



TEA-BREAK GUIDE



Effective information sharing between different agencies who may hold risk information is often key to safeguarding children. This can be challenging, and even more so for children and families who live close to the geographical boundaries covered by local authority children's services, health service commissioners, and police authorities amongst others.

Families may access different services across organisational boundaries -for example attending school or being registered with a GP practice in a different organisational area. Professional relationships, record and information sharing agreements and regular channels of communication may be less well established across such boundaries. Operational differences in safeguarding processes are potential source of miscommunication and confusion.

Northamptonshire

Northamptonshire has a single provider of local authority children's services (Northamptonshire Children's Trust), a single-lead commissioner for health services (Northamptonshire CCG) and a single police authority (Northamptonshire police) and the geographical boundaries for these areas are almost always contiguous. This is not the case in many other places!

Post codes

It is particularly important to be aware that post codes in boundary areas do not always reliably indicate which local authority area a child is resident in. There are a number of cross border areas with NN postcodes which lie in other local authority areas, and some localities in Northamptonshire which have postcode suggesting that they lie in a different local authority.

Case Example

A young baby moved from Northampton with his vulnerable young mother to live in a locality with an NN postcode, which actually lay in another local authority area. Mum and baby continued to receive a high level of support from Northamptonshire health visitor services and children's social care, who did not realise that the locality was outside of their organisational boundary. Mum and baby were registered with a GP outside of Northamptonshire CCG and accessed Hospital services in yet another local authority area. Vulnerability, needs and risk information for the baby were not proactively shared with the GP practice.

In the meantime, children's social care and the health visiting service in the other local authority area, where the mum and baby were actually resident, had grave concerns about the safety of the locality where the mum and baby were living, because of a previous serious safeguarding incident. These agencies were not aware that the mother and baby were resident in their area. If Northamptonshire services had been aware of this information, they would have made every effort to relocate the mum and baby to a safer situation.

Best practice in cross border working:

All practitioners working with vulnerable children and families should seek to have an understanding of the localities and communities where children live, including risks and strengths specific to that locality. . They need to understand how children and families in those localities typically access services including health, education, early intervention support services and statutory children's services.

For practitioners and agencies based on specific localities close to geographical boundaries, consideration should be given to establishing professional links and lines of communication, for example with a school whose catchment area crosses local authority boundaries.

How to check postcode areas:

It is essential that practitioners and agencies are aware of localities where confusion may arise because the postcode does not provide clarity about which is the responsible local authority.

The best way to do this is via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>

Vulnerable children and Families moving across local authority areas:

The importance of effective communication and information sharing, particularly where there are safeguarding concerns for children, is well understood. For further guidance please see the following link:

[Children Moving Across Local Authority Boundaries \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://www.proceduresonline.com/children-moving-across-local-authority-boundaries)