

Notes of the Data Ethics Committee (DEC) meeting 6th November 2025 via Teams

Attendees

Presenters

James Rist (*Business Intelligence Partner, Essex County Council*)

ecda members

Wysh Kanesalingam (*Data Partnerships Officer, ecda*)

DEC members

Katerina D Hadjimatheou (Chair)

Yani Tyskerud

Alex Fassio

Lucia Hawkes

Project overview

During this committee meeting Essex County Council (ECC) presented their Single Digital View of a Child Project. This proof of concept was inspired by Somerset Council's approach to developing a data warehouse that consolidates partnership datasets into a single-view record. The primary objective of this initiative is to enhance practitioner decision-making, reduce safeguarding risks, and promote wellbeing practices.

To achieve this, ECC developed a prototype for the Children's and Families Hub, designed to integrate limited information on children as an initial step. The aim was to explore how a single digital view (SDV) could improve service efficiency. Traditionally, triaging requests for support at the hub requires accessing multiple data sources or contacting various individuals and institutions to gather the necessary information for decision-making.

The SDV tool seeks to alleviate this pressure by presenting essential information in a unified view, reducing the need for manual data lookups. This streamlined approach is intended to accelerate decision-making and enable staff to refer or signpost requests to appropriate services more effectively. ECC emphasised that the project is not focused on cost savings but rather on improving operational efficiency and exploring the potential benefits of a single-view solution.

Conclusions from Committee discussion

ECC acknowledged the need for additional investment in staff, technology, and financial resources to enhance the effectiveness of the SDV tool. A key priority will be expanding data inputs through greater stakeholder engagement, e.g. securing buy-in from Essex Police, to improve the tool's effectiveness and user feedback.

To maximise impact and avoid duplication of work, ECC plans to align this project with other departments, including Education and Health. This collaborative approach could enable the creation of a truly comprehensive single-view database and allow resources to be pooled across initiatives.

Furthermore, ECC will seek guidance from the Digital, Data and Technology board to clarify the rationale for not only continuing the SDV project but also expanding the scope of available information.

Committee observations raised and responses provided:

- The committee raised concerns about ensuring that users do not access data beyond their operational needs. ECC acknowledged that the current tool is very basic and does not yet include access to anything the practitioners haven't already got access to. Should a successor project be developed, ECC understood that tech solutions will be required to restrict data access strictly to the necessary information needed for an intended purpose and by authorised persons only – currently all available data is already accessible, albeit data is stored across multiple storage systems.
- ECC reported that frontline staff found the tool more beneficial than the pathway team and clarified that this disparity was expected due to the prototype's restricted dataset. With the inclusion of more comprehensive data, similar to Somerset's implementation, the tool's impact is anticipated to improve significantly. ECC also noted that the tool was particularly useful for providing readily available contact details, saving time compared to manual searches. However, ECC highlighted that information needed to make a decision varies case by case, which also explains the differing feedback on the tool's usefulness.
- ECC advised that future iterations would most likely use Microsoft Fabric as a platform and will look to utilise data collaboration opportunities presented by Local Government Reorganisation, to minimise risks associated with data transfer and enhance security. ECC reaffirmed its commitment to thoroughly assessing the legal, ethical, digital, and operational risks associated with data pooling, looking to ensure robust safeguards against potential vulnerabilities.

Project recommendations

- The committee recommended expanding the evaluation process to include a wider range of users for more representative and actionable feedback. This should involve not only additional practitioners but also parents of children, ensuring that future iterations of the tool reflect the needs and experiences of end users.
- The committee highlighted the risk that information input may be adapted or distorted based on assumptions about who will view it. ECC was advised to consider implementing clear data access protocols and governance measures to mitigate this risk and maintain the integrity of information within the system.
- Committee recommended inviting Somerset County Council to present on their journey from the initial iteration of their Single Digital View tool to its current state. This would provide valuable insights into the challenges they encountered, the strategies used to overcome them, and the improvements that enhanced the tool's effectiveness. Learning from Somerset's experience will help ECC anticipate potential pitfalls and identify best practices for future development.

General recommendations

The committee would like to invite a project lead/subject matter expert from ECC to provide a detailed explanation of how ethics, data protection, and governance are embedded within their project processes. This engagement would enable the committee to gain a clearer

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understanding of these considerations and subsequently make informed recommendations to strengthen the integration of ethical principles and AI/data governance within future ECC project frameworks.