

- ▶ Creating an effective information sharing community:

Whole Essex Information Sharing Framework



WEISF

Background

Partners across Essex have a history and experience of working together and this has influenced the way their information sharing community has developed over the last decade. This community is rooted in the Essex Trust Charter (ETC) and has expanded to the Whole Essex Information Sharing Framework's (WEISF) current membership of over 400 organisations that include local authorities, Police and Fire & Rescue Services, health, schools, voluntary and community sector (VCS), housing and academic bodies. The framework provides this community with access to advice, guidance, good practice, networking and tools to support the development of local information sharing.

The Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing (the Centre) became involved when Essex County Council approached it for support at the point that WEISF was being set up in 2014. At the end of 2016 the Centre was invited to speak at the framework's inaugural conference and it felt that this was a good point to capture their story so far and share their learning with other local places. At the start of 2017 via a Local Government Authority (LGA) funded piece of work the Centre also started working with Essex County Council to support the development of their new 'Essex Data: Programme'.

Why WEISF was created

The WEISF has its origins in the ETC – an initiative created in 2004 by the 15 Essex local authorities, based around set of principles for information sharing (the Charter Agreement) and a desire to have a standard local template for Information Sharing Protocols (ISP).

Essex Trust Charter

- ▶ Created in 2004
- ▶ Set up by the 15 local authorities (district, borough and county council) in Essex
- ▶ Aims and objectives set up as a way for local authorities in Essex to acknowledge the need for information sharing, support each other, provide transparency on sharing and develop locally consistent information processes and policies.

What it provided:

- ▶ a list of principles about information sharing to sign up to (the Charter Agreement)
- ▶ a common Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) template
- ▶ a published list of partners signed up to the charter
- ▶ an opportunity for informal networking and background discussions between partners.

Over time, the use of the Charter's template for ISPs dropped off, and the publication of new national information sharing guidance, such as Information Commissioners Office (ICO) Privacy Impact Assessments, meant the Charter had become outdated.

The need for change was also linked to the recognition that key reform agendas, such as health and social care integration and the move to 'digital' ways of working, were increasing the importance of and need for information sharing between partners. Specifically, in 2013 Councillor David Finch, as chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board, commissioned a task and finish group led by David Wilde (CIO, Essex County Council) to address the problem raised in the 'Who will care?' commission (Sir Tom Smith-Hughes) around information sharing.

The 'Who will care?' report highlighted information sharing as a key barrier to effective reshaping and transformation of the health and social care. The task and finish group recommended the establishment of the WEISF as a successor to ETC which was then endorsed by the Health and Wellbeing Board and Essex Chief Executives Association.

The aim of creating a replacement for the ETC, was not only to develop something 'fit for purpose' and up-to-date, but also to use the change as an opportunity to both support central government's drive for transparency, around the information held and used by the public sector, and to make use of web based technological developments and capabilities.

Expectations for the design of a new model to support an information sharing partnership were built around the key learning gleaned from the development and delivery of the ETC itself, which was:

- ▶ the commitment and use of the ETC had proved that there was both a demand and need for information sharing support across local partners
- ▶ that this kind of partnership working, focused on information sharing, also had the potential to drive the development of stronger, trusted relationships between partners
- ▶ beyond the templates and principles, there was significant value in the talking and networking which took place as it enabled sharing of learning and experience.

The approach

The development was informed by a range of activity including reviewing the different models and practice used in other local places. The existing ETC partners were also re-engaged with through the quarterly meeting of information governance (IG) leads but it was clear from this that there was a need to reach out to a much wider set of partners.

The Health and Wellbeing Board approved a business case for a series of partner engagement events and acted as the sponsor for this activity. Essex County Council (ECC) Information Management Team delivered six partnership workshops which developed the understanding of what partners wanted and needed to support local information sharing and what barriers they faced.

Recognising a fundamental principle that WEISF needed to be wholly owned and led by partners for it to be successful, the final proposed model was shared with all partners before it was signed off and implemented.

What is the WEISF?

Online portal – providing guidance, a list of partners, and a space to publish ISPs and data sets held by partners

Information Sharing Protocol review – mechanism to log and issue reminders to members for review of their ISPs

Management group - multi-sector group to steer the work and development of WEISF

Partner communication and engagement – including e-forum, news and horizon scanning briefings

Network and peer support - the core offer of WEISF is to facilitate a support network for its members

Resourcing

In line with the fundamental principle to develop partners' ownership of WEISF the model is resourced collectively with contributions from ECC and members of the Essex Online Partnership. This is through a shared approach to financial, staff and physical resourcing including ECC providing the staff for the core team that provide organisational support, partners taking it in turn to chair the WEISF management group and hosting of meetings by the Essex Fire and Rescue Service. The success in this demonstrates the strong level of partner commitment and buy-in to WEISF and a collaborative approach to making best use of the collective resources available.

Challenges and learning

In creating and continuing to develop the WEISF, the core team and partners have faced a number of challenges. In this section we explore how they have overcome these hurdles and look to share the learning gained.

Providing the right guidance

One of the needs expressed by partners during the development of the WEISF was to have all the guidance members needed in one place. The creation of the web portal provided a space in which the guidance could be gathered and easily accessed, but there was a need to agree exactly which guidance should be placed here. The challenge was to provide all the guidance needed, whilst ensuring it was consistent and didn't give rise to conflicting interpretations.

In response to this challenge, a decision was made at the start to only put the top level and official national guidance and regulations (e.g. ICO codes of practice) on to the portal. This has allowed confidence to grow and a shared perspective of a consistent approach to information sharing to develop, demonstrated by the more recent addition to the portal of some local guidance including the Data Lifecycle Mapping Management work that is supporting General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) readiness.

Keeping focus on information sharing

Whilst the ETC was set up to support information sharing, the increasing focus on transparency at the time meant that discussions taking place at quarterly practitioner meetings were becoming dominated by Freedom of Information (FOI) issues, rather than information sharing. In response to this challenge, partners were asked if they would like a separate group to focus on FOI given the time taken on the topic, but there was not an appetite to commit to an additional meeting.

Reflecting on this, when setting up the WEISF as a replacement for the ETC thought was given to how to make sure the focus on information sharing was maintained. Steps which helped to make this happen (beyond including the words 'information sharing' in the name) included securing sponsorship of the WEISF by the Health and Wellbeing Board, which helped ensure a focus on information sharing as it is so fundamental to their work.

Losing engagement from partners

The reduction in the use of the ISP template was a key signal of the reducing level of engagement with the Charter by partners. Reflecting on this, effective engagement of partners became a priority in the creation of the framework. It was clear that disengagement by partners was rooted in the Charter's ISP template becoming out-dated. This resulted in partners developing their own approaches to ISPs and other ways of working which meant a loss of consistency and further barriers to information sharing.

With this in mind, and after the early discussions at the quarterly practitioner's meetings about a replacement for the ETC failed to prove productive, a wider set of partnership workshops were agreed. These were arranged in different locations and a broad range of organisations invited, from not only the public sector but also voluntary and community groups.

These sessions provided a route to not only get partner input into the WEISF's draft principles but also gave insight into a wider range of views about information sharing. Involvement of community groups in the workshop highlighted the breadth of groups involved in supporting and delivering the outcomes enabled by information sharing.

Variation in information maturity of partners

From the starting point of establishing the ETC, through the creation of the WEISF and now with the implementation of the Greater Essex Information Strategy (GEIS), a consistent aim has been to support partners to develop their information maturity. This includes building each individual partner's knowledge, skills and understanding around information management.

Peer learning has been key in tackling this challenge, an example of which was seen in the partnership workshops run when setting up WEISF. During these workshops participants were asked to share the barriers they were facing around information sharing and then given the opportunity to use their own experiences to develop solutions for each other. This meant that as well as sharing their learning, everyone felt they had got something out of the events and this helped to strengthen further engagement and buy-in.

The insight gained from this, along with the ongoing dialogue with partners about their needs, has enabled the WEISF model to be developed to reflect the differing levels in each partner's information maturity. The framework ensures it supports the varying needs of partners through offering increasing levels of support from templates and national guidance through to targeted advice on specific projects.

Getting the 'right people' involved

When bringing together a range of partners to develop and grow the model, one challenge was to get the 'right people' engaged from the start. Being clear on who these people were was central to this. It enabled targeted efforts to be made to secure buy-in from strategic senior level as well as from those practitioners with operational responsibility, where the results of information sharing are applied. It also ensured that the professionals engaged were wider than those whose focus is on the technicalities of sharing information.

Getting the right people involved

Tracy King, Essex Fire and Rescue Service

Strengthening links

When Tracy King took on the role of representing the Essex Fire and Rescue Service on the WEISF management team, this created an opportunity to:

- ▶ review how the Fire and Rescue Service were engaging with the WEISF more widely
- ▶ get the 'right people' involved to ensure that the benefits of being members were felt and recognised at all levels of the Fire and Rescue Service.

Benefits

For Tracy, the benefits of being a member of the WEISF include:

- ▶ the ability to access experience and knowledge about information sharing within the WEISF
- ▶ helping her to improve her own knowledge
- ▶ having access to a source of friendly challenge and support, which according to Tracy "stops us from losing our focus on information sharing"
- ▶ support around major issues and changes, such as the introduction of the GDPR
- ▶ an external perspective on information sharing which can help to guide strategic thinking within the Fire and Rescue Service. For example, when Lauri Almond from the WEISF attended a meeting of the Fire and Rescue leadership team, Lauri was able to provide an external view on the need to develop information sharing capacity that helped Tracy to get across key issues, and strengthened the argument by demonstrating that "it's not just me saying this".

Successes

In developing and establishing the WEISF a range of achievements have been realised and the following have been highlighted as key successes.

Securing partner buy-in

Reflecting on the WEISF after its first 12 months it was apparent that it was too local authority focused. In order to achieve a wider perspective that covered all the framework's partners, a rotating chair for meetings was introduced. The individual holding the chairing role for that meeting approves the agenda for the WEISF Management Board and also attends that month's Essex Information Board to report progress and escalate issues. This has resulted in a deeper understanding between partners of their individual cultures and perspectives on information sharing, as well as joining up the strategic governance arrangements and thinking.

“Introducing a rotating chair for the meetings has really helped generate a shared ownership and responsibility”

[Tracy King, Essex Fire and Rescue and WEISF Management Group]

Understanding and demonstrating benefits

The initial and ongoing commitment to developing partner engagement has enabled the WEISF core team to identify and capture the qualitative benefits to Essex and partners in the form of information sharing success stories and these have been disseminated back to partners via the framework's inaugural conference at the end of 2016.

The production of a formal 'benefits statement' has also identified and captured the quantifiable cost savings for partners derived from improved compliance and records management, greater partnership working and shared resources. This evidence of benefits is supporting the move to a self-funded model by helping individual partners to prepare internal business cases that will secure a collective commitment to the future funding of the WEISF.

Sharing success stories: Pan-Essex counter fraud identification

Problem: In Essex a local agreement sees the county council, Police and Fire investing their resources to support the local collection of council tax with the benefit realised through the increased collection of tax more than off-setting that investment. Chelmsford City Council's Revenues and Benefits Service knew from information sharing facilitated through the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) that there was a benefit from information sharing to identify error and fraud and so increase the tax income. However, the approach to information sharing needed to be improved as NFI information when it arrived was often out of date, some of it being over 18 months old, and therefore of limited use.

“To enable more regular fraud prevention checks we needed more data sets, more often, so we could refresh on a monthly basis. What we needed was an NFI on steroids.”

(Rob Hawes, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Chelmsford City Council).

In 2014 there was a refresh of data management and information governance processes in Chelmsford City Council but information sharing was not on the agenda. Also the need to share information extend beyond Chelmsford, extending county-wide and drawing on a range of information including benefits, taxi licensing, school's allocations and residents parking permits

Approach: A member of the Essex Benefit Managers' group knew of the WEISF and suggested that they approach them for help. A proposal was taken to the WEISF Management Group at the start of 2014 and a sub-group was convened to bring partners together to consider the information sharing challenges for the project and how they could be resolved

Impact: Engaging with the framework enabled the project to demonstrate the high level commitment to information sharing, both through the county's Chief Executives Association endorsement of the WEISF and the formal sharing agreements in place, which provided a clear mandate to others for action. This was further strengthened from having the support and endorsement of the WEISF Management Group. The access to the expertise and knowledge of the framework's members helped to identify the specific legal basis for sharing and guided them through the completion of an ISP for the project. Also the project leaders developed their understanding of what information sharing questions to ask others and what answers would be needed from themselves and the project. These all helped to address information sharing concerns, identify enablers and clear barriers

Learning: The WEISF provides those heads of service and managers who have an operational focus with the both technical information governance advice and guidance, and professional support and encouragement which gives them the confidence to explore information sharing opportunities.

Learning goes both ways, as WEISF partners found involvement in this project exposed them to how different people respond in different ways to using the IG tool templates, with some partners being less willing or confident in changing a standard format. It also revealed the differing information maturity levels across the partners involved in the project.

Advice to others:

“The message about WEISF that I would give to other Heads of Service who are thinking about information sharing is – use them. They are a resource to tap into. If you've got a clear view about what you want to achieve, go and talk to them. They can give you the help on information sharing that you need, which will help you do what you want to do.”

(Rob Hawes, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Chelmsford City Council).

Identifying and responding to partners needs

The initial engagement to develop the WEISF meant partners were able to highlight, what was until then, an unrecognised need for support in ensuring ISPs are regularly reviewed. The WEISF has been able to respond to this by enhancing the original facility that published partner's individual ISPs with an additional mechanism that alerts members when their protocol needs reviewing. Through this, WEISF has demonstrated how it is alert and able to respond to partners' needs, and in doing so is providing greater transparency, supporting the sharing of practice on ISPs and revealing issues faced by member organisations, such as "we don't know where our ISPs are"!

Developing a shared vision

Members of the core team that have supported the development, implementation and delivery of the WEISF were also involved in the development of the Greater Essex Information Strategy (GEIS). This meant that from the outset the strategy benefited from the accumulated knowledge and understanding of the partner landscape held by the core team and informed the approach to engaging partners in the development of the GEIS.

"The insight into each individual partner's information maturity, focus and drivers was invaluable. We could schedule and time our engagement work on GEIS to ensure partners could get involved, with health we knew when they would be busy working on key developments, like Sustainable Transformation Plans, or when a local authority social service department would be receiving an inspection, and plan around this."

(Lauri Almond, IG Operations Lead, Essex County Council).

There was also the direct benefit of being able to use the WEISF network to target communications on the development of the GEIS and ensure members were aware of the strategy and could get involved in shaping it.

Developing the Greater Essex Information Strategy

Problem: An outcome of the WEISF Management Team discussions was the surfacing of the broad variation in information maturity across Essex's partners. This led to a proposal to create a county-wide information strategy that would clearly describe what good information management and sharing would look like for everyone in Essex and seek to secure partner buy-in to help bring all partners to a level of information maturity that would achieve this vision.

Approach: WEISF partners were fully informed of and involved in the development and shaping of the GEIS, which was progressed as a partnership activity and supported by resources from ECC.

Impact: The development of the strategy also acted as a catalyst for change within WEISF, as once the strategy was agreed the WEISF portal and the tools it provided was reviewed to ensure that it could support partners in achieving the vision set by the GEIS.

“Being on the WEISF Management Board I have been fully involved in the development of the GEIS and this has helped me in being able to bring it back in to my organisation and make it relevant to people in the Fire Service. Fire officers can understand the risks around a fire engine being out of action but aren't so clear on the risks or benefits to us associated with information sharing. Also the support I get from WEISF, whether it is simple tips on how I can best communicate a particular message or by providing an 'expert' to speak to my Senior Leadership Team, has really helped in developing the organisational understanding and approach to information sharing by the Fire Service.”

(Tracy King, Essex Fire and Rescue Service)

Learning: GDPR is both a curse and a blessing as it draws Essex's partners focus and energies away from the implementation of GEIS but it will also help drive forward elements of it such as the priority to develop the VCS engagement in WEISF.

Developing and producing the GEIS has highlighted the enormity of the task ahead as it is about wider information management and what has become clear through the process is the significant variation in information maturity that exists across Essex's partners. To support better information sharing there is a need to focus on increasing partners' information maturity. Resourcing the strategy's implementation will therefore require careful thought and involvement beyond just WEISF, as the solutions will require collective effort.

Key reflections

In developing this case study, we asked a group of representatives from the WEISF to reflect on their journey so far and identify those key factors they felt others need to consider if they are going along the same path.

Developing a sense of collective responsibility

A key moment of change and a marker of success for the WEISF was their 2016 conference. This event was seen as the point when it became apparent that people were now clearly thinking about issues in a collective context, and asking not what they could do individually, but rather talking to each other about 'what we can do together'.

What would we do differently if we did it again?

In considering what they might do differently if they were looking to create the WEISF again, or if they were advising other local places considering setting up a similar model, the following key points were highlighted:

- ▶ think carefully about resourcing - make sure it's one person's full time job to support the framework
- ▶ get the right people and with the right skills in from the start – ensure you have people in the core team who are really good communicators. Not necessarily communications officers, but people with communication skills, who can “fearlessly talk to partners” and bring partners together
- ▶ identify the steps you need to take – in preparing to set up a framework key questions to ask are less about the technicalities of information sharing, such as how do you go about writing an ISP, and more focused on where do you want to get to go as an information sharing community, what is your starting point and what are the logical steps you need to take to achieve your objectives. This will help ensure that information sharing is viewed in a more contextualised way
- ▶ understand your partners - make sure you get to know who the people are that you are engaging with, and be clear on why people are involved including what they hope to achieve
- ▶ clarity and communication – invest time and energy in getting clear messages out which explain exactly what you're about, using language relevant to all of the people being engaged and not just the information specialists. And avoid the jargon.

Next steps

As well as reflecting of the journey so far, this case study also looks at how the WEISF is preparing for the future and supporting the continued development of an effective and positive information sharing community in Essex.

Looking to the horizon

Learning from their journey and recognising the constantly changing national and local context around information sharing, the WEISF is supporting its members by horizon scanning for developments in policy, regulation and other local drivers.

One current and future area of focus is the need for members to prepare for the implementation of GDPR in May 2018 and the WEISF are alert to the fact that this represents both an opportunity and threat. There is a need to ensure that the WEISF provides the support its members need around GDPR so that it doesn't draw the focus of the information sharing community to the extent that it weakens engagement with the framework and the wider agenda

Ensuring sustainability

The WEISF is developing the business case to move on to a sustainable self-funding model. This will build on the current commitment and shared vision of members to create a collective funding arrangement, establishing itself as a jointly owned and shared resource.

Supporting member's future needs and aspirations

Listening to member's needs and aspirations is a core objective for the WEISF, as demonstrated by the recent creation of an online forum for members to share issues, concerns and successes, and look for help not just from the core team, but also from each other.

This approach is helping to make the WEISF relevant not only to information specialists within member organisations, but also operational Heads of Service, such as Rob Hawes (Revenues and Benefits Manager, Chelmsford City Council). Rob, when asked what his aspirations are for continued involvement with WEISF, explained that he is looking for:

- ▶ access to people who think information sharing is a good idea
- ▶ access to practical support
- ▶ 'wheel greasing' to make tangible demonstrations of information sharing easier to achieve.

Advice to others

Reflecting on the WEISFs development the following points are the key cultural factors that impact on information sharing and need to be considered if you are embarking or already travelling on the same journey:

Information maturity

Essex have continued to be surprised by the significant variation in partner's information sharing skills, knowledge and experience. Appreciating at the outset the long distance that some partners will need to travel and the level of support they will need to get there is essential. WEISF are now taking this valuable understanding in to their work to build engagement and strengthen the links with the county's VCS providers

Information sharing community

Essex has seen that, whilst partners may call for a focus on the mechanics of information sharing to start with through tools such as ISP templates, what they really want and value is the opportunity to learn from each other; to talk honestly about the challenges they are facing in a trusted environment; and to feel supported by a like-minded community.

What is apparent is the development and instilling of an ethos of partnership and collaboration at the heart of the WEISF has facilitated the coalescence and growth of an Essex 'information sharing community'. This has placed WEISF in a good position to embrace new partners, who are information and non-information specialists alike.

Flexibility and agility

By not restricting themselves in terms of a final shape or bolting themselves down to a predefined operational model, WEISF has been able to respond and adapt to the changes in both context and partner's needs. This has required a balance of organic and planned growth and enables them to continue to be innovative, experimental and learn.

Passion

The WEISF would never have got to where it is now if it wasn't for the commitment and belief by individuals in what they were trying to achieve and in order to achieve it they need to place the partners at the centre. You need to be bold, take risks, and sometimes push ahead without the safety net offered by having a plan B.

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