

A Closer Look



A Team Effort @ Sandwell Council

Overview

Formed in 1974, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council is located in the West Midlands. With an estimated population of just over 316,000, Sandwell covers an area of around 31 square miles.

The Council went live with the Liquidlogic Early Help Module (EHM) in 2010 and the Children's Social Care System (LCS) in 2017.

A New Way of Working

Sandwell has an exceptionally high number of agencies using the Liquidlogic EHM including those in health, education and police settings.

Speaking about this, **Rachel Stringer, Information Systems Project Manager in the ISM Team at Sandwell Council** comments: "Currently our user numbers are over 2,700. This includes school health nurses, health visitors and police neighbourhood officers and there is at least one member of staff trained from each school within Sandwell."

Before Liquidlogic EHM

Prior to the introduction of the Liquidlogic EHM, staff based at Sandwell Council recorded all Early Help information about a child on the previous social care case management system. External agencies were unable to access this system, therefore secure and instant information sharing between the Council and charities, schools, police and health was not possible.

Extending the Reach

The Council prioritised extending online access to a child's Early Help episode and took the decision to implement the Liquidlogic Early Help Module in order to achieve this. The wide range of stakeholders included police, third sector, health and education.

Training

Initially the Liquidlogic EHM was rolled out in town clusters and began with Tipton as an original pilot. The Council targeted areas where the highest referrals were made and rolled out to other areas along with a training programme. **Rachel Stringer explains: "All of our training is classroom based, as we find that method most effective. New users are initially provided with a half day course which focusses on the basics such as how to complete an Early Help Assessment. For those whose role involves using the Liquidlogic EHM in more detail, an additional half day's training is provided. There is also a 'refresher course' available which schools and police take advantage of."**

Benefits

In addition to the obvious advantages of clear audit trails and immediate insight to a case, the Liquidlogic EHM has saved all staff who use the system significant amounts of time. **Rachel Stringer goes on to say: "Previously everyone working outside the Council who was involved with an early help case recorded it on paper. There are obvious flaws in terms of both security and information access with this approach, however the major disadvantage was the length of time which it took to communicate with other agencies. Now when something is recorded on the Liquidlogic Early Help Module, all parties with relevant profiles can view and contribute. As a Council, we are truly working in a multi-agency way. We are also able to take advantage of the fact that as a Council, we are now live with the Liquidlogic Children's Social Care system (LCS) and able to 'step up' and 'step down' cases between the two parts of the system if necessary."**

The most significant advantage for the families who we work with is that they have no need to tell their story to numerous agencies. Often details which families provide are distressing and as such having to provide the same information repeatedly can be difficult for those involved."

PC Hughie Treasure, Young Person Officer at West Midlands Police says: "The Early Help Module has been extremely useful for my role as the Young Person Officer for Sandwell Police. I have been able to identify young people more or less instantly and then get their details - and in many cases the guardians details as well. The added bonus is visibility of other information which is provided by partners which, we as police would not ordinarily have access to, because it is not crime related."

We get a bigger picture on the person we are dealing with, as we can see all the other agencies involved with the family.

EHM also helps us to see who is in a better position to deal with the issue from a strategic and corporate approach. In addition to this, we are able to ascertain who is the most appropriate contact along with contact details. We have recently given more training to neighbourhood officers and they now are in a better position to glean the right information for the issues the family are dealing with; and to upload their ASB outcomes for partner's information."

One of Sandwell's Commissioned Services is the Family Offer provided through Children's Centres in the Borough. Children's Centres have been using EHM (formerly known as eCAF) for some time. Adam Cooper from Action for Children feels that the support offered after EHM implementation from the Council's ISM Team has supported closer working with the Council. **Adam comments: "The ISM Team has been receptive to queries, proactive and able to deal with individual requests along with attending team meetings and talking to groups of staff".**

Adam's Colleague Rachel Jesson says: "Using EHM has enabled us as a service to have one point of contact for all professionals involved in the Team Around the Family (TAF) process. This improves communication with partners, and reduces administration time and cost. This approach enables us to spend more time on direct work with children and families, the results of which are more effective outcomes for the children and families that we support."

As the system is now used to record all levels of interaction from universal through to targeted work, it enables us to be more effective in both evidencing the outcomes we have achieved with children and young people and also effectively identify areas of need.

The system is flexible and has been supported by a proactive and hardworking ISM team in Sandwell Council which has been readily adaptable to meet our changing needs."

Additionally; Sandwell Council provides a Point of Access (POA) for all referrals for Emotional Well-Being and CAMHS referrals for young people in the area via a Customer Defined Workflow (CDW) within the EHM. This is staffed by both CAMHS and Children's Society staff who triage each incoming case and direct to the relevant service dependent on the need. CAMHS staff have reported that using EHM allows them easier access to information which is pertinent to the triaging of mental health needs, and allows them to offer the correct support first time as they have a holistic view rather than just having symptoms reported to them. This in turn means that CAMHS are receiving more appropriate referrals from the Point of Access (POA) and other services can be utilised where these better meet the needs of the young person such as counselling or group sessions.

Next Steps

Sandwell Council will continue to encourage an even wider range of agencies to contribute to a child's case and train them appropriately - a focus will be given to colleagues in the health sector.

Given that the Council is now live with the Liquidlogic Adults' Social Care system (LAS) and Children's Social Care system (LCS), there will be other opportunities to work with colleagues from those teams to continue the joined-up approach at Sandwell Council.