered, drab or unfriendly in other ways, for example, because they presented very white or otherwise stereotyped images, because the language was off-puttingly officious, because pop-ups kept popping up, because home keys were in unexpected places or not evident at all, because links took the visitor out of the site entirely, or because the search facilities were frustratingly inefficient. These common problems are discussed further in a later section in this report.

Very few sites signalled the existence of a children’s services directory on their home page, exceptions at the time of this study being Cambridgeshire, Dorset, Leeds and Medway. One authority listed all external links in alphabetical order on one page, a strategy that seemed very helpful and in contrast to the usual practice of only embedding these links on individual pages throughout the site. Although most authorities included disclaimers at the bottom of their home pages, letting the public know that they do not bear responsibility for inaccuracies, no information of this kind could be found on 21 sites. Similarly, most authorities explained to site visitors how any personal information that they gave would be treated (though this information did not appear to be available on more than one fifth of sites) and some gave additional helpful advice and explanation to visitors to assist them in protecting against security violations (e.g. Devon and Torbay, Hartlepool, Hertfordshire, North Somerset, Redcar and Cleveland, Richmond upon Thames).

Navigability and problem-solving
Adequate search facilities are absolutely vital for website visits to be successful. The only way of being sure that search facilities are successful is to build in a facility that monitors visitors’ progress, i.e. a way of inspecting what they are looking for and how. However effective search facilities are or however full the information is that is available, there will always be a need for contact details for non-web-based services. Sites were therefore examined to see whether there were:

- Adequate search facilities.
• A feedback facility to the web team on whether searches have/ have not produced satisfactory results.
• Contact details, with maps showing where council offices are, what services they offer and their opening times.

On the majority of sites, search facilities did not produce helpful results. Where there were ‘advanced’ search facilities available, these seemed to produce results that were even more irrelevant. In other words, it seemed that simple search facilities produced the most relevant results. This point is taken up again in the case studies, where the importance of tracking and testing search terms emerged as perhaps the key task to be achieved if visitors are going to be able to find and benefit from an online directory of services. Meantime, what seemed very clear from the website analysis was that most local authority websites do not have sufficiently refined search facilities and, because of this, they are likely to present an obstacle to visitors seeking services.

Twenty-eight websites did not offer visitors any facility to feed back on problems with the site or, if they did, the facility was not discovered during the web trawl. Of the others, a substantial proportion did invite feedback but only in the form of an anonymous online email comment facility. This, obviously, is not helpful to visitors who do not have personal email addresses. An additional option to telephone the web team or host, as exemplarised by Doncaster, therefore seems sensible.

While most authorities gave visitors details of how to contact the council as well as how to make a comment or complaint about council services, a small minority of authorities (eleven) failed to supply these details. At the other extreme, 18 not only gave full details of how to locate the appropriate officers to deal with particular problems but also provided information about office opening hours and maps to show their location. Among these were Worcestershire, Wiltshire, Redbridge, Bexley, Coventry and Bolton.

1.2 DIRECTORY SEARCH
Although it is likely that members of the public, particularly perhaps younger people, will search for information about subjects and organisations of interest to them using search engines such as Google, it is equally possible that newcomers to a region or people with no other information about where to find services on the web may begin their search by going to the relevant Local Authority website. It therefore seemed important to explore whether directories were easily accessible on these sites.

Two approaches were taken to test how easy it was to find service directories on Local Authority websites over the first four months of the project. First, all sites were visited as part of the web trawl described above and searched both for service directories and for individual services that might be expected to be found in a directory. Second, three people naïve to the project aims participated in a ‘mystery shopper’ exercise in which they sought for service directories using a more restricted number of search terms.

Directories of services were searched for starting from the Home Page of each Local Authority website. Each site was explored using the search terms below:

(1) ‘directory of children’s services’, ‘directory’ and ‘children’s services’ were entered into searches (free text and A-Z directories) to see whether and how easily a directory could be found.

(2) The site map (if there was one) and the A-Z of council services were inspected to find out where the Children’s Information Service was located and what it was called – if necessary this was done by a search using the word ‘childcare’ – if information was found, a note was made of whether this was
within the LA website pages, on a microsite, or on an independent website; within these pages, a search was made to see whether information about tax credits was available, where information about childcare services was lodged (or how to locate it) and whether other information about support for parents was signposted from these pages. If ChildCareLink was used, the Parent Support section was checked to see whether it was populated.

(3) If no directory of services had been found in these ways, information about individual services and resources was searched for, including family support and parent support, youth services, child development information, hospital/medical services including CAMHS, voluntary organisations and community organisations.

If service directories were located, notes were made of:

- the ease with which the directory had been found
- how ‘visitor-friendly’ pages in the directory appeared to be, particularly the front pages (e.g. culture sensitive images, language)
- what search facilities were available within the directory and how effective these search facilities appeared to be in producing relevant results
- the internal consistency of structure and organisation of material within the directory
- whether the directory appeared to fulfil the requirements to provide information about location, eligibility and referral processes
- how well populated the directory appeared to be, including the balance between local and national organisations (as this judgement was not based on knowledge of local services, it really only served to pick up on whether there appeared to be information in the directory about any rather than all local services)
- whether there were separate portals or separate routes into the directory for parents, practitioners, children and young people
- whether there was any indication of how to obtain the directory in different formats (e.g. audiotape, braille, other languages, hard copies) – this availability may already have been signalled elsewhere on the local authority pages.

Findings from this directory search were used, along with information from the mapping exercise, to identify authorities that appeared to have made the most progress in developing online directories that are well populated and user-friendly.

Results of the online search for Children’s Information Services also showed that there is enormous variation in the ease with which these services are findable on the web and also huge variation in the quality and amount of information about both childcare and other support services for parents to be found on the net. Direct links to Children’s Information Services, either through free text or A-Z searches, produced hits in only just over half of all authorities (56 per cent). Though entering the term ‘childcare’ was more likely to take visitors to a Children’s Information Service or a variant upon it, it seems important to bear in mind that not all parents looking for services will be searching for childcare. If Children’s Information Services are to play more of a role as gateways to service directories, it seems evident that action will need to be taken to flag up their existence more clearly to the public, perhaps by having a clearly identifiable icon or button on LA home pages, as was the case for Enfield at the time of the website trawl. More importantly, perhaps, NACIS might consider the value of developing a nationally identifiable symbol for CIS services, which could then serve a function similar to that of the Sure Start icon.
2 ‘MYSTERY SHOPPER’ EXERCISE

Over the period of October 2005 to January 2006, three people with varying knowledge of the nature of service directories were given the same set of instructions to search local authority sites using the following search terms: ‘children’s services directory’, ‘directory of services for children’, ‘services for children’, ‘parent support’, ‘parenting’, ‘parenting programme’. The terms ‘family support’ or ‘family services’ were not used here since, from the web trawl, it had become evident that these often brought up statutory services that all Local Authorities provide and which are often listed on websites though not as part of a services directory. It was thought that including them might therefore have produced too many ‘false hits’, i.e. reporting that service directories were in existence when what had been identified as a service directory was actually a directory of, more or less, related services. The mystery shoppers were asked, in the event of a successful search, to note the URL of the web page on which they had found the information that they were searching for. They were also instructed not to spend longer than ten minutes searching each website. Results were subsequently examined with reference to the website analysis and survey information to ascertain whether a directory of services had been located.

Figure 1 indicates that, of the 86 online service directories available, 24 were found and 62 missed, i.e. only just over a quarter of directories that might have been found were actually located. In 10 cases, even using the limited search terms selected, mystery shoppers still produced ‘false hits’ in relation to ten LA websites, that is, they misidentified other types of online directories as directories of children’s and family services. When percentages of correct hits and misses are calculated for all 150 LA websites, it can be seen that there was an almost 50/50 chance of accurately stating that a directory did or did not exist. In other words, it was just as easy to find as to miss directories. This indicates a very clear need for better signposting and publicity from Local Authority sites if ECM requirements are to be met.

**Figure 1**
Outcomes for ‘mystery shopper’ directory search

- Hits: 16%
- False hits: 7%
- Correct rejections: 36%
- Misses: 41%
3 SURVEY OF CIS AND ISA MANAGERS: THE MAPPING EXERCISE

The sample
Full details of the sample of CIS and ISA managers participating in the mapping exercise can be found in Appendix One. The survey questionnaire, which asked managers to supply information about directories in their authority with specific reference to progress on developing an online directory of children's and family services, was emailed to CIS and ISA managers and followed up shortly after by an email giving information about the URL of the online version of the questionnaire. Repeated follow-up requests were made by telephone from November through until the end of January 2006. These indicated that a substantial proportion of ISA managers were no longer in post or were no longer responsible, if they had been at all, for directories. Further, in a number of authorities, discussions around responsibility for developing directories were still under way.

A total of 187 questionnaires were returned from a potential pool of 295, i.e. just under two thirds (see Appendix One). In addition, reasons for non-returns were ascertained in relation to 47 managers. These indicated a degree of overlap between non-returns and returns: some CIS managers had chosen to return questionnaires which were only half complete, explaining that their involvement in directory development was limited or under negotiation while, for the same reason, others had selected not to return them. Also, despite the request to complete questionnaires independently, some CIS and ISA managers returned identical or joint responses. Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of responses to the survey questionnaire among the total potential pool of 295 respondents across all 150 authorities (148 if Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, and Devon and Torbay are combined).

Figure 2
Source of returned questionnaires

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Note: This number represents one ISA and one CIS manager from each of the 150 authorities but also takes account of authorities such as Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland where the same manager is responsible for three authorities.
Questions about existing directories
The first survey question asked managers to list all existing directories in their authority known to contain information relevant to Children’s, Young People’s and Family services. The second asked how many of these directories were online. A later question asked whether the authority had an online directory of services for children, young people and families. The intention here was to explore the extent to which the development of one integrated online directory may have reduced the necessity to maintain pre-existing directories. Figure 3 shows numbers of directories still being maintained within the 115 authorities from which this information was obtained (responses from ten authorities indicated that managers could not answer this question).

**Figure 3**
Directories containing information about services for children and families

![Figure 3](image_url)

As Figure 3 illustrates, it is relatively rare for information about services for children and families to be contained within one integrated directory. Comparing the 90 authorities with online directories and the 25 without, no significant differences emerged between numbers of directories: authorities with online directories reported an average of 5.5 co-existing directories while those without reported 5.8. The two authorities reporting the highest numbers of directories (27) did have online directories of services.

These rather unexpected findings are possibly explained in a number of ways. First, managers who did not know how many directories there were tended either not to have been involved in directory development or to be working in an authority where no online directory had been developed. By contrast, where an online directory was in existence, and particularly where this directory was a ‘first fix’ directory in the process of being re-developed, the question appeared to have been answered on the basis of a more accurate audit of existing directories. Second, and perhaps even more important, the nature of online directories varied considerably, with most to some extent signposting existing directories rather than replacing them. Third, responses indicated that there may be a degree of confusion and/or varying interpretations...
about which directories might be relevant. CIS managers seemed more likely to be unclear about this and, where CIS and ISA managers returned separate questionnaires from the same authority, there was a tendency for different directories as well as different numbers of directories to be listed.

In the following section, questions and responses are summarised (fuller descriptive statistics in relation to questionnaire responses can be found in Appendix Two).

Questions about online directories
A number of questions related to the presence of an online directory and its functionality. Responses to these questions can be summarised as follows:

• Just under three-quarters of all respondents stated that a directory of services could be found online (details of URLs for online directories can be found on the DfES website at http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/resources-and-practice).
• Among these, 95 per cent reported that the online directory had a search facility.
• A larger proportion of ISA managers than CIS managers stated that there were online directories with search facilities. It is not clear whether this was due different levels of knowledge about the status of online directories or to other differences between the two sets of managers.
• Where explanations were given for lack of online directories, these tended to indicate that decision processes were delayed due to organisational re-structuring, because no ISA manager was currently in post, because responsibility for maintenance of directories was under review or was currently in process of being transferred, because time had been taken to weigh up alternative options, or because directory development had not been seen as a priority.
• A substantial proportion (almost half) of online service directories were reported to be incorporated within the A-Z of all council services by all respondents, though fewer ISA than CIS managers endorsed this view. Caution is needed in interpreting this finding since it seems possible that some respondents may have understood this question to be asking whether A-Z directory of council services listed the service directory whereas others may have interpreted it, as intended, as meaning that the service directory was integrated in its entirety into the A-Z of council services.
• Where there was an electronic directory, paper versions were also produced in just under one third of cases (30 per cent).
• Almost 60 per cent of electronic directories were downloadable either in full or in part overall.
• While CIS and ISA managers’ reports on the availability of paper-based directories were similar, a larger proportion of ISA managers reported that online directories were downloadable than CIS managers.
• Translations of information in directories and the capacity to produce them in formats such as braille or audiotape, suitable for people with visual impairments, were reported only by a small minority of respondents.

The relationship between childcare information and other child and family services information
One question attempted to explore the nature of links between information about childcare provision and other information relevant to children and family services. Where separate responses were obtained from ISA and CIS managers, they tended to diverge considerably on this question, with CIS managers, perhaps expectably, giving rather fuller answers. Seventeen per cent of CIS managers as opposed to 10 per cent of ISA managers said that they were using the same firm that supplies their childcare database to build their service directory. Some of these managers explained that, as they were already using the CHIS database for childcare
information and were satisfied with the service provided, the bolt-on directory, the front end of which could be adapted to be consistent with their own website or hard copy directories, appealed as an option. However, managers who had developed directories independently of the CHIS database, using often cheaper internal IT systems or alternative external information management firms, were more inclined to criticise the system in place for maintaining Ofsted and childcare information, or to see it as an obstacle that needs to be overcome in developing an integrated directory of services.

Links between CIS and ISA directories
One question asked whether CIS and ISA directories were linked and, if so, whether there had been any benefits of linking directories. This question also tended to produce different responses from ISA and CIS managers: rather fewer CIS (just under a quarter) than ISA managers (just under a third) stated that their ISA and CIS directories were linked. Where directories were linked, the nature of the link varied from a simple web link between two separate directories to one identical directory. Where a CIS directory had been ‘grown on’ to take account of ‘Every Child Matters’ requirements, which appeared to have happened in a substantial proportion of cases where a link was present, this question appeared to have been answered somewhat inconsistently, for example, some people had ticked ‘not applicable’ while others had ticked ‘yes’, explaining that they had never had two separate directories. In cases where two separate directories had never existed, respondents tended to mark the next two questions, about the difficulties and benefits of linking directories, either as unanswerable or as not applicable.

Data fields within service directories
Another question asked about the kind of information recorded in online service directories. Answers to this indicated that, where online directories exist, almost all have standard formats to ensure systematic data entry. However, a substantial minority (around a quarter) did not request information about referral processes or eligibility criteria to be recorded in these forms. It seems possible that some Local Authorities have interpreted the requirement to include these details as optional rather than obligatory. A smaller proportion of respondents stated that their information records did not allow for live website or email links. Since it seems likely that these variations will limit the usefulness of electronic directories, particularly in terms of their capacity to function as preventative tools, this would appear to be an area where greater consistence is needed.

Finding service directories on the web
In response to a question about how well signposted online directories were from LA home pages, less than half of the respondents, fewer CIS (32%) than ISA (42%) managers, considered that their electronic directories were satisfactorily signposted. This situation seemed, in many cases, to be due to the fact that, although embryo electronic directories had been uploaded, they were not well populated and there were plans to develop them further before making their presence widely known. However, in other cases, there were ongoing difficulties in ensuring that a prominent signpost was placed on the Local Authority home page due to competition for space on this page. This seems clearly to indicate a failure on the part of some LAs to appreciate the importance of the role of its service directory.

Accessibility
Relatively few managers (well under a quarter) reported that they had taken steps to facilitate access to their directories for people who do not speak English as a first language. Slightly more but still under half had taken steps to facilitate access for people with limited access to computers. Somewhat more (around half) had made some attempt to facilitate access for children, young people and adults with special needs. Where reasons were given for this, they tended to relate to the fact that this had not yet been done as directories were still in the process of being developed and populated.
Usability

Few people had carried out extensive formal usability tests although some (about a third) had trialled their directories on a relatively informal basis. In total less than ten ISA or CIS managers had written usability reports available. It seems highly likely that this situation reflects funding and other resource constraints rather than a deliberate choice to rely principally on informal feedback.

Comprehensiveness and Publicity

Five open-ended questions were included. These asked:

1. How is it ensured that all relevant local providers are included in the directory?
2. How it is ensured that all non-relevant services are excluded from the directory?
3. Have there been any difficulties in maintaining accurate information?
4. What steps have been taken to ensure that all relevant professionals are aware of the directory?
5. What steps have been taken to ensure that the public is aware of the directory?

A summary of responses to these questions is given below, with questions four and five combined under the heading of 'Publicising directories of services'.

1. **How is it ensured that all relevant local providers are included in the directory?**

   In most authorities, this has been accomplished using lagged strategies, beginning with an audit of existing directories and building on the information that these provide, then using these and project steering group contacts to network more and more widely. Ongoing checks are made in newspapers and on websites for new organisations, and ongoing publicity of the directory (see below) supports new contacts. Snowballing and feedback from comments on online and hard copy directories are also used. Some web-based directories have managed to incorporate search monitoring facilities that can pick up on non-find searches and so identify gaps in services. In some areas, volunteers have been appointed as ‘champions’ of the directory, for example, the National Youth Advocacy Service has a Signposting Service in Birmingham uses a large team of volunteers to research, recruit and update its directory of services. In the large, sparsely populated areas of North Yorkshire, library services are vital in gathering and distributing relevant information. The notion that directories need as many people to ‘champion’ them as possible came up frequently.

   One manager’s response seems to characterise the sense that this process can never be quite under control, “Luck, local knowledge, the group that worked on the original set up, thinking laterally and keeping it in mind. It is hard to know what you don’t know”. Several people also referred to the fact that directories will always have gaps because they reflect changing situations: “it is a living directory”. It was also not at all common for comments to reflect an appreciation of the way directories grow because they are part of a live network within which knowledge is constantly being increased and deepened.

   Occasionally, managers came across agencies that did not want to be included in the service directory, perhaps for fear of being overwhelmed, or because they could not see the point for some other reason. While this was rare, it seems important to recognise this difficulty and to consider whether it may have overall implications for the quality of directories or whether it should be a compulsory requirement for all agencies to be represented accurately in services directories.
How it is ensured that all non-relevant services are excluded from the directory?

Apart from occasional odd responses such as, “? Every service is relevant to someone”, most respondents saw the need to have some strategy for vetting information about agencies. In some authorities, vetting was being done by a designated member of staff or team of staff. In others, queries about the fidelity of organisations were monitored by the steering group involved in directory development.

Criteria for inclusion were not always clearly set and varied quite a lot between authorities. However, in many authorities, clear criteria had been agreed, for example, “we do not include service providers that are there just for profit, unless they are providing a very relevant service, e.g. leisure/ dancing/ etc.”. For some authorities, the way that information was input into the database determined whether it was included: unless all fields were complete, it was not included. Restricting inclusion by the nature of the service provided was not uncommon, for example, particular age criteria might be set, such as that services must be for children or to help parents and carers to support their children.

Several authorities have clearly established quality standards that provide the basis for inclusion on the system (Bridges, Leicestershire and Rutland: “We have an Ethical Policy which we have compiled and we only add Service Providers which meet with the criteria set out in the Ethical policy”). In Gateshead, three quality control features were listed: (1) A moderation function, based on policy that is posted on website, (2) For large A-Z files and suchlike partners have deployed a filter to retain only those to do with children and families, and (3) There has been labour-intensive manual deletion of irrelevant services on top of this. In the East Riding of Yorkshire, each service is judged to ensure that it holds value for the directory and a ‘stamp of approval’ has been established to accredit organisations that meet a minimum set of criteria, i.e. CRB checked staff, equal opportunities policy.

Medway Parent Partnership Network also has clearly documented criteria: PPN will include agencies offering advice, support and information to Medway families on a wide range of parenting and life issues; PPN is not a data mining site – agencies cannot publish on PPN without undergoing training and approval process; PPN publishes terms and conditions of partner membership which form part of sign-up agreement; Non-relevant activities (such as evangelism) are not permitted by agreement. They explained that, in practice (over 3 years), there have not been any problems and the only incident of a spurious ‘provider’ service had been dealt with without difficulty.

Have there been any difficulties in maintaining accurate information?

The difficulty mentioned most frequently was that organisations did not return their update forms or, if they did, the information provided was of poor quality. There was a sense that “Upgrading information on the website is not really a priority for organisations/services” and that more effort was needed to train people in how to complete update forms, particularly the metadata: “getting the correct and most useful word links to each service for a keyword search”. Comments suggested that these difficulties applied mainly to voluntary organisations where, sometimes, forms were filled in by one member whose perception was not necessarily shared by other workers. However, there were also difficulties in obtaining information about large statutory organisations such as PCTs and from national organisations. Mention was made of lack of confidence in the accuracy or currency of information on other websites and of the fact that some national organisations took the view that they could not respond individually to all 150 local authorities.

Other difficulties included the amount of time needed to follow up non-returns and to check returns, lack of dedicated staff to find out about existing organisations and shortage of funding for posts. These difficulties were aggravated in certain circumstances, such as when phone
numbers or other contact details had been changed or when information was required about quickly passing events such as holiday play schemes.

Lack of funding was also mentioned in connection with problems with software for updating or maintaining databases. Many people mentioned that, as the directory had grown, the task of updating it had extended exponentially so that more sophisticated functions were required in order to update databases efficiently. This could sometimes involve upgrading systems or switching on functions such as automatic email reminders (e.g. “as currently designed, back end processes are cumbersome and not automated enough”). Upgrading or altering systems could also cause delays in processing and checking entries.

Various strategies were being adopted to tackle these difficulties, including taking decisions to limit the directory to the more accessible types of information (e.g. cutting out leisure activities) or making links to PCTs rather than trying to include this information in the service directory. To ensure availability of staff for updating, many authorities had either already or were contemplating widening the brief of the CIS staff. In Birmingham, the National Youth Advocacy Service’s Signposting directory is maintained by dedicated project workers supported by a team of volunteers. Almost all authorities interviewed expressed an interest in the possibility that information about national organisations should be collated nationally, so that it would no longer be necessary for each individual authority to keep separate records.

(4& 5) Publicising directories of services

Very few managers mentioned having included training in use of the directory as part of staff induction or development programmes in response to the question about steps taken to ensure that professionals were aware of the existence of the directory. Those that had emphasised the value of this practice, in view of the high staff turnover in many care services and the fact that most directories have either only recently been developed, or have been refurbished and can often still benefit from user feedback. ‘Mainstreaming’ the directory in this way also carries efficiency benefits with regard to staffing resources.

Few managers considered hard copy directories a thing of the past, although many mentioned that they were expensive to produce and out of date before being published, so they preferred to encourage people to rely more on electronic information that is more likely to be up-to-date. Many also, somewhat reluctantly, acknowledged a continued role for hard copies, particularly for professionals engaged in home visiting. Several authorities continue to distribute free hard copies, often in binder form, to staff members and public places such as libraries, as a way of ensuring that staff know about and use the directory. Some authorities also provide shortened handy versions of more comprehensive electronic directories.

Otherwise, the mapping exercise showed that a wide variety of methods is being used to increase awareness of the existence of the directory, including inclusion in commonly visited areas, such as e-mail strap-lines, icons on screen-savers, links on local intranets and on the net, flyers loaded onto agency intranet sites, information in regularly produced staff bulletins and newsletters, and on pay-slips. Most authorities have produced distinctive posters and flyers that have been widely distributed both to practitioners and to the public more generally. A number have also found funding for advertisement on products such as mugs, mousemats, coffee mats, bookmarks, postcards, pens, pencils, canvas bags and toys such as yo-yos, balloons or fluffy animals. Some managers have remarked that, unless these objects are commonly used and useful, the message that they convey can be lost or, worse still, trivialised.

Taking on board the value of a ‘human face’ to accompany information, in many authorities, ongoing publicity and demonstrations have been incorporated into the job description of staff, particularly information officers in the CIS or elsewhere. As a regular part of their job, they
will inform themselves of potentially useful events, such as conferences, public meetings or training events which also offer a market stall venue.

Many of the methods used to publicise the directory to professionals are also being used with the public more generally. Here too, launch events and roadshows accompanied by press and media coverage are common. It seems important to remember, though, that one-off events inevitably reach only a very small proportion of the public and, though news of them spreads by word of mouth, they need to be supported by additional ongoing publicity and education. In most authorities, therefore, there is evidence that people understand the importance of engaging people widely in using and teaching others to use the service directory. For this reason, some managers have targeted practitioners, like health visitors, who can act as demonstrators to some of the most hard-to-engage families.
4. CASE STUDIES

In the case study component of this research, the aim was to identify ‘good practices’ in developing directories of services. In this, we aimed to include managers who were working in a variety of ways, at different stages and in differing settings. To accomplish this, we hoped to interview equal numbers of ISA and CIS managers and, where possible, to obtain the views of both managers in a minimum number of 15 authorities. In the event, for a variety of reasons explained below, we extended case studies to a larger number of authorities.

The authorities represented spanned the UK. They included relatively small inner London boroughs with highly diverse populations, and both small and large rural counties, ranging from very sparsely populated to high density regions, and from high deprivation to affluence. Some managers worked across county boroughs. Some drew upon specialist resources from outside their authority. Some were directly employed by the Local Authority while others were externally contracted. Three had been IRT ‘trailblazers’.

Method of recruitment
‘Good practices’ or ‘innovative solutions’ were identified on the basis of the website trawl and the mapping exercise. Ideally perhaps, judgements about how satisfactory practices are in terms of directory development should be informed by a systematic and realistic assessment of directory content. However, this was not possible within the constraints of this project.

Instead, initially using the criteria outlined in the website trawl, authorities were identified which appeared to have readily accessible and user-friendly online directories. This information was later supplemented by information from returned surveys.

The initial reliance on results of the web trawl meant that (a) results were based on examination of ‘front end’ rather than the often more critical ‘back end’ functionality and organisation of directories, and so could not pick up on important potential differences between directories and their capabilities, (b) the time frame of the trawl was subject to normal fluctuations in website performance, (c) this ‘snapshot’ approach was strongly influenced by the fact that many local authorities were in the process of putting directories online or upgrading ‘first fix’ directories with the result that, within days, the situation may have changed, (d) substantial progress would not have been captured in cases where deliberate choices had been made to develop electronic directories on the back of hard copies.

Nevertheless, the web trawl, which utilised multiple criteria and the judgements of one researcher, did have the advantage of being based on direct inspection of all Local Authority websites and so had a degree of consistency and internal coherency. It therefore could be viewed as a fairly useful ‘rule of thumb’ means of accessing a preliminary strata of information.

In fact, in the course of in-depth interviews with ISA and CIS managers in authorities identified as ‘promising’ using this method, it soon became clear that workers in several of the local authorities so selected were dissatisfied with the ‘first fix’ solutions they had arrived at, were not publicising their temporary directories and were planning to replace them with new directories capable, often by means of larger memory capacity and/or greater functionality, of embracing more of the information held elsewhere. In some authorities, in consequence of ISA funding having ended and of staff having been re-allocated, negotiations were under way for new systems to be set up in order to maintain directories and most people interviewed were of the opinion that certain aspects, most often their search facilities, were in need of refinement, particularly if the directories were to become easy to use for a wider group of people than practitioners (a substantial proportion of directories had been designed in the first instance for use by practitioners, with the needs of children and young people, and parents being considered later).
As questionnaires were returned, information from these was used to identify more instances of good or innovative practices. From among the 15 authorities identified as ‘promising’ during the web trawl, eight were initially selected to be invited to participate in telephone interviews: Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Islington, Leeds, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Swindon and West Sussex. Selection of these eight was primarily guided by the ease with which their online directories could be found and searched, relevancy of search results, and how well-populated the directories appeared to be. On the basis of the information returned by CIS and ISA managers, a further fifteen local authorities were subsequently identified. These included Barnet, Brent, Birmingham, Dorset, Durham, Bath and North East Somerset, Gateshead, Durham, Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire, Richmond upon Thames, Stockport, Surrey and North Yorkshire.

During the course of interviews and interview analyses, it was decided that information from some of these authorities should not be included in the final report either because it had become clear that there was not enough evidence of ‘good practice’ or because the good practices evidenced were already exemplarised by other authorities participating in the case studies. The final selection of case study authorities includes the authorities thought to fulfil the original aim to include as wide as possible a range of approaches to directory creation. It also includes an example of an authority that has built upon a previously existing directory, an authority that has focused primarily on special needs services, one that has looked at the needs of practitioners and one that has focused more widely. The authorities represented also vary in the extent to which they have involved Children’s Information Services in the compilation of services directories. The final selection also depended on availability of staff for interview.

METHODOLOGY

Interview format and analysis

In each of the identified authorities, relevant managers were contacted and invited to participate in telephone interviews. Interviews were conducted using a structured check-list (Appendix Three) which essentially covered five areas: Who (developed the directory, who was directory developed for and who tested it), What (information does the directory contain and what form does it take), How (were decisions made about how the directory should be designed), Where (do people find the directory), How much (has it cost, how is it funded, any concerns about sustainability). A final question asked respondents if they could think of any special advice to give to other people involved in developing directories: anything they would have done differently, anything that worked particularly well.

Interview data was subjected to content analysis in line with the focus group/market research techniques used by NATCEN (Framework).
FINDINGS
Fuller details of case studies are presented in Appendix Four. Below is an outline description of some of the key principles of good practice that emerged from the case study exercise.

Key principles of good practice
Twelve key principles of good practice emerged from CIS, ISA and associated IT project managers who participated in telephone interviews.

They include:
- Preparation
- Networking knowledge and understanding
- Collaboration
- Integrating information across separate databases
- Updating the directory
- Flexibility - ‘horses for courses’
- Flexibility - coping with change
- Mainstreaming
- Consultation
- Creativity and problem-solving
- Education, publicity and outreach
- Optimising access

While some common practices are evident, it is quite remarkable how many different solutions have been discovered by workers in diverse social and geographical settings. Most of the authorities represented in the case studies illustrated more than one of the key principles. However, to avoid repetition, the case studies detailed in Appendix Four reflect a selection of examples of their good practices rather than a comprehensive list in each case. Below is a summary of the examples, with page numbers cross-referencing to the appended case studies.
**Preparation**

Most, though not all, managers taking the lead on directory development started off by carrying out an audit of existing directories. In doing this, they were able to identify what relevant information was already being gathered and by which agencies, as well as what else needed to be done to create a viable directory.

Workers in several authorities benefited from consulting with each other to discover what software products are available and how other authorities are working.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREPARATION - Key points from case studies</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Identify and build on existing good practices. 43, 45</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Good preparation usually requires an audit of existing directories and discussion about how to define good practice. 63</td>
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<td>• Where good directories already exist, there may be no need to ‘re-invent the wheel’. 55, 72</td>
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<td>• It is essential to spend time working out in advance, as far as possible, which information is needed and how it will be used. 47, 64</td>
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<td>• Time spent firming up and agreeing between partners the specifications for the directory may be more challenging but generally pays off in the long run. 59, 71</td>
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<tr>
<td>• It is often more satisfactory to err on the cautious side, save money and think ahead rather than submitting to pressures to comply with unrealistic timescales. 59</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Having an informed practitioner involved from the start in building a directory can facilitate the process of developing a directory tailored to meet the needs of practitioners. 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Having an in-house IT department that monitors all council projects provides a valuable resource: it can minimise duplication and permits transfer of skills and learning. 55, 64, 78</td>
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Networking knowledge and understanding

In the course of consulting with other authorities, some IT and website architects identified specialisms or resources that they could draw upon across counties, for example, in infrastructure design or database expertise. This reduces duplication of resources across local authority IT departments.

In the process of carrying out the audit and planning the development of service directories, managers in many authorities have set up multi-agency steering groups which have also been extended as work progressed to wider stakeholder groups. In this way, development of directories has built new networking capabilities, strengthened existing networks and increased the likelihood of making contact with local organisations.

A number of managers were very enthusiastic about this process, explaining that they have really appreciated the way that the process of directory development has facilitated ‘joined-up’ working because it had deepened their understanding of what workers in other agencies do. They use this understanding to inform refinement of search functions: it feeds into the process of tagging entries. This is essential if the metadatabase is to be accurate and consistent. Without it, searches are less effective.

Many managers therefore stress that, although directories are in themselves a very valuable tool, it is important to continue to meet and talk if workers are to have a deep enough understanding of the scope of each others’ services. To ensure that this happens, workers in some authorities have continued to meet regularly to discuss issues around referrals and advice-giving.

**Networking:** Key points from case studies:

- Working together widens and deepens relevant knowledge bases. 55, 56
- It strengthens networks and ensures the human element that many practitioners value. 56
- Working together cooperatively also helps to define tasks more clearly. 47, 74
- Continual research and partnership work is fundamental to the maintenance of an effective directory. 55
- Working together can mean that partners have to recognise and work with each other’s limitations. 56, 74
- Website directories can be used to facilitate networking and information exchange between parents and professionals. 67
- Directory websites can be designed along the lines of a network with many nodes in the form of microsites, so that each organisation can maintain and update their own information. 67
Collaboration

The value of effective collaboration within the authority in developing and maintaining a well populated service directory emerged clearly from case studies. To be effective, partners need to agree what exactly the directory is for and who will be responsible for which information.

In some authorities, for example, a decision has been taken only to include targeted rather than universal services. In others, it has been decided that the directory will signpost some services rather than hold and maintain all information. Websites of PCTs, for example, are often linked to rather than being physically integrated into the directory database.

Although there can be risks attached if all partners fail to pull their weight, some authorities have also succeeded in working across authority boundaries to produce directories. This practice has not only cut costs but has given users a more comprehensive directory with information all in one place. This can be particularly beneficial for people seeking services across boundaries (perhaps because children attend schools, parents work or separated parents live in another county).

**COLLABORATION:** Key points from case studies

- It is worth putting in time to persuade key people of the value of the directory, as they can often help to make sure that directories are well populated and publicised. 43
- Identify as many people as possible who might be willing to help with publicising the directory and encouraging people to engage with it, at delivery points throughout local authorities. 43
- Good working relationships with key informants have dual benefits: they improve the quality of information exchanged and also deepen understanding of the nature of services. 55
- It is important to recognise and respect the expertise of key people, for example, information workers. 47
- Collaboration between IT departments in different local authorities, or "plugging into expertise" across a region can reduce the need for multiple databases and IT systems. 59
- This means that costs can often be cut dramatically. 57
- Collaborating across authorities to produce a joint directory depends crucially on all partners understanding their role and making sure that they deliver their input. 57
- Certain principles, namely multi-agency work, building on best practice and a clear Community Information Strategy, produce a cost-efficient solution. 57, 71
- Sharing common aims and seeing each other as part of one team means that agencies can work together to deliver the most effective service directory, with each agency contributing its area of expertise and complementing others. 70, 74
- It helps to involve people with special insight into the needs of service users when developing directories and websites. 76
- It is also well worth involving the wider stakeholder group early on in the process of directory development, for example, in the tendering process. 78
Integrating information across separate databases

Workers in very few authorities appear satisfied that they have completed this task which has perhaps been the biggest challenge for directory development. Where information about childcare is held on the ICHIS database and is not managed by the authority, this has presented the main obstacle to integration of information across CIS and other databases.

Many different approaches are being taken to overcome these difficulties, such as migrating entire databases to new sites, creating ‘front ends’ that obscure the seams still extant in ‘back office’ databases, improving ways that data is input so that inputting to one system automatically inputs to a second in selected fields, ‘bolting on’ a service directory to the ICHIS database, or simply using links to signpost visitors to separate directories.

**INFORMATION INTEGRATION: Key points from case studies**

- A county-wide ‘one database’ policy has clear advantages in terms of preventing duplication and maximising opportunities for integration of information that is stored in different systems. 56, 63
- It is important to make use of existing information in order to avoid duplication and to build on good practice. 45
- Working together can simplify the process of combining datasets. 57
- No matter how large or small databases are, or what software is used, they will only speak to each other if their human data managers permit this to happen! 65
- A database that integrates information across a wide range of provision can also capitalise on shared functionality. 48, 52, 55
- Even where information about services has been integrated into one database, it may not be necessary to have postcode or highly interactive search facilities throughout the entire directory. 52
- ‘Front end’ linkages do not depend on links between ‘back end’ databases but information from these does need to be made freely available if it is to be drawn upon. 65
- It might pay off to set up a ‘one-off’ consultation to ensure that childcare and other databases speak to each other. 71
- Service directories do not need to include all services for families and children, so long as other services are clearly signposted. 78
- It can help to use a ‘dummy interface’ to create the appearance to users of one seamless database. 71
- Where funds are limited and good directories already exist, a signposting gateway can provide a viable interim solution. 45
- Complex search facilities are often less useful than simple ones based directly on information held in the directory. 78
Updating the directory

A wide range of different methods appear successful in updating directories. After initial data input, most managers have found it useful to incorporate automatic reminders, often by email, to organisations on the directory. Allowing organisations to choose the expiry date of their entry, particularly in the case of small voluntary groups that might only be funded on a short-term basis for specific events, is more likely to facilitate cooperation than less flexible systems. Many authorities have now developed their systems so that organisations can also update their own entries as and when necessary, though these modifications still need to be checked by trained database administrator(s).

### UPDATING THE DIRECTORY: Key points from case studies

- The gradual move towards CISs being responsible for directory maintenance is proving a popular one: in many cases, it is ensuring sustainability and reducing duplication as well as raising the profile of the CIS as the main information repository. 71
- People often prefer human contact and may engage more in giving and updating information if they initially learn about the directory by word of mouth. 74
- It is helpful for people to be able choose how often or when they would like to be reminded to update their entries. 74
- It is always worth using more than one method to encourage people to update or add to their information, and to offer more than one uploading option. 43, 61
- Distribution of a limited number of hard copies can ‘kickstart’ the process of encouraging practitioners to engage in updating their own information. 44
- Volunteers can help to gather and update information. This reduces costs and can provide volunteers with valuable learning experiences. 46
- Automatic update functions cut administrative costs. 48, 65
- However, there will always be a need for dedicated staff as it is essential to edit new entries, checking them for accuracy and consistency, and to modify existing entries. 63, 65
- Regularly reviewing performance and constantly monitoring the quality of information uses resources but is crucial. 61
- Monitoring users’ ability to find what they are seeking is key to an effective directory; this function can be built into the website directory. 53, 65
- Strategies for identifying gaps in services are valuable: A function that enables tracking of search outcomes can also be used to identify gaps in services and the need for updates or additions to directory entries. 53, 65
- A statutory requirement for all service providers for children and families to regularly update information about their services might help the process of updating. However, engaging organisations within the directory closely, for example, in the upkeep of their own microsite increases the likelihood that their information will be regularly updated. 67, 69
- It also means that organisations have instant free publicity at their disposal. 67
- In a very large, sparsely populated county, service directories can be effectively managed by library staff. 74
Flexibility - ‘horses for courses’

Local authorities have very different requirements. The kind of directory that suits a relatively small, densely populated London borough may be quite different from that needed by a largely, sparsely populated rural county.

Managers recognised that best practice must reflect the needs of the local population, both in the format of the directory itself (hard copy or electronic) and in its delivery (where and how, e.g. through contact centres, libraries, CIS, or phone line, etc.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Horses for Courses: Key points from case studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Take account of the needs of the local community and potential site visitors/ service users to ensure effective delivery of service directories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In some counties, it may be preferable to produce a paper-based directory before an electronic version.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Externally contracted Children’s Information Services, working within different sets of constraints to in-house services, may find tailor-made products more convenient.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Although what works well for one Local Authority may not meet the needs of others, a number of solutions have been found that appear to suit different populations and different contexts.</td>
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Flexibility - coping with change

Survey responses indicated that many authorities were in the process of re-structuring and that changing funding possibilities, new directives and fresh policy agenda necessitated radical revisions. Some of the more successful adaptations have involved re-positioning of information services staff and, in some cases, changes in the skills profile of staff. Within this, it is important to weigh up the skills and strengths of workers in relation to the needs of local communities, to determine which might be the most effective way to deliver a sustainable and convenient service directory.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Coping with change: Key points from case studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• However much the local context is changing, it is important constantly to aim to ensure effective information exchange between organisations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reaching viable solutions has much to do with good working relationships and shared goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Quick fixes’ rarely fix quickly, if at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taking it in bite-size chunks, step by step, can save money and staff resources in work conditions where funding streams and organisational structures are subject to constant change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some people take more time than other to adjust to new ways of working – it pays to acknowledge and respect their more gradual pace if they are to be carried along.</td>
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Mainstreaming funding

Some authorities have been successful in ensuring the sustainability of service directories by tying them into mainstream services and associated funding.

**MAINSTREAMING: Key points from case studies**

- By conceptualising the service directory within the bigger picture of Every Child Matters and other Council targets, its relevance to a wider number of funding streams can be seen.
- Buy-in by senior managers is more likely if they recognise the importance of the directory as a vital preventative tool and as having a key role in effective multi-agency work. 65
- Making the database available borough wide is more likely to establish it as a key part of mainstream council provision. 65
- A one-county or integrated approach to project development is more likely to ensure that new projects can be mainstreamed for funding. 64

Consultation and feedback

Most managers recognised the value of testing out service directories on users, both to ensure that their language and content is user-friendly and adequate and, crucially, to find out if search facilities are capable of producing relevant results.

Some of the best systems incorporate functions that enable searches to be tracked and monitored so that missing information about services can be identified and so that more can be understood about the way users search for information.

**CONSULTATION & FEEDBACK: Key points from case studies**

- Effective consultation strategies are essential to effective service development and delivery. 73
- Effective consultations are labour-intensive and it can be difficult to capture the views of representative groups of users. 73
- It is important to take on board criticisms as well as praise. 73
- Building on successful strategies depends on close consultation with users. 51
- Usability tests do not need to be elaborate or extensive but are important if the directory is to be effective. 54
- Linking in with local educational facilities to test out the service directory is often of benefit both in respect of directory development and with regard to its publicity. 54
- The more people are enabled to interact with website information, the more likely it is that they will use it. 60
- Online options for feedback need to offer person-to-person contact as well as anonymous forms.
- Programmes that have a function enabling user feedback are essential if quality information is to be maintained. 53, 71
- Give young people hands-on experience to propose their own links and to create their own web page. 60
- The high visibility of information suppliers on the web can act as a self-policing mechanism. 68
- Passwords and login procedures have costs as well as benefits - they can provide information about visitors but they may also put people off. 68
Creativity and problem-solving

Involving users, particularly young people, in directory development not only gives information about the kinds of service and advice that might be found helpful, it can also produce valuable insights into ways of presenting information so that users can get the most from it. In some authorities, this has led them to develop different ‘front ends’ for the four user groups (children, young people, parents and carers, and practitioners) while retaining a shared ‘back end’ database.

Several managers described innovative solutions to the problem of integrating different databases, or getting separate databases to speak to each other. They emphasised the need for more than one delivery point and for multiple formats, particularly with regard to obtaining and updating information about services, as opposed to a ‘one solution fits all’ approach.

Some authorities are in the process of setting up systems that have secure non-public-facing fronts and non-secure public-facing fronts. They are also devising ways of putting CAF referral forms online and also tracking the referrals made using the directory, to check whether the directory is leading to better quality referral procedures.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CREATIVITY &amp; PROBLEM-SOLVING: Key points from case studies</th>
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| • Built-in functionality for future development gives increased scope.  
• This could include access to administrative tools for users who may be relatively IT-naïve.  
• It could also include a capacity to make systematic checks on the fidelity of organisations.  
• Having the capacity to track searches is also valuable.  
• Developing a secure back end system is likely to enhance the capacity of service directories to operate effectively as tools for practitioners.  
• Secure areas for professionals can promote partnership working between agencies and sharing of best practice.  
• The more flexible a site can be, the more likely it is to suit the needs of service providers and users.  
• Keep open to new ideas.  
• Continually look for new ways of developing your site so that it meets the needs of its visitors.  
• Consider adding extra information to attract more and longer visits.  
• Test out and add in new functions gradually, “in bite-size chunks”, to ensure that they are cost efficient and appropriate.  
• Include a well-organised and easily-navigable signposting service for national organisations; a separate web page collating links is very helpful.  
• Several authorities now offer expert advice to other authorities to assist in the building of directories and of increasing their functionality.  
• If there is not enough money available for a postcode search facility, there may be an alternative method.  
• A growing number of firms and products are now available. |
Education, publicity and outreach work

Many managers take the view that the existence of the directory needs constantly to be flagged up. Freebies in the form of t-shirts, mousemats or balloons, according to several people interviewed, tend not to be very cost-effective. Rather, wider publicity including big community event launches and roadshows, giving demonstrations and distributing information at local events, in community centres and libraries, with the help of media such as local radio and newspapers, tends to be more fruitful.

Some managers have focused first on educating practitioners about the directory, through workshops in which they demonstrate how to search the online directory and gather feedback on practitioners’ experiences, either on a group or individual basis. Their expectation and, often, their experience has been that practitioners, in turn, share this knowledge with other practitioners. However, as staff turnover is often high among practitioners, there is a need for dedicated staff to be able to continue this work.

EDUCATION, PUBLICITY, OUTREACH: Key points from case studies:

- Education and training can help people to see the benefits of service directories as a tool for changing ways of working. 61-62
- Publicity and training need to be ongoing. 48, 62
- Particularly in rural areas, outreach work is vital. 53
- The funding implications of this need to be recognised at local and national levels. 48
- Publicity needs to be tailored to meet the needs of both service users and providers; what works for a sparsely populated rural county may not suit a London borough. 50
- Organise launch events at strategic points during directory development. 50, 64
- Run workshops and offer training on how to use the directory. 64
- Help practitioners to see the value of the directory as a tool. 77
- Use all available opportunities to promote the directory via leaflets, telephone, face-to-face, market place and outreach work; have multiple output points. 64
- Be prepared to demonstrate entry input wherever possible. 77
- Many people prefer to speak to information service staff - let people see that the directory has a human side. 50, 77
- A recognisable UK-wide logo may greatly assist parents in accessing and identifying service directories. 53
- Create a logo and use it as a screensaver and as an icon on desktops. 44
- Having local-authority-neutral publicity means that the same material can be used regionally; local authority boundaries do not always mean much to service users. 62
- Service directories are of benefit to everyone - this fact can be used to advantage. 44
- Getting the directory’s existence known depends heavily on extensive partnership work. 62, 76
- Bear in mind that multi-agency work is still new and challenging for some people. 62
- Take every opportunity to encourage partners to share the burden of marketing service directories. 44
- Identify champions who can promote the idea of adding and updating services to practitioners and to the public. 61
- Including additional information and tools for practitioners and the public on the directory website ensures that it is frequently used and constantly developed, e.g. a ‘What’s on today’ page. 75
- Include reference to the directory in all training and staff induction programmes: this raises its profile. 77
Optimising access

Relatively few authorities have yet begun to address the question of how children's service directories can best be accessed by people whose first language is not English or who prefer to have information in non-written formats.

It is good practice for local authorities to have facilities in place and prominently displayed for county or borough-wide access to web-based translation and text-conversion tools, Language lines, helplines and free interpretation (BSL or other languages) and braille conversion.

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<tr>
<th>OPTIMISING ACCESS: Key points from case studies</th>
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<tr>
<td>• No matter how good the service directory is, Local Authority practices and policies on accessibility are an essential adjunct - question whether your Local Authority has adequate services and policies in place to ensure that people who need information in alternative formats can have access, i.e. what facilities are there for braille conversion, audiotape, language lines, BSL or other language interpreters, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Design an evolving shop front that is attractive and user-friendly; for this, it is helpful to have software that allows you to customise the ‘front end’ appearance of your directory and its look.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Aim to provide information in as many formats as possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• To optimise accessibility, in some counties, it may be preferable to continue to produce abbreviated paper-based directories as well as a fuller electronic one.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Many practitioners are still not yet ready to rely solely on an electronic directory and, for some, hard copies are more useful in the work setting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• However, the need for hard copies of the directory can be minimised if delivery points make it easy to access.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have multiple output points, e.g. touch screens, free net access in libraries, school and PCT intranets, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• There are advantages to authorities that reach high standards on the website accessibility initiative, though these come at a cost which needs to be weighed up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• An alternative may be to make sure that the Council IT system contains adequate information quality checks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A cheaper alternative to full Plain English Campaign checks is to buy in training for relevant members of staff - though this will not give Crystal Mark status, it should lead to more user-friendly language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• However good the quality of information is in a directory, it will not be useful unless the search facilities are user-sensitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Successful searches are only possible if supported by appropriate metadata; to achieve this, search results need to be carefully monitored and search terms and results extensively tested both by users and by people with a good understanding of users’ needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use content to attract longer site visits, e.g. local ‘what’s on’ information, consultation papers, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using the front page of the online directory to advertise events in the county is a good way to raise awareness of the directory and to encourage its use.</td>
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GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

- The experience of developing Children, Young People and Families Service Directories (CYPFSD) has generally been very positive. As a result, in many authorities, there is great impetus for continued development and evidence of innovative projects that provide solutions to the question of sustainability.

- A chief obstacle to integrating information about childcare and related services into Children, Young People and Families Service Directories arose from the non-compatibility of obligatory arrangements for storage of Ofsted childcare records and in-house or other IT products. The time taken to resolve these problems and the cost of remedying them has created difficulties in a sizeable number of authorities.

- ‘Quick fix’ solutions aimed to satisfy government-set time constraints for directory development have, in some cases, led to non-optimal solutions that have not capitalised on CIS or other local expertise and that have, in some instances, created a ‘funding cul-de-sac’.

- These problems have now begun to be addressed and a number of solutions have been found. But for some authorities the cost of these solutions may still appear prohibitive.

- There is clear evidence that information and IT managers are keen to share experiences more widely and to explore options for collaboration and skill-sharing.

- Directory development has been delayed in authorities where it is not seen as a priority, where funding has not been identified, where the usefulness of the directory as a tool for practitioners has not been fully understood, or where re-structuring has been in progress. This delay, in some instances, may have left managers in a better position to reach cost-effective solutions but this may not be true for all.

- Local Authority structures and policies have a clear impact on capacity to work collaboratively. It is perhaps too early to evaluate yet the full impact of the restructuring that has taken place in response to the more recent major initiatives, such as the Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda, and difficult to assess the importance of regional and local variations in social and physical landscapes, yet some authorities have been very successful in putting in place and implementing policies that facilitate ‘joined up’ practices.

- On the technical side, Local Authority websites vary tremendously in appearance, user-friendliness and navigability. While some Local Authority websites facilitate access to service directories, a more substantial number obstruct it. Many strategies and tools are available that increase the likelihood of successful visits.

- Clearer guidance from central government may be needed to ensure that Local Authorities clearly signal the existence of service directories on their sites.

- National organisations themselves seem to prefer not to be asked for information from local authorities individually. They would prefer either national or regional requests for information. Keeping all information about national organisations in one place, maintained by one agency, but accessible to local authorities would appear to be a popular option with local authorities. This would reduce multiplication, free up webspace on local sites, and, by enabling staff to focus more attention on local organisations, reduce the burden on them.

- Many managers favoured the idea of developing a more readily recognisable icon to signify the Children, Young People and Families Service Directory to the public.
• In an increasing number of authorities, CIS has been re-branded to reflect its wider remit to deliver information and advice relevant to children, young people and families across the lifespan. Concomitant with the rising profile of CIS, in some authorities, there has also been a change in the skills profile of CIS staff and evidence of increasingly effective partnership work.

• It is inevitable that publicising and maintaining Service Directories, and that the need for training in use of Directories, will continue to require funding and staff resources. Many authorities, particularly those operating working policies that support integration of project work across the authority, have already found ways of mainstreaming these costs but there is a sizeable minority where long-term solutions are still being negotiated or sought. It is not clear what the situation is among the 15 per cent of authorities where no survey questionnaires were returned.

• Responses to the mapping and case study exercises suggested that while there is value in one-off launch events, more subtle publicity is often more effective, for example, permanent displays of information in prominent positions in public places, such as on screensavers, front pages of intranet systems and of Local Authority websites, email strap-lines and community bulletin boards, and through reciprocally linked websites.

• The mapping exercise indicated that DfES records, particularly in respect of ISA managers, were sometimes as much as two years out of date. This hampered the progress of the mapping exercise and necessitated considerable unforeseen expenditure of time on efforts to trace relevant staff. It points to administrative problems that the DfES may need to address if its capacity to offer informed guidance is not to be compromised.

• In a substantial proportion of authorities, responsibility for ISA management has not been formally written into any staff job description; now that ISA funding has ended, there may be authorities in which no consistent responsibility for ISA management is being taken or where ISA management has not involved ISA directory development. This raises doubts about whether the term “ISA directory” has any practical meaning for a proportion of information staff who might otherwise have engaged well with the task of producing directories of Children, Young People and Families Services.
RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations

1. More guidance should be provided from central government to assist LA managers to meet obligations with respect to the provision of a Children, Young People and Families Service Directory for practitioners, parents, children and young people. While information in this report may form part of this complementary strategies and targeted intervention may also be useful. For example:
   - Seminars and discussion fora are encouraged in order to build upon and disseminate more widely the good practices that have emerged from the process of developing directories of Children, Young People and Families Services.
   - An audit should be kept of difficulties associated with the funding of directory development and maintenance, with a view to keeping track of problems that may benefit from guidance based on common (as opposed to unique) experiences.

2. More attention might be given to the problems experienced in linking information to child and family services contained in the national ICHIS database and local databases, if necessary by making grants available to LAs that need assistance around issues of software non-compatibility. For example:
   - Any grants should be conditional upon LAs having systems and strategies in place to ensure an optimally integrated approach to data management and maintenance and to harmonising projects.
   - This might include a ‘whole-authority integrated approach’ to new project development, to extension and modification of existing projects and directories, as well as the establishment of accessibility policies, particularly in relation to the use of web-based resources that enable free access to all council services, as is the right of all individuals and groups of people with special needs.

3. Local Authorities identify funding or funding requirements to ensure that systems are in place to monitor user interaction in order to ensure that these directories can be used as effective preventative tools.

4. Where authorities have chosen to reduce the administrative costs of developing and maintaining a directory by working across county, district or borough boundaries, research is carried out to monitor and evaluate this way of working, and to explore possibilities for replication and extension of these models.

5. Where government directives are given for important and far-reaching changes, capacity is built into time frames for completion so “bite-size chunks” of work can be carried out enabling managers working within tight funding constraints to proceed cautiously, testing usability at each stage, allowing time for sound, multi-agency approaches and avoiding ‘quick fix’ approaches that rarely provide adequate long-term solutions.

6. A review of methods of information exchange between local and central government, with the aim of ensuring that centralised records are maintained to greater levels of accuracy so central government departments are in a strong position to provide guidance that is well-informed, relevant and appropriate.

7. One centralised repository of information should be set up to hold information about National Organisations offering support, advice and services for children, young people and families, and ways of funding this should be sought to ensure accurate and up-to-date information and nationwide accessibility.
Recommendations specific to development of Directories

That all LAs, taking into account their organisational, and social and geographic context, should adopt integrative practices that enable and support good practice in relation to directory development and maintenance, in accordance with the twelve key principles of good practice that emerged from this study.

Twelve key principles of good practice: Summary

1 Good preparation
   - Build on good existing practices, do not re-invent the wheel:
     - carry out an audit of existing directories
     - consult closely from the outset with partners and a wider group of stakeholders
     - identify relevant information already being gathered and by which agencies
     - identify what else need to be done to create a viable directory.
   - Consult widely to find out how other authorities are working.

2 Increase knowledge and understanding through networking
   - Consult with other authorities to identify IT specialisms or resources, for example, in infrastructure design or database expertise. This reduces duplication of resources across local authority IT departments.
   - Set up multi-agency steering groups and extend these to wider stakeholder groups.
   - Use the process of directory development to strengthen and facilitate ‘joined-up’ working and to deepen understanding of what workers in other agencies do.
   - Feed this information into meta-database information to make search facilities more effective.
   - Continue to set up forums so that partners can meet and talk, for example, to discuss issues around referrals and advice-giving.

3 Collaboration
   - Effective collaboration requires that partners agree what exactly the directory is for and who will be responsible for which information:
     - Decide whether to include universal or targeted services
     - If information is maintained effectively on another site (e.g. a PCT), a link may be more economical than physical integration
     - Decide which services to include directly and which to signpost or hyperlink.
   - Collaboration across county boundaries can bring benefits for service users:
     - This can cut costs and produce a more comprehensive directory with information all in one place.
     - But it is important to build in systems to ensure that all partners contribute effectively.

4 Integrating information from separate databases
   - This is likely to present the greatest challenge but is much more likely to be met if, first, the first three key principles are being adhered to.
   - In addition, take time to identify the nature of obstructions to database integration:
     - Do they come from the nature of the information?
     - Or from the format in which it is stored?
     - Or from other sources, such as the administrative context?
- Assess the costs and benefits of physical versus virtual merging of databases.
- Rather than migrating whole databases that are currently being well maintained into a new directory site, consider whether there is scope for joint inputting by matching across relevant fields (this has been achieved in some Local Authorities in respect of the ICHIS database) or by ‘bolting on’ a service directory to the ICHIS database.
- Creating a ‘dummy interface’ or a front end that obscures the seams in the ‘back office’ databases might be the most cost-effective solution where database systems are not fully compatible.
- Even if all information is integrated into one ‘back end’ database, there will often be a need for a range of search facilities if the needs of different groups of users are to be met.

5 Updating the directory
- There is no one successful method of updating – it is safer to follow the principle of ‘the more options for updating, the more likely it is that updating will ensue’.
- Automatic reminders, by email, are popular and effective.
- Let organisations choose the expiry date of their entry, particularly if they are small voluntary groups funded only on a short-term basis for specific events – this can facilitate cooperation.
- Even if systems have been developed so that organisations can update their own entries as and when necessary, modifications still need to be checked by trained database administrator(s).

6 Flexibility – ‘horses for courses’
- Feel free to develop your Local Authority directory so that it reflects and meets the particular needs of your local community:
  - In some very rural areas, particularly with poor transport links, sparse population or low income levels, hard copies may need to be produced before electronic versions are developed and phone lines may prove to be the most effective medium.
  - Delivery points will differ too, according to local resources and geography, so get to know which points users access most and who at those points is willing to act as a ‘champion’ for the directory (e.g. contact centres, libraries, CIS, leisure centres, etc.).

7 Flexibility – coping with change
- Local Authorities frequently undergo re-structuring and funding streams and options constantly change. Successfully negotiating these changes while developing directories has tended to be closely associated with:
  - Re-positioning of information services, giving them a higher profile to suit their wider remit.
  - Re-training information services officers or changing the skills profile of staff teams overall.

8 Mainstreaming funding
- The most effective way of ensuring the sustainability of service directories is to tie them into mainstream services and associated funding.
- This is most likely to be achieved in Local Authorities that have an integrated approach to project development.
- Since developing a service directory should and must be given a high priority as an essential and integral part of delivering services to practitioners and the public, this vital role should be recognised in Local Authority budgeting.
9 Consultation and feedback

- Test service directories on users:
  - Ensure that language and content is user-friendly and adequate
  - Find out if search facilities are capable of producing relevant and results.

- Systems that incorporate functions enabling searches to be tracked and monitored can also serve valuable additional functions, e.g. they can identify gaps in services and can help those responsible for maintaining the directory to ensure that it is user-friendly.

- Systematic and effective consultation processes are labour-intensive and therefore can be costly.
  - Local Authorities need to put systems in place so that the needs and views of practitioners, children, young people and carers are consulted as fully as possible.
  - These systems must take account of the views of diverse groups of people from a range of backgrounds and with special needs.

10 Creativity and problem-solving

- Involve users, particularly young people, in directory development
  - This encourages greater ‘ownership’
  - It is the basis for adequate consultation
  - It enables more appropriate ‘front end’ solutions

- Be open to new ideas: Where funds are short, many innovative cheaper solutions have been found, for example, to ensure that web accessibility standards are adequate, that plain English standards are met, and that searches by location are possible.

- Think laterally: multiply user options, for example, as many delivery points and formats as possible, multiple updating options – eschew the ‘one solution fits all’ approach.

- Build in the capacity for increased functionality but test out options bit by bit, e.g. secure non-public-facing fronts/ non-secure public-facing fronts, online CAF referral forms, capability for tracking referrals and/or to check effect of directory use on quality of referrals, etc..

11 Education, publicity and outreach

- Ongoing publicity and outreach work is crucial:
  - A dedicated worker will be needed
  - Include training in staff induction programmes
  - Take advantage of conferences and multi-agency events to demonstrate the directory
  - Be prepared to work with individuals or in groups
  - Don’t be surprised if freebies in the form of t-shirts, mousemats, balloons, etc. are relatively ineffective, more cost-effective strategies tend to include wider publicity including big community event launches and roadshows, giving demonstrations and distributing information at local events, in community centres and libraries, with the help of media such as local radio and newspapers.

- Cultivate ‘champions’ for the directory, e.g. practitioners, teachers, young people who can share their knowledge.

12 Optimising access

- LAs should have facilities in place, prominently displayed on their websites, for county or borough-wide access by people for whom English language text is problematic, i.e. web-based translation and text-conversion tools, audio-conversion tips, audiotapes, Language lines, helplines, interpretation (BSL or other languages), as well as access to facilities for braille conversion.
References
Childcare Bill (2006) Available at: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmbills/080/06080.i-v.html#top
APPENDIX ONE
MAPPING EXERCISE: SAMPLE DETAILS

Using lists supplied by the DfES in early October, a survey questionnaire was sent out by email to named CIS and ISA managers in each Local Authority throughout England with the request for independent completion by one CIS and one ISA manager in each of the 150 Local Authorities. An initial deadline for questionnaire return was set for November 11th, at which point 87 questionnaires had been returned. This deadline was subsequently extended to the end of January 2006, by which time 187 questionnaires had been returned. Among the 187 returned were some that covered more than one authority but were completed by the same manager (i.e. the ISA manager for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland; CIS and ISA managers for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire). These were treated as one return, thus reducing the total number of separate people from whom returns could be expected to 295. Therefore, overall, 63 per cent of questionnaires were returned.

Through follow-up telephone calls, a further 47 non-returns had been accounted for. Among these were 19 CIS managers who explained that they had not completed the questionnaire either because they had not been involved in work on service directory development or because the nature of their responsibility was currently under discussion. In the other 28 cases, it appeared that the ISA manager or the person who had previously taken the lead on ISA management was no longer in post, or was no longer or never had been involved in work on the service directory. It was not possible to ascertain reasons for non-returns among the remaining 26 CIS and 35 ISA managers (61/20.7%). Information was therefore obtained in relation to almost 80 per cent of managers.

Among the 187 questionnaires returned, 28 had been completed by ISA and CIS managers jointly, either by sending separate but identical questionnaires, by sending one joint response or by one manager sending a response on behalf of another. Data from these questionnaires were entered as separate but identical responses in analyses.

In a number of authorities, work on service directories had been taken on or was in the process of being taken on by CIS, either within the Local Authority or contracted out; in a small number of authorities, IT project managers or library services had responsibility. In several authorities, the person with responsibility for overseeing ISA development held this responsibility alongside other managerial responsibilities, while, in a few cases, responsibility for ISA and CIS management resided in the same individual.
## APPENDIX TWO
### DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: SURVEY OF CIS AND ISA MANAGERS

### 2.1 CIS MANAGERS

<table>
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<tr>
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APPENDIX THREE
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CASE STUDIES

WHO
- was involved in putting the CSD together?
- did steering group or project group include CIS representation (if not, why not)?
- did it have senior management support?
- any outside contractors (if yes, who and what experiences)?
- was the CSD compiled for? (parents/professionals/young people and children)
- have there been any usability tests?

WHAT
- databases were drawn upon?
- organisations were included (balance between national and local organisations)
- formats are available (accessibility considerations – braille, audiotapes, translations, people without internet access)
- other website accessibility criteria (PEC/Crystal, Bobby, etc.)
- any consideration of inter-borough databases?

HOW
- long did it take to arrive at the current format
- how were existing databases adapted (if they were)
- what kind of processes were involved in deciding upon the current format
- was search engine decided upon and set up?
- how and how often is information collated, maintained, updated (any templates available)
- any duplication?

WHERE
- is CSD sited on the web
- is CSD signalled on the web
- has CSD been advertised (to professionals, to public) (any examples of publicity?)
- outreach/education

HOW MUCH
- did it cost to produce a satisfactory working directory?
- any advantages, e.g. reduction of costs/duplication
- any concerns about sustainability?

OTHER COMMENTS
- advice/lessons learnt?
- anything you might do differently if you did it again?
APPENDIX FOUR
CASE STUDIES

LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

- BARNET 43
- BRENT 45
- BIRMINGHAM 46
- CAMBRIDGESHIRE 47
- CORNWALL & ISLES OF SCILLY 50
- DORSET 52
- DURHAM 55
- FORMER AVON AUTHORITIES
  (with reference to North Somerset) 57
  - SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE 57
  - BRISTOL 57
  - BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET 57
- GATESHEAD 59
- ISLINGTON 63
- LEEDS 65
- MEDWAY 67
- NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE 70
- NORTH YORKSHIRE 72
- SURREY 76
- SWINDON 78
BARNET
Barnet is one of the largest boroughs in London, situated to the North West of the City, bordering on Hertfordshire. It has a diverse population which ranges across all levels of socio-economic status.

Key principles illustrated:
- Collaboration
- Updating the directory
- Education, publicity and outreach
- Optimising access

Collaboration
In many authorities, it has proved difficult to involve voluntary organisations from the start in the creation of service directories.

In Barnet, CIS managers were able to work with Barnet Voluntary Services Council (BVSC) to produce a directory (called “Directme”) which builds directly on information already held as a hard copy by BVSC from a previous directory called ‘Choices for Children with Special Needs’.

BVSC helped to publicise the directory and encouraged its members to be included in Directme. Library staff also cooperated with efforts to publicise the directory widely.

Collaborative work of this kind, which builds on existing good practice, reduces duplication and is also of benefit to partners who can be freed of the cost of regular reproduction of hard copy directories.

Key points:
- Identify and build on existing good practices.
- Put time in to persuade key people of the value of the directory, as they can often help to make sure that directories are publicised and well populated.
- Identify as many people as possible who might be willing to help with publicising the directory and encouraging people to engage with it, at delivery points throughout local authorities.

Updating the directory
Barnet CIS is also producing a limited number of hard copies of their online directory mainly for reference use by providers. Reference copies are available in libraries and members of the public are able to buy copies at cost price if they wish. However, they want to encourage as many people as possible to use the electronic directory so information in the hard copies alerts readers to its existence and of the need to check for updates online. There is also space for users to insert new pages or to add information onto existing pages.

In order to reduce duplication, clear decisions need to be made about the extent to which the directory will act as a repository of information and how much it will signpost to sites where information is kept. Barnet signposts PCT websites, which have extensive, updated information about health services including dentists and doctors. It also gives details of people to contact to find out about time-limited leisure activities such as holiday play schemes.
Key points:
- It is worth using more than one method to encourage people to update or add to their information.
- Distribution of a limited number of hard copies can 'kickstart' the process of encouraging practitioners to engage in updating their own information.

Education, publicity and outreach
Barnet developed a strong brand identity for the Directory, which appeared on postcards and posters around the Borough. The promotional material was distributed at CIS outreach events and in partnership with libraries, Social Services, Primary Care Trusts and the BVSC. Barnet CIS also carried out roadshows at the PCT and various departments within Barnet Council to publicise the directory.

In addition, a Directme screensaver was designed to appear on all Barnet Council computers, thereby raising awareness of Directme among staff. The Directme logo also featured on the homepage of the Barnet website, which is accessible to everyone, including members of the public.

Key points:
- Create a logo and use it as a screensaver.
- Take every opportunity to encourage partners to share the burden of marketing service directories.
- Service directories are of benefit to everyone – this fact can be used to advantage.

Optimising access
Barnet are producing a limited number of free CD ROMs, which are cheap to produce, “because we recognise that some people have computers but no access to the internet at home”. In libraries, there is free access to the net and to hard copies of the directory.
BRENT
Brent is the seventh largest London borough, with a steadily rising population currently standing at around 270,000. It is one of only two council areas nationally where the majority of residents are from ethnic minority communities. Over 130 languages are spoken. Between 7 and 8 per cent of the population are classed as refugees or asylum-seekers. Seventy four per cent of children in schools are from ethnic minorities. Over a third of children live in low income households, nearly a third receive free school meals, nearly a quarter live in social housing, and over a fifth live in single adult households.

Key principles illustrated:
- Integrating information from separate databases

Integrating information from separate databases
In Brent, funding and capacity constraints prohibited building a new ‘all singing and dancing’ directory from scratch. “We looked at external contractors but the cost implications were too high... We had only the IRT/ISA project coordinator and the department’s web development and communication officer working on developing the on-line directory, so the capacity was not there to go through every organisation from scratch.”

“Fortunately, prior to government requirements to build directories of services, significant amount of information about local statutory and voluntary services was already held on the council’s services database, and on our award winning community website called BRAIN. Our local CIS website was also very good. All these sites had almost all the requisite information about organisations with the exception of eligibility criteria. So for us, it was a case of pulling everything together.”

A new directory has been set up as a “signposting gateway”. It directs visitors to information about statutory and voluntary services on a number of sites. Visitors can look on the A-Z link, or look at specific sections such as advice and information, early years, education, health and social care, leisure and play. Called the Children and Youth Directory, it is clearly indicated on the Local Authority Home Page and so is easy to find.

Links go both ways from and to sites where information is held. “It’s made things simple and allows all relevant web links to be accessed from one point. We have brought together links from education, health, social care and from the voluntary sector under one site. I am confident you would be able to find a large number of local services that are already advertised on the net, on our directory.”

Part of the success of the directory is tied in with restructuring of Council services. This has brought all child and family services together into one department, “we are just the one Children and Families Department now and it makes sense for people to come here as it’s the headquarters.” Although there is no interactive capacity and the search facility is basic, the signposting gateway is seen as a useful interim measure. Plans are under way for management of the directory to be taken over by CIS as this is thought more likely to ensure its sustainability.

Key points:
- Where funds are limited and directories already exist, a signposting gateway provides a viable interim solution.
- It is important to make use of existing information in order to avoid duplication and to build on good practice.
BIRMINGHAM

Once known as the ‘workplace of the world’ and as the ‘city of a thousand trades’, Birmingham has developed into a large industrial city, with a population of one million people from many cultures. Still offering a wide range of employment opportunities, it is characterised by pockets of extreme affluence and of extreme deprivation.

Key principles illustrated:
- Updating the directory

Updating the directory

In Birmingham, the National Youth Advocacy Service has been working to build a service directory (www.signposting.org.uk) which is a variant of another directory, also produced by NYAS, in Dudley (www.askme.org.uk).

Funded initially by the Children’s Fund, their directory covers services for children aged 0-19 and their families, spans both statutory and voluntary provision and includes over 2,000 services. Plans are under way to have an interactive, user-friendly web-based interface which will have separate fronts for parents, children and professionals.

They have an interesting way of searching for resources and for keeping information up to date which relies on input from a team of volunteers recruited from local colleges and other places. Supervised by a team of trained advisors who run helplines and receive requests for advice and support, the volunteers are given the task of finding out about and updating information about local organisations in the area. As a result, the volunteers learn about the wide range of organisations.

Key point:
- Volunteers can help to gather information. This reduces costs and provides volunteers with valuable learning experience.
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Cambridgeshire, which is located in East Anglia, contains several large urban conurbations besides the city of Cambridge. There are small towns as well as village communities, representing a wide range of income groups, cultures and occupations.

Key principles illustrated:
- Preparation, networking knowledge and understanding
- Integrating information across separate databases, updating the directory
- Education, publicity and outreach
- Consultation, feedback and creativity, optimising access

Preparation, networking knowledge and understanding
In Cambridgeshire, the CIS, a service that is contracted out by the local authority, was given the brief by the ISA team to gather information about organisations and services for children and young people. The initial intention was that the directory itself would then be developed by the local authority and housed on its website. In the course of doing this research, the CIS also explored more widely and came back to the ISA manager with a suggestion that they would, within the same budget, develop the directory and a site for it.

At first, there were tensions in the relationship but these gradually eased as, on both sides, the complexity of the task of developing a directory began to be appreciated more fully: “The project manager from the LA gave us a brief, then we could see the holes in it and we started going back and it was almost like we were telling the project manager how we thought it should work really …. So there were frustrations at times. The LA didn’t really understand the time that it took, building the database. On both sides, I think we didn’t understand the complexity.”

There was also a sense that the directive “encouraged people to rush at it”, that it would have been preferable to have taken time to carry out a feasibility study and that the ISA manager did not have a very deep understanding of the work of the CIS.

To address these difficulties, the CIS workers encouraged the ISA manager to be involved hands-on in the work of directory development, for example, in developing questionnaires, data entry and cleansing. They encouraged a longer term view, directing attention to fields in the database and asking questions like “you said you wanted this information, but now what do you want to do with it, where do you want it to appear on the website? What is the language you want to use? Where do you want it on the web? You said you wanted opening times, is that a 24-hour clock, a 12-hour clock? And is that for all services for consistency.” This helped to give the ISA manager a better sense of the scope of the project.

As time has passed, and it has become clearer what practitioners and other users want from the directory, as well as greater involvement of voluntary organisations, the gaps in initial preparatory work are beginning to close.

Key points:
- It is essential to spend time working out in advance, as far as possible, which information is needed and how it will be used.
- Recognise and respect the expertise of information workers.
- Working together cooperatively helps to define tasks more clearly.
Integrating information across separate databases, updating the directory
A large part of the success of the Cambridgeshire directory has been its relationship to the CHIS database. Unlike other authorities, Cambridgeshire CIS manages this database, can interact with it directly and so has been in a position to develop a directory that 'bolts on' to the childcare database. It is also now offering to enable workers in other authorities to do the same.

Within the Cambridgeshire directory database, there are postcode as well as keyword search facilities, and function which automatically sends requests for updates to records, on a quarterly basis, by email, text or snail mail.

Although there is still duplication of information about services across the borough, in the main, the information is all drawn from one database parts of which are held in a number of places. This multiplies the number of delivery points but does not create extra work in terms of directory compilation.

Key points:
- A database that integrates information across a wide range of provision and capitalises on a shared functionality.
- Automatic update function.
- Multiple output points.

Education, publicity and outreach
Education, publicity and outreach have been carried out in tandem with consultations (below). In Cambridgeshire, the need for continual marketing is accepted. Distinctive posters and bookmarks have been designed for distribution to libraries, social services offices, GP surgeries, Connexions offices, district councils, police stations, fire stations, “everywhere we could possibly think of.” There was a big launch, accompanied by information on the Radio Cambridgeshire and in local newspapers. This has cost around £5,000 and another £5,000 is budgeted.

Key points:
- The need for publicity
- Funding implications.

Consultation, feedback, creativity, optimising access
Throughout the process of developing the directory, parents and families as well as practitioners have been consulted. As a result, the directory interface and search facilities have become increasingly refined. One thing that has been learnt in this process is the importance of having practitioners with knowledge of services testing out the search facilities. Without this expert input, there is very little way of knowing whether searches are bringing back relevant results, that is, whether appropriate metadata or tagging is in place. The process of refining searches is laborious but essential and, once it has been done, vastly improves the effectiveness of the directory as a tool.

Feedback from children and young people has also led to the development of a directory with separate zones for practitioners, parents or carers, children and teenagers/young people. The front pages on these zones can be given different ‘skins’, perhaps to incorporate children’s artwork, or to match with other looks that the authority feels are appropriate. The language used in each zone is carefully chosen to meet the needs of different users, for example, “the
children were saying ... when someone dies, don’t say bereavement to us, don’t say loss or anything, it’s ‘when someone dies’.”

Because young people often seek for information on the net, information from external, national sites is included in the directory, to encourage people to use the directory more. The emphasis is still on local services but, on each page, there is information about ‘additional’ non-local services.

Key points:

- An evolving shop front, attractive and user-friendly.
- Appropriate metadata facilitating effective searches.
- Capability for customising ‘front end’ appearance and look.
- Using content to attract longer site visits.
CORNWALL & ISLES OF SCILLY
Cornwall is characterised by its rurality and high seasonality. It includes 136 wards, with six district councils as well as local authorities. At times there are high levels of unemployment and a lot of minimum, basic wage positions. There are some urban areas but also communities that can be quite isolated, with poor transport linkage.

Key principles illustrated:
- Flexibility - ‘horses for courses’
- Mainstreaming, education, publicity and outreach
- Consultation, feedback, optimising access

Flexibility - ‘horses for courses’
Taking account of the nature of Cornwall and its population, a decision was made not to produce an electronic directory in the first instance. Instead, an A5 ‘Help’ guide was produced that was made available to practitioners and in public venues throughout the county. This gave practitioners, such as health visitors, a practical tool to use with families.

Although it is well known that paper-based information goes out of date before it is published, the booklet, which fits easily into pockets or bags, has proved very popular. Although the Help booklet does not fully meet ECM requirements, plans are well under way to develop a web-based directory which will follow the same format as the booklet but which will contain more detailed information.

Key point:
- It is important that authorities take account of the needs of local communities to ensure effective delivery of service directories.

Mainstreaming, education, publicity and outreach work
To ensure the directory reaches its desired audience time must be spent on effective publicity. In Cornwall, the CIS have taken the lead on publicity for the directory. They did a leaflet drop to every household in Cornwall, explaining about the Help guide and information-sharing and where copies of it could be found.

On the back of the leaflet, the CIS was described as becoming the main signposting organisation for services for children and young people, 0-19. This meant that the CIS has become more widely known and that people can speak to a person if they want to find out more about organisations or services. The CIS has also taken a lead on promoting the directory, through their normal telephone and face-to-face service and through outreach work. As a result, their profile has been raised. Reflecting on the role of the CIS, the manager commented, “I don’t think our role is changing. I think it’s widening and deepening.” To emphasise this wider, deeper remit, the CIS has now been renamed the Family Information Service (FIS).

Cornwall’s service directory booklet, which included contributions in the form of art work by children, was launched at an event with live local music performances and agencies drawn together through the Children’s and Young People’s Strategic Partnership. Managers felt that it was important for the directory to be promoted through actual contact: “Yes, it’s lovely to have information about a service but it’s still nice to talk to someone and to have some more personal contact as well.”
Key points:
- Publicity needs to be tailored to meet the needs of both service users and providers.
- Many people prefer to speak to information service staff.
- Organise launch events at strategic points during directory development.

Consultation, feedback, optimising access
The reception of the ‘Help’ booklet was so positive that the initial print run of 100,000 had to be extended by another 50,000. This further run gave opportunity for updating some entries.

Before developing a website, a variety of people, including schoolchildren and groups of staff within the council and education were asked to trial some of the available service directories. On the basis of this feedback, a decision was made to contract an external firm to build a website tailored to look and feel like the paper directory already in existence. In this way, the distinctive look of the paper directory has been retained so that, with the posters, flyers all matching, it is easy to recognise.

The Cornwall CIS and ISA managers stressed the importance of continuing to liaise closely with users: “we’re still talking to people and getting feedback and moving it and, in that respect, it moves itself on, it develops into something that is user-friendly and that everybody feels they have some part in and ownership of.”

Key points:
- In some counties, it may be preferable to produce a paper-based directory before an electronic version.
- Building on successful strategies depends on close consultation with users.
DORSET
Located on the south coast of England, the predominantly rural county of Dorset consists of six district or borough councils, the county council and two unitary authorities. It is average-sized but relatively sparsely populated. It has the largest elderly population of all shires and a correspondingly low proportion of children. Life expectancy is higher than elsewhere in the UK. It has both low rates of unemployment and low rates of pay.

Key principles illustrated:
- Networking knowledge and understanding
- Integrating information across separate databases/creativity
- Updating the directory
- Education, publicity and outreach
- Optimising access
- Consultation and feedback

Networking knowledge and understanding
In Dorset, CIS has broadened its remit from early years and childcare to a far wider range of services for children and families. To facilitate the transition, they have developed a programme of training for CIS staff. This has involved training CIS staff to use the new directory and in particular to use the search facilities to greatest advantage. With the use of questions or scenarios to check whether CIS staff can locate the relevant services, the trainer can identify difficulties and explain how to carry out the most effective search.

Staff from different organisations are also invited to come along to the CIS to talk about their services. As the CIS manager explained, “it takes time to build up good relationships with other agencies so that they are confident that we can signpost them to other agencies rather than using their own directories.” This process is gradually reducing duplication at the same time as strengthening communication networks.

Key point:
- Training is important, to facilitate the wider remit of CIS services and to improve the effectiveness of the knowledge network.

Integrating information across separate databases/creativity
In Dorset, though information about play, family activities, family services and childcare are all now kept in one integrated database, there are different types of search associated with each section, for example, there is a keyword search for services but, on the childcare search, as in ChildCareLink, the search is carried out using tick boxes relating to the different types of childcare and a postal town search. The play and family activities sections are separately searched using drop-down menus. From the point of view of the user, therefore, it is as though there were still four separate databases.

Key point:
- Even where information about services has been integrated into one database, it may not be necessary to have postcode or highly interactive search facilities throughout the entire directory.
Updating the directory
The Dorset directory software includes a facility for monitoring hits and for tracking results so that managers can spot if there are missing keywords or gaps in services, for example, “a service that we run is called Rerun, it’s a service for runaway children, we have it listed in the directory as ‘rerun’, all one word, so anybody putting one word will bring up the service but I noticed that someone was putting in ‘re-run’ with a hyphen the other day and it didn’t come up, so I added ‘re-run’ as a keyword too so that it will come up. In the same way, professionals often shorten things so I can add in acronyms as well so that services will come up.”

Web hits are monitored monthly, or more frequently if there is time, and a monthly report in spreadsheet format is presented to the steering group and to other agencies, so that they can make suggestions.

Key points:
- Monitoring users’ ability to find what they are seeking is key to an effective directory.
- A function that enables tracking of search outcomes can also be used to identify gaps in services and the need for updates or additions to directory entries.

Education, publicity and outreach
The Dorset CIS manager believes that, just as the Sure Start logo has been an effective publicity tool, it may be useful to have a UK-wide logo for service directories that people could recognise, perhaps marketed through television advertisements.

As Dorset is so rural, one full-time and one part-time member of CIS staff has been employed to do outreach work. They work with health visitors, and go to venues such as ante-natal classes, postnatal groups, parent-toddler groups, job centre plus, village halls, etc., to promote and demonstrate the use of the service directory: “This outreach work has proved invaluable I believe.”

Key points:
- Particularly in rural areas, outreach work is vital.
- A recognisable UK-wide logo may greatly assist parents in accessing and identifying service directories.

Optimising access
Dorset County Council as a whole has well-established policies and practices that ensure that people know about their right to have access to materials in different languages and in different formats such as braille.

They have also established web accessibility standards relating to text size, contrast, logos, etc. that stipulate what can and cannot be done.

They have not carried out Plain English Campaign tests but take care not to use acronyms or headings without explaining what they mean.

There is also a telephone helpline because “I think you need all different formats because sometimes people prefer to just type into a computer rather than to talk to a person about a problem but they have the option of talking too.”

Key points:
- No matter how good the service directory is, Local Authority practices and policies on accessibility are an essential adjunct.
- It is probably best to aim to provide information in as many formats as possible.
Consultation and feedback
In developing its service directory, Dorset took advantage of the nearby Bournemouth University. A panel of about 200 people, who had a child under 18 living at home, were recruited to form a website user group. They tested out the search facilities and information in the service directory. This feedback was collated into a report on the basis of which information and searches were refined, before the service directory went live.

In addition to this, the search tracking facility, mentioned above, enables the information manager to make constant checks on directory and search facility performance to make sure that relevant results are being obtained.

Key points:
• Usability tests do not need to be elaborate or extensive but are important if the directory is to be effective.
• Linking in with local educational facilities to test out the service directory is often of benefit both in respect of directory development and with regard to its publicity.
DURHAM
Situated in the North Eastern tip of England, Durham is a cathedral city with a long-established university, a relatively strong economy and a relatively non-diverse population.

Key principles illustrated:
- Preparation
- Collaboration, networking knowledge and understanding
- Integrating information across separate databases

Preparation
Durham has had a directory since about 1999. The first stage of developing a new service directory therefore consisted of examining this directory and deciding what to keep. This process was more difficult than anticipated “because the underlying question is, who is to say what is appropriate and what isn’t?”

Essentially, all the original information, which initially targeted adults with a physical disability, was retained. However, the look, colours and logo were changed to match the Durham ECM agenda: “as the database grew, it quickly became apparent that what helped older people with a physical disability, the organisations for those people very often also helped other age groups.” Over time, more research has extended the database and web search facilities. However, much of the necessary information was already in the community directory: “that is one of the strengths of using it as a baseline, because we already have the systems in place and the people to constantly monitor and maintain the information that’s on there, and that’s key to the success of any information.”

Key point:
- Where good directories already exist, there may be no need to ‘re-invent the wheel’.

Collaboration, networking knowledge and understanding
Although they built on an existing directory, Durham recognised the necessity for continued research if the new directory was to be effective. Two levels of knowledge were required: “We needed local knowledge and we somebody who could do research on what was already out there and who could draw that information into the database.” Much of this work is done through partnership work, with representatives of Durham County Council, especially the IT and library department s, but also with Social Services and their local information assistants, and with Occupational Therapists.

Gradually, the working relationship between CIS and child care social workers has changed “The social workers, now, that we are working with regularly, who are involved with the way that the database looks and are using it, they now have more of an understanding of our role, more respect for it and that leads to the thought that they will contact the CIS because they’ll know if there’s any information, they’ll help us to develop this.”

Key points:
- Continual research and partnership work is fundamental to the maintenance of an effective directory.
- Good working relationships with key informants have dual benefits: they improve the quality of information exchanged and also deepen understanding of the nature of services.
**Integrating information across separate databases**

Durham has a policy of only having one database in the council. If people want to build a database, they can only do so if they obtain approval from the Management Group. The IT representatives consider whether the new database would need to be stand-alone or whether it could become part of the larger database, with adaptation, as the ‘ECM directory’ (this is what the new directory is called) is.

Because the ECM directory is extracted from the original Community Organisation database and does not replace it, whenever the Community Organisation database is updated, the service directory is too.

Initially, the CIS used the CHIS database and information that was drawn off the Ofsted database had to be dual entered. But, with more advanced technology and bigger memories, Durham’s server now talks to other servers so that the updating of both CHIS and the county database are also done at the same time.

**Key point:**
- A county-wide ‘one database’ policy has clear advantages in terms of preventing duplication and maximising opportunities for integration of information that is stored in different systems.
FORMER AVON AUTHORITIES
Three of the four former Avon authorities, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, and Bath and North East Somerset, chose to develop their children’s services directory together and have created a joint directory called 1BigDatabase. Having worked closely together in the past, this seemed a natural option. Also, they share a population of people many of whom commute across the region to the major cities. They also frequently refer clients across county boundaries.

North Somerset sees its population as somewhat distinct from the other three authorities and has not opted into the partnership. Wanting to create a directory that is child-friendly and to build on the system that they currently use and are very satisfied with, they have chosen instead to ‘bolt on’ to their childcare database a customised service directory bought from the external supplier who manages that system.

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE, BRISTOL and BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET

Key principles illustrated:
- Collaboration, networking knowledge and understanding
- Integrating information across separate databases

Collaboration, networking knowledge and understanding
Four major partners made up the project group who worked together to produce the cross-county online service directory called 1BigDatabase: ISA, Connexions, CIS and the Care Forum (which offers information for people with disabilities), who met monthly while developing the directory. Each member of the project group also reported to higher management, for example, the ISA manager reported back to the ISA Management Steering Group on which all major agencies, including Health, Social Services, Education and corporate IT services were represented.

Participants speak enthusiastically about the experience of collaborating across local authorities and services “Working together to produce the directory, there has been some spin-off, in finding out what different organisations do and, also, between the authorities, it has been a helpful thing to keep in touch, because we were otherwise beginning to separate out. Finding something to work together on has been positive, actually, very positive, and there have been very little difficulties, no real problems at all.”

Working together in this way does need everyone to be clear about who is doing what. At the outset, the three authorities drew up a list of partner organisations and decided who would be responsible for collecting, maintaining and updating information about which organisations, for example, maintenance of information about nurseries and childcare remains with CIS, about services for people with disability with the Care Forum and services for young people with Connexions. Responsibility for maintenance of Health, Education and Social Services information is similarly allocated to one of the partners. Even though organisations can update their own records, these designated staff monitor new entries to make sure that they are appropriate and that information is complete and accurate. They also send out automatic requests for updates. So far, this arrangement has worked well, though no system has been put in place to address problems that might arise should one of the partners become neglectful of their role.
There are obvious financial advantages to working collaboratively. The directory, which was reasonably cheap anyway because it was already part of the remit of the three organisations to collect this information, cost around £12,000 with £1200 per year for web hosting. As this is shared between three authorities, there are no concerns about sustainability.

Key points:
- Working together widens and deepens relevant knowledge bases.
- It strengthens networks and ensures the human element that many practitioners value.
- It reduces the need for multiple databases and IT systems.
- It cuts costs dramatically.
- Depends crucially on all partners understanding their role and making sure that they deliver their input.

**Integrating information across separate databases**

High level signature across authorities was needed to agree to combine a database across these authorities. However, once the Memorandum of Agreement was signed by the Chief Executive and the Head of Social Services, the support of senior management was seen as less crucial to the success of the project than the efforts of the middle-to-senior managers who actually built the directory.

Much of the early discussion centred on how to integrate databases and which existing databases to incorporate. A decision was taken to build on the existing Connexions model (Where2 for 13-19 year olds) as this had already been tried and tested and appeared to be working well. Some modifications were made, though, in extending it to older users, in broadening its remit and in refining the search facilities available.

1BigDatabase now draws directly upon existing databases maintained by Connexions, CIS and the Care Forum. There are signposts to the directory from Connexions Where2 front page, CIS, Bristol County Council, Care Forum and Children and Young People’s portals.

From the start, it was decided to emphasise support services rather than provision primarily geared towards leisure or entertainment. There is currently some debate about how to pitch the level of services actually represented in the directory, for example, should the directory signpost another source of information about doctor’s surgeries or schools or should it contain records of each individual surgery or school.

There were two constraints on total integration of the CIS database into 1BigDatabase: the need to keep regular updating of information on the Ofsted childcare site and CIS staff’s strong feeling that parents needed personal contact when they were seeking childcare in order to discuss options. This division of responsibilities has ensured that CIS still plays a considerable part in developing and sustaining the directory.

Key points:
- Working together can simplify the process of combining datasets.
- Working together can mean that partners have to recognise and work within each other’s limitations.
GATESHEAD
Gateshead Council is the largest of the five Tyne and Wear districts. It covers a total of 55 square miles and extends 12.6 miles along the south bank of the River. With a population of approximately 198,100 people, it comprises the mainly urban areas of central Gateshead, Felling, Dunston and Blaydon and the more rural districts of Ryton, Whickham and parts of the Derwent Valley.

Key principles illustrated:
- Collaboration and preparation
- Creativity
- Consultation and feedback
- Updating the directory
- Mainstreaming
- Education, publicity and outreach
- Optimising access

Collaboration and preparation
A multi-agency steering group was set up covering Gateshead and Newcastle. It had representatives from a wide spectrum of agencies, including health, education and libraries, social services, CIS, and Barnardo’s as an umbrella organisation represented the voluntary sector. The steering group expanded on the fairly loose remit from the DfES to formulate their specification of what they wanted the directory to be able to do, for example, they wanted service providers to be able to update their own information independently, a function whereby administrators could check and validate entries and to make sure that only the entries that were wanted were on. Between June 2003 and early 2004, the requirement specifications were agreed with multiple partners. Directory development has proceeded in three phases: the first focused on the core service directory functionality, the second on the interface and the way the directory was searched. They now have the specifications for the next phase of directory that Stockton, Sunderland and other authorities in the region have fed into “because there’s real interest in this part of the country in making it a regional directory”.

Mindful of the Invest to Save programme to collaborate across authorities, authorities in the North East have been collaborating: CIS managers have monthly meetings in connection with the ECM agenda and on the IT side, workers call upon each other, keeping in touch through both the Tyne and Wear ICT e-Government Partnership (TWICT) and a fledgling technical architecture group that looks at the demands of the DFES and DH agenda about joining up and information-sharing. They invited vendors onto that group too. They recognise that some authorities have invested money in some areas and gained more expertise than others and have bought different kits and developed different competencies, for example, Durham in the broadband initiative and Sunderland and Northumberland on hosting, disaster recovery and database expertise. So they call upon each other, because if each authority specialised in each of those areas, they would need massive data centres and all sorts of kit: “we’re pretty clear that, if we’re being responsible with the public purse, why buy it ten times over when someone just down the road already has got something that you can plug into?”

Through the group, the ISA IT manager got to know suppliers and ICT managers locally, and felt that he was getting a lot of helpful ideas about how best to invest money or how things can be done most cost-effectively. They looked at several models for service directory delivery, some of which were very good but expensive. They then opted to use a firm that already provided touch screen information kiosks in Tyne and Wear, with the hope that the web-based directory might eventually become available on kiosks.
Key points:
- The importance of firming up and agreeing between partners the specifications for the directory.
- Plugging into expertise across the region.
- Erring on the cautious side, saving money and thinking ahead.

Creativity
The actual system that was eventually bought cost £50-60,000. For this money, they were able to develop a public-facing website with a secure web-based administrative facility. It also included:
- About ten different ways to search for services
- An administrative function available across the web so that administrators can moderate services information
- Content management facility (sophisticated at the time so the most expensive part)
- All logos, links and documents on website can be added by a non-technical person
- A signposting service to National websites which is also content-managed
- A contents page that can be added to and edited
- Text on each page can be moderated and new pages can be added
- Can view what people are searching and how
- By looking at search log, can identify gaps in services and address those needs
- Can see where visitors have come from, e.g. Google etc..
- If visitors cannot find what they are looking for, pages are brought up with contact details for them to ring information officers to obtain individual assistance.

On the left hand side of page, there are instructions on how to add your service, what to do if you can’t find a service, how to contact administrators. These instructions take users through to pages that administrators can content manage. The system also has a number of functions that are still to be used. This way they were able to see what they needed to spend money on, “taking it in bite-size chunks”. They are still developing the overall structure of the directory and looking at how best it might fit together.

Key points:
- Taking it in bite-size chunks.
- Building in functionality for future development.
- Ensuring access to administrative tools for users who may be relatively IT-naïve.
- Including a well-organised and easily-navigable signposting service for national organisations.

Consultation and feedback
Illness hampered consultation processes but, nevertheless, the look of the website was determined by a reference group of young people at a series of workshops in a school in Gateshead – colours, fonts, ideas like eggs hatching, thought bubbles, and some potential logos were developed by the children who also had the idea that they would like to have their own webpage. Someone from Gateshead library has now taken out a content management facility to a local Gateshead school and worked with young people in a local comprehensive school in Gateshead. They have built a page with the links that they wanted to see. Feedback was also obtained from young people user group in one of the more economically and socially challenged parts of Newcastle’s ‘West End’.
As in other authorities, only “parents who double up as Council workers” have been consulted so far, during the period from January to April 2005 when there was only password access to the directory. There is an online facility for feedback and the “No Dead-Ends Card” of having a content-managed page for people who have drawn a blank on searches, with details of someone to phone. They also now have a good governance document, which has given people more confidence to get involved.

Key points:
- The more people are enabled to interact with website information, the more likely it is that they will use it.
- Giving young people hands-on experience to propose their own links and to create their own web page.

Updating the directory
On the principle that no one solution will suit all, there are three possible ways of putting information into the Solutionfinder directory:

1. Using the online form and instructions
2. By uploading an xml file that speeds up process of transferring information although once this is uploaded a moderator still needs to go through each individual entry
3. Using an Excel spreadsheet (c 52 columns)

However, the ISA IT manager stressed that, “No matter how whizzy your system is, you do need people to monitor data quality,” adding, “I think the attitude was that the Children’s Index required more consideration, and the service directory was very straightforward. You just collect information on children’s services and put it on the web. How hard can it be? We’ve got the Children Act to worry about. There was always an assumption that service directories are easy but, actually, they are just as easy to get wrong.”

Key points:
- Offering more than one uploading option.
- Reviewing performance.
- Constantly monitoring the quality of information.
- Champions to promote the idea of adding and updating services to practitioners.

Mainstreaming funding
It was recognised that the service directory is relevant to at least ten initiatives within the council and that it met several council targets. This recognition alongside a collaborative approach has enabled some potential mainstream funds to be identified and has also meant that costs have been shared between partners.

Key point:
- Conceptualising the service directory within the bigger picture of Every Child Matters and Council targets.

Education, publicity and outreach
“I think that what we’ve learnt is that you can’t just have this wonderful web admin facility where people can update their own service, you do need somebody to own it and drive it and push it to practitioners and let them know that this is a tool that they might want to be using, especially now that they will be doing common assessment, identifying needs.”

In Gateshead and Newcastle, they have found that, because people are normally filling these forms in alongside lots of other things that they’ve got to do, they need “a lot of hand-holding and a lot of encouragement. Some people see the point, others don’t necessarily see the value.
straight away, so it’s a longer process to get them on board.” Service providers are given a user name and password, and 45 minutes training, to make sure that they are comfortable with the system. While not everyone needs this training, the experience of offering it has thrown into question the steering group’s vision that people would update their own information and that the project team would not be needed long-term.

They have held several launch activities, involving information centres, libraries and schools. They believe that they need to let practitioners know that the service directory can be useful as a tool for their changing ways of working and that, for the public, “you’ve got to get out there and help them out, to find it, because no matter how wonderful the URL is or how good the thing looks, you’ve got to get out there and let them know about it.”

They recognise that multi-agency work is still new and a little bit uncomfortable for some people and that they do need help, perhaps more than it was hoped they would need, to come to terms with it and to see the benefits of it: “That’s something that you need a central team to push. You do need that human element driving the directory.”

The information leaflets that are used are authority-neutral (i.e. they do not show local authority or NHS logos) so that they can be used regionally rather than just locally, to suit the needs of families and individuals who access services across local authority boundaries, e.g. GP services and schools outside boundaries. This means that families that move around the North-East, if they want help and support, can still use the same website that they had accessed previously.

Key points:
- Publicity and training need to be ongoing.
- Education and training can help people to see the benefits of service directories as a tool for changing ways of working.
- Multi-agency work is still new and challenging for some people.
- Having local-authority-neutral publicity means that the same material can be used regionally.
- Local authority boundaries do not always mean much to service users.

Optimising access

Because the focus up to now has been on populating the directory and it costs £6000 to upgrade to level AA, Gateshead and Newcastle are currently only at level A on the website accessibility initiative and have chosen not to pursue the PEC Crystal Mark yet, although a colleague trained in PEC has reviewed and approved the text. This may be one of the reasons why Stockton, for example, is holding back from buying into Solutionfinder (though Sunderland, which now has over 100 services on the Solutionfinder directory and information of a very high quality, has a central coordinator driving its data collection and quality).

There are now over 800 local services with 350 waiting to be checked and about 500 national services signposted by links in the directory. These services are not just ECM focused but include other services too, e.g. leisure and services for adults.

There are plans to have an icon on desktops of workers in Contact Centres so that Solutionfinder can be fired up from there. This is in the process of being set up.

Key point:
- There are advantages to authorities that reach high standards on the website accessibility initiative but these come at a cost.
ISLINGTON
Islington is a relatively small, densely populated London borough with many residents, both transient and longer term, from many different cultures, with many languages. It spans income groups at both extremes of poverty and affluence.

Key principles illustrated:
- Preparation
- Collaboration
- Integrating information across separate databases
- Mainstreaming funding
- Education, publicity and outreach work
- Updating the directory

Preparation and collaboration
In Islington, they have what they call the ‘One-Islington integrated approach’. This aims to ensure that no work is undertaken by anyone in the authority that duplicates the work of anyone else. As a result, workers complement each other rather than competing for the same funds.

Development of the service directory was tied in with the work of both the CIS and Contact Centres, and effective collaboration was ensured with the Children and Families division of Social Services, the e-Government section, and representatives from the PCT, Education and Library services, using the Council’s own IT resources.

An audit was carried out of all the existing directories and from this a business plan was produced. This was approximately a nine-month project that prepared the ground for effective joining up of existing directories. While the directory that was eventually built did not transfer information directly from any of the existing directories as none of these was thought capable of meeting ISA requirements, this initial groundwork enabled effective collaborative work, minimised duplication, identified many of the organisations relevant to the service directory that should be contacted, and indicated what additional information was required.

To deliver the directory, Islington re-positioned the CIS and re-defined their brief to include information about all services for children, young people and their families. They also dedicated the equivalent of a full-time post to the maintenance and publicising of the directory (a CIS manager to edit and input data as well as to publicise and educate potential users and service providers, administrative assistance from e-Government and technical support to ensure regular, automatic updating and review of entries).

Key points:
- The value of an audit
- Making a business plan.
- Re-positioning the CIS and re-defining the CIS remit.

Integrating information across separate databases
As the database in Islington has been built and developed using one in-house system for all information including childcare, the problem of having separate systems that do not speak to each other has not arisen.

Key point:
- Advantages of using one integrated in-house database.
Mainstreaming funding
The new database is accessed borough-wide by workers in shop-front contact centres as well as in libraries and Children’s Information Services. In this way, integration of the directory into more general council information services has not only raised the profile of the CIS who maintain it, but has also linked it to more sustainable sources of funding, within the E- Government stream. Costs of maintaining the directory are thought to be minimal as the task dovetails so closely with a substantial part of work already being undertaken by the CIS.

Both the ISA and the CIS manager in Islington stress the importance of having the support of senior managers as well as the value of the One-Islington approach in ensuring that senior managers work together: “It depends on the mentality of your senior managers, I suppose. We were very lucky in that we have the One-Islington approach. It’s very useful because everyone is bound to think of the whole borough and how we work together”.

Key points:
- Effective information exchange between organisations.
- The value of an integrated approach to service development and ongoing funding
- Making the database available borough wide.
- Importance of the support of senior managers.

Education, publicity and outreach work
Islington have also carried out outreach work to publicise their directory. This has encouraged organisations to be listed, as well as letting practitioners in both voluntary and statutory sectors know how to use it. They have also taught people, in either a group or an individual basis how to access and search the directory. These workshops have, in turn, provided useful feedback on the usability of the directory.

Key points:
- Using all available opportunities to promote the directory via leaflets, telephone, face-to-face, market place and outreach work.
- Organising launch events at strategic points during directory development.
- Running workshops and offering training on how to use the directory.

Updating the service directory
To ensure that the directory is fully populated and accurate it is vital that effective systems for updating the information are implemented. In Islington both CIS and ISA managers acknowledged that a lot of work is needed to ensure this. Although in Islington the system for updating and checking records was considered very satisfactory (an automatic six-monthly email with, if necessary, follow-up telephone calls to update), they also found that editing all entries was essential. This ensured that appropriate keywords were allocated and that there was a consistent strategy for doing this. Leaving this process to the organisations themselves risks under- or over-tagging, which lower the likelihood that searches will bring up relevant results.

Feedback from training events and workshops is also used to identify gaps in services which can be addressed by adding new information.

Key points:
- Editing new entries and modifying existing entries is essential.
- Need to appoint dedicated staff.
- Automatic updating by email.
- Strategies for identifying gaps in services are valuable.
LEEDS
Leeds is the second largest metropolitan district in England, with a population of over 715,000 and covering an area of 552 square kilometres. Located near the geographical centre of the UK, Leeds is the regional capital of Yorkshire and the Humber and home to more than 75 different nationalities.

Key principles illustrated:
  • Preparation
  • Integrating information across separate databases
  • Updating the directory
  • Creativity
  • Optimising access

Preparation
In Leeds, a directory was already well under way before any Government directives appeared. This was largely due to the recognition by a social worker employed in the CIS of its value.

Key point:
  • Having an informed practitioner involved from the start in building a directory can facilitate the process of developing a directory tailored to meet the needs of practitioners.

Integrating information across separate databases
Rather than having everybody trying to hold information about everything, in Leeds, the information manager has taken the view that “What’s really important is to have small sites that concentrate on a small area and make sure that’s up-to-date and then let other people link to it.” In this way, a far broader, richer spread of information can be obtained.

Leeds has its own in-house software, developed before the Ofsted childcare database came on stream. The information manager feels strongly that the systems around maintenance of childcare information are not as helpful to local authorities as they could be: “the information from Ofsted, instead of coming straight to us, goes from Ofsted to a separate firm to them (the childcare database managers) and then to them. There’s no reason for it to go that firm. It could have come direct to us.”

Key points:
  • No matter how large or small databases are, or what software is used, they will only speak to each other if their human data managers permit this to happen!
  • ‘Front end’ linkages do not depend on links between ‘back end’ databases but information from these does need to be made freely available if it is to be drawn upon.

Updating the directory
As in other authorities, information managers in Leeds experience difficulties with getting organisations to update their information. A suggestion was made that “There should be a stipulation that organisations should keep their records up to date. That would be something I would push for.”

Key point:
  • It would perhaps benefit service directory managers if there was a statutory requirement for all service providers for children and families to regularly update information about their service.
Creativity
Postcode search facilities can be expensive so, in Leeds, an alternative method for providing information about service location has been devised. “When the paf file from Royal Mail came along with Grid East and Grid North, it occurred to me that you could use Pythagoras to work out the hypotenuse distance, so you find the nearest as the crow flies.” This way, the postcode area or exact location is not needed in order to find the nearest service.

Having been for some time ahead of other authorities in developing their service directory, Leeds has sold their directory website and offered support to other authorities. Upgrades to their system have been made, e.g. search functions have been refined, separate portals for parents, children, young people and professionals have been developed. - is prepared to sell upgraded directory to other authorities, also offer support

Key points:
• How to set up a less expensive location search
• Leeds offers expert advice to other authorities to assist the building of directories and of increasing functionality.

Optimising access
Leeds still produces a hard copy of the service directory which is now going into its third reprint. It consists of an A5 cellophane-wrapped binder with inner pages separated by card separators. These pages do not contain quite as much detail as the web directory but can be personalised, by adding features like calendars or personal notes, and updating or modifying its contents using information from the web or elsewhere.

As the information manager remarks, “I was always in favour of electronic and I always thought the physical service directory was just a sop because some people were technologically challenged, but actually, you can see that people really do love the idea of this physical directory.” Useful though electronic information is, many people still prefer the more personal physical directory.

Key point:
• Many practitioners are not yet ready to rely solely on an electronic directory.
MEDWAY
Medway is characterised by a highly populated urban area around the River Medway estuary. To the north and west lie substantial rural areas. One of the largest urban conurbations in the south-east outside London, Medway is part of the Thames Gateway, a national priority area for regeneration and growth. It has a younger than average population for England. Minority ethnic groups in Medway make up 5.4% of the population and are diverse, including several groups whose first language is not English. Unemployment levels are low.

Key principles illustrated:
- Networking
- Updating the directory
- Creativity
- Consultation and feedback
- Education, publicity and outreach

Networking
In Medway, the directory has always been seen as a vehicle for networking and this is reflected in its name, The Parent Partnership Network (PPN). The ISA manager believes that “developing a really good directory of services is a massive opportunity for some really good multi-agency working and I think that, if you just think of it in bog standard terms as an add-on to your council website, you’re missing an opportunity here.”

From the outset, the website of PPN was set up and developed as a network that brought practitioners and parents together, to share information and to learn from each other. The site is interactive, enabling discussion groups, opinion polls, and sharing of interests and expertise. Here, the idea is that the site does not only share expertise but may also act as a preventative tool: “a person can go on a site and, if they’ve got a problem, they may be able to help themselves, instead of banging on the door.”

Launched in December 2001, PPN has a multi-agency project board which includes Health and the wider group of over one hundred stake-holder organisations represented within it. Each organisation has its own microsite within the PPN website onto which they can load whatever information they choose about their organisation, including text, leaflets, forms or pictures. The template into which information is loaded ensures that there is not a mixture of fonts but there is some leeway in what information is loaded: “The only real constraint is that, if people want to put information on over a megabyte, it’ll cease up. But, in one sense, that’s quite good because, for downloading purposes, that is a very big document and on some people’s machines that would take a very long time. We also try to encourage people not to put on things that are too complex because not everybody’s got the software.”

The primary objective of the PPN website is to get parents and practitioners talking to each other and this seems to work well in the sense that “if you are a practitioner looking for information about a local agency on a network site like PPN, you’ll probably find the agency that you were looking for, but you’ll probably find half a dozen others that you weren’t aware of as well.”

Key points:
- Using the website directory to facilitate networking between parents and professionals.
- Designing a directory website along the lines of a network with many nodes in the form of microsites.
Updating the directory
Each organisation is given their own password so that nobody else puts information on their pages. They are then responsible for updating their own information and responding to feedback from users. An administrator, who offers training and ongoing support to site users and potential site users, uploads additional relevant information onto the site. There is also a facility for information about agencies to be printed off immediately sites are updated.

Key points:
- Engaging organisations within the directory closely in the upkeep of their own microsite increases the likelihood that information will be regularly updated.
- It also means that organisations have instant free publicity at their disposal.

Creativity
As mentioned above, the site is interactive, and affords opportunities for discussion as well as flexible information distribution facilities. Additional popular features include recommendations for books, translations of leaflets and brochures, and a link to an online appointment card for practitioners that automatically translates information about appointments.

Although the PPN website is primarily designed for adults, there is a magazine section that includes links to websites for children and young people.

Key point:
- The more flexible a site can be, the more likely it is to suit the needs of service providers and users.

Consultation and feedback
There is no need for an overall editor on the PPN site because, “if people put on inaccurate information or potentially harmful information, the site is self-policing, because the information is there and people can see it. It’s traceable back, because when you put a piece of information on, the agency that’s put the information is identifiable.”

In this way, feedback from users is used to prevent problems: “Early on in the days of the network, there was an organisation that was potentially going to join and somebody else in the network picked up on this and flagged up that there was a significant issue, and we took the decision not to allow them to join.”

In the early days of PPN, access to information on the site was through a registration process (login with username and password). This helped the site developers and administrators to get an initial idea of who was using the site and what they were searching for but it soon became clear that visitors did not like having to go through this process and that it may be a deterrent for some visitors, “so we got rid of it.”

Key points:
- High visibility of information suppliers as a self-policing mechanism.
- Passwords and login procedures have costs as well as benefits – they can provide information about visitors but they may also put people off.
Education, publicity and outreach
As the information manager stressed, “You do need dedicated time to develop and maintain and support the network. It’s much more than just electronic stuff. There is no quick fix. There is no easy solution. You’ve got to dedicate some staff time and resources to get the capacity to do a good job.”

The aim of PPN has always been to get people working together in a multi-agency way both virtually and actually. The website is therefore like a shop window behind which real-life interaction are taking place, for example, the multi-agency group training in using the site affords an opportunity to get together.

Key points:
- ‘Quick fixes’ rarely fix quickly, if at all.
- Information exchange and networking requires a lot of support and encouragement if it is to be effective.
NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE
North East Lincolnshire is a unitary authority in the north east of England, bordering onto North Lincolnshire and Lincolnshire. It was created on April 1, 1996 from the Humberside boroughs of Cleethorpes and Great Grimsby.

Key principles illustrated:
- Collaboration/Preparation
- Integrating information across separate databases
- Updating the directory
- Flexibility - coping with change
- Creativity

Collaboration/Preparation
In North East Lincolnshire, the directory, called FISHNETWORK, was developed by a subgroup which contained managers from services including CIS, Early Years, the in-house IT team, Health (a Joint Services Manager of social services and the PCT), Family Support Development, Humberside Police, Connexions, as well as the Caldecott guardian, a school governor, and clinical services managers from the PCT.

The subgroup consulted the in-house central IT department about the sources of information collected by LA. At the time, a website for children and young people (‘In your area’) had already begun to be developed and there were technical difficulties with the CIS site database. As a result, a decision was taken to build something separate in order to comply with the required timescale. Also, neither of the existing directories fulfilled ECM requirements: the paper-based one was difficult to maintain and the CIS database neither held enough information nor provided it in a suitable format.

A firm, local to Grimsby, was contracted to develop a new directory from scratch, along the same lines as ‘In Your Area’ and a paper-based directory run by customer services in Children’s and Families Directorate. The new directory kept the same sections as ‘In your area’ and built on it. Customer Services already had all details of organisations so automatically handled the permissions side of the new directory, but gradually the skills and experience of the CIS staff, which had always been appreciated, have been used more and more to develop and maintain the directory.

Within the council, a Community Information Strategy has now been developed, to make sure that there is no duplication of effort in building databases.

Key points:
- Pressure to comply with timescales leads to non-optimal start.
- Nevertheless, certain principles, namely multi-agency work, building on best practice and a clear Community Information Strategy, can produce a cost-efficient solution.

Integrating information across separate databases
With the development of the FISH network well under way, it soon became apparent that the problems with the childcare database were leading to duplication and confusion. Some people were registering their service on the FISH network, some on the childcare one, and some on both. There was therefore duplication of information, especially on day care services.

To solve this problem, the project team decided to approach the firm that was managing the childcare database with a view to seeing whether or how this duplication could be prevented. With a one-off consultation (perhaps the most expensive element in the building of the FISH network), an arrangement was made to cross match fields within each database. Now when entries are made in certain fields in the childcare database (nursery provision etc.), the same information automatically populates the FISH network. In other words, the back end of the childcare database and the front end of the FISH network were retained. This solution was reached after agreement that the FISH network user interface was more user-friendly than the CIS database, which did not have automatic updating. “We had a very good
working relationship, we could see that, with all the functionality of the FISH network, if the CIS wanted to upgrade their system to the same levels, it would cost an awful lot more to start all over again than to find a way of integrating with the network.”

There are currently two phases of directory development in process. Phase One will make sure that the CIS and the FISH network talk to each other. Phase Two will then be to use that model of a “dummy interface” with the libraries and with leisure services who also collect information, so that this information can be integrated: “Because information can be collected from any number of sources but what we don’t want to have to do is to make sure that all the information has to be channelled into one area before it gets put on the system, because then there could be bottlenecks and it could take an awfully long time for information to be put on the system.” For the foreseeable future, therefore, the FISH network will consist of separate databases talking to each other rather than one big database. The FISH network has cost about £6,500 including consultants’ fees.

Key points:
- Use of a ‘one-off’ consultation to ensure that databases speak to each other and that duplication and confusion is prevented.
- The use of ‘dummy interfaces’ to create the appearance to users of one seamless database.

**Updating the directory**

As mentioned above, the FISH network has a lot of automatic updating facilities; in addition, it is possible to self-register as an organisation on the FISH network. In reply, organisations receive an email giving them their registration details and a link to their information. Updating and inputting is to move from Customer Services to CIS on the basis that it was thought preferable, from the point of view of consistency, to have monitoring done by one rather than two sets of staff.

Key point:
- Gradual move to CIS directory maintenance to reduce duplication.

**Flexibility - coping with change**

As in many authorities, North East Lincolnshire found it difficult to use CIS expertise as much as they may have liked due to the time frame within which directories were to be put in place and the fact that the CIS database was not, at the time the directives arrived, adapted to the task. Finding a solution to this required that managers kept the targets clearly in sight: “A lot of people expected me and the manager of Early Years to fall out, but we didn’t because it was not about being precious, at the end of the day, it was about getting something that worked. It is about working relationships, trying to make sure that it is a general database that does the job, not two or three systems that are duplicating each other and the public are confused about which one to use.”

Key point:
- Reaching viable solutions has much to do with good working relationships and shared goals.

**Creativity**

North East Lincolnshire has also shown a degree of resourcefulness in another sense: although the FISH network has not got a postcode search because funds could not be found for this, instead maps are hyperlinked to postcodes in the directory.

Key point:
- Another tip on how to include location information when not enough money is available for a postcode search facility.
NORTH YORKSHIRE
North Yorkshire is England’s largest County, stretching from the North Sea Coast to within 12 miles of Morecombe Bay, and from south of the M62 to the edge of Teesside. It borders many other local authorities and, though it contains two relatively highly populated urban areas (Harrogate and Scarborough), is predominantly rural, with many small, isolated communities and areas that are very sparsely populated. Many residents regularly commute across the county and its border boundaries.

Key principles illustrated:
- Preparation
- Collaboration and networking
- Consultation
- Creativity
- Updating the directory
- Education, publicity and outreach
- Optimising access

Preparation
In 2003, a multi-agency team in North Yorkshire looked around the county to see what they had in terms of directories. The IFFY (Information for Families and Youth), which held information about services in Scarborough and already had different ways to search, seemed to provide the best model. It was also well-known to local people and, though different names were considered, IFFY was kept because people on the ground knew it and associated with it.

The plan was to go with IFFY, to develop their contract to extend countywide, to improve what they had already got and to further amalgamate between the other information services and directories that existed.

Key points:
- Building on good practice.
- Not completely re-inventing the wheel.

Collaboration and networking
Pre-ISA, CIS had already set up links with the original IFFY. The extended IFFY directory has been developed over the last two years by a multi-agency group. The group comprises the lead for Children’s Library Services, the lead for Early Years, Sure Start, Children’s Centres and CIS, Health, Education, Social Care and Police colleagues. The IFFY project team leader is in regular contact with the manager of the CIS and “at any point when we’re looking to develop or when we’re doing a review, we do it as a group.”

A research project is underway to determine if the two directories can come together in the same place. Currently CIS and IFFY are not linked together in the back office, though the information can both be accessed in one place on the public interface on the internet.

The multi-agency strategic steering group works collaboratively so “they all feel like they own it, which is really important, because they encourage their staff to use it and that’s given it a really positive spin.” As a result, staff in many agencies understand it, know about it and use it. The pooled resource supports this sense of ownership across agencies.
Because everyone is very customer-focused and they all want to make sure that it’s as easy as possible for people to get the help they need, there are very good relationships between agencies. Even so they continue to look for ways of bringing workers even closer together.

**Key points:**
- Working together to deliver the most effective service.
- Sharing common aims.
- Seeing each other as part of one team.
- Each agency contributes its area of expertise, complementing others.

**Consultation**
There is a good structure for consultations in North Yorkshire. The consultation strategy is comprised of three consultation groups: one group leads with children and young people, another leads with parents and carers and a third with practitioners and staff. This group leading on the consultation with children and young people has been going for several years.

In connection with the service directory, there have been several sets of consultations:
1) With practitioners, to find out what they knew, as part of the audit
2) Later with young people and parents

The CIS carry out surveys with parents which has provided regular reports. The first full consultation on IFFY involved over 78 children between the ages of 10-14 from five schools, including one special school, across the county.

North Yorkshire takes consultation with service users seriously, recognising that “It’s hard, actually. It’s easy to get the people who will always respond but, to get a fair representation of the users, can be quite challenging, because it is quite resource-intensive. It takes time and it takes a lot of energy. And you have to be brave to take the full comments on board, really, not just pick and choose what you want to hear!”

They were pleasantly surprised at the number of people across the county who were very supportive, across practitioners and the public, for a service directory and information in one place. They found that people are not really interested in where the information comes from or which website it sits on, they just want all the information in one place: “So they’ve been very positive about the fact that there is a service directory and that they are going to be able to access it.”

Consultations with children have improved search facilities, for example, making sure that IFFY comes up on Google. They have also added in a Google-like keyword search that gives suggestions if search terms are not recognised.

**Key points:**
- Effective consultations are labour-intensive.
- It is difficult to capture the views of representative groups of users.
- It is important to take on board criticisms as well as praise.
- Effective consultation strategies are essential to effective service development and delivery.

**Creativity**
Children and young people came up with a lot of ideas about what they would like to see, for example, that they would like interactive characters taking them through how to use the directory as well as giving advice on what to do about being bullied or where to find helpful
services. They also said that they liked the anonymity of the net and requested a link to the directory on their school intranet, so that they could access it quickly and easily without having to go through the internet to find it. As a result, North Yorkshire are working to put a shortcut onto school computers where requested. They are also considering access to advice as well as services as part of their review of the service directory.

From originally being an Access datafile that needed to be transferred to the net via a CD sent to the IT services who published it, the database now sits within the local authority county council website portal area and is no longer static but interactive and automatically update-able. This has considerably shortened the time that uploading information takes.

Organisations can submit their details over the internet. Information submitted is initially held in a holding bay to which only authorised people have access. Once authorised administrators with passwords and logins have checked information in the holding bay it can go live. The administrators can also contact the authority’s safeguarding agenda so that information can be double-checked, or suspended, if necessary. If they become aware of a bogus organisation, they consult with the group and follow it up. They also check that forms are filled in accurately and that all the appropriate boxes are ticked. A number of people are now trained to carry out this monitoring.

There are still aspects of IFFY that are being developed, for example, it contains a lot of information on accessibility but not enough yet on eligibility. Also, consideration is being given to the question of whether there should be separate portals for practitioners, parents and carers, children and young people, so that more information can be put on about referral processes. Once it has been decided which referral information is needed other aspects might then be developed.

Key points:
- Openness to new ideas.
- It is important to build in a capacity to make systematic checks on the fidelity of organisations.
- Developing a secure back end system is likely to enhance the capacity of service directories to operate effectively as tools for practitioners.
- Importance of checking entries for accuracy and consistency.

**Updating the directory**

In a county like North Yorkshire, the libraries play a vital role in collection and dissemination of information. Being out in the local communities and having a remit which involves information distribution and sharing means that staff both get to know what is going on in their community and the information that they supply gives a good geographical spread: “That’s been a challenge for North Yorkshire, to find out all those local groups that can be really helpful but they’re quite small, or they’re just in one little community. You do need people out there to find out what’s there, otherwise it would be lost, if we did it all centrally.”

The IFFY team update and adds to the directory by scouring newspapers, sending out emails to agencies or ringing them. They tend not to do mass mail shots because they did not find them very productive. Instead, they contact in person, explain what the directory is about, ask if the agency wants to be on it and also ask if they know of anybody else who might want to be on it. This has built up a network. Also, they found that by having that conversation beforehand, people are much more willing to fill in the forms and be involved than if they just got a random email or mailshot: “People prefer the human element, the contact.”
As the directory has progressed, updating is done in a lot of different ways, by phone, by email, by the net. Once the initial contact has made, there is scope for multiple methods. There is also enough flexibility in the system so that agencies can choose how often they want to be automatically reminded to update their information. Some voluntary agencies that only run for a few months needed a different timescale.

Key points:
- In a very large, sparsely populated county, service directories can be effectively managed by library staff.
- People often prefer human contact and may engage more if they initially learn about the directory by word of mouth.
- It is helpful for people to be able choose how often or when they would like to be reminded to update their entry.

Education, publicity and outreach
Giving presentations at as many different events as possible, such as business sector days, public sector days, or voluntary sector forums has helped people to understand how to use the directory and its importance as part of the Change for Children programme and other policy agendas. The project manager is able to answer individual questions and help people to put their information on the net so that people are really engaging with the project.

Now that the directory is more fully populated, more marketing is planned, with regular newsletters, boxes with cards and forms in public places, roadshows and posters in all schools and other settings across partners, targeting particular areas. The plan is that practitioners, including schools, will be targeted first, to support them with ECM agenda, then extending out to the public, including parents and children.

Key points:
- Helping practitioners to see the value of the directory as a tool
- Being prepared to demonstrate entry input wherever possible
- Letting people see that the directory has a human side

Optimising access
As the back end of IFFY is a database from which any fields requested can be pulled off, there does not seem to be any need for hard copies. Some staff in health services have asked for lists of agencies and these have been easy to supply.

Having events on the front page has proved very popular. Parents and practitioners can find out what’s on and where: “It’s free advertising and it’s quite helpful for the public as well.”

People can request any Council information in alternative formats, e.g. braille, other languages, audiotape. In the next stage, it is hoped that other media will also be available, e.g. a telephone directory, for people who have trouble with using computers.

Key points:
- The need for hard copies of the directory can be minimised if delivery points are suitable.
- Using the front page of the online directory to advertise events in the county is a good way to raise awareness of the directory and to encourage its use.
SURREY
Surrey County Council is the fifth largest local authority, with a population of 1.1 million, nearly one fifth (19.5%) of whom are under 16. Five per cent of residents are from minority ethnic communities. It is considered the most highly urbanised county in England although 85% is rural (designated Green Belt). It is an affluent county and residents enjoy the second highest life expectancy in the country though there are pockets of deprivation.

Key principles illustrated:
- Preparation
- Collaboration/Networking
- Integrating information across separate databases
- Education, publicity and outreach
- Creativity

Preparation
Surrey County Council IT department have systems in place that make sure that new projects do not duplicate existing ones. Before embarking on development of what they have called the CAFIS directory (Children and Families Information Service), the ISA manager looked at project mandates for other directories on council websites, consulted with their managers and “took some ideas from that”.

Key point:
- Having an in-house IT department that monitors all council projects provides a valuable resource, minimising duplication and ensuring transfer of skills and learning.

Collaboration/Networking
During the initial project design phase, the ISA manager attended partnership and single agency forums and consulted widely with professionals and the public to ensure that there was direct input from stakeholders. During consultation with one group of parents, one parent of a child with special needs expressed interest in becoming more involved in the project. This parent was appointed to the post of directory website manager: “he could give that real insight into how parents find information on the web and things that they’d look up.” This post is now funded and managed by the CIS.

Through the extended consultation process, the directory has become widely known, to the point that, nowadays, most people considering modifying or extending a directory check with the CIS so that their directories tie in with the ISA directory: “We’ve obviously marketed it enough so that people aren’t going off and setting up their own little databases everywhere.”

Key points:
- It helps to involve people with special insight into the needs of service users when developing directories and websites
- Getting the directory’s existence known depends heavily on extensive partnership work.
Integrating information across separate databases
Although the directory in Surrey is targeted for all groups of service users, the actual organisations represented in the directory are primarily focused on children who have additional needs rather than generic, universal services. Comprehensive information about these specialist services is not provided elsewhere. From the CAFIS website, there is a page dedicated to signposting other directories, which include NHS services, Scouts and Guides, colleges, schools, leisure services.

Key point:
- Service directories do not need to include all services for families and children, so long as other services are clearly signposted.

Education, publicity and outreach
Also on the CAFIS website is a range of information for social workers and the public, for example, consultations on the Children’s and Young People’s Plan. The CAFIS website is also mentioned at multi-agency events and training sessions, e.g. CAF training. In this way, it is becoming mainstreamed.

Key points:
- Including additional information and tools for practitioners and the public on the directory website ensures that it is frequently used and constantly developed.
- Including reference to the directory in all training programmes raises its profile.

Creativity
The CAFIS website is currently being further developed to include logins so that both the public and practitioners can have access to news, training courses and conferences of interest to them. This secure area with include a resource bank and a discussion forum area. In practice, this means that there will soon be a web-based area where multi-agency staff will be able to share resources and have online discussions.

Key points:
- Continually look for new ways of developing your site so that it meets the needs of its visitors.
- Secure areas for professionals can promote partnership working between agencies and sharing of best practice.
SWINDON
Swindon is a relatively prosperous town in the south-west of England. Labour productivity, the economic activity level, employment rate and new business set-up rate in Swindon are higher than average and average earnings are also above the national figures.

Key principles illustrated:
- Preparation/Consultation
- Integrating information across separate databases
- Creativity and problem-solving

Preparation/Consultation
In Swindon, unlike many other authorities, the aim from the start was to create a directory that is child-friendly. The steering group consulted with a wider group of stakeholders, including a group of young people, in drawing up the directory specifications. This wider stakeholder group specified that the directory must be children-friendly, must be online and must include all organisations; in addition, ISA requirements meant that there had to be a way of mainstreaming funding for it and updating it.

CIS were awarded the contract because they had tested their system with parents and young people, had some data on which to build, and put forward a generally more robust proposal, which seemed more likely to be sustainable.

Key point:
- Involving the wider stakeholder group in the tendering process.

Integrating information across separate databases
In Swindon, as in many other authorities, there has never been a separate ISA database. The CIS database has been extended to meet the requirements of an ISA directory. To accomplish this, information has been taken from existing databases, including an internally used database called the Bulletin Board which used to hold information about all schemes run in Swindon. It has also taken over the database that Swindon Area Disability service kept and now includes the teenage pregnancy service database, statutory services, social care, health, education, and voluntary sector information. It does not currently include the three different leisure services databases which are not straightforward to load on.

To ensure that searches yield relevant information, the search facility has been kept as simple as possible, and in direct relation to information stored in the directory.

Key point:
- Complex search facilities are often less useful than simple ones based directly on information held in the directory.

Creativity and problem-solving
Because the Swindon CIS is an externally contracted firm, there were no advantages in using the council IT services which was, anyway, not capable of hosting the website for the directory. Instead, a new database, designed specifically for service directories, was bought. This had already been tested with children and parents. All information had to be migrated to the new system and parents and children were again consulted on the look of the new directory.
The package includes search facilities by keyword, by organisation name, by geographical area, and there are category boxes to browse as well as an alphabetical list, i.e. four different ways to search.

An alternative version of the directory, the same database with a different front end, is also run internally for members of staff. This has slightly different search facilities that allow people to be more specific than the external system and also has different options for printing off batches of pages. A hard copy version of the manual, a sibling of the website version and updatable from the website, is also available to professionals.

Key points:
- Externally contracted Children’s Information Services, working within different sets of constraints to in-house services, may find tailor-made products more convenient.
- A growing number of firms and products are now available.