

Sefton Council 

Sefton Children's Services

Practice Standards

For Effective Support and Intervention with
Children, Young People, and Their Families

✓ High Expectations ✓ High Support ✓ High Challenge

#MakeADifference

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Introduction

High quality social work, good partnership communication and collaboration is vital for supporting and safeguarding children and young people. These practice standards have been developed to support good practice in Sefton so that we can achieve best outcomes for children and young people.

They set out minimum service standards which can be expected by our children, young people, families, and partners. They are informed by statutory guidance and regulations; policies and procedures and so do not stand alone.

All employees of Sefton Children's Services or those providing services on behalf of Sefton Children's Services are accountable for ensuring these practice standards are always met. Our practice standards are mandatory and considered key to ensuring Sefton Children's Services meets the needs of and improves outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.



Risthardh Hare, Executive Director of Children's Services and Education

Our ambition in Sefton is not just to be a wonderful place for children and young people to grow up; but to be a Council that people wish to come and work in. We aim to work restoratively with children, young people and their families to provide early help and support at the right time; building on family strengths and resources to help them manage challenges they face and mitigate against any risks. It is key that we keep children and young people's daily lived experience at the forefront of our minds and that we ensure that they are at the heart of everything we do. Supporting care experienced young adults is a high priority too.

We want every child, young person/ young adult in Sefton to be heard, happy, healthy and have opportunities to achieve. We want the same for our people who come into work each day to do an excellent job and serve our communities. Our people: our staff are one of our most important assets.

We recognise that working with children, young people and their families is one of the hardest and most complex tasks carried out by the public sector and that this work requires practitioners to give of themselves, both professionally and emotionally in a demanding environment. Work with children, young people, care experienced young adults and families requires a high level of emotional intelligence, resilience, integrity, and fortitude.

These practice standards are intended to be supportive and are underpinned by a whole partnership approach – Sefton Stronger Together.



Sefton Council is working in partnership with Leeds Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Team to implement Leeds Family Valued programme in Sefton.

Family Valued is focused on changing culture, leadership, and practice. When introduced in Leeds, the ambition was to embed restorative practice across Leeds Children's Services; beyond the local authority and into partner agencies across the city; with the recognition that all practitioners play a key role in preventative approaches and culture change. It was found that the programme helped to develop the skills and openness of social work practitioners in teams, improve confidence in managing risk and support restorative social work through supporting the whole system around the child and family. Family Group Conferencing was expanded and developed significantly, enabling family networks to come together and drive planning for children and young people.

These practice standards are underpinned by a Family Valued approach and demonstrate our commitment to keeping children and young people at the heart of everything we do, within their own families wherever possible. We have invested in additional specialist services such as My Space, Targeted Family Support and our new Family Conferencing Team. We will work in a strengths-based way with children, young people, families, and each other to understand their experiences, find solutions, build on family strengths and what we know works well.

These practice standards are a living document and will be reviewed regularly to fully reflect the needs of teams in Children's Services in Sefton as it develops and grows.

Our Vision

Our aim is to improve the lives of children, young people, and their families. We want every child and young person to be heard, happy, healthy and have opportunities to achieve. For them to have access to good and outstanding education and training and support to ensure they are valued throughout childhood and able to build independence skills to support them to enjoy stability in adulthood.



✓High Expectations ✓High Support ✓High Challenge

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Practice Standards

These practice standards make explicit what is expected when providing a service to children, young people, and families. They should be understood within the context of wider service delivery and consider:

- The College of Social Work Professional Capabilities Framework
- Social Work England Standards of Conduct, Performance & Ethics
- The Department for Education Knowledge and Skills Statement for approved child and family practitioners.

It is important that this manual is read in conjunction with Children's Services policies and procedures which can be found online. A separate manual has been created which focuses specifically on Practice Standards for Managers and an additional set of practice standards will be launched during 2023 to support the work of our Business Support.

Practice standards are designed to improve consistency in practice and intended to drive up the quality of services provided to vulnerable children, young people, and families in Sefton.

We have created this manual to support all child care practitioners in their work; highlighting 12 overarching practice standards that define good practice. Supplementary guidance has been developed to support each standard; covering core activities; setting out each against minimum standards that are routinely expected across a range of areas as follows:

- Contact with children and young people – their lived experience and voice
- Case Summaries
- Chronologies
- Case recording
- Strategy Meetings/Discussions
- Initial Child Protection Conferences
- Core Group Meetings
- Cared for Children Reviews
- Permanence Planning
- Supervision & Management Oversight
- Communication

Expectations in respect of confidentiality are set out at the end of this document. A separate document will specify expectations in respect of timescales.

By setting out our standards we aim to:

- Increase use of professional judgement, competence, and self confidence
- Support practice which is creative and disciplined
- Foster an environment of high expectations, support and challenge; professional rigour, and praise
- Support practitioners to demonstrate empathy, integrity, and humility
- Support practitioners who are both confident and knowledgeable



- Enable and support practitioners and managers to learn, reflect and change
- Put children, young people, care experienced young adults and families at the heart of everything we do and improve their experiences and outcomes.

The Senior Leadership team in Sefton will act as good role models; appreciating that exceptional leadership is required to support and drive outstanding practice which our children and young people deserve.

Practice Standard 1

Risks to children and young people will be identified, responded to, and reduced in an effective and timely manner to make a difference to each individual child or young person.

Practice Standard 2

Children, young people and family assessments will include all relevant information to illustrate what it's like to be them; they will be kept up to date and involve the child or young person, their family, significant others, partners and carers.

Practice Standard 3

Children and young people's plans will be individual to them; influenced by their views, the views of their family and carers and developed in line with the child or young person's journey. Plans must be shared with the family who must be given a copy of the plan, which will be reviewed in all future meetings. Plans will be SMART.

Practice Standard 4

Visits to children and young people, care experienced young adults, families and carers will have a clear purpose and will progress their plan with appropriate use of direct work and tools. Visits will take place in line with expected frequency and will be recorded well and in a timely manner.

Practice Standard 5

Children and young people/adults case records will detail their lived experience and what they would like to be different; with evidence that our intervention is influenced by their views. Records should evidence their voice and show the impact of our intervention.

Practice Standard 6

All aspects of children and young people's identities and significant people in their lives will be routinely considered throughout their involvement with us. All children and young people should have an up-to-date chronology and genogram on their file. The case summary should bring them alive as individuals and be up to date with relevant historical information and key current information.

Practice Standard 7

All relevant professionals will be involved in the assessment, planning and review process with robust professional challenge in the interests of the child or young person where appropriate.

Practice Standard 8

Cared for Children and Young People will be cared for by people who can meet their needs, care for them, and show love and regard. The child or young person's views, wishes and feelings will be considered and have some influence. Children and young people will be provided with opportunities to find out what they enjoy and be encouraged to achieve good outcomes. They will be prepared for independence from an



early age to promote stability into adulthood. Our care experienced young adults will be supported into adulthood.

Practice Standard 9

Life journey work will start as soon as the child or young person becomes cared for. All practitioners will recognise the importance of life journey work from the outset of their involvement and gather and record accurate information, updating records so that important events, decision making and outcomes are well recorded.

Practice Standard 10

Children and young people's records will have evidence of effective, layered management oversight and reflective supervision which drives children and young people's plans forward and consider practitioners learning and professional development.

Practice Standard 11

Case recording will be timely, clear, and reflective of all work undertaken with evidence that our intervention has had a positive impact on the child or young person's future outcomes.

1. Practice Standards in More Detail

Practice Standard 1

Risks to children and young people will be identified, responded to, and reduced in an effective and Timely manner to make a difference to each individual child or young person.

- Risk assessments include input and information from the child, young person, family, and significant others.
- Risk assessments include input and information from all professionals and partner agencies involved with the child or young person and their family.
- Risk assessments consider - Current Risks, Historical Risk, Protective Factors, the impact on the child or young person, impact on any other child within the family.
- Risk assessments include analysis and actions to address risks and safeguard the child or young person with timescales proportionate to the level of risk.
- We continuously assess risk to the child or young person but make clear within the risk assessment what change of circumstance, event or behaviour would trigger an immediate review.
- Clear contingency plans are made if our initial response does not reduce the level of risk to the child or young person. These should be explicit within case summaries.
- We understand and record the improved outcomes for the child or young person as a result of managing the risk.



Practice Standard 2

Children, young people and family assessments will include all relevant information to illustrate what it's like to be them; they will be kept up to date and involve the child or young person, their family, significant others, and carers.

Children, Young People and Family Assessments

- Are child/young person centred and include their needs, views, and opinions. They are informed by direct work.
- Draw on a full range of current and historical information.
- Include facts and opinions which are clearly distinguished.
- Identify the needs and level of risks to the child or young person; also making explicit protective factors, family resources and strengths.
- Consider the parent(s) ability to respond to meet children/young people's needs.
- Are shared with the child or young person and their parent(s) or carer(s) so they can contribute to change.
- Are professional judgements that rely on information gathered and shared with other agencies.
- Clearly indicate the weight given to pieces of information gathered.
- Clearly show management oversight in the decision making; with regular check in points and assessment planning meeting.
- Include information from a range of agencies involved with the child or young person and their family.
- Include a fast forward view around sustainability for the future – in 3, 6 or 10 years time.
- Identify children and young people in need of help and protection and make appropriate and timely referrals to obtain relevant support, advice, or protection.
- Are signed, approved, and dated by a Team Manager with clear rationale.
- Are updated at least annually (Review Child Protection Report, Sec 47 are classed as an updated assessment).
- Are updated each time a significant event occurs.
- Evidence impact on the child or young person. What positive difference has intervention made?
- Where it is known that parents have learning difficulties or additional complex needs, this is considered within assessments and any reasonable adjustments are considered and made.



Practice Standard 3

Children and young people's plans will be individual to them; influenced by their views, the views of their family and carers and developed in line with the child or young person's journey. Plans must be shared with the family who must be given a copy of the plan, which will be reviewed in all future meetings. Plans will be SMART.

SMART Plans:

- Follow on from the analysis carried out during assessments.
- Link individualised, SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) actions to identified outcomes required.
- Take account of the child or young person's ethnic and cultural background and any disability or complex need of the child or young person.
- Are multi-agency in nature and/or specific to each family member.
- Use resources effectively and deliver as agreed.
- Have effective contingency planning as risk does not remain static.
- Are re-evaluated between formal reviews to ensure outcomes are being achieved and are effective.
- Are reviewed and updated regularly using information from the child or young person, parent(s) and carer(s) and other professionals involved at every meeting.
- Be communicated to all those involved, are accessible and understandable to the child or young person and produced with them, their parent(s) or carer(s) and other relevant agencies.
- Include an accurate reflection of agreed service intervention/support and outcomes required.
- Copy to be provided to parent(s), children and young people and all professionals.

Practice Standard 4

Visits to children and young people, care experienced young adults, families and carers will have a clear purpose and will progress their plan with appropriate use of direct work and tools. Visits will take place in line with expected frequency and will be recorded well and in a timely manner.

Good Quality Visits

- Consent is obtained and recorded before any first visits to a family; save for in child protection matters when consent is not required.



- First visits are significant as they present an opportunity to create a positive working relationship with families and children.
- The purpose of any visit, statutory or otherwise should be clear. Statutory visits should link to a child or young person's plan.
- Rapport building is key, and time should be taken to get to know the child, young person, and family. Introductions allow for role to be fully explained.
- During statutory visits, children and young people should be seen and spoken to alone; unless there is a clear reason why this would not be appropriate; then this should be recorded. Capturing their lived experience is important. Their voice should be recorded in blue font on records.
- Observation skills are also important during home visits; consider behaviour and demeanour of pre-verbal or non-verbal children or young people to ascertain if they are happy, safe, content, and comfortable.
- Consider the relationship between the child or young person and their parent/carer(s).
- Relationships between the child or young person and any other household members to include sisters, brothers, relatives, friends, children of the foster family; those who are regular visitors to the home, emergency contacts, next of kin need also to be understood.
- Consider the environment in which the child or young person is living, including where they sleep, relax, eat, and play.
- High quality visits are focused on ensuring that a child or young person/young adults living environment is safe and supportive and identify actions to be taken if needs are not being met with clear timescales for feedback and completion of any required tasks.
- Take prompt action to address any concern identified.
- Distinguish between the carer(s) and child or young person's opinions.
- Consider ethnicity, age and disability of the child, young person/young adult.

Practice Standard 5

Children and young people/young adults case records will detail their lived experience and what they would like to be different; with evidence that our intervention is influenced by their views. Records should evidence their voice and show the impact of our intervention.

Good Quality Case Recording:

- Children and young people are central to our work and the assessment and planning process.
- Case recording details the child or young person's lived experiences and current circumstances to include information about their home life, school, college (employment), friendships, involvement in the community, relationships, challenges, and ambitions for the future.
- Children and young people's records should show what a good outcome would look like for them, considering the child or young persons own perspective and that of significant others.



- Every child or young person within a family is unique, their voice is distinct and should be recorded independent of any sisters or brothers or important extended family members.
- The voice of the child or young person/young adult will be evident throughout case file recordings; including case notes, chronologies, reports, plans and will be evident in decision making. Their voice should be recorded in **blue text**.
- Direct work will be undertaken in line with the child or young person's age and stage of development.
- Direct work will be undertaken at the child or young persons pace considering other important aspects of their life and their individual interests.
- Sefton "Go To" direct work tools and a range of other tools are available to support creative work; direction should be sought from children and young people around how best to engage with them.
- Analysis of direct work is important; what have we learnt; what else would be good to explore?
- Any direct work should be uploaded to LCS and dated; also, referenced in case notes.
- Observation of babies and toddlers can be observed with their care giver and form part of the overall assessment including their responses to their environment. Observations should be recorded in **blue text** also.
- The role of fathers, estranged parents; any relevant adult or partner living in the home is properly understood and assessed.
- The role of adult siblings, children of the foster family living in the household or regular visitors to the home is properly understood and assessed.
- Case recording should be up to date; in line with Sefton recording policy.
- Case notes will be written in an accessible way that is easy to understand, explaining any abbreviations. Our preferred writing style is directly to the child; guidance has been issue to support this.
- Service Managers/ Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager oversight should be recorded in **red text**.
- IRO/FIRO/CP Chair oversight should be recorded in **green text**.

Practice Standard 6

All aspects of children and young people's identities and significant people in their lives will be routinely considered throughout their involvement with us.

- All children and young people should have an up-to-date chronology and genogram on their file. The case summary should bring them alive as individuals and be up to date with relevant historical information and key current information.
- An appreciation of the importance of lifelong links will inform planning for all children and young people.



- There will be an up-to-date chronology on every child or young person's file. The chronology will be created/ updated upon allocation and will be updated if circumstances change or following significant events. The chronology should be informative; detailing relevant information, decisions, changes, outcomes and achievements.
- Every child or young person's file should have an up-to-date case summary, which brings them alive as individuals. The case summary should be updated upon allocation within 5 days; and thereafter at least every 3 months or following any significant change or event.
- Case summaries make clear who is important to the child or young person, their interests, personality, experiences and ambitions.
- Case summaries provide a clear, succinct overview of the child, any relevant history, their current circumstances, any concerns/risks, any strengths or protective factors, key professionals details, the child/young person's plan, appropriate contingency plan, legal status and any relevant court or assessment timescales. A good practice example has been created to support consistency – About Mya.
- Where it is known that parents have learning difficulties or additional complex needs, this is clearly highlighted within the case summary along with details of any reasonable adjustments that should be made to promote engagement.
- The child or young person's identity and culture together with their ethnicity and religion will form part of any direct work and will be evidenced in case recording.
- Any known additional needs will be recorded on the case file.
- The plan created by a Family Group Conference will be uploaded to the child or young person's record.
- Family Meetings are recorded on the child or young person's record in respect of all children and young people who require support or protection.
- There will be a genogram on every child or young person's open to the local authority which details who they live with.
- A more detailed genogram will be drawn up for all children and young people who have been open to the local authority for longer than 3 months. This should include full extended family, who they have previously lived with and who is important to them. 3 generations should be recorded. Any significant relationships or losses should be noted.
- All significant family members/ others are considered, particularly those relatives/friends who the child or young person indicates are important to them.
- We should know who children love, who loves them and who could potentially love and care for them if they cannot be cared for at home. Permanency and stability is so important to children and young people – permanence needs to be in our minds and planning from the outset.
- Legal status should be explicit within the child or young person's file. Records should make clear who has Parental Responsibility for the child or young person, detail of any legal orders.
- Family members who are unavailable are considered and their views sought where possible e.g., parents subject to custodial sentences/in hospital, armed forces etc



- There is evidence that chronologies and genograms are used to understand the child or young person's journey. Analysis and impact is key.

Practice Standard 7

All relevant professionals will be involved in the assessment, planning and review process with robust professional challenge in the interests of the child or young person where appropriate.

- Input and information are sought from all professionals and partner agencies involved with the child or young person and their family throughout the child or young person's journey.
- The concerns of other professionals are listened to, clearly recorded and this information is used in the assessment.
- All relevant agencies are included in relevant meetings and receive a record of any decisions made/taken and copies on any record of the meeting.
- All professionals who attend meetings will share chairing and minute taking responsibilities.
- The Child or Young Person's Social Worker is responsible for ensuring any notes or plans are appropriately distributed and added to Liquid Logic and minutes distributed.
- Escalation process is followed should any professional wish to raise any concern.

Practice Standard 8

Cared for Children and Young People will be cared for by people who can meet their needs, care for them, and show love and regard. The child or young person's views, wishes and feelings will be considered and have some influence. Children and young people will be provided with opportunities to find out what they enjoy and be encouraged to achieve good outcomes. They will be prepared for independence from an early age to promote stability into adulthood. Our care experienced young adults will be supported into adulthood.

- All efforts will be made to keep children within their families unless this is not in their best interests.
- All efforts will be made to keep children together with their brothers/sisters; unless there is clear rationale or assessment to say this is not in their best interests. Together and Apart assessments will be undertaken to inform decision making and planning.
- When children come into our care; we will do all we can to work with parents and extended family; utilising what they know about the child and family strengths to support all involved.
- In an emergency, it may not always be possible to keep children together but all efforts will be made when this is considered to be in their best interests.
- When decisions are being made about children or young people coming into our care; family members or significant others will be considered first.
- Viability assessments should be undertaken if time permits; in other circumstances Regulation 24 will be considered.



- A connected persons assessment should be completed following a viability assessment or whilst there is temporary approval via Regulation 24. Regulation 24 allows 16 weeks for a connected carers assessment to be completed. If it is known that the assessment will not be completed and presented to fostering panel within 16 weeks, a Regulation 25 extension should be requested. A judgement about this should be formed at week 12.
- The connected persons assessment is a joint piece of work between the Kinship and Special Guardianship Assessment Team (Fostering Team 2) and the Child or Young Person's Social Worker.
- When a child or young person joins a family member/ friend or a mainstream approved foster carer; carers should be provided with information (including family history and a view on the vulnerability of the child or young person so that they can care for the child or young person safely and meet their needs). An introductory meeting is best practice to consider the child or young person's needs and how these will be met.
- For older children and young people, the risk of going missing should be considered and assessed and a plan agreed to reduce the likelihood of this. Any known risk factors should be discussed fully and recorded with detailed safety plan.

Practice Standard 9

Life journey work will start as soon as the child or young person becomes cared for. All practitioners will recognise the importance of life journey work from the outset of their involvement and gather and record accurate information, updating records so that important events, decision making and outcomes are well recorded.

- Every cared for child should have an About Me book as a starting point which should be reviewed every 6 months. This tool should be used to get to know the child and will help to identify what they understand about their life and decisions that have been made so far. Working with the child to complete this book will increase understanding and help to identify if any additional support or work is required.
- All Sefton foster carers will be provided with a memory box to store special items and information about the child. This should be viewed by SW, IRO as part of their ongoing involvement.
- Life journey work is more than completing a life story book that outlines events in the life of a child or young person; it is a way of working that can help children or young people separated from their birth families to maintain a good sense of their identity and and can also support transitions or reunification.
- Chronologies, genograms, case recording and case summaries can all contribute to life journey work which can help children and young people to better understand their identity, experiences, and any decisions and planning in respect of them.
- Chronologies, genograms, case recording and case summaries assist in the assessment and planning process.
- The process of working with a child or young person to create an About Me book/ undertake a piece of life journey work will be planned, allowing for breaks and further information gathering. Any work should be undertaken at the child or young person's pace to allow them to consolidate information and consider additional questions they may have.



- A wide range of people can contribute to identity work and life journey work; also, to the creation of a the About Me book. For example, early help workers, targeted family support, family time team, children and young people, foster carers/parents, birth family members, social workers, health professionals and teachers.

Practice Standard 10

Children and young people’s records will have evidence of effective, layered management oversight and reflective supervision which drives children and young people’s plans forward and consider practitioners learning and professional development.

- There is evidence of regular case supervision with critical reflection on the child or young person's record.
- Every child/young person should be considered within formal supervision on a monthly basis (unless a reduced visiting frequency has been ratified at a Cared for Review meeting and this is noted on case records and within the case summary as agreed).
- Monthly supervision applies to approved foster carers; to include connected carers who are responsible for caring for children and young people.
- Supervision ensures that plans are progressed in an appropriate timescale, previous agreed actions are tracked and any new information is considered.
- Management decisions are well recorded and form a ‘golden thread’ through ‘case notes.
- Children and young people will see if they if they access their case notes later in life evidence of layered management oversight. They will see that social workers were receiving support and guidance; that key decisions impacting on their lives were well informed and options are always considered; together with their voice and that of their family.
- Management decisions are SMART. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely).
- Management decisions are recorded proximate to the events they apply to in the case record.
- Management decisions for significant or complex actions (e.g., Assistant Director decision for a child or young person to become cared for, removal of a child or young person or safeguarding decision include a summary of the key facts, professional opinions and rationale for the action proposed). This could include evidence of consideration of alternative options.
- Management decisions are clear and specific about the actions required of the case holding Social Worker and any other staff members including any action the manager will take personally.
- Management decisions are made in consultation with Social Workers and other relevant staff /partners (including Senior Managers), and this should be evidenced in case recording.
- Management decisions provide evidence of escalation to senior management and specialist advice where this is required due to high levels of complexity and risk (such as Legal Advice) or advice from the IRO, CP Chair, FIRO; or Case Progression Manager/Fostering Panel Advisor; if timescales are a concern.



- Management decisions comply with Sefton Children’s Services policy guidance and the guidance set out in TRIX on Sefton intranet.
- Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager oversight should be recorded in **red text**.
- Senior Manager oversight to include Service Managers oversight should be included in **red text**.
- IRO/FIRO/CP Chair oversight should be recorded in **green text**.

Practice Standard 11

Case recording will be timely, clear, and reflective of all work undertaken with evidence that our intervention has had a positive impact on the child or young person’s future outcomes.

- Case recording is up-to-date and reflects the purpose of interventions, and visits to the child or young person.
- Case records are updated in full within agreed timescales; best practice within 2 working days.
- Case records are clearly written, in a simple, jargon free, child and young person friendly manner that is accessible to children and young people and their families. Our preferred writing style is to write directly to the child. Agreed templates should be followed.
- Recording is specific to each child or young person within the family. Notes should not be copied to persons not related to the case note.
- Case recording uses and evidences the **child or young person’s spoken words** and language. If quoting children and young people directly speech marks are used to highlight their voice – their words are recorded in **blue text**.
- Recording reflects the individual needs of the child or young person taking in to account their specific circumstances, culture, and identity.
- Recording accurately reflects any ongoing assessment and planning for each child or young person.
- Recording shows that statutory requirements are being met in terms of visiting frequency and seeing and speaking to children and young people alone.
- Recording considers the developmental stage and needs of young children and babies, including observations of interaction and responses to their care giver, other household members, surroundings, and environment.
- Recording includes the views of family and others who are significant to the child or young person; together with efforts made to encourage family led decision making which enables families to influence and devise their own plans
- Recording includes the views of other professionals; references their job role; purpose and extent of their involvement with the child or young person and their family.
- Recording will evidence the use of interpreters as appropriate.
- Recording considers the ongoing outcomes for children and young people.
- Recording reflects high aspirations for children and young people.



- Recording is part of the child/young person's overall journey; considers their lived experiences within their family home or otherwise.
- Each case note is concise but coherent; written in a dignified manner with the child/ young person and family in mind.
- Recording must be clear to anyone accessing the record; abbreviations if used explained first.



2. Practice Guides

Practice Guide 1 - Direct Contact and Direct Work with Children and Young People

Most children and young people whom the local authority has responsibility for or comes into contact with will have some experience of adversity and need our help. Building a relationship with a child or young person takes time and patience. It would be wrong for us to expect anything different. Children need to know that those who are working with them are trustworthy. They need to know that practitioners/managers are there not only at times of crisis but also when life is going well; to celebrate their achievements.

“Children don't care how much you know until they know how much you care”

(Everyone from Teddy Roosevelt to John C. Maxwell have been attributed with coining this phrase)

The above message applies to children, young people and care experienced young adults we set out to support, help, and protect; babies who cannot understand words we say or children with disabilities or complex needs who are unable to communicate verbally or who struggle to express themselves. Children and young people notice non-verbal cues, warmth, tone, and facial expressions. They know if someone is reliable, a good listener with sound attention skills and a calm disposition. Children and young people can be very perceptive; they know if they feel cared for.

- Children and young people must be at the heart of everything we do.
- They are central to our work. Hearing their voice and understanding their experiences is a priority and should inform the assessment and planning process.
- Undertaking meaningful direct work with children and young people is a key priority.
- Every child or young person within the family is unique and separate to their sisters or brothers. Their age, stage of development, experiences, ability, needs and interests will differ.
- The voice of the child or young person will be evident throughout case file recordings and will be highlighted in speech marks and recorded in **blue text**.
- Words and picture work may be the preferred communication tool of some children and young people. Others will prefer to “walk and talk”.
- The voice of young children can be captured in direct work, using their own words, drawings, or pictures.
- The snipping tool can be used to highlight their contribution in assessments, reports, and plans.
- Even very young children can communicate what is happening in their world and how this feels for them.
- Observation of children with their family/care giver or significant others is important for children and young people of all ages. Interaction can form part of the overall assessment including any responses to their environment.
- Observation is particularly pertinent for those children under age five and babies under 1 who have not yet developed the skills to verbalise how they feel. Observation of their world and how they present within it can inform assessment of need and risk.



- For children and young people who have disabilities observing them is critical in understanding how they are, how they feel, their attachments with caregivers, family, significant others, siblings, and professionals. Are they happy?
- Children and young people will be kept updated and informed of any planning for them and the reasons why plans are in place and decision making affecting them.
- Children and young people will have information explained to them in a manner that they can understand. Different techniques will be tried; topics will be revisited to check out understanding.
- Direct work with children and young people will be evident throughout case file recordings, a summary/analysis of any work will be included within the case note and any relevant direct work uploaded to LCS upon completion.
- Direct work is undertaken in an environment that is safe for the child or young person.
- Evidence based direct tools should be used to support work with children and young people.
- Some children and young people will engage more readily if they are engaged in designing their own tools. A range of tools can be used to communicate with children and young people that reflect their individual needs and interests.
- The child or young person's identity and culture will form part of the direct work process and case recording.
- Children and young people will be supported to understand their rights including advocacy, representation, and complaints as appropriate.

Practice Guide 2 – Strategy Meetings/Discussions

- If a strategy meeting or discussion is required on a child that has been referred to Sefton Integrated Front Door (MASH) or due to concerns raised about a child or young person known to Children's Services; the strategy meeting will be convened by Children's Services and be chaired by a Team Manager within 24 hours of the decision to hold it.
- It should take place as soon as concerns are identified; when there is concern that a child or young person may be at risk of significant harm, and it has been agreed that a strategy meeting should be held.
- Strategy meetings concerning unborn children to be held at 30 weeks.
- Where possible strategy meetings should be a sit-down face to face meeting; in some circumstances a 'Teams' meeting involving a range of agencies will only be possible.
- All strategy meetings must be quorate and must involve colleagues from Police, Health, Education, and any other key agencies involved including relevant adult services. They should consider:
 - Introductions
 - Confidentiality Statement
 - Demographic check of family and significant others
 - Reason for meeting including threshold criteria and referral details
 - Historical and current information.
 - Information and involvement of each individual agency – LA, Police, Health and Education
 - Any other agency information
 - Any conversations with parent/child/carer
 - Any protective factors, known family strengths or resources.



- Needs of each individual child or young person within the family and their ongoing protection, any other relevant children.
 - Desired outcomes for each child.
 - Contingency planning.
 - Each agency view on outcome/ consideration of safety plan
- All strategy meetings should be recorded in a timely manner with clear actions and timescales for each agency.
 - Where it is not possible to hold a face-to-face meeting e.g., out of hours; strategy discussions should involve discussions with each agency known to the child or young person and family as part of the information gathering process e.g., police, children's services.
 - A record should be kept of any strategy discussions held out of hours; to be undertaken and recorded by EDT.
 - Recording should clearly show management input and oversight in decision making and ongoing planning in a timely manner.
 - Decision making must be child and young person centred; underpinned by clear assessment and analysis.

Practice Guide 3 – Child and Young Person Protection Conferences

- Initial Child and Young Person Protection Conferences are undertaken within 15 working days of the strategy meeting taking place.
- Conference reports should be shared with parent(s) at least 3 working days before the Initial Child & Young Person Protection Conference to enable them to consider in private, seek any advice, support, or raise any queries.
- Where a pre-birth Initial Child Protection Conference is required, it will be convened at 30 weeks gestation and held within 15 days of the strategy discussion.
- The Child Protection Review Conference must be held within 4 weeks of the birth of the baby.
- Review Child and Young Person Protection Conferences take place within 3 months of the initial conference; then at 6 monthly intervals.
- Conference reports should be shared with parent(s) at least 5 working days before a Review Child & Young Person Protection Conference.
- Conferences involve the parent(s) and a wide range of agencies involved with the child or young person and their family.
- Conferences should be conducted as a face-to-face meeting; with effort made to help the family feel comfortable and ensure their views and opinions are sought.
- Promotes engagement of parent(s), child/young person if present and professionals throughout the conference.
- Attendance and participation of children and young people is well considered; including the use of advocacy services to represent their views and needs.
- Appropriate consideration is given to any need and use of an interpreter.
- Family strength, resources and protective factors should always be considered; together with the parent's ability to respond to meet needs.
- Needs and level of risks to the child or young person are considered, with input from family, young person if appropriate, significant others and professionals.



- Ensures a clear risk analysis stems from the conference.
- Identify an outcome focussed plan for each child or young person with clear timescales and responsibilities. The views of the family should influence the plan providing this plan does not place the child or young person at risk which cannot be managed.

Practice Guide 4 – Core Group Meetings

- The first core group meeting should take place within 10 working days of the Initial Child & Young Person's Protection Conference and occur four weekly thereafter.
- Parents should be fully involved in the core group meeting including parents who do not live in the household. The meeting should be face to face.
- Children and young people should contribute where possible to the core group meetings and their views should be clearly recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- At each core group meeting the Child and Young Person Protection Plan should be used as the basis for discussion. For each child or young person, the plan should be fully considered, discussed, amended, and updated to drive the plan forward.
- Ensure all key information is shared in core groups and this is recorded so that multi-agency planning is most effective.
- A copy of the updated plan must be given to the parents and professionals following each meeting.
- The minutes and updated Child and Young Person Protection Plan should be reflected and evident on each child or young person's case file and fully circulated to core group members.
- The core group will consider specific tasks of core group members to include the timescales for completion to achieve best outcomes for children and young people.
- The core group will consider and evaluate the assessment findings between core group meetings and the ongoing safety of the child or young person.
- The core group will consider at the core group meeting, prior to the next review conference, if the child or young person remains at risk of significant harm, and the proposals for the child or young person remaining on a Child and Young Person's Protection Plan prior to the review conference.
- Following completion of the core group, minutes should be circulated, and a case note completed which includes date of circulation and who has been sent a copy e.g., Mum, Dad etc.
- Responsibility for chairing the core group meeting is the responsibility of all professionals attending the core group and should be shared.

Practice Guide 5 – Good Chronologies

- Should be created at the beginning of our intervention and capture all significant events, and achievements in the child or young person's life.
- Are purposeful and tell a child or young person's story in a succinct evidenced based manner.
- Provide a simple list of key events and evidence clear decision making in each child or young person's life.
- Record events of significance; including positives, as well as difficulties in the child or young person's life and neutral, factual information.
- Identify important themes and levels of risk, for example, domestic abuse, loss, or neglect.
- Are used by practitioners as an analytical tool to help them to understand the impact of lived experience and risks, both immediate and cumulative.



- Are used by practitioners to help them understand sequence of events and any changes in the child or young person's life, relationships, school, address, or developmental progress.
- Assist in understanding key milestones in a child or young person's life.
- Provide a way for a practitioner to quickly see a pattern of events, themes, issues and tried interventions over the family history, for example, transgenerational parenting styles.
- Assist understanding of the child or young person's life when planning for them; to include life journey work.
- Are reviewed and updated every month and/or each time a significant event, decision is made, or milestone occurs.
- Assist understanding of the child or young person's life when transferring to a new worker or completing a file audit.
- Assist in clarifying important information and key events/outcomes in the event of a Subject Access Request.
- Should be quality assured by Team Managers as part of regular case supervision.
- Should be written in a way that would make sense to anyone reading this later in life – when updating the chronology; consider what the child may want to know about as an adult.

Practice Guide 6 – Case Summaries

- Provide summary of key information relating to a child or young person; also foster carer(s).
- Summarise relevant history and current key issues regarding the child, young people, their family, fostering household and anyone else significant to them.
- Provide clear, accurate information.

Bring the child, young person, young adult alive:

- Pen Picture – About them - their name, who they live with, any brothers and sisters, what they look like, what they enjoy, their interests, hobbies, achievements, likes/dislikes and aspirations any known needs, strengths, vulnerabilities or risks. What is a concern for them/others – any known risks, any concerning behaviours which place them at risk; any external influences; plans in place to mitigate against and risk and desired outcomes,
- Their voice highlighted in **blue font**. Observations are very relevant too.
- Health - Individuals needs?
- Education – nursery, school, college or employment involvement.
- Identity and Diversity – what makes them unique?
- Relevant history – involvement with children's services, other support services; interventions and outcomes detailing any significant changes and impact.
- Parental Responsibility – who holds this; any parental needs or reasonable adjustments to consider
- Legal Status.
- Their family, important relationships and support network/family time plans - who is in their family, who is important to them, who they have lived with before/ now and strength of these relationships, who they love, who loves them, details of any family time or indirect contact.
- Permanence Plan – what is the plan and how is this to progress to ensure stability and permanence? Local Authority view and that of others. What needs to happen, the child/ young



person's understanding of this and their families; any supportive, consistent adults in their lives. Timescales.

- Contingency Plan – in an emergency who can help; longer term? Family/friend network – details, strengths and resources, support available, who may be able to support them in the future – contingency support and planning. Checks/ references completed?
- Visiting frequency/Meeting frequency.
- Family/Support Network – names and contact details.
- Professionals involved - name, role, contact details and relationship with the child/young person/young adult.
- Photograph child/young person held in LCS to support the case summary.
- A good practice example has been created and a template to follow to promote consistency – [Appendix Mya and case summary template.](#)

Bring the foster carer(s) and members of the fostering household alive:

- Foster carer/parents' profile – their approval terms, how long they have been fostering for, who lives in their home, their support network, whether they have any additional employment, hobbies, or interests.
 - Strengths - Training summary, any training/development needs
 - Last unannounced visit
 - Last Annual review date – due date
 - Any particular information that could usefully be shared with a young person to assist them in settling or choosing them as carers
 - Any matching considerations
 - Any pets; relevant risk assessments
 - Key professionals involved, with names and contact details
 - If there have been any allegations against the foster carers/parents these should be recorded under the allegations tab, with clear detail and outcome
- Case summaries should be updated upon allocation; at least every three months thereafter or when there has been a significant event, whichever is the sooner.
 - Case summaries must be easy to understand; up to date always in the event of an out of hours contact. EDT rely on sound information to inform decision making out of hours.

Practice Guide 7 – Permanency Planning

- Permanency planning for children and young people commences as soon as they become Cared For.
- Ensure stability and permanence are at the forefront of our minds from the outset of any involvement.
- Where there are concerns in respect of an unborn baby; permanency is considered at the outset with early consideration to family network and support; to avoid any child coming into our care.
- Family Group Conference to be arranged at the beginning of involvement with a family to identify areas of concern and support that can be provided by the family.
- Permanency planning is underpinned by a Family Group Conference.



- Permanency planning considers the individual needs of the child or young person and should be sensitive to parents and extended family.
- Life journey work will commence as soon as a child or young person becomes cared for by the local authority. Everyone is responsible for recording carefully to ensure accurate information is recorded to support the child.
- Life journey work can be ongoing and will rely on reliable input from child, family, professionals and others.
- About Me books are completed with all cared for children and young people. An example booklet has been produced as an outline, be inspired by the young person themselves.
- The initial introductory planning meeting must be held within 3 working days of a child/young person moving home or prior to any change if a move is anticipated and planned.
- Initial Health Assessment to be initiated within 2 working days and completed within 20 days of the child or young person becoming cared for.
- Personal Education Plan (PEP to be completed within 20 working days of any change to the child's living arrangements (practitioner to consult with Virtual School), so the PEP can be available at the first cared for child or young person review and subsequently updated before any cared for child or young person review. PEPs are to be completed every school term.
- By the second cared for child or young person review, a permanency plan is in place.
- Planning paperwork and Delegated Authority forms to be completed before or at the latest within 72 hours of any change of living arrangement for the child/young person.
- The child or young person's care plan to be completed prior to any change, where the move is planned.
- In an emergency situation, the child or young person's care plan must be completed within 10 working days.
- Permanency planning fully considers the child or young person's legal status in view of their individual care plan and case law.
- Assessments commence without delay, so decisions can be made in the child or young person's timeframe and best interests.
- Assessments consider issues of reunification to parents where it is considered safe to do so.
- Permanency planning fully considers the range of options and legal orders available to securing permanency, including the use of Child and Young Person Arrangements Orders, care provided by extended family members, Special Guardianship, Adoption, and reunification home.
- Permanency planning considers relationships with brothers and sister in the overall planning process.
- Permanency planning reflects the child or young person's identity and cultural needs.
- Permanency planning draws upon and reflects current research.

Practice Guide 8 – Children and Young Person Cared for Reviews

- The reviews of cared for children and young people will be focussed on them.
- Where possible, reviews will take place in their current home or at a venue of their choice.

Frequency of reviews:

- The initial cared for child or young person review must take place within 20 working days of the start date of any change in care arrangement/move.



- The second cared for child or young person review takes place at four months (from the date the child or young person became cared for).
- Cared for children or young person reviews then take place at a minimum of 6 monthly: thereafter.

Sharing of reports with parent(s):

- The first cared for child or young person review social work report must be shared with parent(s) at least 3 working days before meeting.
 - At subsequent reviews, at least 5 working days before the review meeting.
- The review considers the relevance of the child or young person's legal status linked to the current and proposed care plan and case law.
 - The review is informed by an assessment of the circumstances, underpinned by evidence from a range of factors.
 - The review considers the child or young person's holistic needs; including how the child or young person's culture and identity needs are being met.
 - The review involves the views of parent(s), significant others, and carer(s) and these are clearly established and reported; to include the views of any parents who are absent in the child's life.
 - The child or young person is actively involved in the review and is seen by their Independent Reviewing Officer IRO, on their own before the review meeting as part of the review consultation process.
 - The review fully considers issues around advocacy, rights to Independent Visitors and representation for the child or young person, including legal advice as appropriate.
 - The review considers Sefton Pledge for Cared for Children and young people.
 - Escalation is followed up and followed through in line with the concerns emerging from the review.
 - The review fully considers achieving permanency at the child or young person's second review.
 - The review considers issues of vulnerabilities, including concerns around child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, extra familial harm, missing or absent episodes.
 - The review fully considers issues around family time, including extended family members, sisters/brothers, and significant others.
 - For children and young people placed at a distance from their home and community; the review considers how local services are meeting their needs and the impact of living outside of their community. Consideration of advocate or Independent Visitor should be revisited with the child/young person.
 - Reunification to birth family, subject to assessment, is considered within the review process, including timescales. The importance of lifelong family links is acknowledged and given consideration.
 - Outcomes are clear and identifiable and underpinned by high expectations for cared for children and young people.
 - The review considers the visiting arrangements for the child or young person in line with their current plan and statutory guidance and local arrangements.
 - Cared for reviews are underpinned by guidance within the IRO Handbook and Care Planning Regulations.



Practice Guide 9 – Supervision

- A supervision agreement should be signed and dated by both parties, updated on an annual basis or if there is a change in supervisor.
- Takes place regularly in line with the individuals job role and functions. Sefton Supervision Policy provides more detail.
- Welfare supervision should follow an agreed agenda and fully consider issues of well-being, training, and development. Consider team, service issues and wider organisational issues too.
- Supervision is strength based and allows for praise to be given and shared.
- Identifies areas for ongoing professional development, using appreciative inquiry.
- Considers the individuals workload at each supervision session.
- Fully considers, reflects on and tracks actions from previous supervision to ensure plans for children, young people and the supervisee move forward.
- Uses elements of reflection to consider progress of planning for children, young people, and families; where possible. Explores new ways of working; different ways of communicating to achieve better outcomes.
- Involves high support, high challenge, and professional rigour.
- Is reflective and solution focussed.
- Is timely and uninterrupted.
- Is undertaken in a manner that promotes accountability.
- Is attended and planned for by both supervisee and supervisor.
- Is recorded with copies being provided to the supervisee within 5 working days to allow for consideration.
- Is signed, dated by supervisee, and returned to the supervisor to upload to SharePoint.
- Considers at intervals the supervisees Personal Development Plan – My Sefton My Space.
- Discusses any observations of practice, learning from audit and tracking of any relevant audit actions.
- Provides opportunity to discuss performance related issues and any support needs, action planning.
- Case records relating to children, young people, young adults, foster carers/parents must be saved in the supervision form on LCS. Only LCS number of anyone discussed to be referred to in the welfare supervision record.

Practice Guide 10 - Communication

Communication with Children and Young People and their Families/foster carers/parents

- Children and young people, care experienced young adults, families, and foster carers/parents to be spoken to professionally and always treated with respect.
- Children and Young People's Social Worker to provide full contact details to children and young people, families, carers, and all relevant professionals within 2 working days of case allocation. This includes name, telephone contact and email address.
- Children and young people and their families to be notified of any significant changes to the management within 2 working days (e.g. re-allocation or transfer).
- Foster Carers/parents to be notified of any significant changes to the management arrangements within 2 working days (e.g. re-allocation or transfer).
- All messages to be responded to within 2 working days.
- Copies of relevant documentation to be shared with family members within timescales.



- Children and Young People's Social Worker to be open, honest, and transparent with families always. Same applies to Fostering Social Workers, Personal Advisors and other child and family practitioner roles.
- Plain and jargon free language to be used with children, young people, care experienced young adults, families, and foster carers/parents.
- All practitioners should provide their first and last name to callers and when reference is made to someone talking to their manager, the name of that manager is provided to the caller.

Communication with Professionals.

- All professionals to be spoken to professionally and treated with respect.
- Children and Young People's Social Worker to provide full contact details to all professionals involved with the child or young person and their family. This includes name, telephone number and email address.
- All messages to be responded to within 2 working days.
- Professionals to be advised of any significant events or changes within the family circumstance within 2 working days.
- All professionals to be invited to all key meetings regarding the child or young person.
- All professionals to receive a copy of all relevant documentation within timescales.
- If the court requests a report from a Social Worker, Manager or other practitioner, the individual should take professional ownership and be proactive in seeking out relevant information and adhere to directed court timescales to avoid drift and delay for the child or young person.

Communication with your Team Manager and colleagues.

- All Managers and colleagues to be spoken to professionally and always treated with respect.
- Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager (ATM) to be advised immediately of any changes to the family situation which may mean a child or young person/young adult is at risk.
- Team Manager/ATM if appropriate to be advised immediately if a timescale or piece of management advise cannot be adhered to with a clear rational as to why.
- Team Manager to advise Service Manager immediately if a timescale or piece of service management advise cannot be adhered to with a clear rational as to why.
- Social Workers must advise their TMs/ATMs if there are any issues which are impacting upon their ability to fulfil their role so that support can be put into place at the earliest opportunity.
- Social Workers to follow the sickness policy and flexi policy.



Confidentiality

Child Care Practitioners have access to personal and highly confidential information pertaining to the public and employees. Sefton Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy explain how we expect employees of the Council to treat confidential and personal information and so should be read alongside this practice guide.

You will receive and handle personal and private information about children, families, foster carers/parents, adopters, partner agencies, Sefton employees and organisational matters through the course of your day-to-day work. Sefton Children's Services is committed to ensuring this information is well-protected. To this end, all Council employees are expected to complete mandatory Information Sharing and Compliance training and to refresh learning on an annual basis.

We must protect information for a number of reasons, to include:

- Children, young people, and family's personal information is sensitive.
- Information can be sensitive to the operational area.
- An employee's personal information belongs to them.
- To safeguard children, young people from harm and / or promote their wellbeing.
- To safeguard and protect vulnerable adults.

Confidentiality affects all employees. Council employees may have various levels of authorised access to confidential information. All practitioners are expected to understand and maintain confidentiality relevant to their role. This is key to the functioning and integrity of Sefton Borough Council.

Common examples of confidential and personal information include:

- Financial information.
- Personal data regarding children, families, foster carers/parents, adopters, members of the fostering family, partners, agencies, and commissioned services.
- Data entrusted to the Council by external parties.
- Documents and processes explicitly marked as confidential.
- Unpublished goals, plans, forecasts, strategies, and initiatives marked as confidential or otherwise.

GDPR statement. [3-1 sefton data protection and confidentiality policy v6.pdf \(smbc.loc\)](#)

What you should do:

- Ensure mandatory training is always up to date.
- Clear desk policy.
- Lock or secure confidential information always.
- Place confidential documents in the confidential waste when they are no longer needed.
- Make sure you only view confidential information for the purpose of completing work related tasks.



- Make sure you only view confidential information on secure devices.
- Only disclose information to other employees when it is necessary and authorised.
- Keep confidential documents inside Sefton Metropolitan Council premises unless it is absolutely necessary to move them.

What you should not do:

- Use confidential information for any personal benefit, profit, or interest.
- Disclose confidential information to anyone outside of Sefton Metropolitan Council unless there are legitimate reasons for doing so.
- Replicate confidential documents and files and store them on insecure or personal devices.

Confidentiality Measures

- Sefton Metropolitan Council will take measures to ensure that confidential information is well protected; to include:
 - Ensure that manual records are held securely.
 - Minimise printing.
 - Encrypt electronic information and safeguard databases.
 - Ask you to sign a confidentiality agreement.
 - Ask for authorisation by senior management to allow employees to access certain confidential information or restrict access e.g., if there is a known conflict of interest.

Exceptions

- Confidential information may occasionally have to be disclosed for legitimate reasons. Examples include:
 - Where a regulatory body requests information as part of an investigation or audit.
 - Where it is necessary and considered to be in the best interests of safeguarding the welfare of children and young people.
 - Where Sefton Metropolitan Council examines a venture or partnership that requires disclosing some information (within legal boundaries).
- In such cases, employees involved should document their disclosure procedure and collect all necessary authorisations. We are duty bound to minimise the amount of information disclosed to only that which is necessary.

Disciplinary Consequences

- Any breaches of the Council' Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy may lead to disciplinary and legal action.

Sefton Metropolitan Council will investigate every breach of confidentiality and consider termination of any employee who wilfully or regularly breaches our confidentiality guidelines. Sefton Metropolitan Council may also have to act in respect of any unintentional breach of its confidentiality policy depending on the nature of this, intent, frequency, and seriousness.



4. Sefton Improvement Journey

Through adopting our practice standards and understanding ourselves through training, performance, quality assurance and audit we will make continual improvement across Children's Services in Sefton. High quality practice will be embedded throughout the service and will drive improved practice outcomes which will be sustainable in the long term. We will focus on:

- Getting the basics right, every time and at the right time
- Purposeful intervention, meeting, and visits – timeliness
- Good assessments
- Smart plans
- Timely, accurate, sensitive case recording
- The voice of the child, young person, care experienced young adult, family, and any significant others to inform and influence plans and outcomes
- Increased use of family group conferencing – family led decision making
- Improving the quality of practice with a focus on considering the impact of our interventions; assessing what positive difference has been made? Could something else be tried?
- Data will demonstrate that we are achieving better, more timely outcomes
- Tighter Quality Assurance & Impact Framework with an emphasis on continual improvement, increased involvement and feedback from children, young people, families, and partners
- The Quality Assurance & Impact Framework will highlight and build on good practice as well as identify areas for improvement and deliver practice improvement
- Good practice will be celebrated and a culture of giving and receiving feedback will be promoted ensuring all employees feel part of change and have a role to play in the improvement of practice and practice outcomes
- A bottom-up approach which will empower employees to bring effective challenge, opportunity, and ability to inform practice and ownership to drive through improvements
- Employees being part of reviewing practice standards, strategies, policy, and best practice guidance to respond to any arising issues, will lead to people being clearer of what is expected of them and how standards can improve outcomes for children, young people, care experienced young adults and families
- Encouraging employees to shape our People Strategy and Career Progression Policy; taking feedback from across the service; with regular opportunities for staff engagement, survey and discussion
- Delivering training that meets need, is interesting and not duplicitous and ensuring mandatory training is accessible, relevant, and completed
- Partnership with Leeds Strengthening Families, Protecting Children team to introduce Leeds Family valued whole partnership approach in Sefton – **Sefton Stronger Together**. Oversight and analysis of this partnership will ensure full understanding of issues affecting practice and outcomes, recommendations and changes will be made from a position of being fully informed
- Change projects identified for **Sefton Stronger Together** will focus on reducing the need for children to be cared for, improving the quality of recording, assessment, plans, supervision and management oversight; family engagement, reducing school exclusions and getting the basics right.



- Interest, support, challenge and guidance from the Improvement Board and feedback from others who are advising
- Researching the sector and learning from best practice to inform our improvement journey.



Advice from Parents...

We are a group of parents and we have some thoughts about how you can help children, young people and families in Sefton. Here's some things we think you can do to make a difference to our lives...

"Give me realistic timescales; don't over promise."

"Listen to my views."

"Be on time for visits."

"Tell us if the social worker changes or is not available."

"Communicate with us and make sure we can communicate back."

"Give us a way we can reach you if our usual social worker is away."

"Be open and honest with us."

"Explain why things can't happen, explain the rationale."

"Read things about us before you come and meet us."



	Dear Everyone...
	We are a group of cared for children and we have some thoughts about how you can help us. Here's some things we think you can do to make a difference to our lives...

"Tell me 'mate; we will help and get things sorted."

"Tell me if you are going on holiday, leave a name of someone else and give us our IRO phone number."

"Tell me if you are leaving and say goodbye - sometimes social workers just seem to disappear like a puff of smoke."

"Class charts sometimes say I am fostered and others find that out about me. I don't want to explain my personal information to others. Ask the school not to show this."

"Make sure you give us a copy of our cared for notes."

"Visit me and talk to me about positives in my life."

"Give me the name of someone I can speak to if you are leaving."

Sefton Council  *From the Youth Ambassadors group*



Dear Everyone...

We are a group of cared for children and we have some thoughts about how you can help us. Here's some things we think you can do to make a difference to our lives...

"Ask me how I am when you come and see me... tell me things will get sorted."

"Do more activities with us - get to know us."

"Let me know what time you are visiting - ask me what day is best- not straight after school when I am going to footy!"

"If you are visiting me in school, tell the teacher to say someone is here to see me - I don't want people to pull me out of class saying your social worker is here."

"Listen to me - don't forget to follow up on the things I ask you to do - let me know the outcome."

"Don't ask me the same questions over and over again! Read things about me before you come and meet me."



From the Youth Ambassadors group



Dear Managers...

We know that your role is busy and complicated and that you are often pulled in different directions. We also know that you want to keep children and young people safe and at the heart of everything you do; so here's how we think you can MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

"Ask why children have not seen their brothers and sisters. We were removed from our mum and dad; not each other."

"Ensure we are given the name of someone who we can contact if my social worker leaves."

"Before you speak with me; find out a bit about me; it's confusing when managers suggest things that have never been discussed before."

"Fact check information if you are speaking with me; paperwork has flaws."

"Listen to me, don't just read the notes; if you want to know something, ask how I feel."

"Listen to my views... if I ask for a change in a social worker or IRO, please listen to my reasons for this. Take my views seriously."

"Ask social workers in supervision if am happy where I live; if the answer is no; explore this more with the social worker."

"Can I know your name and see what you look like, so I know who you are; it's easier then if I meet you."

"Critically analyse, don't just focus on the presenting issue."

Sefton Council 

From the Make A Difference group



Dear Managers...

We know that your role is busy and complicated and that you are often pulled in different directions. We also know that you want to keep children and young people safe and at the heart of everything you do; so here's how we think you can MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

"Sometimes, it would be good to hear difficult decisions from you – why things can't happen; why has funding not been agreed."

**"Put yourself in my shoes."
"Be more visible to young people."
"Be more relaxed."**

"Don't just be the bearer of bad news; try and meet me when things are going good too."

"If you are responding to a complaint – look into it properly; don't just look to protect the practitioner."

"Think about who knows me; if you are asking people to talk to me about important stuff."

"Help me feel safe, don't agree for me to see family members without me knowing about it; I might not want that."

"If you speak to me, ask me if how I want to be described."

"Don't just focus on little ones. I might be older and seem more settled but my needs still matter and planning for my baby sister impacts on me."

"Tell me things straight, no lies because you think that might make me feel better."

Sefton Council 

From the Make A Difference group

✓High Expectations ✓High Support ✓High Challenge

#MakeADifference



Hey, we want to get better at working with you, what can we do?

15:00

It's easy... First, make sure I know you are coming to see me. Oh and check if that time is ok for me!

15:01

I might have plans or it might be tea time, it won't help if I'm distracted! Oh also, if you're gonna be late, tell me!

15:01

So would it work if we met somewhere else?

15:02

Yeh! We could go for a walk or you could come and see me in school- just don't say where you're from, I don't want everyone to know.

15:03

Ok great, and what do you want from us?

15:03

Don't make promises you can't keep! Just be honest with me. Listen to me and let me get my words out

15:04

Be patient! I might have told my story before so it may take time for me to want to talk to you. Don't give up!

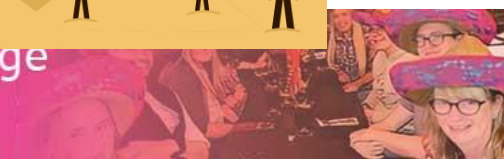
15:04

Is there anything else we can do?

15:05

Make sure you check in after we've chatted about difficult stuff- and please, don't disappear in a puff of smoke!

15:06



Case Summaries Example

Practice Standard 6:

- The case summary should provide key information relating to a child or young person; also foster carer (s). It should summarise relevant history and current key issues regarding the child, young person, their family, fostering household (if relevant) and anyone else significant to them. The case summary should be clear and up to date.

Sefton Timescales:

- Upon allocation, the case summary should be updated/created within a child/ young person's/foster carers record; **within the first 5 working days.**
- The case summary should then be **updated at least every 3 months or following a significant event; or change in circumstances.**
- This case summary should be **reviewed and updated prior to any transfer or closure and should be reviewed by Managers in monthly supervision.**
- Everyone has a responsibility to update a case summary if they spot a factual inaccuracy.

Good Example

Pen Picture – About Mya Mya is a 7-year-old girl who lives with her maternal aunt, Simone and her brother Adam who is 5 years old. She has shoulder length red hair and green eyes. She is tall for her age and loves to wear sportswear. She plays football in school, has recently joined a local club; likes to score goals and enjoys being part of a team. She goes to swimming lessons on a Saturday morning. Mya collects football stickers and his proud of her book.

Mya's voice - Mya can be chatty; when asked what 3 words she would use to describe herself she said "fast, friendly and caring." Sometimes, she does not want to chat when you visit her; she can find it hard to talk about her mum and dad who she does not live with but sees regularly. She misses them a lot and wants to return home before her new baby sister is born in July 2023. Mya does not like visits from SW on Tuesdays or Wednesday after school; this is when she plays football, and she likes to get her kit ready and have a snack before she goes.

Health Mya's general health is good; occasionally she suffers from eczema which Aunt treats with over-the-counter creams. She keeps physically fit and is extremely active. She is allergic to cats, if she touches them white itchy bubbles appear on her face and arms. This is eased with reducing contact and Piriton.

Education Mya has attended Merryhill Primary school in Litherland since she started school; her attendance was previously low but is now 100% - she loves school and will readily tell you about her day. She is not keen on reading and finds this more difficult to grasp; she is receiving extra support in school to help her. She enjoys drawing and colouring in; her favourite thing to draw is her pet rabbit – Snowy. Mya is exceeding in pe and drama. She is expected for other subjects save for English which she needs help with.

Identity and Diversity - Mya is of White British origin; her mum and dad and their extended family have lived in Litherland area of Sefton all their lives. She has no known additional needs. She does not identify with any religion. Mya has enjoyed working on her "About Me" book with her Social Worker, Aunt and Learning Mentor from school. She understands why she lives with her aunt but needs more help to understand why she cannot return home now. This was being worked toward but halted when mum and dad found out they were expecting a new baby.. Mya calls her aunt "mum" in front of school pals, but knows she is her Aunt. Mum is aware and is happy to support knowing this helps her to feel settled/less different.



Relevant history Mya lived with her mum, Paula and her dad, Ian up until she was 3 years old. Numerous contacts were raised by neighbours and extended family about mum and dad using drugs, home conditions and supervision of the children. A child and family assessment was undertaken which raised additional concerns around domestic abuse; this led to a ICPC. Mya and her brother were placed on a child protection plan under the category of emotional harm, the family were provided with practical support to improve home conditions, nurse attendance for Mya and referrals to drug services and SWACA. Drug use escalated; police responded to a referral in August 2002 and used Police Protection Powers to ensure the children's safety. They were placed in foster care for 4 weeks until Aunt Simone's viability assessment was completed, and she was subsequently approved as a kinship carer for them. Mum and dad have been working with services; their drug use is managed well, and they wish for Mya and Adam to return to their care but are working with the LA to plan this

Parental Responsibility - shared between Mum, Paula and Dad, Ian and Sefton Council who obtained a Care Order on 01.06.22. Paula is assessed as having learning needs; reasonable adjustments required to ensure information is explained to her verbally before sharing in writing. **Legal Status** - Care Order.

Mya's family, important relationships and support network – family time - Mya lives with her brother, sees him each day – sometimes shares and plays well; not always which is natural. She is close to her maternal aunt and other maternal family. She can stay over at Simone's older daughter home (Becky). She sees her mum and dad every Wednesday for tea at their home and they go out every Saturday together. Overnights took place at their home during February & Easter half term. Paternal Nan Mary and Paternal Uncle Sean have been helping the family with practical changes in the home. Mya is comfortable with them. **Adults who Mya should not spend time with – Maternal Gran Sue Sheen & Maternal Grandfather, Dave Sheen – deemed risk to children.**

Permanence Plan LA to support reunification; PWP under a Care Order initially. Mum, Paula experienced post-natal depression with Mya and Adam; this impacted on her wellbeing and parents' relationship and so this plan cannot progress now. Aunt Simone will apply for a SGO in January 24 if this plan has not progressed. LA support this.

Contingency Plan – Simone's daughter, Becky is part of her support network and would be able to care for Mya and Adam in an emergency – basic safeguarding checks have been completed.

Visiting frequency/Cared for meetings – Mya should be seen at her home every 6 weeks; agreed at her cared for review meetings. Care planning meetings take place every 8 weeks and cared for review meeting every 6 months. Mya likes to contribute to her meetings by drawing a picture.

Family/Support network

Maternal Aunt – Kinship Carer – Simone Brown – Email and mobile number
 Mum – Paula Burns – Email and phone number
 Dad – Ian Jones - Email and phone number
 Paternal Uncle – Sean Jones - Email and phone number
 Paternal Nan – Mary Jones - Email and phone number

Professionals involved:

George Michael – SW Cared for Team Email address and mobile number.
 Andrew Ridgely – Child Social Care Support Worker, Cared for Service Email address and mobile number.
 IRO – Norman Cherry - Email address and mobile number
 Merryhill Primary School – Pepsi Cola - Class Teacher – Email address and mobile number
 Merryhill Primary School Shirley Shaw - Learning Mentor - Email address and mobile number
 Virtual Head Teacher – Mary Pailn, Email address and contact number
 Carol Pointer – Advocacy North West, Mums Advocate Email address and contact number
 IDVA Sally Smith - Email address and contact number
 SWACA – Claire Clark - Email address and contact number
 Mick Moore - Addaction - Email address and contact number
 Supervising Social Worker for Simone – Mandy Gill, Email address and contact number



Writing Directly to Children & Young People Guidance

- In Sefton, our IROs have been writing outcomes of children and young peoples cared for review meetings directly to them for a number of years. We have also seen some beautifully written case note entries whilst considering children and young people’s records during audit work; not just from IROs, examples from Service Managers, Team Managers, Social Workers, and other practitioners.
- Our aim is to build on this good child and young person-centred practice over time; encouraging those who feel confident with this writing style to continue; sharing examples of good practice to encourage others to try out.
- If you do not feel comfortable yet, continue to record as you do – the most important thing is that we capture children and young people’s journeys; noting their views and feelings when they share them and record observations of them to better understand their lived experience. Don’t forget always highlight their voice in **blue font**.
- Our aim always is to show that we are listening to young people, making efforts to engage with them using direct work tools of their choice when this is helpful; listening, walking, talking with them if they prefer. Recording in a timely way, ensuring we analyse the impact of what they say and share with us and what their circumstances and observations tell us. Every child is different – not one approach will work for all.
- It can sometimes feel natural to write directly to the child; at other times this can feel overwhelming; sometimes difficult to find the right words particularly when there are complex situations or decisions to explain or assess. When we can; let’s try and write directly to children and young people. Our Youth Ambassadors and MAD group tell us it makes a difference and makes more sense to them.
- We must always have in mind that the young person may in adult life may want to read their records; personalising what we write to them is likely to be much easier for them to read and understand. We want them to see they were respected, involved where appropriate in planning for them and that their views inform decision making. We want to see that their Social Worker and others are in interested in their life; for Cared for Children that they have acted as good responsible corporate parents who are supporting them and ensuring they get the best chance in life.
- Here are some good examples of writing directly to the young person, see what you think.



Example 1

Part 1 - Contact

Service Manager oversight – Meeting with Alisha

Detailed Notes

Today, Alisha, during a conversation with your social worker I was asking for an update on how you were doing. Megan mentioned you were coming into the office, so I asked to be introduced to you. I wanted to hear from you myself about how things were for you, given that I'm involved in making decisions about where you live and know that Ofsted have raised worried about where you live. (Ofsted inspect residential homes to see whether they are safe). You had a lot to say, and I was totally struck by how articulate and funny you are. We all really laughed about the great impressions you were doing of the people who care for you, Janet in particular. **You told me a lot about feeling unfairly treated but I could hear the affection in your voice when you talked about Marie and Mark, and you had a smile on your face most of the time.** You told me you didn't go out from the home at night, and that's a huge achievement Alisha.

We talked about your bedroom. **You said you were unhappy about the furniture in your bedroom and said you didn't like that people had wanted to change this before your social worker had seen it.** I think you meant that you wanted her to see how bad it had got. Megan, your social worker told me she's going to take some pictures for me to look at. I asked whether you had been able to choose your new furniture and **you told me you have asked for a bed with a crushed velvet headboard, a desk, and a new chest of drawers.**

I'm attending a meeting tomorrow (a meeting we hold every week now) to see how where you live is doing with their improvement plan following their Ofsted inspection. I'll make sure we talk about your bedroom and your relationship with Lyni who **you said had been awake a lot at night and this was annoying you.** Megan is coming to see you tomorrow and she told you what time she was visiting. You said that would be before you are up! She is going to come an hour later now as it's really important she sees and speaks with you. I won't ignore your worries; **you have said you don't want to stay where you are,** and I will make sure I hear more from Megan after she meets with you on your own.

Part 2 – Write Up - Analysis

Alisha, you spoke openly about your feelings today; there are some more issues which need to be explored and we need to ensure that your bedroom is homely for you and helps you feel safe. You are taking increased responsibility for more aspects of her life which is encouraging and something to build on. We



need to understand more about how you feel about where you live, understanding both good and worrying aspects. We need to know that you feel safe and are well cared for.

Actions: Meeting planned for tomorrow which Service Manager and Social Worker will attend. Social Worker will visit to Alisha tomorrow; to be followed up by SM on Tuesday 9th May.

Example 2

Part 1 - Contact

Practice Improvement Manager entry on case notes

Detailed Notes

Hi Louis

Thanks for speaking with me today. I explained to you that my role was to look at how we are working with children and families to ensure that we are doing our very best to help them. **You said that you were happy with the support you had received and gave example of how your Social Worker had visited you and spoke with you to explain things that you were wondering about. One thing that you said was that you would like to see your grandad more often and could not understand the reason why this is not happening.** I spoke with your social worker after our call, and she is going to visit you on Friday to talk with you in more detail. Thanks for speaking to me Louis, Best Wishes Wendy

Part 2 – Write Up - Analysis

Louis you are uncertain about arrangements to see your grandad and would like this to be more often. You are worried and puzzled about this and this needs to be explained in more detail to help you understand decisions; increase time with Grandad if this would be good for you. This is not currently impacting on your relationships in your foster family or at school but is clearly something that is bothering you that we want help sort out. The strength of your relationship with your grandad needs to be better understood. Adding more detail to the genogram that has already been created with your family could be a good starting point; also, perhaps your social worker could bring along the Hall of Fame direct work tool to help talk about who is important to you. It maybe that people will need to talk more with your Grandad. I will leave this to your social worker to follow up with you.

Actions

Call made to SW to request a visit following discussion with Louis. A statutory visit is due and so this can be explored with Louis further. Upon finishing the audit, notes will be considered to ensure this has happened for Louis.





Example 3

Part 1 Contact

Farewell visit from IRO

Detailed Notes

Hi Helen

I visited you this evening to say goodbye to you and your family as your Care Order was discharged today. **You told me you had been really anxious about the court hearing, and you had not been able to sleep because of it. You said you were then so tired that you slept when your mum attended the hearing virtually.** You, your mum, and your dad are so happy about the outcome of the hearing. You acknowledged that even though you are pleased about the Care Order ending, **you said you were also sad about the changes that brings you. For example, like my role in your life ending and a change in social worker.**

You talked about how you think you have ADHD. You said that you are very unsettled by change and you know that you can sometimes find it difficult to concentrate. Your mum told me that she had felt unable to share this query; worried that others would not believe this. We agreed that your school will be asked to refer to Alder Hey pathway.

You have recently turned 12 and your home was decorated today with lots of balloons and banners. You love books and received lots of new ones. We talked about Tom Gates books as we both love them, and you showed me a few new ones. You like to keep them in order on your desk.

You told me that you are going out with a friend for her party on Saturday – your birthday is very close to each other. **You said you were excited and loved wearing new clothes.**

Good luck in your future Helen, I have really enjoyed getting to know you and hope you have a great time on Saturday and a lovely future.

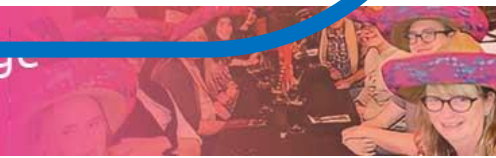
Best Wishes Radha

Part 2 – Write Up Analysis

Helen, you have a good awareness of what the end of the Care order means for you and what support will be ongoing. You have a good friendship group and relationship with mum and dad. It is unfortunate that mum felt unable to speak about her concerns around ADHD and this is something for all to reflect on, but it is good now that a referral is being progressed.

Actions

Conversation will be held with new team to advise of my final visit and ensure they are clear that referral outcome needs to be followed up sensitively. My involvement will then cease.



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