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Developing Key Working

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Developing Key Working

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The Open University, 2014

About this guide

The aim of this 'Developing Key Working' Guide is to offer guidance to those involved in developing, managing and delivering key working.

The primary audience is commissioners and managers in local areas and in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector implementing key working, but it is also intended to be of use for a wider range of people including policy makers and those carrying out key working functions. We have drawn on information gathered from a young person, parents, key working practitioners, managers and commissioners from four sites, along with further evidence gathered by other organisations.

This Guide was commissioned by the National Children's Bureau as part of a key working evaluation project carried out between December 2013 and March 2014. Focus groups with parents, practitioners delivering key working functions, managers and commissioners were conducted in three locations: Wolverhampton, Cornwall, and KIDS whose provision covers Hull and Wakefield.

We also spoke with a young person who had received key working support. A telephone interview was conducted with an Early Support manager in Plymouth and a key working training developer. Individuals also completed questionnaires. The different sites were chosen to reflect both designated and non-designated key working, and provision based in the local statutory services as well as in the PVI sector.

This Guide introduces key working and the current context and then summarises findings and recommendations. There is a large evidence base on key working, its benefits for families and services, and the features of best practice. This has been sourced, analysed and incorporated into this guidance.

There is a bibliography at the end of this Guide and an accompanying website, for those who wish to learn more about key working. Where relevant, particularly useful resources containing further information, practical examples and helpful tips have been highlighted in the main body of the Guide.

"You know, family life can be pressured anyway and then when you've got other problems it's even more pressured, but they [key working practitioners] take that side away so you can almost enjoy, dare I say normal, but what could be a normal life for you."

Parent

Acknowledgements

Contents

1. Introduction

Definition of key working

Key working is implemented differently from area to area but is increasingly being seen as a way of working rather than simply a discrete role carried out by an individual. Early Support (2012) stresses that key working is most usefully defined as a set of ten functions enabling an integrated approach to supporting children and their families, rather than an 'add-on' service.

This highlights that key working does not have to rely on a specific role and that it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that children, young people and families receive key working support. The ten functions of key working are conceptualised into four primary areas: emotional and practical support; coordination; planning and assessment; and information and specialist support. The key working functions should be underpinned by a principled way of working such as the Early Support approach and principles.

Emotional and practical support	**Coordination**
• Providing emotional and practical support as required, as part of a trusting relationship • Enabling and empowering the child, young person and their family to make decisions, including using their personalised budgets in a way that is most effective for them.	• Being a single point of regular and consistent contact for the child, young person and family • Facilitating multiagency meetings • Coordinating services and practitioners around the child, young person and family
Planning and assessment	**Information and specialist support**
• Supporting a single planning and joint assessment process • Identifying the strengths and needs of all family members	• Providing information and signpost-ing where necessary • Advocating on the child's, young person's and/or family's behalf where appropriate • Facilitating clinical care seamlessly integrated with specialist and universal services, where appropriate.

People who carry out key working functions can be known by a number of names including key worker, care coordinator, lead professional, link worker, family support worker, service navigator, service coordinator, family liaison worker, Early Support worker and named person. While recognising this diversity in terminology, for consistency this guide will refer throughout to key working or a key working practitioner.

This guide concerns key working provision for children and young people aged 0-25, along with their families. For convenience, when referring to this age range we will use the term child or children. We use the term family to refer to the familial relationships around the child; this will be unique to each child and may also include close family friends and community members. We use the term parents to refer to those people with parental responsibility for a child.

In this guide, there will be frequent reference to the team around the child or TAC. TAC refers to a model of service provision where different practitioners who are involved with the same child come together to support the child and their family. TAF is an acronym also in use referring to team around the family.

Models of key working

Key working can be designated, non-designated or a blend of the two forms. In a designated service, staff are employed specifically and solely to carry out key working, whereas for non-designated key working, a practitioner already working with the family in another capacity, for example as their social worker, takes on key working functions. In some local areas, key working is provided by statutory services and in other areas it is provided by the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector.

A recent SQW report (Hill et al., 2014) stated that key working functions in the context of producing Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans can be taken on by more than one person working with the family. An example of this may be one person coordinating the EHC planning process and a lead professional ensuring that it meets statutory requirements. In this Guide, we consider key working as a broad concept, within which the EHC 20-week planning period is only one element.

Quality criteria

Based on the evidence gathered for this Guide, the following quality criteria are recommended for use by local managers, commissioners and others when developing and evaluating key working provision:

- Establishing a shared philosophy of putting families at the centre of decision-making and planning.
- Maximising benefits to families, children and young people.
- Empowering parents.
- Providing continuity to families through transitions and changes.
- Providing support early to avoid problems escalating.
- Enhancing efficiency and cost-effectiveness through coordinated service delivery.
- Building from existing working practices, local context and range of provision.
- Providing appropriate training, supervision and administrative support.

Special educational needs and disability (SEND) context

Although key working is not a novel concept, there is a renewed driver for change within the English government's reforms to the SEND system. The Children and Families Act and the Code of Practice for working with children and young people with SEND place an emphasis on joined-up working between education, health and social care services, and key working is one of the ways in which services are expected to achieve this. Early Support is a delivery partner for the reforms and delivers key working training nationwide.

Previous research on key working

A large evidence base exists for key working, including peer-reviewed journal articles, reports published by charities and reports commissioned by government departments. A systematic literature review was conducted to build an evidence base for this guide and a repository of useful key working sources has been compiled. In the relevant sections of this Guide, there are links to specific sources that provide further information and practical examples, and the full bibliography is available at the end of the document.

For more information about Early Support and the range of practical tools and resources to support key working, please visit http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/networks-campaigning/early-support

2. What is key working?

> - Key working is a holistic way of working to support the whole family
>
> - Key working encompasses different functions and these are best used flexibly, adapting support for different families in different suituations.

"The key worker kind of brings it all together almost and sometimes you don't feel strong enough to do all that, because obviously you've got other priorities, you know you need someone to take control of that and I think and you know it's been very positive"
Parent

"It's getting everybody together really and getting an overall picture of everybody working with that family."
Key working practitioner

Whole family approach

Key working is a person-centred approach that places the family at the centre of service provision, putting the child at the heart and also recognising the needs of other family members. Families welcome this holistic approach, with support available for parents, the child with SEND and their siblings. The nature of this support ranges widely and can include, for example, arranging for siblings to join support groups, organising respite care and accompanying the child with SEND into new settings. Parents express the great value of the relationship with their key working practitioner for their child with SEND, and this message is reinforced when listening to young people about their experiences of key working.

- Include person-centred approaches as a core part of all training and induction.
- Ensure practitioners introduce families to the range of local provision, in particular by signposting and discussing the local offer.

"Quite a lot of people were involved and it was frustrating but what I found was helpful is we all sat down and I liked it because I wasn't repeating myself, so say like I wanted a meeting we would all meet together"

Young person

Coordinated support

Families value having one practitioner who is their single point of contact within the TAC, as this helps them to coordinate practitioners, services and meetings. Receiving this joined-up and informed support also reduces the need for families to tell their story multiple times, which is frustrating and upsetting, and takes up valuable time in meetings.

As well as acting as the single point of contact for the family, the key working practitioner is also the single point of contact for other practitioners working with the family. Through coordinating the work of all the practitioners in the TAC and facilitating joint planning, assessments and meetings, key working helps everyone to work together and to address shared outcomes more efficiently.

- Consider using a family-owned resource such as Early Support's 'Our Family, My Life' to bring together all relevant information about a child and their family.

Emotional support

For families, a core component of key working is emotional support. For this to be established and successfully sustained, there needs to be a trusting and open relationship between the key working practitioner and the family, with the family knowing that the key working practitioner is pro-active in their communication, honest and 'there for them'.

Being able to talk freely about their concerns and questions reduces levels of stress and anxiety for families, and this in turn reduces demands on services.

In order to build a relationship with families, key working practitioners need to have good interpersonal qualities and this is at least as important as their practitioner background. Where key working works well, families highlight that they find their key working practitioner approachable, friendly, understanding, trustworthy, and 'more human' than other practitioners with whom they may be in contact.

Where there is a recruitment process for key working practitioners, it is useful to have parental involvement to help managers to identify those candidates that demonstrate the necessary interpersonal qualities and skills.

- Key working practitioners should prioritise building trusting, long-lasting relationships with families through being proactive, accessible and open. Home visits can help to achieve this, although alternative means of communication such as phone and text are also highlighted as being effective.
- Ensure that families can contact or leave messages for their key working practitioner at all times and implement a system so that answerphone messages and emails are responded to quickly by colleagues if the key working practitioner is out of office.
- Ensure that interpersonal qualities that are important to families are reflected in the criteria for appointing key working practitioners.

Practical support

Key working practitioners signpost families to appropriate information sources and relevant services, explain processes, systems, service thresholds and terminology, and can facilitate opportunities to network with other parents. As well as distributing leaflets to families, key working practitioners will discuss the contents with them, ensuring families understand the information and that they have the opportunity to ask for clarification or more detail. As families are helped to become better informed about services and how to access them, key working helps to ensure that the child continues to receive the most appropriate support and thus helps them to achieve their full potential.

- Key working practitioners need to be informed about the nature of local services, processes and opportunities, or know where to easily access such information, for example by being familiar with the local offer.

Advocacy

Key working practitioners have a role in ensuring that the conclusions from TAC meetings are documented and used as reference points for actions and review. This can support parents in their discussions with practitioners, particularly where they feel that progress has not been as expected. Families sometimes need someone to act as a mediator with other practitioners, especially when they are unsure about what is available to them and what their rights are.

Therefore key working practitioners need to be able to be impartial. Mediation has the potential to pose a conflict of interest for key working practitioners acting in a non-designated role and/or employed by statutory services. Where this is the case, it may be more appropriate for a different practitioner in the TAC to act as advocate for the family, or for the family to be helped to access advocacy from outside the TAC, for example from parent partnership services or the PVI sector.

- Outline clear channels through which families can access advocacy and ensure that families are aware of these. This may be through their named key working practitioner, another member of the TAC or from outside of the TAC.

Planning and assessment

Families should be seen as knowing themselves best and as in a position to offer valuable and unique contributions to practitioners. Key working involves respecting this knowledge and taking it into account, for example by supporting parents and children to contribute fully to assessment and review processes. Families can also be encouraged to develop their own records about their child's experiences and progress, which can then be shared with practitioners to provide a holistic view.

It is essential that everyone in the TAC shares the same goals for the child and works on them together, by carrying out joint assessments and meetings through the single planning process. Through working collaboratively and recognising the strengths across the family and all those working with them, key working helps to put into place and maintain a co-produced and personalised support package, to adjust this where necessary and ultimately to empower parents to become more autonomous, where this is feasible.

Key working practitioners work with families with and without statutory plans. Where families are participating in an EHC plan process, maintaining continuity of key working before, during and after the plan preparation needs to be a priority.

- Planning and assessment processes need to be multi-agency and co-produced with families. Key working practitioners can help families to record their child's development and achievements, and to identify potential areas of support by using resources such as Early Support's series of Developmental Journals.

Supporting transitions

Transitions can be challenging for parents and children, and key working is of particular value during these times. By meeting with and coordinating new practitioners, and ensuring families are informed of changes, a key working practitioner can help with transitions, such as when a child enters a new service, setting, school or classroom.
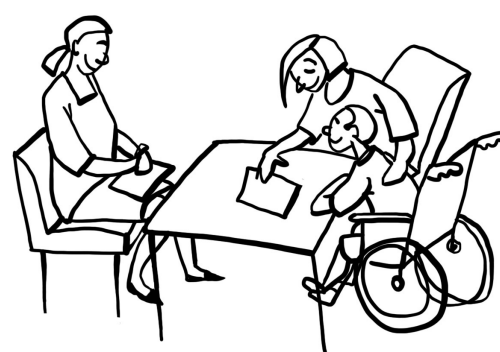
- Which transitions are sources of difficulty for your families to manage? Provide support using key working, for example, by accompanying children and parents to new settings.

Continuum of provision

A flexible system to meet the changing needs of families is crucial to successful overall service delivery, and key working is part of a local area's continuum of provision for children, young people and families. The complexity of the package of support and what families feel they need determine the level and intensity of key working; there is no 'one size fits all' approach.

Long-term intensive key working will be appropriate for some families, however short-term support may be more appropriate for others. This may be particularly relevant if a family's situation has recently changed, they are undergoing a transition or they have just received a diagnosis. Some families may only need low-level short-term support, for example if they need help applying for services or funding. Therefore it is important that families are able to receive key working support easily and quickly, particularly when their circumstances change or they need urgent help.

- Ensure practitioners have the capacity within their workload to address any urgent support needs that may arise.
- Regularly assess the local area's SEND provision to ensure that it is meeting the needs of your families, for example by using an Outcomes Star or Early Support's Multi-agency Planning and Improvement Tool (MAPIT).

Useful sources of information

CCNUK. (2009). **Care Co-ordination Network UK Key Worker Standards**. York: Care Co-ordination Network UK.

Early Support. (2012). **Key working: improving outcomes for all**. Available from http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/networks-campaigning/early-support/key-working

Mukherjee, S., Sloper, P., Beresford, B., Lund, P., & Greco, V. (2006). A resource pack: **Developing a key worker service for families with a disabled child**. York, UK: CCNUK. Available from http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/206/

Early Support's range of resources including Developmental Journals, MAPIT and Our Family, My Life can be downloaded free of charge from the Early Support website: http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/networks-campaigning/early-support/resources

3. Outcomes

- The support provided by key working is seen by families as essential and saves them valuable time, energy and emotional distress. It empowers families, increases their confidence and develops their independence.

- By working in partnership with parents, respecting their views and acknowledging their expertise, key working helps to promote a positive relationship between services and families.

- Key working enhances service efficiency by streamlining paperwork, coordinating the work of different practitioners and reducing the need for multiple meetings.

"I personally feel a lot stronger as a parent and as a person as well, they give you that confidence to be able to cope and deal with that situation, so I believe you do become that better and stronger person with the situation and with other people around you really don't you?"
Parent

"If they've got somebody who's supporting parents to make time with referrals and early intervention then perception of services is sometimes different because they're not feeling that they're having to continually fight or battle."
Commissioner

Family satisfaction
A strong message from families is that key working support is seen by them as being essential. They say they could not have coped without key working support and would not have known how to access the services that their child needed, or even have known which services were available and appropriate. From listening to families, it is clear that delivering the key working functions flexibly in response to families' holistic needs is crucial to the effective implementation of key working and provides long-lasting and wide-reaching benefits for families.

"You just don't have the knowledge that they do and I think that they set you on the right path, I think without them you'd just be, I mean we couldn't have done it without them, I wouldn't have known where to start."
Parent

- Discuss with families what aspects of key working they most value and consider how best to implement this in your area.

Promoting independence
Adopting a strengths-based approach to working with families, and enabling and empowering them, is central to the goals of key working. Indeed, an important benefit of key working from families' perspective is the added strength and resilience it gives them. Key working can develop families' independence through showing them how to access services and information, coordinate TAC meetings, engage with practitioners and negotiate with services, where appropriate.

- Ensure that key working training and supervision covers ways of promoting independence in parents and young people.

Time and energy saving
Key working saves families time and energy in a number of different ways, for example by coordinating practitioners, taking on administrative tasks, avoiding inappropriate referrals and helping families to access information and support more easily. This gives families the opportunity to spend more time being a family, with positive effects for supporting children's development and well-being.

- Are there particular tasks that families in your area find time- and energy-consuming? Consider how these could be eased through key working.

Positive relationship between services and families
Families can sometimes view their relationship with services as negative and adversarial, leading to frustration and anger. This dissatisfaction can then impact on future encounters with services. Families and practitioners report improvements in relationships resulting from the provision of key working support. Having a positive experience through key working, from the beginning of their relationship with services, improves family satisfaction and outcomes in the short- and long-term.
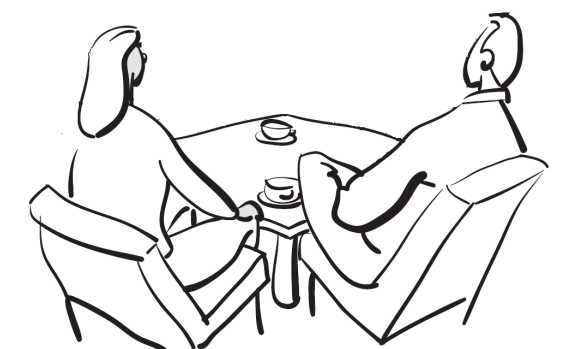
- Introduce key working support for a family as soon as possible to maximise benefits

Increased efficiency

In line with the core philosophy and objectives of key working, meetings should be combined where possible. In keeping with the collaborative nature of key working, practitioners in the TAC may benefit from co-ordinating a shared therapeutic approach and sharing responsibility for taking forward particular actions from TAC meetings. These ways of working can also result in more streamlined paperwork and record-keeping, enhancing overall service efficiency.

- Consider the different ways key working could help your service to combine and streamline meetings such as TAC meetings, Child In Need (CIN) meetings and EHC plan meetings.

Useful sources of information

Early Support. (2012). **Key working: improving outcomes for all**. Available from http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/networks-campaigning/early-support/key-working

Greco, V., Sloper, P., Webb, R., & Beecham, J. (2005). **An exploration of different models of multi-agency partnerships in key worker services for disabled children: Effectiveness and costs.** Research report RR656. Nottingham: Department of Education and Skills. Available from https://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/keyworker.pdf

Mukherjee, S., Sloper, P., Beresford, B., Lund, P., & Greco, V. (2006). **A resource pack: Developing a key worker service for families with a disabled child**. York, UK: CCNUK. Available from http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/206/

4. Impact

- Key working helps families' needs to be identified and addressed as soon as possible, improving outcomes for families and services.

- Key working can result in overall savings through increasing service efficiency and minimising the need for higher-cost services in the long-term.

- Benefits for families should not be given solely a monetary value and are key to delivering a high quality service.

- Key working is a core element in helping local authorities to meet the requirements of SEND reforms.

"The bulk of key working that we're delivering is much more early intervention and preventative."
Commissioner

Identifying and addressing needs as early as possible

Key working practitioners are well-placed to identify potential problems early, due to their professional training, holistic approach and close relationships with families and children. Indeed, families recognise that key working practitioners may be able to identify needs that they would not otherwise be aware of.

Earlier identification of problems, a joined-up multi-agency approach and more rapid access to services makes it more likely that support for a child or for other family needs can be provided as soon as it is needed. Addressing needs as early as possible minimises the probability of other, potentially more costly, problems arising.

- Ensure that key working practitioners can put support packages in place as soon as a need is identified as part of the TAC and in partnership with the family.
- Consider the pathways by which early identification of problems may reduce the burden on other services.

"How do you put a value, how do you put a unit cost on actually having that person help me and take the time and understand a very complicated process but also have the opportunity to say and this is what else is going on in my life and actually I've got two or three children and I've got all of these appointments and I've got this to co-ordinate; how do you put a value on that as a resource, it's actually the impact on that family, that's what parents have told us isn't it?"
Commissioner

Cost-savings

Key working ensures that services and resources are targeted and used most effectively. Where key working practitioners perform functions such as organising and minuting meetings, and researching information for families, this reduces potential duplication across the TAC. Key working practitioners can also identify potential funding and other opportunities for families from external sources.

By empowering families, providing support early and avoiding problems escalating, key working can minimise the need for other, higher-cost, crisis services. Local areas also report that effective key working, co-production and increased family satisfaction reduce the number of tribunals. It is therefore important to take a long-term view of the benefits of key working and the opportunities for cost-savings. There is a strong conviction among managers and commissioners that key working, done well, has a significant impact on cost reduction in service delivery.

- Consider how best to implement or develop key working in your area so that overall services and resources are used most effectively.
- Consider the long-term cost and savings of key working in the context of your service, for example models of potential savings could be constructed by considering different outcome pathways for case study families.

Beyond financial benefits

A strong message from managers and commissioners is that key working is helping them to provide a high quality service, improving the lives and well-being of families. They recognise that a monetary value alone cannot and should not be placed on this. Indeed all children and young people, regardless of whether they have SEND or not, have the right to access high quality and appropriate learning and development opportunities.

- Consider the non-monetary benefits of key working for families in your area, and how key working can help to

meet local area's strategic aims regarding outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Meeting the requirements of the SEND reforms

The Children and Families Act sets out a statutory requirement for education, health and social care to work together and put families at the centre of service delivery. Key working embodies these changes and is one of the mechanisms that local authorities can use to help them to meet the requirements of the new legislation.

In the Code of Practice, it is stated that local authorities should consider adopting a key working approach, which provides some or all of the ten functions listed by Early Support (see Introduction). This support could be provided by statutory services or the PVI sector. The Code of Practice also highlights that key working should be available to children and young people with SEND across the age range, covering early years provision, statutory schooling and preparation for adulthood.

An evaluation of the SEND pathfinders by SQW in 2013 found that key working has a positive impact on the extent to which the changes are family-centred and how well families understand the new process. With the reforms having statutory force, it is crucial to resource and prioritise key working appropriately and to highlight the benefits it offers for both services and families.

- Consider how key working can help your area meet the requirements of the Children and Families Act and the Code of Practice

Useful sources of information

Craston, M., Thom, G., Spivack, R., Lambert, C., Yorath, F., Purdon, S., Bryston, C., Sheikh, S., & Smith, L. (2013). **Impact evaluation of the SEND pathfinder programme: Research report**, October 2013. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/impact-evaluation-of-the-send-pathfinder-programme

Department for Education, & Department for Health. (2013). **Draft Special Education Needs (SEN) Code of Practice for 0-25 years**. Available from https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/special-educational-needs-sen-code-of-practice-and-regulations

Early Support. (2012). **Key working: improving outcomes for all**. Available from http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/networks-campaigning/early-support/key-working

Greco, V., Sloper, P., Webb, R., & Beecham, J. (2005). **An exploration of different models of multi-agency partnerships in key worker services for disabled children**: Effectiveness and costs. Research report RR656. Nottingham: Department of Education and Skills. Available from https://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/keyworker.pdf

KIDS (2012). **The development of key working for disabled children**. Available from http://www.kids.org.uk/delivering-inclusion

Mukherjee, S., Sloper, P., Beresford, B., Lund, P., & Greco, V. (2006). A resource pack: **Developing a key worker service for families with a disabled child.** York, UK: CCNUK. Available from http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/206/

Noaks, L. (2012). **Evaluation report: Key worker pilot** (ABMU, Bridgend; Neath/Port Talbot & Swansea). Available from http://www.earlysupportwales.org.uk/news/2916
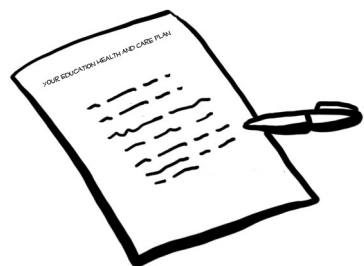
5. Structure – what needs to be in place for effective key working?

5a. Embedding key working locally

- Key working should build on existing multi-agency ways of working, clear channels of communication and effective information sharing.

- Key working is a valuable way of working across the workforce and should be reflected as such at all strategic levels and in workforce development plans.

- There are different ways of implementing and delivering key working, and these are affected by the existing ways of working and service provision in a local area.

- High-quality, clear and accessible information about key working needs to be readily available to families and practitioners.

"X would share information with us because she knows there's the confidence, there's the confidentiality and she knows what we would say and how we would use that."
Manager (discussing communication between health and education services)

Multi-agency working, communication and information sharing

The underpinning of key working is a principled multi-agency approach. This approach is built on a basis of trust between different services and a history of ways of working successfully together, and commitment to key working should be evident at practice and strategic levels. Although not essential to key working, co-location can be a particularly effective way of encouraging communication and multi-agency working.

Multi-agency communication and information sharing is at the core of key working. Service-wide protocols for record-keeping and information sharing are important to enable this to be implemented effectively.

- Consider whether co-location is feasible for your service.
- Involve multiple services in developing protocols for record-

"Because of the approach with the joint working, it's been established for such a long time, that was the platform that made it [key working] work so well."
Manager

keeping and information sharing, for example having proformas for TAC meeting minutes.

Strategic visions

Joint commissioning between the health authority and different local authority services such as education and social care is key to delivering integrated multi-agency provision. Single points of referral for children and young people with SEND help to ensure that referrals are handled quickly and effectively. This needs representation at regular meetings from all of the services that may be involved in the care of a child with SEND enabling plans to be put into action efficiently.

Where key working is implemented effectively, it is represented on multi-agency strategic groups within local areas. One such example of good practice is where a manager with responsibility for key working provision co-chairs a local area SEND board along with the children and young people's services commissioner and the CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group) commissioner. The SEND strategy should include upwards reporting to Health and Wellbeing boards. A number of workstreams may sit underneath the SEND strategy, for example focusing on the local offer or EHC plans. Key working also feeds into strategies beyond SEND, for example relating to a local area's Early Help strategy. Therefore the key working approach should be threaded throughout all strategic levels within local areas.

In keeping with the co-production ethos, it is important to include parents and young people on strategic groups; one exemplar of this is a multi-agency steering group for Early Support with representation from social care, education, health and a parent and carer forum.

- Implement a single point of referral for SEND services by establishing a multi-agency group.
- Embed key working in local area strategy and involve representatives from different services and PVIs, along with parents and young people.

Awareness raising

Awareness raising about key working and the benefits it brings is crucial. It is essential to disseminate information about key working and its benefits for families, as well as its efficiency for services, to all practitioners likely to be involved in the care of a child or young person with SEND.

In some local areas, key working functions are embedded in the way of working and thus key working is on offer to all families. Families may still need to be informed about the key working approach so they can express their preference for who will be their single point of contact in the TAC.

In other local areas, key working may be viewed as a separable service and therefore, in order for key working to reach the families who most need it, information about the service needs to be

made available. Every Disabled Child Matters (2012) identified that in some areas delivering key working there is no publicly available information or where information did exist, it was not clear. It is crucial that clear, accessible information is easily available to families and that practitioners such as health visitors and GPs are well-informed about key working in their local area so that they can pass information on to families.

- Distribute clear and concise information about key working to all practitioners working in education, health and social care services.
- Ensure that up-to-date, clear and accessible information is publicly available online and at targeted, appropriate sites such as GP surgeries and Children's Centres.

Workforce development

Embedding a widespread and family-centred key working approach can be facilitated by key working functions being included in the job descriptions of all practitioners who work in education, health and social care services. Training in key working functions should also be part of the core training and continuous professional development for all practitioners, for example in one area key working training has been delivered to all staff in a local special school.

The broad knowledge and experience of designated key workers provide a valuable resource for enhancing other practitioners' skills and knowledge bases. Peer to peer training is an important component of ensuring a shared consensus on the key working philosophy.

- Include information about key working functions in induction and training for all practitioners.
- Consider how your service might capitalise on having an up-skilled workforce and how this may benefit quality of provision for families, service efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Funding sources

The funding required for key working depends on how it is implemented. Non-designated key working practitioners benefit from having support from a funded administrative role and services may choose to provide additional training opportunities for key working. Designated key working may require a higher level of direct funding, for example to cover the salaries and overheads of key working practitioners and managers.

It is clear that unstable funding can be a major issue. Short-term funding can affect the level of commitment and involvement from practitioners and prevent long-term plans being formed and actioned effectively. Families also need the security of knowing that the provision will stay with them. Furthermore, key working is affected by budget cuts in other areas as this can affect the services that families can access.

* Identify any aspects of key working provision that may require additional funding, and consider how this will be provided. Where multi-agency funding is provided, this can promote the sense of ownership and participation across different services.

Accountability

Key working practitioners need to understand the accountability of their role, to the families they work with along with their professional responsibility, and be aware of accountability of other services involved in the TAC. This is particularly highlighted when fulfilling statutory duties such as preparing EHC plans. Cross service agreements and integrated management can support key working and help to ensure that lines of accountability are clear and maintained.

* Ensure that accountability pathways are in place and communicated clearly to all TAC members.

Local context

It is vital for key working to be well adapted to the local context and to work with, and enhance, the existing statutory and PVI services. Key working practitioners need to know what is available for families and how to access support, drawing on the local offer. It is also important for services to identify and understand the varied needs of the families in their area, for example regarding cultural expectations and potential interpretation support.

There can be confusion about the terms 'key worker' and 'key working'. In some areas, there are practitioners who fulfil key working functions without this term being used, for example, 'lead professionals'. There can be important differences in the level of support that is provided, for example lead professionals typically focus on coordination and are less likely to provide emotional support. If a lead professional feels that a family would benefit from more intensive support, they could help to ensure that a fuller range of key working functions is provided.

Key working may also exist in local areas for meeting needs other than SEND, for example family nurse partnership services and mental health services. Where appropriate, there will be benefits in SEND key working practitioners coordinating with these different services.

* Consider the range of ways in which key working functions are already delivered in your area, how these could be extended and how these can work most effectively with each other.

Useful sources of information

CCNUK. (2009). **Care Co-ordination Network UK Key Worker Standards**. York: Care Co-ordination Network UK.

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5b. Support and management

- Families and practitioners all need clarity as to the nature of the key working role.

- Initial and ongoing support in the form of training, supervision, peer support and administrative support is key. This helps key working practitioners develop their skills, to perform the role to their full potential and to manage their workload.

Clear roles and responsibilities

It is important that key working practitioners have clearly and explicitly defined roles, and so it is recommended that key working functions are routinely included in job descriptions for all practitioners who may take on key working responsibilities. It is also recommended that the role is clearly explained to families, so they have realistic expectations of what to expect.

- Produce a clear description of key working duties for practitioners, and also communicate this to families.

Administrative support

Key working practitioners and managers highlight the crucial need for administrative support for tasks such as typing and circulating minutes from meetings, and contacting practitioners about upcoming TAC meetings. This is particularly important for non-designated key working practitioners as they may not otherwise have sufficient time available to fully meet their key working responsibilities.

- Ensure that administrative support is available for key working practitioners where they need it, for example to compile minutes, arrange meetings and research information or support provision for families.

Supervision

Supervision cultures vary amongst the range of practitioners who deliver key working functions. It is clear that high-quality supervision for key working is crucial from a manager or other appropriately experienced person who understands the role

"There's always a big benefit of being in a team, a solid team, if you don't know the answer, there are people to ask and share information, but also I think as a key worker yourself, there's a huge importance on the supervision that we get, the peer supervision, the structured supervision."
Key working practitioner

and its demands. Key working practitioners value flexible supervision from their manager, for example by being able to discuss urgent matters in good time, complemented by opportunities for peer supervision.

A core objective of key working is to help families to become more independent. Therefore key worker practitioners need to have the skills and supervision to effectively manage the relationship with families to ensure that they do not become overly dependent on the key working support and that reasonable boundaries are maintained.

- Ensure that key working practitioners are provided with appropriate and timely supervision.

Workload management and time demands

The management of workload and protection of time for non-designated key working practitioners is a significant challenge. It is recognised that where the local area has a broad ethos of multi-agency and person-centred working, practitioners may not have protected time for carrying out key working functions. In this scenario, provision of administrative support and supervision to ensure the key working practitioners are able to manage their workload become even more critical to the success of key working.

Furthermore in some roles, for example for teaching staff, it may be difficult to arrange and attend meetings outside of core working hours and in these situations, cover may be needed. In services where practitioners can manage their own diaries, practitioners report being able to more easily allow time for delivering key working functions.

- Consider how delivering key working could impact on the workloads of practitioners and how this could best be managed, for example through administrative support, flexible diary management, provision of cover for core role.

Initial training

Induction training covering the nature of key working and its underlying ethos is essential. It is crucial that key working training is delivered to a multi-agency audience and that families are involved in developing and delivering the training. It can also be useful to offer practitioners who are new to key working the opportunity to shadow a practitioner who is more experienced in this way of working.

- Training should be co-produced with families and should be delivered to multi-agency audiences, such as with the Early Support Key Working training.

Ongoing support

Key working practitioners need to be able to access ongoing training on aspects of local

provision and continuing professional development. Relevant online resources could be a more flexible way of providing training opportunities. Peer support is an important mode of delivery for ongoing support, capitalising on the different areas of expertise and perspectives of key working practitioners. This can occur through an email list, monthly team meeting and on an informal basis if key working practitioners encounter each other on a regular basis. Regular face-to-face meetings could also include opportunities for external speakers, such as housing officers, or discussion about specific complex cases and may be particularly valued in rural areas.

- Ensure that ongoing training is prioritised and consider the ways in which this may be best implemented for your organisation, for example occasional external speakers, regular meetings or email lists.

Useful sources of information

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CCNUK. (2009). **Care Co-ordination Network UK Key Worker Standards**. York: Care Co-ordination Network UK.

Early Support. (2012). **Key working: improving outcomes for all.** Available from http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/networks-campaigning/early-support/key-working

Greco, V., Sloper, P., Webb, R., & Beecham, J. (2005). **An exploration of different models of multi-agency partnerships in key worker services for disabled children: Effectiveness and costs.** Research report RR656. Nottingham: Department of Education and Skills. Available from www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/keyworker.pdf

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For more information on **Early Support Key Working** training, please visit http://www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/networks-campaigning/early-support/training

5c. Managing transitions across the continuum

- Families appreciate having support from key working to help ensure continuity through transitions and as their circumstances change.

- Key working should reflect the level of support required by a family at that point in time, and this is likely to vary over time.

Changing key working practitioner

Key working can change for a variety of reasons such as a shift in focus or intensity, or a new practitioner delivering key working functions. A change in their key working practitioner, either permanently or due to a period of absence, can be difficult for families, especially if it coincides with other periods of transition, for example the move from early years settings to statutory schooling.

This may be particularly relevant for non-designated key working, for example if families choose key working practitioners who work in early years settings. To manage this, a period of overlap has proven to be useful, for example where an early years key working practitioner works alongside the new key working practitioner during the child's first term at school. PVI organisations that deliver key working functions may be able to offer greater continuity to families as there are no traditional boundaries, for example if a child ceases therapy services with their physiotherapist key working practitioner or if they have an early years key working practitioner and move into schooling. There is also a need to establish formal arrangements for covering the absence of key working practitioners, both for short and long-term periods of leave.

- When there is a change in key working practitioner, it is useful to have a period of overlap where the new and previous key working practitioners work together with the family.
- Develop a service-wide formal process for covering key working practitioner absence and ensure that families are fully informed about this.

"It's kind of those levels, isn't it, of key working so there might be times when they're doing lots, when they're having lots of input and doing a lot of practical things and getting things in place but there'll be other times when they're just kind of meeting and having those conversations that parents want to have…..it's as and when they need it."
Manager

Reducing support and maintaining contact

A core objective of key working is to build strength and resilience and, where possible, to help families to reach a point where they need less intensive key working support. Some parents or young people may become their own key worker and they may need support with this transition.

Even if families are not currently receiving key working support, they value the reassurance of knowing that short-term or back-up support is there for them in the future if they need it. This is particularly relevant for designated key working. Leaving the door open for families in this way is part of having a flexible and adaptable service and it is unlikely to significantly increase workload, as families often only request time-limited support such as one-off assistance in completing an unfamiliar form. It is important that key working practitioners ensure that families always know how to access help in such situations, for example by providing the relevant contact details or informing them about drop-in sessions.

Although more areas are now delivering key working functions across the age range, this is not universally the case and in some areas, key working is focused on the early years only. Children and young people of all ages, along with their families, benefit from key working, and thus it should be offered from birth to young adulthood and should also be available to cover transition into adult services. If key working is available for a certain duration or to families with a child within a specific age-range, then it is important that this is explained clearly to families when key working begins and that strategies for exiting are put in place well in advance.

- Leave the door open for families if their needs increase, for example by providing stable contact details and informing them about support groups or drop-in sessions.
- Be clear with families from the start about how long key working will last.
- Ensure that there is key working provision for children and young people from ages 0-25, in line with the SEND reforms. This may involve prioritising the attendance of staff who work with adolescents and young adults at key working training sessions and reflecting these aims in local area strategic goals.

Useful sources of information

CCNUK. (2009). **Care Co-ordination Network UK Key Worker Standards**. York: Care Co-ordination Network UK.

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The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) is the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England, with links to the other UK nations. CDC works to influence national policy that impacts upon disabled children and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their families. The CDC Council is made up of a variety of professional, voluntary and statutory organisations, including disabled young people and parent representatives. CDC's broad based membership and extensive networks of contacts provides a unique overview of current issues. It also enables us to promote collaborative and partnership working among organisations.

CDC hosts the following networks and projects;

•	National Parent Partnership Network
•	Special Education Consortium
•	Transition Information Network
•	Making Ourselves Heard
•	Preparing for Adulthood
•	Independent Support
•	Early Support

CDC is also part of the consortium that delivers the Every Disabled Child Matters campaign.