

Local Offer (December 2013)

Appendix 1 – SE7 ‘Local Offer – Not a Directory’

Document



Local Offer – Not A Directory

Introduction






This document aims to provide guidance as to what is meant when the phrase ‘the Local Offer is not a directory’ is used.

A great deal of work has taken place in Hampshire to understand what parent carers’ information needs are and why the Local Offer cannot simply be an online directory. Our thinking around the Local Offer is evolving all of the time, as the Local Offer development progresses. This paper does not give all of the solutions, but hopefully explains our current approach to developing a meaningful and useful Local Offer for families in Hampshire, which we hope will be useful to share.

What problems is the Local Offer trying to solve?

In order to start Hampshire's Local Offer development we felt it was really important to understand the problems that the Local Offer is trying to address. By doing this we know what the Local Offer needs to deliver to make a real difference to families.

The Local Offer is being developed for a reason. Apart from it being a Statutory Duty in the proposed Children & Families Bill, it is hoped that the Local Offer will also contribute to improving outcomes for children/young people with additional needs and disabilities, and their families.

	<p>When talking about trying to find information parents often report a range of negative emotions which add to their already stressful lives</p>
	<p>They feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information and do not know where to start</p>
	<p>They often receive conflicting advice and simply do not know who to trust to give them the information that will help them, especially when it is professionals giving conflicting advice. Parents report that they tend to only trust other parents' advice who have already been through the system and understand which direction to go in.</p>
	<p>They report feeling 'lost in a maze' or feel as though they are constantly 'going round and round in circles'</p>
	<p>And finally when they find what they are looking for then far too frequently they find that either the information is out of date and the service is no longer available, or the contact information is incorrect, or that they are not eligible and the service is closed to them. When this happens they are back at the beginning and do not know where to turn.</p>

In order to meet parent carer needs, the Local Offer has to deliver:

- A one-stop shop for parent carers to access all of the information that they will need relating to their child/young person – so that parents know exactly where to go every time that they need help or information.
- A way for parent carers to be able to find the information that they are seeking quickly and easily – it needs to help parents sort through the vast array of complex information from a wide range of sources and then provide only the information that will be relevant and useful. This will ensure that parents are no longer overwhelmed with the sheer volume of information available.

The Local Offer therefore needs to help users quickly and easily find what they need
– by linking information
- by filtering out information that is not relevant

- Support for parents who do not know what they are looking for but know that they need help.
- Effective signposting to support and services – to the right place first time! This is especially important when services are not suitable for a particular child/young person - other solutions need to be suggested to stop parents feeling as though they have reached a dead end
- Clear, comprehensive, relevant, transparent and current information in a way that can be understood, accessed by all and most importantly that it can be trusted
- A source of information for professionals to refer to, in order to give current and correct advice – to reduce the conflicting information given, and to ensure parent carers are no longer pushed from pillar to post and back again. Professionals, like parents, are short of time so it needs to be quick and easy for them to use also
- Needs to meet a range of needs – from parents who have no knowledge at all to the most informed parents who know exactly what they are looking for, as well as young people and professionals

Even the most comprehensive directory cannot deliver this, which is why it is important that the Local Offer is not a directory.

Why is a directory unsuitable?

Directory - a book or website listing individuals or organisations alphabetically or thematically with details such as names, addresses, and telephone numbers (Oxford Dictionary)

A directory:

- Expects the user to know what they are looking for – results delivered are based on what the user requests/types in

Example - results when you type in 'bow'



A bow?

a bow?

a bow?

or a bow?

This demonstrates how the results returned in an online search can be diverse and not necessarily suitable for what the user is looking for, unless there is a way for the user to clarify what exactly it is that they are looking for (through the use of filters/providing additional information).

- Can require previous knowledge or certain level of understanding
- Is service led not family/user led. Parents, children and young people's information needs often do not fit neatly into categories defined by the way organisations work internally. Directories tend to be presented in buckets of information based on how organisations operate/are organised internally.
- Only gives the information you ask for, not necessarily the information you need
- Can lack richness of information

- Does not always link information so you may not find the answer you are looking for

Example:

A database knows:

a) all dogs are blue

b) all bassett hounds are dogs

Unless you find a way to connect these 2 pieces of information when the user asks 'What colour is a bassett hound' the answer will be 'results not found'



Parental Journey research (Parent Voice, Hampshire www.parentvoice.info)



http://www.hantslocaloffer.info/images/7/76/Parental_Journeys_Research_Report_Oct_2013.pdf

Parent Voice undertook Parental Journey research in Summer 2013. The purpose of this research was to understand existing experiences of information provision:

- What works well
- Where parents struggle to find information currently (and why)
- How information can affect feelings about service provision
- Whether good quality, timely and accurate information can help to reduce stress and avoid potential conflict

The work was led by Parent Voice and also involved members of staff from Hampshire County Council, Hampshire Parent Partnership Services and Hampshire Parent/Carer Network.

Initially Parent Voice sent out a simple questionnaire inviting parents to take part in the research study. They received 170 responses. From these, they anonymised the responses and an independent panel selected 40 families by ensuring a range of geographical area, age of child/young person, and disability type. 31 interviews were conducted (each taking on average 1.5-2hrs) and reports were written up. The interview focussed on the parent telling their story from beginning to end, focussing on the part information played and the impact that good, or not so good information had on them as a family. The results were analysed and the report was published Autumn 2013.

Key findings

What works well?

- Having a single point of contact or someone to talk things through with
- Having information prior to appointments knowing who's who, what they do and what they can expect
- Effective signposting – particularly when not eligible for a service
- Having options and choices (shared decision making)
- Being listened to

When things went well families felt involved, that they matter, supported and kept in the loop.

Some of the Challenges

- Clear message that parents feel that they are 'left to their own devices' that professionals assume that they know everything and therefore don't signpost to other services
- Find a lot of information by accident and find a lot of Information too late
- Feel that some information is 'hidden' particularly around statementing and social care assessments
- Lack of clarity and responsibility for families living on the authority borders

Families reported feeling angry, isolated, farmed out, let down, inadequate, isolated, overwhelmed and lost. Many felt that conflict could be avoided if there was greater transparency about how decisions are made and if sign posting was more effective.

Other feedback from parents about information

Review of existing information websites

As part of the Local Offer development, a group of parents were asked to review existing information websites and state what they liked and disliked. A summary is below.

Like:

- simplicity
- quick & easy to find
- up to date content
- clean, bright and appealing design
- ability to customise content
- friendly/user friendly language (no jargon)
- clear navigation
- good search function
- results filtered to specific need
- accessible features
- blogs
- rich content eg videos/webcasts

Dislike:

- out of date content
- corporate feel
- directories/lists of information

The Local Offer is NOT a Directory

Following the work that has taken place in Hampshire, the following conclusions have been reached as to what the Local Offer must be and what it has to deliver – most importantly our conclusions show what it must deliver to ‘not be a directory’.

The local offer must:

- Link pieces of information – so that the user does not have to have prior knowledge or know what they are looking for
- Push content to the user – make suggestions based on what other users have used or found useful, or suggestions based on what parents say is important for parents to know at key stages

For example – when someone is searching for a school, push content about the Area Wide education offer (what support is available in mainstream schools, information about EHCPs, information about school transport) so that users do not have to actively find this content

Or if someone is searching for information on special needs preschools, include a link to continence services/free nappy information

- Allow the user to filter out information that is not relevant or useful
- Not have any dead ends – parents must never end up anywhere on the site where they cannot go any further. Other suggestions/signposting must always be available
- Provide clear and unambiguous information about services including information that is currently hard to find, such as eligibility criteria, complaints procedures, and contact information. This cannot be hidden within the depths of the Local offer website
- Follow a strategic review of the content of the Local Offer with parents and young people – to ensure that they can use their unique knowledge and experiences to input to what content is included and how it is arranged/delivered on the website
- Be as a result of co-production with parents and young people – in order to ensure that the content is written in a way that other parents/young people can understand and access and that all the information that is needed is included.
- Demonstrate that the Local offer has been developed with parents/young people and that it is responsive to their feedback and input. This will also help other parents trust the Local Offer – parents trust other parents more than anyone else!
- It cannot just be a web based solution but must also offer support for users to access the information in a way that they can, whether this is telephone support, training sessions or face-to-face support

The Local Offer is more than just a website – it is a new way of working and a new approach to delivering information.

It is about being open and honest with parents, and working with them to understand their needs, both for information about services and about actual service delivery too.

It can only be delivered by working in true partnership with parents and young people, and with a shift in culture to one of transparency, clarity of information and a willingness to work in a different way.

If a Local Offer can be developed that meets the criteria listed above then there are a lot of benefits for families:

- Improved outcomes for children and young people – more information easily available to help make better choices plus information will be ‘pushed’ to parents/young people to tell them about services/support they previously would never have found out about
- Parents and young people will feel informed and empowered to make choices
- Expectations will be managed – people will be clearer about what is available and why, and what alternatives are available
- More effective signposting – less disappointment for families who have been incorrectly referred to services in the past
- The relationship will change between parents/young people and professionals as there will be more honesty, better accuracy of advice given, less time wasting and hopefully more trust too

What is happening in Hampshire to deliver the Local Offer?

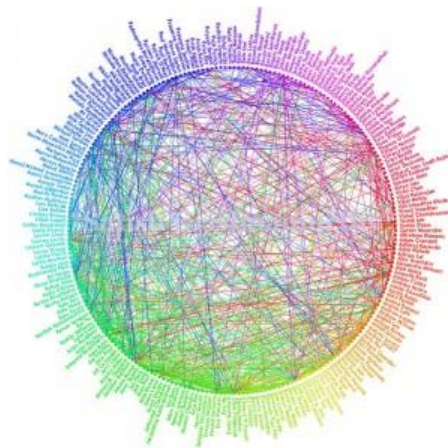
This document has been developed to communicate our learning and thinking about the Local Offer, this is not to say that Hampshire necessarily has it right.

It is still very much a work in progress and until we get further along in the development and it is tested with a wide range of parents and then launched for use in real life situations we cannot know whether we have achieved our aims.

However it may be useful for other local authorities to understand Hampshire's approach, now that this thinking and analysis has been undertaken and therefore this section has been included to give a very high level overview of the current project status.

In Hampshire, an IT solution using semantic technology is being used to deliver the online Local Offer. The local offer delivery has been contracted to Parent Voice (a voluntary sector organisation who have years of experience of offering information and support to families in Hampshire) and they are using a semantic software solution for the Local Offer, working with a local IT development company, Prescient Software.

One of the main benefits of semantic technology is that it links all of the different buckets of information, ensuring a better user experience. It makes the connections so that the user does not have to.



Rather than individual buckets of information, all the information is linked to assist the user

This document does not cover the use of semantic technology, nor the additional benefits it can bring to a website, but it is felt that this is the most suitable solution to deliver a Local Offer that is 'not a directory' in Hampshire. There may be other solutions that other Local Authorities would want to use, though semantic technology appears to deliver all of the requirements identified.

The technology will not only link all of the various buckets of information, but will also be able to learn from how users are using the website to inform how and when specific pieces of content should be delivered/shown on the page to a user – it will use other parents' experiences to

improve the experiences of parents who use the site at a later stage. It will be a responsive and adaptable solution, and it is hoped will deliver a website that parents will be able to use and will want to use.

A parent advisory group has been set up and have been invaluable at identifying what content should be included on the website, what should appear within the main navigation/section headings and how content links from one area of the website to another. A young people's advisory group is to be set up in 2014. All content will be co-produced.

A prototype of the website has been prepared and is being shown to the Local Offer steering group in December 2013. This will demonstrate how semantic technology will deliver a suitable solution and how the information on the website will link (as it can be hard to understand the benefits of semantic technology in abstract).

However despite the commitment to delivering a useful and comprehensive Local Offer website, it is felt that a website alone will not be sufficient and therefore further work needs to be done to explore the support service that needs to sit alongside.

It is recognised that support particularly needs to be made available to the most vulnerable families to be able to access the information on the Local Offer website – for some people this may be training of how to use the website, for others it will be hands-on support to help them access the information. It is especially important for groups with more complex needs, such as parents with learning disabilities themselves or for those for whom English is not their first language.

There is a clear need also for there to be an awareness campaign/training amongst all professionals who come into contact with families so that they can a) tell families about the local offer and b) use the local offer themselves to provide accurate and relevant information and advice. This is in addition to the awareness campaign that needs to take place to let families know about the local offer, and is another significant piece of work.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The key themes identified in this document and the Parent Voice Parental Journey report are themes that were identified in the Green Paper and are reflected in the 'draft Children and Families Bill', such as working with parents and young people and involving them in decision making and the need for greater transparency about eligibility criteria and decision making.

The Local Offer will help to address some of the issues highlighted, however it is clear that a website will not be sufficient to meet the information needs of all parents and alternative formats will need to be considered.

It is also important that the Local Offer is supported by 'real people' who can act as a single point of contact for information and can listen to families and talk them through the process

Our research findings and discussions with parents have demonstrated to us that when things go well it can make the family more resilient and reduce stress levels within the family considerably. This will impact on the need for the family to access other support services now and in the future.

Some of the recommendations for all professionals and practitioners working with Disabled Children and their families that came out of the Parental Journey report – all of which could be met by a well-resourced and well developed Local Offer:

- Take time to explain things to parents and suggest 'next steps'.
- Where possible, discuss options and choices with parents before decisions are made
- Help parents to understand the complexities of 'how things work'
- Be clear about criteria and be honest about how long things are going to take.
- Ask parents if they need assistance with anything
- Sign post to services that may be able to help
- Try to listen and acknowledge their point of view
- Help parents to understand 'What you do' and how your service will benefit their child
- Don't assume that parents 'know'.

Trust is a key outcome of these recommendations which will help to 'take the fight out of the system' and reduce the high cost of resolving disagreements and the increasing cost of providing 'crisis' intervention.

The Local Offer provides an opportunity for services to 'tell parents what they do' and explain how their service can be accessed and who it is for.

This information will enable parents and young people to make informed choices about their care and will help professionals to signpost more effectively so that families find the information they need, when they need it

Engagement across all sectors will be the key to its success.