

LIVERPOOL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

LIVERPOOL PROTOCOL FOR SINGLE ASSESSMENT



INTRODUCTION

Working Together 2013 states,

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 and be consistent with the requirements of this statutory guidance. The detail of each protocol will be led by the local authority in discussion with their partners and agreed with the relevant LSCB... The local authority is publically accountable for this protocol and all organisations and agencies have a responsibility to understand their local protocol.

(Chapter 2, paragraphs 62 and 63.)

The Liverpool Protocol for Single Assessment protocol is intended to be used alongside the local threshold guidance, Liverpool Safeguarding Children Board Responding to Need Guidance & Levels of Need Framework.

The protocol introduces the Single Assessment and planning process based on the principle that no single professional can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances. The single assessment is a continuous assessment format which replaces the Initial and Core Assessments currently used by social workers for children.

1. Contributions from Agencies and Professionals to Single Assessments and Service Provision

1.1 Children's Social Care is responsible for leading the single assessment but there is a duty on any agency who knows the child or family to contribute to the process including information and service provision. Agencies who contribute to the single assessment should be involved in the analysis, planning and review.

1.2 Agencies making referrals to Children's social care teams must ensure that all necessary details requested by Children's Services are given at the point of referral so that a decision on the response can be made within one working day. This should include information from Early Help Assessments or previous Common Assessment Framework assessments.

1.3 Contributions should always be considered from the Police (whether or not an offence has been committed), Health (especially in relation to the child's development and family history), and Education (including where relevant, pre-school and further/higher education). Other agencies may also need to contribute where they are involved with the child or family or have information. This includes agencies or professionals such as Health Visitor, Midwife, School, General Practitioner, Probation, Youth Offending Service, Police, Family Support, Children's Centre, Voluntary Organisation, Education Welfare, Adult Social Care, Adult Mental Health, Nursery, Drug Services, Alcohol Services, Early Intervention Team, Early Help Assessment Coordinator, Housing, other Local Authorities, Legal Services, and CAF/CASS.

1.4 Agencies that need to contribute may include agencies who work with adults, for example where parents may have drug, alcohol or mental ill health problems or learning difficulties. Professionals providing a service to parents or carers have a duty to contribute to the single assessment of the capacity and capability of the parent.

1.5 Initial agency contributions to single assessments must be made within 10 working days but may need a quicker or immediate response where concerns affect the safety of a child or timely assessment and service provision.

1.6 For Child In Need cases agencies may be invited to attend a Child In Need planning meeting within 35 days of the single assessment starting. Agencies have a duty to attend and to contribute written or verbal information. If a Child In Need Plan is agreed agencies should attend six weekly review meetings.

1.7 For child protection cases agencies should attend an Initial Child Protection Conference within 15 working days of the first strategy meeting which agreed a Section 47 Enquiry. Agencies will be invited and should contribute to the single assessment beforehand.

2. Prerequisites for the Single Assessment

2.1 Single assessments will be timely with the needs of the child primarily driving the single assessment and an understanding that delay is not in the child's interest. The single assessment should not exceed 45 days from the referral date unless in exceptional circumstances an extension is approved by a manager recording the reasons and setting a new time limit. Many single assessments will be completed more quickly than 45 days.

2.2 Single assessments will be conducted alongside actions necessary at any particular points such as any support services should be provided at the stage of the single assessment at which they are identified. If there are concerns of significant harm at any stage the child's safety should be considered immediately and a strategy meeting convened and legal action considered. Direct work and helping families change should take place alongside the single assessment.

2.3 Single assessments will be clear and transparent so that they are understood by children & their families and all agencies. They will be inclusive of the child and family ensuring they understand the process, who is involved, what is expected to change and how this will be measured. Where appropriate they will be supported by written consent and agreements.

2.4 Single assessments will be proportionate to the needs of individual children and their families. The purpose of the single assessment will be to gather information about a child and identify any unmet needs. The single assessment will include the child's development, family and environment.

2.5 Single assessments will be completed by a qualified and suitably experienced social worker who leads the multiagency process.

2.6 Single assessments will be undertaken with the agreement of the child and parents where possible, by obtaining consent and recording this and any circumstances where consent is not required. Legal advice can be taken where there are issues with consent.

2.7 Single assessments will be completed by the social worker seeing the child alone. If this is not appropriate or possible this will be recorded within the single assessment with

the reasons. The views and wishes of the child will be taken into account and recorded. Single assessments will be inclusive of any information from previous assessments such as an Early Help Assessment or previous Common Assessment and any previous information or chronologies. Single assessments should not be based only on incidents but take account of any historical context to avoid being too optimistic in assessing capacity to sustain change.

2.8 Single assessments will be focused on outcomes for the child including decisions about services and support to deliver improvements for the child and reflect the child's best interests.

2.9 Single assessments will be used to assist social workers to recognise the additional vulnerability of some children in specific circumstances such as disabled children, migrant children, asylum seeking children, victims of trafficking, domestic abuse, bullying, child sexual exploitation or children who go missing.

2.10 Single assessments will be used to assist the social worker and manager to determine if the child is a Child In Need under S17 of the Children Act 1989, if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm under S47 of the Children Act 1989, or if the child needs accommodation under S20 of the Children Act 1989.

2.11 Single assessments will be used to assist the social worker and manager to determine whether any specialist assessments should be undertaken.

2.12 Single assessments will be inclusive of the social workers responsibility to analyse the information gathered at the enquiry stage, decide the nature and level of need and the level of risk. The manager should provide regular supervision and challenge the social worker's assumptions as part of the single assessment process.

2.13 Single assessments will be initiated by a strategy meeting where it is part of a Section 47 enquiry. The strategy meeting should be between Children's social care, the police and any other relevant agencies including health and education where they can provide relevant information or assistance. Where the child's safety may be compromised the single assessment and information may be kept from a parent or carer though the principle of working in partnership should be upheld where possible. If one child in a household or family is being assessed as part of a Section 47 enquiry any other child should be assessed too particularly where there is contact with the alleged perpetrator.

2.14 Single assessments will be carried out after initial or repeat referrals to Children's Services social work teams or carried out as a reassessment in open cases for specific reasons such as Section 47 enquiries, children returning home from care or entering accommodation, when enter into pre proceedings agreements, in proceedings, or other changes of circumstances where professional judgement and management oversight identifies the need for reassessment or a change in plan.

3. Specific Groups of Children

3.1 Disabled Children are Children In Need. Single assessments should be person centred, take into account carer's needs and may be informed by specialist assessments.

3.2 Disabled children who have a statement of special educational need will be entitled to an Education, Health and a Care Plan. Particular care should be taken with communication to seek the wishes and feelings of disabled children. (Disabled Children may also have Early Help Assessments).

3.3 Young Carers are entitled to assessments including Early Help and carer's assessments. Services can be offered once identified to enable young carers to remain with their families.

3.4 Children & young people who commit offences - the Youth Offending Service has a joint protocol with Children's Services for assessment and services.

4. Single Assessments Informed by Other Specialist Assessments

4.1 Where appropriate, the single assessment will be informed by other specialist assessments, such as the assessment for children with special educational needs (Education, Health and Care Plan) and disabled children, unborn children where there are concerns, asylum seeking children, children in hospital, children in the youth justice system, children at risk of gang activity.

4.2 The statutory and specialist assessment processes will be coordinated so that the child and family experience a joined up approach. This should mean that there is a single planning process that is focused on outcomes;

4.3 The social worker leading the single assessment will collate information from other previous assessments such as CAMHS or a consultant paediatrician for example for a child's specific health needs.

4.4 This may serve to avoid the child and family having to provide the same information on a number of occasions. It will also assist the social worker to understand the child's needs more fully, analyse and make decisions for good outcomes for the child.

5. Single Assessment Review Points

5.1 There will be set internal review points for continuing single assessments for social workers and their managers as well as for other agencies to contribute.

5.2 Social work managers will review each single assessment at 10 days to monitor the progress of the single assessment, agree any further issues arising out of information gathered during the single assessment and check there are no issues to resolve such as missing information or the child not yet seen. Review may also identify the need to agree services, support or actions before the single assessment is complete. Some single assessments will have ended by this point or closure be agreed while others will continue. For other single assessments early findings may indicate whether no further action is required, a child is in need, or a Section 47 Enquiry should be initiated. The manager will record the review in the single assessment.

5.3 The date by which the child must be seen will have been set by the manager allocating the single assessment and this should be reviewed to ensure compliance and that there are no barriers to resolve in seeing the child and seeking views and wishes.

5.4 The next review point for social work managers will be at 35 days to monitor progress and agree or resolve further issues to allow completion by 45 days. The manager will record the review in the single assessment.

5.5 Agencies may be required to contribute immediately by information sharing but for all single assessments the agencies should have done so within 10 days.

5.6 For Child In Need cases agencies may be invited to attend a Child In Need planning meeting within 35 days of the single assessment starting. The child must be seen by the social worker before the CIN meeting. Agencies have a duty to attend CIN planning meetings and to contribute written or verbal information – but the information must be sent to the social worker in writing before the meeting if the agency is unable to attend. If a Child In Need Plan is agreed at the meeting there will be 6 weekly review meeting which all agencies should attend or send written reports to the social worker in advance. The social worker's manager must escalate to a manager in any agency which does not attend or send written information.

5.7 The CIN plan will 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.

5.8 For child protection cases an Initial Child Protection Conference may be convened within 15 working days of the first strategy meeting which agreed a Section 47 Enquiry. Agencies will be invited in line with multi agency procedures and should contribute to the single assessment beforehand. Social workers will use the single assessment with a chronology and plan to inform the Initial Child Protection Conference and an updated single assessment for subsequent Review Conferences.

6. The process for single assessment for children who are returned from care to live with their families

6.1 Single assessments should be undertaken when there is a plan for children to return from care to live with their parents.

6.2 Where the child is subject to a Care Order or Interim Care Order the Placements with Parents procedure in the Liverpool Children's Services Procedures Manual must be followed. Agencies will be consulted in writing on the placement plan and the senior manager agreeing the placement will take the views of agencies into account. The Single Assessment will be used as the social worker's report.

7. Information for the Child and Family

7.1 Information should be available so that the child and family understand the type of help offered and their own responsibilities in order to assist in ensuring that the outcomes for the child are improved.

7.2 The single assessment should include direct contact with the child and family to seek their information, views and wishes.

7.3 The single assessment outcome should be decided by the social worker and manager who should agree the plan setting out the actions and any services to be delivered, how and by whom.

7.4 The outcome and plan should be discussed with the child and family and provided to them in written form (unless, exceptionally, this might place the child at risk of harm or jeopardise an enquiry).

7.5 The Child In Need plan will 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.

7.6 Agencies involved in the single assessment should also be informed of the outcome and where they are involved in service provision this should be stated in the plan as agreed with the social worker.

8. Recording

8.1 All single assessments and decisions will be recorded in the Single Assessment, Child In Need plan, Child Protection Plan or Looked After Child Plan and held within the Children's Services electronic social care record for each individual child.

8.2 Records should include information about the child's development so that progress can be monitored to ensure their outcomes are improving. This will reduce the need for repeat assessments during care proceedings, and reduce delay.

8.3 Case file audits will take place including some multiagency audits.

8.4 Written contributions from any agencies will be included and attached to the single assessment.

9. Complaints

9.1 Children, parents or agencies can raise issues about single assessments with the social worker in the first instance but if they are not resolved they can escalate to the team leader, service manager or assistant director. Issues can also be raised with Safeguarding Officers for Child Protection Plan cases or Independent Reviewing Officers for Looked After Children.

9.2 There is a process for challenge to single assessments through the Children's Complaints service which is available to all children and families.

9.3 If any agency receives a complaint which relates to another agency it will be passed to a manager in the relevant agency.

9.4 Agencies will try to resolve any issues relating to this protocol between themselves before referring to the LSCB.

10. Review of the Protocol

10.1 This protocol will be reviewed continuously in the multiagency working group from the point of implementation to resolve any immediate issues.