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Review Date: July 2016

Southampton City Council

Protocol for Children's Social Care Assessment

August 2015

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013 sets out that: 'Local authorities, with their partners, should develop and publish local protocols for assessment. A local protocol should set out clear arrangements for how cases will be managed once a child is referred into local authority children's social care. The detail of each protocol will be led by the local authority in discussion with their partners and agreed with the relevant LSCB.'

Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. Local authorities undertake assessments of the needs of individual children to determine what services to provide and action to take.

This protocol recognises that the welfare of children is a corporate responsibility of the entire local authority working in partnership with other public agencies, the voluntary sector, and services users and carers. Joint working extends across the assessment, planning, management, provision and delivery of services. This principle underpins the *Southampton Child and Family Early Intervention Model 2014* which sets the standard for multi-agency and multi-disciplinary procedures and arrangements which ensure effective inter-agency working.

The Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub

The Multi agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is the single point of contact for all safeguarding concerns regarding children and young people in Southampton. It includes representation from Children's Social Care, Police, Health, Probation, Education, Youth Offending Service, Housing, Family matters, IDVA service, voluntary services and Adult Services.

MASH acts as a front door to manage all safeguarding referrals and determines the level of response that is offered to contacts and referrals.

The Single Assessment

Southampton City Council has developed a single assessment in line with the requirements in Working Together 2015. This replaces both the initial and core assessment and includes pre-births and unborn children. The single assessment incorporates the three domains of the Assessment Framework Triangle: the child's developmental needs; parenting capacity and family and environmental factors. The assessment records information concerning the child's development which is monitored through the duration of the plan so that progress can be monitored.

The timescale for completing any assessment of a child or young person's needs will reflect their individual circumstances, but in any event will not exceed 45 working days. All assessments will be completed within 15 days if a decision is taken to proceed to an Initial Child Protection Conference.

Children in Need

A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is 'unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled'.

In these cases, assessments are carried out under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Assessments which consider children's social care needs may also be carried out to support children with specific needs, for example, for children with disabilities, young carers or those who have committed a crime. The assessment process may also be used for children whose parents are in prison and in all cases for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Children in need of protection

Concerns about maltreatment may be the reason for a referral to MASH or concerns may arise during the course of providing services to the child and family. In these circumstances, Children's Social Care will initiate enquiries to find out what is happening to the child and whether protective action is required.

Local authorities, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, have a duty to make enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. There may be a need for immediate protection whilst the assessment is carried out. The duty also applies to children in police protection, those subject to emergency protection orders or a child who has contravened a ban imposed by a curfew notice.

Where children are considered to be at risk of or suffering significant harm, the 4LSCB child protection procedures will be followed (<http://4lscb.proceduresonline.com/>). The single assessment will be undertaken at the same time as any protective action or service provision.

Specialist Assessments

There are occasions when children and young people referred to Children's Social Care may require more specialist assessments. Where possible, these will be coordinated so that the child and family experience a coherent process and a single, outcome focused, action plan.

Any specialist assessments already in place, for example, for children with special educational needs or disabled children, will be considered and inform the single assessment as appropriate, although not all children subject to these assessments will also require a single assessment.

Recording and Reviewing Assessments

The assessment process concludes with consideration for a need for a plan, which may result in a universal help plan, child in need plan, child protection plan, care plan or pathway plan. These set out the outcomes to be achieved, how these will be measured; and within what timescales. Once formulated the plan should be reviewed on a regular basis and at least every 6 months to ensure the child's needs are being addressed and appropriate services are being provided. Regular reviews will also reduce the need for repeat assessments.

Involving child, young people and parents/carers

Children and young people are central to the assessment process. Their views, wishes and feelings should be sought and reflected in the assessment, which should also state what the impact of the child's wishes has been on the outcome of the assessment and the plan. Culture, ethnicity and diversity issues must also be explicitly considered in all assessments as they impact on the child and their experience.

Parents and carers should be fully involved and informed in the assessment of their children; and in identifying appropriate services or resources that will help support them in their parenting role. Parents need to be informed of any risks identified during the course of the assessment and be clear on how they can contribute to improving their children's circumstances as well as the help they can expect from social care and other agencies.

Agency Involvement

Agencies and professionals should wherever possible contribute fully to the assessment process and any subsequent action plan to reduce risk and promote the welfare of the child.

Where a social worker is undertaking a single assessment, all agencies (statutory and otherwise) working with or providing services to children and their families should be invited to contribute to the process. This will include: provision of information and reports; attendance at meetings; and agreeing actions and services to be provided to support the child and their family.

Process following referral to children's social care

Where a referral to MASH requires further assessment, a universal help or single assessment will be initiated. In both cases, assessment will be undertaken alongside provision of services.

For a child at risk of suffering significant harm the single assessment will be undertaken as part of the child protection process, that is: strategy discussion; Section 47 enquiries, single assessment and child protection conference.

1. Planning and Review Mechanism

Children in need: A child in need planning meeting, or discussions with key professionals should be held by day 20 of the single assessment process in cases

where the assessment identifies that services are likely to be required when the assessment is complete and for the purpose of information sharing. The planning meeting will develop a multi-agency plan, which will be based on the agreed outcomes for the child, with the family and all relevant professionals. The plan will include details of who, what, when and how things will be done, and specific actions for all members including the family.

The allocated social worker from Children's Social Care will be the lead professional. He/she will take responsibility for coordinating services. However, it is a shared responsibility between all agencies to contribute to and undertake the tasks identified in the plan. The plan must be written in a way that makes clear professional and family responsibilities for implementation and professionals need to ensure that the family understand what is offered by the professionals and the family's own role in supporting improved outcomes for the child.

A child in need review meeting will take place by day 55 from the initiation of the plan and then at least every 6 months, whilst the child is subject to a CIN plan. Planning meetings and reviews will include the child and family and other professionals as appropriate.

Looked after children: where a child becomes looked after or subject to a child protection plan the single assessment will inform and be reflected in the plans and reviews that take place within these processes.

Reviews: The review points should be agreed by the social worker with other professionals and with the child and family. The review should evaluate the impact of any change on the welfare of the child, noting developmental changes that indicate progress in achieving outcomes. Dates for the review meetings should, wherever possible, be set at the end of the last meeting. After each review meeting the updated child's plan will be sent to all professionals who are party to the plan, and all relevant family members within 15 working days.

Visiting frequency: visits should take place at a frequency set out in the multi-agency planning and review meetings, and conform to statutory guidance for looked after children. The visiting frequency of each individual professional should be agreed and specified within the plan. Where the plan is in place for less than 6 months, the social worker or children and families support worker will visit 3 weekly. Where the plan lasts for 6 months or longer, the visiting frequency can be reduced to 6 weekly.

Universal help plans are developed by a multi-agency team around the child, during or following assessment and determine the tasks, timescales and visiting frequency of the professionals involved.

The frequency of reviews of universal help plans will be agreed at the planning stage by the team around the child but should be no less frequent than three monthly in the early stages and no less than 6 monthly thereafter.

2. Children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and young adults with special educational needs or disabilities still in education

Where a child is disabled or has special educational needs and there are no safeguarding concerns the 0-25 SEND Service take responsibility for co-ordinating statutory SEND Education, Health and Care Assessments and plans. The 0-25 years SEND service provides a response to children and young people within their eligibility offer (which does not include all young people with disabilities). This team offers a co-ordinated approach which brings together in one place the views of children, families and relevant multi-agency professionals and assesses the best way to meet those needs. The family receives an integrated assessment, interventions and family support and is not required to repeat its story in order to receive the services it needs. The service provides support for eligible young people upto the age of 25 years.

Assessments of parents who are carers of disabled children will be undertaken by the Carers' Assessment service, commissioned by Adult Services.

Referrals for children and young people with educational needs and disability who do not meet the eligibility criteria for the SEND Service will be received by MASH and sent to the Early Help Service for a universal help assessment or a single assessment. Concerns that reach the threshold for Section 47 enquiries will be assessed in the Child Protection Team.

3. Young carers

Children who are young carers may be assessed by the Early Help Service if it appears that they may have need for support from the local authority as children in need. When the Local Authority receives a request from the young carer or their parent(s) for an assessment and it appears they are not eligible for services under Section 17 the assessment will be carried out by the externally commissioned Young Carers' Support Service. The assessment will consider the young carer's wishes to participate in education, training or recreation, or to work. The assessment can be carried out in conjunction with the assessment of the person cared for if both the carer and cared for person agree. The assessment will identify whether there are any needs for support, if so, whether those needs can be provided under Section 17 and, if so, whether to provide them.

4. Children and young people involved in the Youth Justice System

Assessments for children involved with the Youth Offending Service (YOS), will be undertaken under the Youth Justice Assessment Framework, currently known as Asset. Where a single assessment is also completed, these processes will support and complement each other. This will include consultation between allocated workers in both services to ensure all relevant information is appropriately shared.

5. Homeless young people

All 16-17 year olds who present as homeless who agree will be offered a single assessment.

6. Children and young people missing from home and care

All children who have been reported to the Police as missing, and returned home, will be notified to Barnardo's for a follow up interview and keep safe information.

7. Children and young people at risk sexual exploitation

All children who are deemed to be at risk sexual exploitation are required to have a sexual exploitation referral assessment form (SERAF) completed by the lead professional, followed by a referral to Barnardo's for a follow up service.

8. Children and young people at risk of trafficking

All children and young people for whom indicators of internal or external trafficking have been identified must have a National Referral Mechanism completed and be referred to Barnardo's Trafficking Service.

9. Children at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM)

Response to children at risk of FGM follow the Home Office Multi-agency Practice Guidelines: Female Genital Mutilation which emphasise that FGM is illegal in the United Kingdom and is 'a clear and savage form of child abuse and violence against women'. In addition to legislation specifically criminalising FGM, Children and Families Service's staff must consider other relevant laws including the Children Act 2004, the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The management of safeguarding enquires into instances of FGM will be managed through MASH. They are generally led by the Police with assistance from social workers and are governed by the 4LSCB procedures, in accordance with Working Together to Safeguard Children in England 2015.

10. Children returning to live with their families

Where children have been living away from their families in residential or foster care or with relatives, whether by consent or court order and there is a plan to return the child or young person home a single assessment will be initiated, involving the parents, child and professionals to inform the assessment. The assessment will identify any needs and actions/services required to enable the child to return home safely with appropriate supports and safeguards. The assessment should also consider the needs of any other child living in the home and initiate any further assessments as appropriate.

The single assessment process will utilise and be informed by the looked after children review and child protection process as appropriate to the child's circumstances. Independent Reviewing Officers must be consulted to inform the assessment and plan in order to support the child returning home.

Complaints Process

Any parent, carer or young person who is dissatisfied with the service they receive from Children and Families Services has the right to make a complaint. Parents/carers and children can request a copy of the complaints procedure from

their social worker or it can be accessed online at

<http://www.southampton.gov.uk/search.aspx?q=Complaints+Procedure>