

Child and Family Assessments



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Child and Family Assessments

This local assessment framework sets out how, in Wigan Council, we will assess, plan for and manage cases once a child is referred into local authority Children's Social Care. It shows how decisions are made about the need for Social Work assessment and intervention. The framework will be followed by Social Workers in the Children's Duty Service as well as the Locality teams, the Children in Care and Care Leaver's team and the Targeted Disability Service. A Child and

Family Assessment is completed by a qualified Social Worker and begins with the information already known about the child and their family.

Providing help early on is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem is identified. This may be early in a child's life; before birth, and as a baby or toddler or it may be anytime up to and through the teenage years.

If children and families are to

receive the right help, everyone who comes into contact with them – for example, midwives, health visitors, GP's, housing officers; early years' practitioners, teachers, youth workers, police, voluntary workers and social workers amongst others, have a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action. We know that no single professional can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances so sharing information is vital.

The Purpose of Social Work Assessments

The purpose of an assessment is to gather information and evidence about a child and their family and to identify whether a child has unmet needs. An assessment is not an end in itself but the means of informing the delivery of effective services for children and families.

An assessment must be carried out by a qualified social worker. The assessment must be based on a sound knowledge of child development and be seen in the context of the child's family and their environment. The social worker leads the assessment, which must be informed by the child and their family members and by other professionals who know them, including teachers, health visitors and the police.

No system can fully eliminate risk. Understanding risk involves judgment and balance. To manage risks, social workers and other professionals must make decisions with the best interests of the child in mind and within a timescale which has the child's safety as its paramount concern.

The new framework replaces Initial and Core Assessments with a single assessment. How long this assessment should take depend on the needs of the

child and their family and their current circumstances. The new framework requires a cultural change in the way assessments are undertaken and recorded – the focus will be on understanding what the child's life is like for them – what

Understanding
what the
child's life is
like for them

do the family's circumstances mean for this child? This requires the Social Worker to think critically about the information they are gathering and to analyse the impact of it on the child.

The Social Worker must use the information they are gathering to understand the needs of the child and to identify any factors that may place the child at risk of significant harm. Undertaking this analysis to determine risk is complex and not all decisions taken in the context of risk can be guaranteed to prevent a hazard from occurring. However planned and informed risk assessment, and risk management based on research will better predict outcomes



than unevaluated information collection.

The new framework expects that plans can be made during the assessment so that services are put in place as soon as needs are identified, rather than at the end of the assessment. A good assessment will monitor and record the impact of any services delivered to the child and family and review the help being delivered. Whilst services may be delivered to a parent or carer, the assessment should be focused on the needs of the child and on the impact those services are having on the child.

Within this protocol, reference to parents/carers includes anyone who holds Parental Responsibility.

Statutory assessments under the Children Act 1989

A good assessment will analyse not only the developmental needs of the child but also the nature and level of both the risks and protective factors in the child's life. The assessment will inform decisions about whether a child is a child in need or is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as defined in Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Assessment under Section 17

A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health and development will be significantly impaired, without the provision of services.

In these cases, assessments by a Social Worker are carried out under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The purpose of these assessments is to gather evidence about a child's developmental needs and the parents' capacity to meet these needs within the context of their wider family and community. This information must be used to inform decisions about the help needed by the child.

A child who is disabled is also defined as a child in need. In Wigan, children with a disability will be asked to work with our Targeted Disability Service to complete a holistic Education, Health and Care assessment

(EHC).

This approach does not replace the local authority's statutory duties. If anyone has a concern that a child with a disability is at risk of abuse they still need to contact the Children's Duty Service.

Assessment under Section 47

If the Social Worker assesses that the child is suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm, then the local authority under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 is required to make enquiries to decide what action must be taken, with partners, to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. There may be a need for immediate protection whilst the assessment is carried out.

Assessment under Section 20

A child becomes accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 if a parent or another person who holds Parental Responsibility gives their voluntary consent for the child to be looked after by the local authority.

When a child is accommodated under Section 20, the local authority has a statutory responsibility to assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services to be provided to meet the child's identified needs. This

will be the baseline for work with the family while the child is looked after. Any needs which have been identified must be addressed before decisions are made about the child's return home.

An assessment by a Social Worker is required before the child returns home under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. This is to provide evidence of whether the necessary changes and improvements have been made to ensure the child's safety when they return home.

Assessment under Section 31

In preparation for, and following an application to court for a care order, under Section 31a of the Children Act 1989, the local authority as a corporate parent, must assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services which will be provided to meet the child's identified needs.

Whatever legislation the child is assessed under, the purpose of the assessment is always to understand the child's needs, and the nature and level of any risk or harm being suffered by the child, and to identify the right help and support to address those needs and keep the child safe.

The Local Framework for Social Work assessment

Our aim is to continuously develop innovative, research-informed practice in order to make an exceptional difference to the lives and experiences of children and young people.

Principles and Values

High quality assessments:

- are child centred. Where there is a conflict of interest, decisions should be made in the child's best interests;
- are rooted in child development and informed by evidence;
- are focused on action and outcomes for children;
- are holistic in approach, addressing the child's needs within their family and wider community;
- ensure equality of opportunity;
- involve children and families;
- build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties;
- are integrated in approach;
- are a continuing process not an event;
- lead to action, including the provision and review of services; and
- are transparent and open to challenge.

Social Work assessments must always:

- use the conceptual framework (appendix 1) to gather information;
- use the guidance linked to the assessment document;
- analyse the information systematically and understand the child's developmental needs, including whether they are suffering harm;
- analyse parents' and carers' capacity to respond to those needs;
- analyse the impact and influence of wider family, community and environmental factors;
- take a systematic approach, drawing on the most up to date research;
- include contributions from all relevant agencies;
- be evidence-based;
- be clearly recorded within the child's social care record;
- be based on the principle that assessment should be followed by a plan – do - review approach to intervention.

Assessment – timely, transparent and proportionate to need

In Wigan, guidance is provided about what to do if you are concerned about a child on the Wigan Safeguarding Children’s Board website. The website has a link to the Thresholds of Needs Document which directs referrers towards the most appropriate service. (Appendix 7.)

Further advice is available on the website about what to do if you are worried that a child is being abused. (link)

In Wigan it is expected that most children and young people who are referred to the Children’s Social Care will have had an Early Help assessment and that services are already being provided through the Gateway Service.

The exception to this is where an immediate response is required because of a serious allegation of harm or an unexplained injury. In such cases, contact should be made straight away with the Children’s Duty Service in Children’s Social Care (01942 828300).

There is a Professional Enquiry form (currently called a Professional Referral Form) accessible through Wigan Safeguarding Children Board’s website and this should be used by professionals in every case, except those requiring an immediate response.

Enquiries to Children’s Social Care are made to the Children’s Duty Service and are recorded electronically as a

‘Contact’. Enquiries are received by the Contact and Referral Team.

It is appropriate for professionals and others to seek advice over the telephone about a concern for a child before completing the Professional Enquiry form. If the advice is that it is an appropriate Contact then the form must be completed within two working days.

A decision must be made within one working day by a Senior Social Worker or Team Manager

about the type of response that is required. Further information may be sought from the referrer, the family and other professionals to assist in making the decision about whether the Contact should progress to a Referral.

Sometimes it may be appropriate for the Senior Social Worker in the Contact and Referral team to attend a review meeting held by those agencies already working with the child and their family. This is an opportunity for

the Senior Social Worker to speak directly with family members; to assist with risk management; to advise on other possible interventions or to accept a referral to Children’s Social Care.

The information gathered at this stage will help to determine whether:

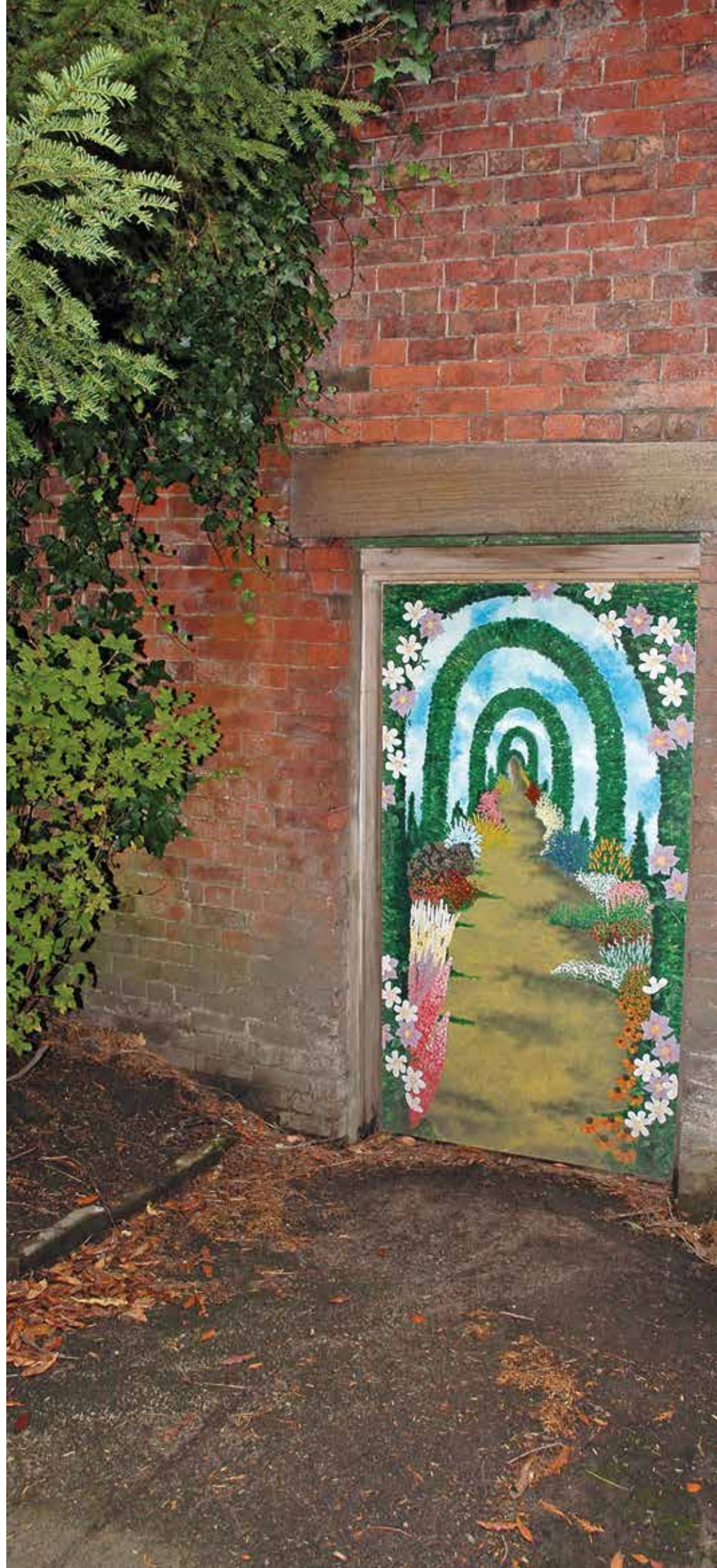
- the child requires immediate protection and urgent action;
- the child is in need, and should be assessed under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989;
- there is reasonable cause to suspect that the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm, and that enquires must be made and the child assessed under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989;
- any services are required immediately by the child and family.
- If further specialist assessments are required in order to help the local authority to decide what further action to taken.

“Child-centred and influenced by their wishes and feelings”

Dependant on the threshold of need, it may be that a more appropriate response can be offered by signposting the referrer to alternative services. Advice and guidance will be given to the referrer if this is the case.

If a referral to Children's Social Care is the most appropriate action then the case will be passed to a Team Manager in Team A, Team B or I-SAPP for allocation (within 24 hours) to a Social Worker for an assessment. In Wigan this is referred to as the Child and Family Assessment.

Acknowledgement and feedback will be given to the referrer on the decision made within 24 hours. If the referrer is a professional, this will be provided by e mail or letter and will include the name of the allocated Social Worker, where possible, or the name of the Team Manager as a point of contact.



Planning the assessment

The purpose of an assessment is to gather information and evidence about a child and their family and to identify whether a child has unmet needs. An assessment is not an end in itself but the means of informing the delivery of effective services for children and families.

The child must be seen by a qualified Social Worker as soon as possible following a referral. Urgent cases will be prioritised with a visit to assess the child's welfare within 24 hours.

The Social Work Team Manager will set a timescale at the outset of the assessment process for its completion, and for when the child should be seen. These decisions are recorded electronically and will be based on the information available at that time about the child's needs. In all cases, the child will be seen within 10 working days.

The date for the completion of the assessment will be shared with the child/family and relevant partners. It is the responsibility of the Social Worker to make clear to the child and their family how the assessment will be carried out and when they can expect a decision to be made on next steps.

No Child and Family assessment will take more than 45 days to complete.

For cases where child protection concerns arise and assessments are being completed in accordance with

Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, the Child and Family assessment will always be completed within 10 days of the Strategy Meeting which identified the need for the assessment. This is to ensure that the assessment is available to the initial Child Protection Conference.

For child in need cases being completed under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, where it is identified that the assessment will take longer than 10 working days to complete, there will be a 'checkpoint' prior to the 15th working day. This date will be planned and recorded at the point of allocation. The Social Worker will discuss with their manager the progress of the assessment and their understanding of the child's needs so far.

There will be a review as part of the 'checkpoint' discussion, of the timescale for completion. If the planned completion date changes, the Social Worker will inform the family and anyone working with the family.

If there is a need to extend the time set for the

completion of the assessment, the Team Manager's decision and reasons for it will be recorded electronically by the Team Manager in 'casenotes' (under Case Management Discussion).

Reasons for extending the time set for completion should be due to family circumstances:

- a key family member is unavailable
- a key professional is unavailable
- a significant new event occurs
- significant new information is received requiring further assessment

Where there are concerns about the safety and protection of children and parents/carers are not engaging with the assessment process, the Team Manager will seek the urgent involvement of a Service Manager in all decisions about next steps. This is a key aspect of managing risk.

Undertaking the assessment

Voice of the child

In order to complete the assessment the Social Worker will see and speak to the child alone on at least one occasion in order to gather their wishes and feelings. They can be assisted in doing this by Children and Young People's workers who will undertake direct work with the child, as directed by the Social Worker. The child's views will be clearly stated in the assessment and all plans will take their wishes into account with explanations recorded if their wishes cannot be acted on. This is a key aspect of ensuring that the assessment is child-centred and influenced by their wishes and feelings.

A range of ways of communicating with the child will be used dependant on the child's age, developmental stage, language, cultural identity and communication preferences. These may include talking face to face; completing written materials together; drawing or using other creative medium; play; role play etc.

The Social Worker and Children and Young People's worker will also observe the child's behaviour and their interactions with significant

people in order to come to an understanding of their wishes and feelings. This observation is essential regardless of the child's age and is relevant to babies and young or disabled children who cannot communicate verbally, as well as older children and teenagers whose behaviour may suggest something different from what they are saying.

All children whose needs are to be considered in a Child Protection Conference will be supported to complete My Plan to ensure their views are sought, considered and recorded. All children who become Looked After will also be supported to complete My Plan and All About Me for the same reason.

My Plan will be completed with children assessed under Section 17 (Child in Need) where this will support the assessment.



Views of others

The Social Worker will speak to parents, anyone else who holds parental responsibility under the law, and other significant adults in the child's life. They will ensure that the views of absent parents are sought and that the role in the child's life of parents' partners, male or female, is fully considered within the assessment.

The Social Worker will seek contributions from all agencies involved in the child's life or involved in supporting the parent or carer.

For child in need cases where the assessment will take longer than 10 working days, a planning meeting will be held between the 15th and 40th day. In Wigan, this is called a Child in Need meeting. Appropriate representatives from partner agencies will be invited to the meeting with the child (where appropriate) and their family. If the case is likely to 'step down' to Gateway Services a representative from the Locality Gateway Team will be invited. If the case is likely to transfer for further Social Work involvement, a representative from the Locality Social Work

team will be invited.

The Child in Need meeting will provide other agencies with further opportunity to contribute their knowledge of the family from their area of expertise. Specialist assessments already undertaken by them can be linked (and attached) to the Child and Family assessment. Ongoing specialist assessments should be joined up so that the family experience a single planning process. This should be an area for discussion within the Child in Need (CIN) meeting and arrangements should be made wherever possible, for joint visits to the family and shared review meetings to avoid duplication.

A joint protocol is in place between Children's Social Care and the Youth Offending team which describes how assessments will be coordinated for young people involved in the youth justice system. (link)

There is an established working relationship between Children's Social Care and the Targeted Disability service. Disabled children whose needs are being assessed under Section 17 have an allocated

Social Worker from the Targeted Disability service. Where child protection enquiries are required under Section 47, disabled children will have an allocated Social Worker from the Children's Duty Service. If the child subsequently becomes subject to a child protection plan, they will transfer to a specialist disability Social Worker within a Locality team for the duration of the plan

The specific needs of children who are young carers will be fully taken into consideration in the assessment and plan.

The assessment will explicitly consider and record whether there are any discrepancies between the information provided at the point of referral and the information provided by family members and others during the period of assessment. The relevance of this will be considered within the analysis unless an immediate response is required in order to protect the child.

A chronology will be collated alongside every assessment and will contribute to understanding the child's

current experiences in their historical context.

All assessments will be undertaken in line with Greater Manchester Safeguarding Children Board Interagency Procedures Manual (link).



The role of planning

A plan will always be started alongside the assessment and should be recorded as needs are identified. The plan should set out which agencies will provide which services to the child and family. It should also set out the expectations and responsibilities of the child themselves and individual family members in meeting the child's needs. The plan should set clear, measurable outcomes for the child and expectations for the parents. The plan should reflect the positive aspects of the family situation as well as the weaknesses.

At the conclusion of the assessment a recommendation will be made by the Social Worker about what should happen next. The Team Manager will decide whether the case should close; be referred to another agency; be 'stepped down' to Gateway Services or transfer to a Social Work Locality team. It is the responsibility of the Social Worker to inform the child, their parents/carers (including absent parents) of the next steps. They should do this within a week of the conclusion of the assessment

The conclusion of the assessment must be shared with

the child and their parents/carers. This includes absent parents. The family must always be given a copy of the assessment and the plan.

Permission must be sought from the child and their parents/carers to share the assessment and the plan with other professionals, to assist them in providing a service.

If permission is refused, the Social Worker in conjunction with their manager should consider whether this raises any child protection concerns. Plans can be shared without consent if so and the reasons for this decision must be recorded.

Whether the child's case remains open to Children's Social Care or not, the plan should be used as the vehicle to review progress against the outcomes. As the child's needs change, the plan should be updated.

Changes in the child's circumstances should prompt a proportionate review of current interventions. This can be reflected in the plan rather than another assessment being undertaken or the current one becoming 'open-ended'. The key worker, in conjunction with

their manager should decide when a change in plan or a new assessment is required. This is likely to be when there is a significant change in circumstances; a plan for a child to return home after a period in the care of the local authority, or where there is an allegation of significant harm.



Feedback; the voice of the child and quality

Children, young people and their families will be encouraged to give feedback about their experience of the assessment process and the effectiveness of this.

They will be given information about how to give compliments or challenge the process at the first contact with the Social Worker. They will be encouraged to speak to the Social Worker or their Team Manager directly in the first instance, but will also be provided with a leaflet and internet link which explains the compliments

and complaints procedure so that they can put any comments in writing. (Appendix 4)

An advocacy service is commissioned independently and provided by Wigan Family Welfare for children. Parents/ carers can be put in touch with Embrace, a voluntary local organisation if they need advocate support.

Professionals are also encouraged to give feedback on their experience of the assessment process, positive and negative.

There is an Escalation

Policy which provides guidance on how professionals can raise any concerns. The policy encourages people to speak to the Social Worker or Team Manager directly in the first instance. (link)

There is a quality assurance framework in place to monitor and evaluate assessments themselves, and compliance with this protocol. This includes systematic scrutiny of practice by senior managers through regular case management discussions; panels and case file audits.



What have we learnt so far?

Wigan was an early adopter of the new single assessment framework. It was implemented in April 2013 with the aim of allowing easy comparison between performance information in 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Feedback on the implementation and process has been sought throughout this time from Social Workers, Children, Young People and Family (CYPF) workers, Team Managers and Service Managers.

The challenges have been:

- Accessing effective performance management data in order to measure the impact of the new framework on practice; to understand strengths and identify areas for improvement; as well as to plan service delivery.
- Ensuring effective management oversight through 'checkpoints', when timescales can be flexible.
- Clarifying the role of Children, Young People and Family workers in the assessment process. This includes the impact on qualified Social Workers of CYPF workers no longer undertaking assessments.

The benefits have been:

- Improved ability to record the information gathered in an analytical way, without the restrictions of a tight format.
- Useful case discussion between Team Managers and Social Workers about the appropriate timescale for the completion of the assessment.
- Some early evidence of improved quality.
- Social Workers have embraced the new framework and find it an easier process to work with.

Implementation of the framework will continue to be monitored closely and learning will drive improved practice.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families

Appendix 2: Child and Family assessment model flowchart

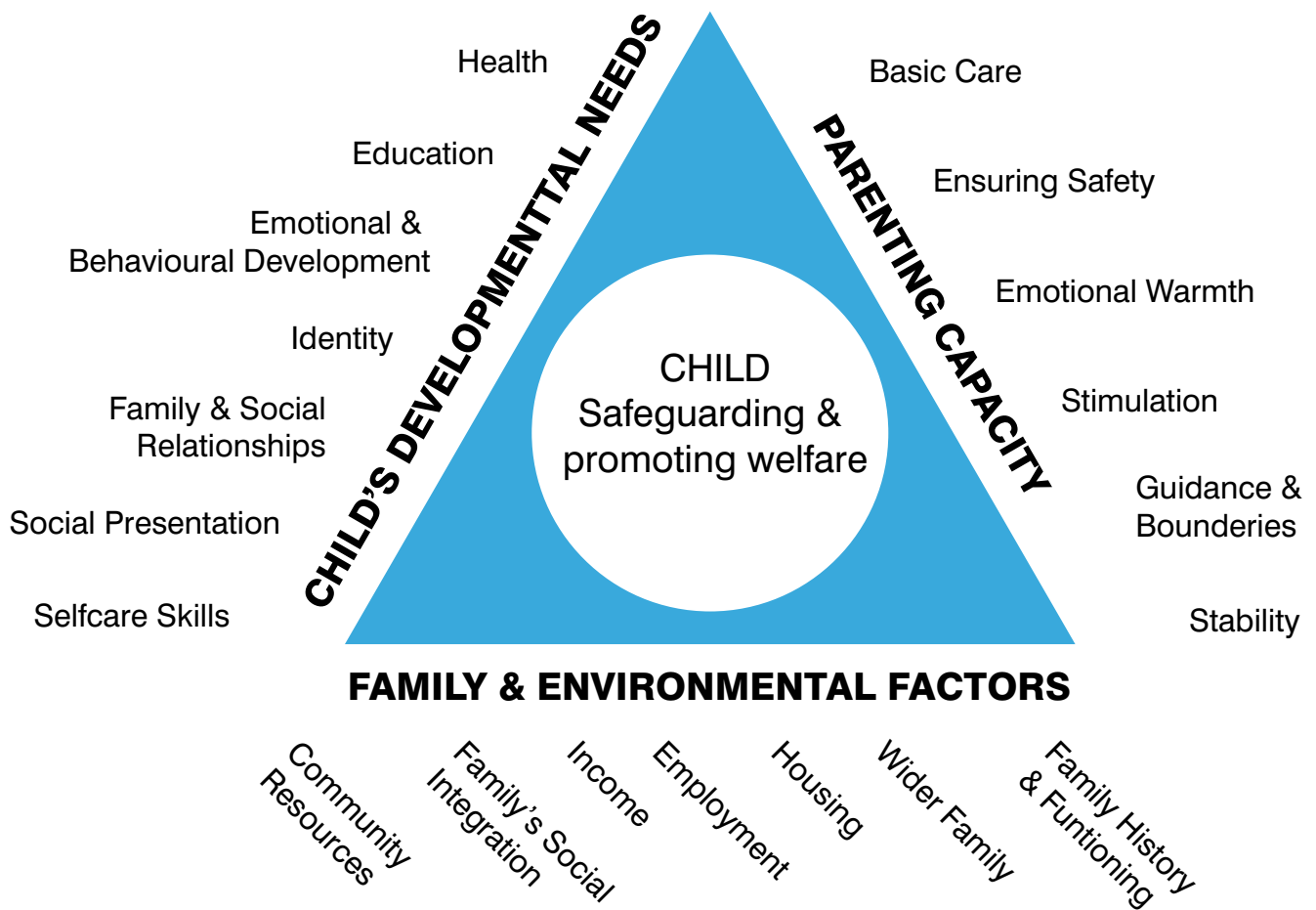
Appendix 3: Team structures

Appendix 4: Complaints Procedures - Adults and Children

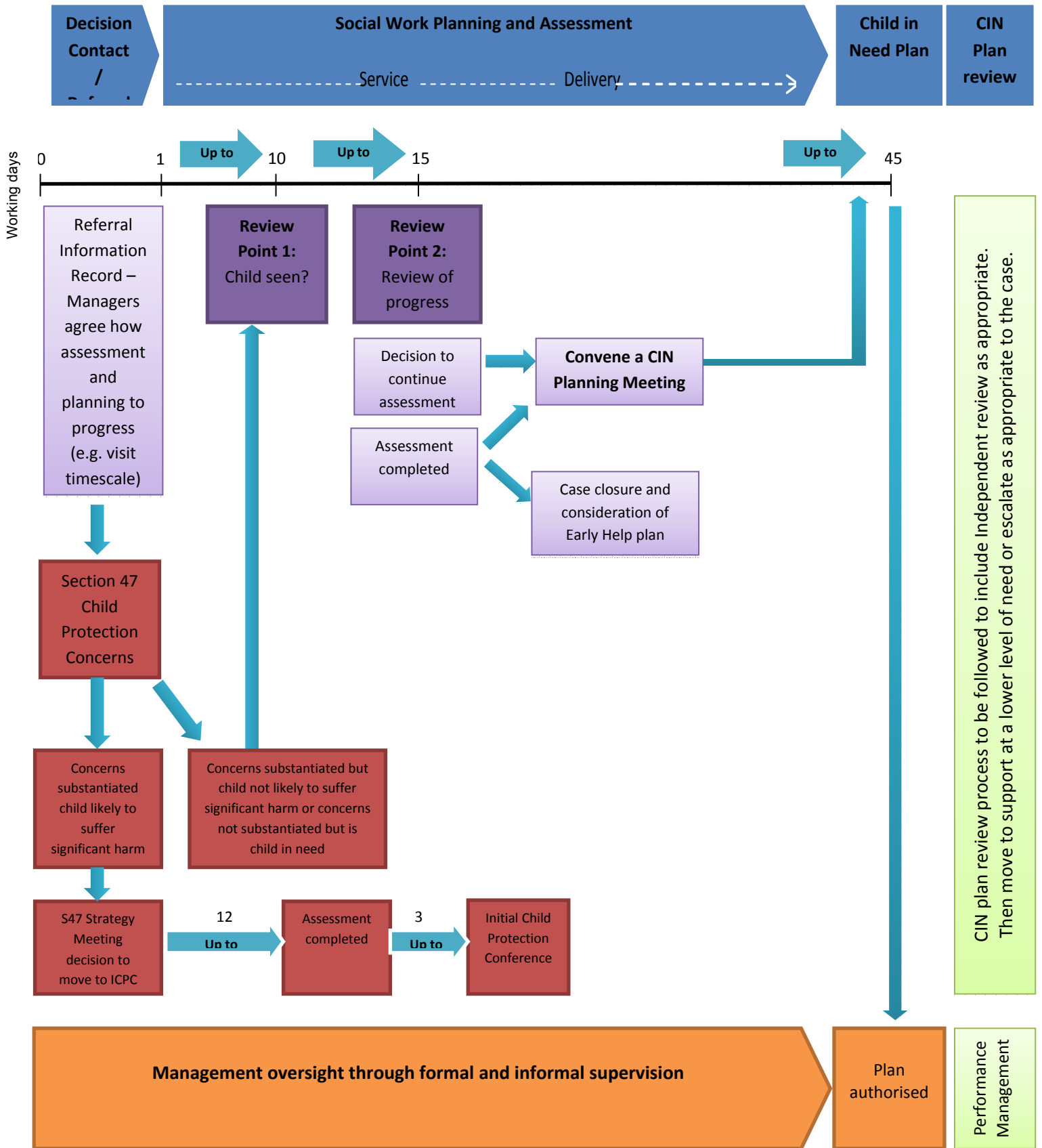
Appendix 5: Child in Need process - flowchart

Appendix 6: WSCB Thresholds of Needs

Assessment Framework



The Social Work Planning and Assessment Model - Flowchart





Children’s Duty Service Structure

Service Manager
Lynn Fields t: 01942 828 454

Team A Manager
Roisin McLaughlin t: 01942 705 210

Team B Manager
Sharon Oxenham <i>(acting)</i> t: 01942 828 438

I-SAPP Team Manager
Leah Edwards t: 0161 856 1813

Contact and Referral Team Manager
Carole Jones Leah Edwards t: 01942 828 389

Administration
Steph Sharples t: 01942 828 385

Locality Teams Structure

Locality 1
Service Manager Lynn Fields t: 01942 828 468
Team Manager Gina Frederick t: 01942 828 468

Locality 2
Service Manager Lynn Fields t: 01942 486 723
Team Manager Dorothy Ashton t: 01942 486 723

Locality 3
Service Manager Sara Patel t: 01942 487 791
Team Manager Ruth Hurst t: 01942 487 791

Locality 4
Service Manager Lynn Fields t: 01942 404 769
Team Manager Angela Shortall t: 01942 404 769

Locality 5
Service Manager Sara Patel t: 01942 404 776
Team Manager Dorothy Ashton t: 01942 486 723 Angela Shortall t: 01942 404 769

Concern

You may be unhappy about a service you are receiving, or...

You don't feel as though you are being treated fairly, or...

You don't feel you are being listened to

Children's Rights Officer (CRO)

The CRO will...

Discuss your problem with you

Talk to an appropriate person about sorting it out

Tell you about your rights.

Children's ADVOCATE

The Independent Advocate will ensure that what you want to say is heard.

He will also speak for you at meetings if you wish, and will make sure that you understand all that is said to you.

Do you still have Concerns?

YES

NO

Make a complaint

You can talk about your complaint to a member of the Complaints and Quality Standards Team.

They will record your complaint and get someone to investigate it for you.

If your concern is sorted out

Complaint closed.

Contact telephone numbers

Children's Rights Officer	01942 487071
Children's Advocate	01942 867888
Complaints & Quality Standards Team	01942 486232

Complaint Process

Complaints and Quality Standards Team gets involved

Stage 1 - Informal Complaint

The manager of the service will investigate your concerns and respond to you in writing. The complaint will be recorded within the complaints procedure.
Your advocate can help you with your complaint.

Customer unhappy with response.

Customer happy with response.

Complaint closed.

Stage 2 - Formal Complaint

Some complaints cannot be resolved at Stage 1, or are too serious a complaint. An Investigating Officer will be appointed and your complaint will be recorded within the complaints procedures.
Your advocate can help you.

Customer unhappy with response.

Customer happy with response.

Complaint closed.

Stage 3 - Review Panel

A meeting of three independent people to consider the Department's response to your complaint and how this can be sorted out.
Your advocate can still help you.

Customer unhappy with response.

Customer happy with response.

Complaint closed.

Stage 4 - Local Government Ombudsman

The Ombudsman will comment on the complaint or investigate it further.

Please Note: In appropriate cases, a customer or a member of staff may request that a complaint go straight to Stage 2

Acknowledgements

Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to interagency working. Department for Education 2013

Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families. Department of Health 2000

The Regional Assessment Group (North West)

Social Work Planning and Assessment model: Draft v1.3 - North West Strategic Leads for Safeguarding and Vulnerable Children 15.05.13

Tameside Metropolitan Borough

Wigan Council partner agencies

Wigan Council: People Directorate – Specialist and Targeted Services

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Karen Hewer – Service Manager

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