

**NEATH PORT TALBOT**  
**Joint Agency Protocol for the Assessment of**  
**Children in Need and their families**

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# **Joint Agency Protocol for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families**

## **1. Definition**

This multi agency protocol sets out the way in which all agencies operating within the Neath Port Talbot County Borough will work with the National framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families.

The National Framework for Assessment establishes a mandatory framework for use by all those who work with children and families assessing whether a child is in need under the Children Act 1989. It is intended to provide a valuable foundation for policy and practice for all professionals and agencies who manage and provide services to children.

This protocol reflects the shared commitment from all agencies in the Neath Port Talbot County Borough to co-operate together on both a strategic and a practice level in order to provide a consistent, co-ordinated and integrated service, so that within the resources available the most positive outcomes possible for children in need and their families can be achieved.

The introduction of the technological Integrated Children's System has enabled an update of this protocol as well as many of the systems and procedures associated with children in need, children in need of protection and children looked after.

Procedures specific to Child Protection are contained within the All Wales Child Protection Procedures and are not repeated here. This protocol is specific to referral and assessment which cuts across children in need and child protection matters.

## 2. Principles

This protocol has been agreed in order to achieve the following: -

- (a) Effective implementation of the National Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their families.
- (b) The involvement of all agencies working with children in need and their families.
- (c) The promotion of a consistent response across agencies and a thorough assessment of children's needs.
- (d) To identify three levels of need and establish priority of need for appropriate service response.
- (e) To encourage flexibility in responding to the needs of children and families.
- (f) To ensure that best practice is promoted in line with current legislation and Welsh Assembly Government guidance.
- (g) To avoid duplication of intervention with children and families.
- (h) To ensure quality of referrals, recordings and assessments.
- (i) To improve outcomes for children in need and their families.
- (j) To act on the recommendations of the Victoria Climbié enquiry, report and recommendations.

### **3. Partnership with Children and Families**

The majority of parents want to do the best for their children, whatever their circumstances or difficulties.

In the process of finding out what is happening to a child, it will be critical to develop a co-operative working relationship with parents. Caregivers need to feel respected and informed, that staff are being open and honest with them, so that they in turn are confident about providing vital information about their child, themselves and their circumstances. Furthermore, for assessments to be carried out under the *Assessment Framework for Children in need and their Families*, consent from families must be obtained. See 5.3.1

The objective of working with family members must always be to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. The child, therefore, must be kept in focus. It requires sensitivity to and understanding of the circumstances of families and their particular needs, for example where English is not a parent's first language or where adults who are significant to a child are not living in the same household or where a parent has a disability.

Developing a working relationship with children and family members will not always be easy to achieve and can be difficult especially when there have been concerns about significant harm to the child. However resistant the family or difficult the circumstances, it remains important to continue to try to find ways of engaging the family in the assessment process.

### **4. Statement of Priorities**

The Statement of Priorities contained within this protocol, sets out the categories under which an assessment may be obtained.

The aim of the Statement of Priorities is to ensure that referral and assessment procedures discriminate between

different types and levels of need and produce a timely and effective service response.

## **5. Process of Referral Making**

The multi agency referral form should be completed and in doing so, the referring agency should consider the following:

### **5.1 Is the criteria for referral met?**

Is this a child in need as defined by the Children Act 1989 and would this child's needs be best assessed and met through Local Authority social services intervention or through a referral to another agency?

### **5.2 Priority of Referral**

Does the referring agency consider this to be a child in need, or a child in need of protection.

### **5.3 Completion of the Joint Agency Referral Form**

The practice guidance for completion of the form should be used. Provision of as much factual information as possible regarding the child's status, family and networks will greatly assist the assessment.

#### **5.3.1 Consent and Confidentiality – Parents/Carers**

In the majority of situations, agencies will work in partnership with parents and the child/young person, informing them of concerns and seeking agreement before discussing a referral about them with Social Services. However, there will be situations where informing parents may result directly in harm to a child or reduce the ability of statutory agencies (including the Police) to safeguard a child's welfare or prevent the Police carrying out their lawful duty. **Only** in these circumstances, will the duty social worker accept a referral without the referring

agency having discussed it with the parents and child/young person.

Where the referring agency has sought agreement from the parents for a referral to be made but it has been refused, the referrer may still make a referral if this is in the best interests of the child. The referrer must consider the available information and use their professional judgement in the context of the *Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families* and *Safeguarding Children: Working Together for Positive Outcomes* to determine whether to make a referral regardless.

If the referrer is uncertain whether to make a referral, the referrer should seek a discussion with the Duty Manager. Where a referrer makes a referral to Social Services without having considered whether to seek agreement from the parents and child/young person, the referrer and the duty social worker should discuss whether seeking agreement is likely to put the child at risk of or at increased risk of significant harm. As a result of this:

- They may agree that there are significant harm issues and also that it is not appropriate to seek consent at this time. The duty social worker will take the referral.

Or

- They may agree that there are significant harm issues but that it would nevertheless be appropriate to inform the parent that a referral has been made. The duty social worker will take the referral.

Or

- They may agree that there are no significant harm issues which would preclude seeking consent, and that the referrer will seek agreement for the referral to be made.

If agreement cannot be reached, the duty social worker will accept the referral and discuss with their Team Manager how to progress the consent issue with the family. The Team Manager may wish to make reference to the *Neath Port Talbot Area Child Protection Committee Protocol – Regarding the Resolution of Professional Disagreements*.

If informed consent has not been sought or has been withheld, the referring agency must consider if there is an overriding public interest and therefore justification for the disclosure of information. In making this decision the following questions should be considered.

- Is the disclosure necessary for the prevention and detection of crime, prevention of disorder, to protect public safety, or to protect the rights and freedoms of others?
- Is disclosure necessary for the protection of young or other vulnerable people?
- What risk to others is posed by this individual?
- What is the vulnerability of those who may be at risk?
- What will be the impact of disclosure on the offender?
- Is the disclosure proportionate to the intended aim?
- Is there an equally effective but less intrusive alternative means of achieving that aim? (Section 115 Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

Occasionally, agencies will contact Children and Young People Services to elicit whether a child or young person is known. The enquiring agency will need to have considered the basis upon which the enquiry is being made, that is, are there potential child in need or child protection concerns, and is a referral likely to be made. In any case, information will be shared with statutory agencies as sharing of information is in the interests of working together for positive outcomes for children and young people.

### 5.3.2. Consent and Confidentiality – the child

Is the child aware that a referral is being made? The judgement as to whether to inform the child must be based upon the circumstances, the child's age and capacity to understand the reason for the referral.

### 5.4 Integrated Children's System

The Joint Agency Referral form has been designed to fit with the dimensions of the Framework for Assessment and the Integrated Children's System. In this sense, the referral information will feed and flow into any or all of the following stages of social services intervention.

### 5.5 Referrals on unborn babies

When unborn babies are referred to Children and Young People Services, the referral will be made no sooner than at 24 weeks gestation. The Core Assessment will be completed by 32 weeks gestation and a multi-agency plan put in place to address the child's needs at birth and for discharge. Should a Child Protection Conference be deemed necessary, this should be convened at no later than 34 weeks.

Where mothers are known to have a history of drug and/or alcohol misuse, a parallel referral will be made to CDAT/WGCADA. The assessment of this agency will form part of the Core Assessment.

## **6. Response to Referral**

There is an expectation that within one working day of a referral being received by Social Services, or new information about an existing situation being received, there will be a decision about what response is required. The response may include no action. The referrer will be informed of the decision and its rationale as well as

parents or carers and the child, if appropriate within 5 working days.

## **7. Initial Assessment**

This occurs where a decision has been made that more information is needed. Initial Assessments should normally be completed within 7 working days.

The purpose of an Initial Assessment is to decide:

- Whether the child is a child in need, a child in need of protection or whether there are no assessed needs.
- An analysis of the child and family's needs and strengths and the nature of any services needed to meet those needs.
- Where the service should come from
- Within what timescales
- Whether a more detailed (core) assessment should be carried out.

If not already obtained by the referrer, the social worker must obtain parental permission to contact other agencies for information to contribute to the assessment, except in cases where the child's safety would be jeopardised.

Depending on the child's circumstances, an initial assessment may include some or all of the following: -

- Interviews with child and family members, as appropriate. The child will always be seen and the child's views, wishes and feelings ascertained in accordance with age and level of ability.
- Involvement of other agencies in gathering and providing information, as appropriate
- Consultation with supervisor/manager;
- Record of initial analysis;

- Decisions on further action/no action/whether to pursue child protection enquiries;
- Record of decisions/rationale with family/agencies;
- Informing other agencies of the decisions

The Initial Assessment Record is a tool to assist social workers to collect information systematically in relating to:

- The child's developmental progress
- Each caregiver's parenting capacity
- The impact of family and environmental factors

## **8. Initial Assessment Plan**

The initial assessment will lead to one of the following

- No further action
- Signposting to other Agencies
- Core Assessment/Child Protection Enquiries
- Plan, including Service Provision.

If the outcome of the initial assessment is that Children and Young People Services are required to co-ordinate the plan to meet the assessed needs, then a plan will be formulated.

This plan must be shared with those agencies contributing to the progress of the plan. The plan needs to reflect the identified needs to ensure optimal outcomes for the child/young person. Provision of advice and services will be detailed on the plan alongside timescales for intervention and reviews.

## **9. Core Assessment**

A Core Assessment is an in depth assessment of a child and family within their community and it follows from a

referral and Initial Assessment. A core assessment is always completed, following a child protection enquiry, for Looked After Children and for children with complex needs. It should normally be completed within 35 working days of the completion of the Initial assessment, or within 42 working days of the referral.

A Core Assessment is completed for each individual child.

All relevant agencies should contribute to the Core Assessment. The assessment should incorporate any other assessments, e.g. statements of special educational needs.

## **10. Child's Plan**

Following the assessment and where there is an identified need for ongoing social work led intervention, a plan will be developed for each individual child.

Children's plans will be monitored and reviewed in line with, Child in Need Review standards, looked after children standards and regulations or child protection procedures, whichever is relevant.

## **11. Complaints, Advocacy and Access to Records**

Parents and children have a right to complain about the services they receive. Local authorities are required by section 26 of the Children Act 1989 to establish complaints procedures, and children and parents will be provided with information about these as part of the assessment process. All other agencies have a requirement to maintain a complaints procedure and parents who have a complaint about a particular agency's services will be advised to pursue this with the agency concerned.

Social Services have a duty to provide clients with access to their records, and to provide an advocate, if required, for children and young people in need or looked after.

## **12. Training**

Training in the use of the assessment framework and its underlying principles will make an important contribution to the skills and competencies of the workforce engaging in helping children and families in their communities.

A multi disciplinary programme of training to meet staff needs will commence to complement awareness raising within individual agencies.

## **13. Evaluation and Review of Protocol and Assessment process**

There will be a periodic evaluation and review of the joint assessment protocol and process by Neath Port Talbot's LSCB. This evaluation will include reference to the specific quality assurance indicators outlined in this document as well as additional qualitative indicators, such as the views of service users and practitioners. In this way, the evaluation and review of the protocol and assessment process will form an integral part of a continuous improvement process.

## **14. Reference List**

- ACPC Child Protection Procedures and associated protocols
- VCI Audit Recommendations and Action Plan
- Framework for the Assessment of Need of Children and their families
- Integrated Children's System Guidance
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Safeguarding Children: Working Together for Positive Outcomes
- National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services in Wales
- Safeguarding Children: Working Together under the Children Act, 2004