



Working Together to Safeguard Children Supporting Effective Early Intervention and Prevention Services in Leeds Clusters – Twenty Practice Points

Introduction

This note brings together current thinking in Leeds about effective inter-agency working in clusters to support early help. This means 'providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life' (Working Together, Page 11).

Our work on this is informed by updated guidance in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', published by HM Government in March 2013, regional and national studies, the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan, the Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy and our on-going journey of improvement for children's services.

It takes account of recent developments and investments in cluster working. This includes the commitment from Schools Forum to continue to fund cluster working over the next three years, the restructuring of children's social work teams from Spring 2012, development of Early Start teams over 2012/13, the introduction of targeted services leadership functions in all clusters by January 2013, our Families First programme and access to a developing range of restorative and evidence based family support services for the most vulnerable families.

In recent years in Leeds we have collectively made the improvement of safeguarding services our highest priority. In autumn 2011 OfSTED found that 'there is a strong sense of shared responsibility for this work with agreement secured across partner agencies at the highest level. The message is that, in Leeds, 'safeguarding is everyone's business'.

Building on this, we want to ensure that our early intervention and preventative support to children, young people and families is well understood and as effective as possible.

Key issues for our services:

- Safely reduce the need for babies and children under 2 to be taken into care
- An agreed offer of parent and family support available through all 25 clusters
- Ensure each cluster has good multi-agency representation to deliver the CYPP
- Ensure each cluster has information sharing agreements which enable full implementation of 'Top 100 methodology'
- Ensure robust Guidance and Support, and access to intensive family support to prevent stepping up to and enable stepping down from a social work intervention
- Increase quantity and improve quality of Common Internal Records and Common Assessment Frameworks carried out prior to requests for social work services
- Promote the inclusion of disabled children to access short breaks within local universal provision



Shaping an effective early help offer will include:

- Identifying problems at an early stage and preventing escalation of problems
- Child focused practice, shaped by views of and quality relationships with children, young people and families
- A clear interface between universal, targeted and specialist services supported by effective information sharing protocols and joint working arrangements
- Access to services where the step up to and step down from interventions is clear, consistent and easy to understand
- Good quality family assessments which are dynamic and lead to quick help, focused and clear action plans, regular reviews and no drift
- All agencies working together, providing a team around the child/family, particularly where there are complex multiple problems such as domestic violence, mental health issues, housing problems and substance misuse
- Services of a high quality, well managed front line work, staff with access to regular formal supervision and periodic audits and reviews of case work

Elements of our early intervention work in Leeds currently include:

- **Multi-agency cluster partnerships** in 25 localities to support effective local working and a focus on children's services priorities; support and co-ordination from a **Targeted Services Leader**
- A range of **staff in universal settings and cluster teams** to support early help work with children and their families
- Increased good assessment practice using the **Common Internal Record** paperwork and the **Common Assessment Framework** to support co-ordinated early intervention work
- **Cluster 'top 100' methodology** work to identify, improve co-ordination of and support for vulnerable children and families at risk of poor outcomes
- **Cluster support and guidance arrangements** in each area to co-ordinate early intervention and prevention provision across the age and service spectrum from 0-19
- Availability of children's social work service **duty and advice team** which provides support to any practitioner who is concerned about a child's welfare and would like advice from an appropriately trained, qualified social worker
- **Follow up of requests to duty and advice** not requiring a social worker via local Targeted Services Leaders
- **Stepping down from social work interventions** through cluster support and guidance arrangements
- Swift access to **support and intervention services** where there is a need for intensive family support that cannot be met within the universal offer of service



Analysing the effectiveness of local arrangements

A number of papers and studies on early intervention and prevention with children and families have been published in recent years. This includes work by the Institute of Public Care / Oxford Brookes University – Early Intervention and Prevention with Children and Families: Getting the Most from Team around the Family Systems, June 2012 (the publication is available online at <http://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/publications/index.php?absid=716>).

Based on available research and their recent work with a number of local partnerships the Institute of Public Care have published a self-assessment tool. This incorporates a set of 10 standards and prompts for local partnerships to use in analysing the effectiveness of their existing arrangements. It is intended also to be developmental, prompting partnerships to think about what they might need to do to either develop or further hone their local arrangements as a result. The tool is available online at <http://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/publications/index.php?absid=717>.

What this means in practice for cluster partnerships and local services in Leeds – twenty practice points

From recent discussions with a number of cluster representatives, service managers, local authority partners and the cluster support group the following areas of practice have been identified to support effective early help work.

1. The principles of ‘safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility’ and ‘a child centred approach’ underpin the work of the cluster.
2. There are good points of communication and contact with a range of local agencies which have a role to play in the safeguarding agenda.
3. Wherever possible individual services and universal services take swift action to meet the needs of children and young people.
4. There are clear arrangements in place to access additional support for children and families who would benefit from early help (eg. top 100 work, guidance and support meetings, early start allocation meetings).
5. These arrangements allow swift support, with oversight from the Targeted Services Leader and periodic reviews of their focus and effectiveness.
6. There are clear processes in place and access to skilled advice to support the effective assessment of the needs of individual children and families who may benefit from early help services (eg common internal record, common assessment framework (CAF), family CAF).
7. A range of staff are trained to undertake the lead practitioner role with access to support and advice to do this effectively from local managers and the Targeted Services Leader.
8. Colleagues are trained and supported to undertake high quality assessments with clear, outcome-focused plans and family involvement.
9. Assessments are systematic and dynamic, they cover the child’s development needs, parents’ or carers’ capacity to respond to those needs and the impact and influence of wider family, community and environmental circumstances.



10. Where a child has other assessments these are co-ordinated so that the child does not become lost between the different agencies involved and their different procedures.
11. There are clear criteria for accessing services which are well understood by professionals in the cluster.
12. The availability of the children's social work service duty and advice team is clearly understood and promoted across local services.
13. There are effective links with the local children's social work service including clear arrangements for stepping down from social work interventions to local cluster partners.
14. The cluster has access to a range of effective, evidence based and restorative services to address assessed needs early. This includes high quality support in universal services and cluster teams along with access to specialist support when needed for assistance with, for example, health issues, problems relating to drugs, alcohol and domestic violence.
15. The cluster has access to services which focus on improving family functioning and building the family's own capability to solve problems; these are done within a structured, evidence-based framework involving regular review to ensure that real change is being made.
16. Arrangements are in place to support effective sharing of information between professionals and local agencies to support effective identification, assessment, service provision and review.
17. The outcome based accountability (OBA) action plan to safely reduce the number of children looked after is regularly reviewed and data is analysed to measure the impact of early help work alongside data on children's social work service interventions.
18. The cluster supports a culture of continuous learning and improvement and identifies opportunities to draw on what works and share good practice, this includes auditing a sample of case files every six months, high quality supervision arrangements, identifying and moderating good local practice across clusters.
19. The cluster supports periodic reviews of cases which can provide valuable lessons about how organisations are working together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
20. The cluster supports local innovation and proposes changes that are informed by evidence and examination of local data.

Based on this we have developed a **cluster assessment tool** to use with cluster partnerships and local services, helping to highlight areas of good practice and areas for development. An example of how this could look is attached.



Tools and resources to support this work include:

Documents

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (<http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00213160/working-together-to-safeguard-children>)
- Children's Services Handbook
- Children and Young People's Plan
- Early Start handbook
- Top 100 Methodology
- Standard terms of reference and paperwork for support and guidance meetings
- Information Sharing Agreement for cluster support and guidance meetings
- Audit tool and supervision policy
- Family Learning Signature
- Helping Hand Framework for Early Start Teams

Workforce development opportunities

- Family support training eg. summer school
- Restorative practice training
- Area based family support practitioner events
- Families First briefings
- CAF training
- Working With Parents Level 3 /4 qualifications
- Family Support Conference planned for Oct 2013

Further information

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