



Reading | West Berkshire | Wokingham

Child in Need Meeting and Plan: Guidance for Practitioners

Introduction

This document is intended to support practitioners to understand the Child in Need process, the expectations of them when asked to participate in a Child in Need meeting, and what they can expect while participating in the process.

Throughout the Child in Need process we expect colleagues to work in a trauma informed, consent-based way, aligned to the five principles of 'safety, empowerment, choice, collaboration and trust'. This is to enable parents/carers, children, and young people to feel empowered to build on their innate strengths and parents/carers are able to care for their children safely and sustainably.

This document does not specifically apply to meetings for Children in Need receiving Short Breaks. For further information in relation to Child in Need Short Breaks, please refer to the appropriate local authority information:

[Brighter Futures for Children \(Reading\)](#)

[West Berkshire](#)

[Wokingham](#)

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What is a Child in Need Plan?

A Child in Need Plan results from a social work [single assessment](#) and analysis that determines that a child is 'in need' of support under S.17 Children Act 1989 (see Appendix 1). This constitutes a statutory intervention, in accordance with Berkshire West Children Safeguarding Partnership (BWCSP) Threshold Level 3. Information about our thresholds can be found [here](#). Partner agencies have a duty to co-operate with Children's Social Care in carrying out this duty to assess the needs of children and to provide services as necessary.

The Child in Need plan should directly address the risk and unmet need raised through the Single Assessment. A Child in Need Plan can also be derived as part of a step down from Child Protection or alongside a Supervision Order. The Child in Need Plan should be drawn up in collaboration with the parent and child/ren. The Child in Need Plan must be developed and confirmed at a Child in Need meeting.

All assessments, plans and support should be holistic and informed by the needs and experience of the whole family and that all children, regardless of age, disability, or language, must be consulted as part of the Child in Need process. Obtaining the child's views and information for all children in the household ensures and supports a balanced discussion.

Child in Need Plans are reviewed and scrutinised within Children's Social Care but should also be scrutinised by all practitioners involved in the Child in Need meeting and process to ensure it reflects the meeting discussions and agreements. The expectation is that every Child in Need will have an updated single assessment every six months or in accordance with local policy.

Outcome focused, trauma-informed and SMART

The Child in Need Plan must be collaborative, multi-agency, outcome focussed and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-scaled), identifying any resources or services that will be needed to achieve the planned outcomes/goals within the agreed timescales and who is responsible for which action and the timescale involved.

Child in Need plans should clearly set out the outcomes parents and children want to achieve; complemented by the single assessment and other agencies involved; and be supportive and progressed innovatively in collaboration with the family. The plan must also be individualised and written in a way that the family can understand. It is vital that requirements of the family are explained clearly, and the approach/discussion be modified if there is a parental learning need which may prevent them from fully understanding the process or what is being asked of them in the plan.

In particular, the Child in Need plan should:

- Describe the identified developmental needs of the child, and any services required
- Include specific, achievable, child-focused outcomes intended to promote and safeguard the welfare of the child
- Include realistic strategies and specific actions to achieve the planned outcomes; agreed in a transparent manner with the parent/s and child/ren
- Include a contingency plan to be followed if circumstances change significantly and require prompt action
- Recognise that Child in Need plan targets must be sustained - meetings must discuss and capture this.
- Include timescales that are not too short or unachievable
- Not be dependent on resources which are known to be scarce or unavailable
- Clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of professionals and family members, including the nature and frequency of contact by professionals with children and family members
- Establish points at which progress will be reviewed and the means by which it will be measured.

What is the purpose of a Child in Need Meeting?

The Child in Need meeting is an opportunity for key practitioners involved with the family, plus the parents/carers and their child, to identify the most effective services and interventions to meet their child's needs and to develop and progress/update the Child in Need Plan.

Children's Social Care will work with the family to empower them to attend and contribute to the Child in Need meeting. Consideration will be given to involving the child and supporting their attendance, as well as ensuring the meeting takes place at a time and place to support the family.

What happens before the meeting?

The lead professional (almost always the Social Worker) must identify the key agencies to be invited to the meeting. There should be consideration of those agencies known to the family, who will have greater knowledge of the family and be more likely to support the family to engage. For example, this may include practitioners within health services or the voluntary sector, who have known the family for a longer period of time than Children's Social Care colleagues. These colleagues are more likely to have a positive relationship with the family, and their presence may be key to ensuring the family remains engaged throughout this consent-based process.

Key contacts are:

- Health Visiting and School Nursing are contacted via Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust.

Health Visiting: WestBerksSafeguardingHV@berkshire.nhs.uk
Readingsafeguardinghv@berkshire.nhs.uk
wokinghamsafeguardinghv@berkshire.nhs.uk.

School Nursing: WestBerkshireSchoolNurses@berkshire.nhs.uk

For children over 5 years, the School Nurse is less likely to know the child and family but contact with Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust will establish if any other health practitioner from the organisation is involved with the child/family.

- Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust. Contact the Safeguarding Team: 07795 266350
Particularly for families where the child may have complex health needs, contact with Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust will establish if any other health practitioner from the organisation is involved with the child/family.
- Education setting, including pre-school: It is important to identify if the child is attending an education setting and contact them directly either via the school office or directly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- Voluntary Sector: There is no one point of contact for the voluntary sector, therefore it is important to speak to the family or other colleagues involved with the family, to establish if they receive regular support from any voluntary sector organisation.

Consideration must be given to other agencies who may regularly provide support to the family to establish contact with them and determine if their involvement in the Child in Need process is applicable. This may include services such as housing or drug and alcohol services.

Practitioners attending the meeting should come prepared with information they hold about the family – see the 'How will you Contribute to the Meeting?' section below. If a colleague is attending on your behalf, that colleague must be fully briefed and bring any updates on actions assigned to that agency/practitioner.

Family Involvement:

Assessments, plans and support should be holistic and informed by the needs and experience of the whole family - all children, regardless of age, disability, or language, must be consulted as part of the Child in Need process. Parents and children must be involved, empowered, and consulted with about what they wish to achieve through a Child in Need Plan and meeting. Child in Need support is consent-based and achieves the best outcomes when parents and children can direct and influence the nature of the support needed. This can be supported by ensuring that trusted professionals are included in the process. Likewise, the family must also be enabled to bring members of their family or friendship network that they or their children have identified as significant and important, to the meeting to provide support.

If the Lead Professional has been unable to support a parent and child to engage in the Child in Need process, the following will be considered to support the best option for the child:

- Escalate to a Child Protection Plan if risk is at a threshold of significant harm, or the likelihood of significant harm
- Step down to Early Help or universal services, if the threshold does not require statutory intervention as a Child in Need
- Close the involvement from children's social care and signpost the parent and child to services that might be supportive to them.

These decisions should be made as a multi-agency group, to ensure that all practitioners involved with the family have been consulted, and views sought. If there is a difference of opinion, the [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Difference of Opinion and Escalation Policy](#) must be used to resolve the issue with the best solution for the child and family.

What happens during the meeting?

For the initial Child in Need meeting, the social worker will have a draft plan, co-produced in collaboration with the parent and child for further discussion and development at the Child in Need meeting.

The meeting must consider what the parent and child identify as their needs, as also informed through the single assessment, information provided by partner agencies, and work towards formulating a clear plan. **Decisions will be made in collaboration.** If no agreement can be reached, differences of opinion should be noted, along with any action proposed. It should be kept in mind that this is a consent-based supportive engagement with parents and children and should not be enforced on them unless the risk necessitates consideration at a child protection level.

The Child in Need meeting should always consider a Family Group Conference as helpful way in providing extended family and friends' support.

Who chairs the meeting?

The Child in Need meetings will be chaired by the most appropriate lead professional within the multi-agency group. The first meeting will most likely be chaired by a colleague from Children's Social Care but during the meeting future chairing arrangements will be discussed and agreed.

Whilst it is recognised that the allocated social worker is often the lead professional overall; the family and **all** professionals are responsible for the contribution, formulation, and implementation of the plan.

How will you contribute to the meeting?

Your role at the Child in Need meeting is to ensure that all relevant and appropriate information is shared, and you have the opportunity to give your views. The expectations of practitioners from all agencies are:

- To provide a child centred, individualised to the child, written report/case summary/updated outcomes plan, to inform the wider plan. There is no standard template, but this update should include, for example, any changes that have happened since the previous meeting, what has gone well, any ongoing concerns. Ideally this is shared with the Lead Professional prior to the meeting.
- To give their open and honest, holistically formed, view on the risks identified for the child
- To ensure that the strengths, protective factors, grey areas, risks and causes for concern are identified and captured.
- For each practitioner to verbalise their written outcomes plan/case summary, incorporating fully the child's voice.

Capturing the voice and lived experience of the child is fundamental to effective planning and achieving agreed outcomes, even when the child is non-verbal. The active involvement of all agencies in the meeting should support and ensure this happens. Likewise, the meeting must also appropriately discuss the child's cultural background, to understand how this impacts the child and their identity, to better inform the plan. Diversity must be respected and valued and informed by the voice of the child to ensure similarities and differences are supported bringing opportunities to feel valued.

If a relevant professional from any agency cannot attend the meeting, as a minimum, a written update must be provided to the chair that can be shared in the meeting and included in the minutes. If a family member /child/young person cannot attend, they should be assisted to present their contribution in either verbal or written form.

If you have any concerns about attending the meeting, or what information to bring and share, you should seek guidance from the Lead Professional. It is important that the family are not 'surprised' by any information shared about them at the meeting, therefore if you have any new concerns or feel uncomfortable about sharing information in front of the family, you must speak to the Lead Professional for advice and guidance. It is important that the family hear your concerns, but this must be delivered in a trauma informed and supportive way.

All those present at the meeting must recognise that this can be an emotive process; but it is important to keep the child(ren) at the centre of the discussion. If a parent/carer is upset or finding the meeting difficult, then the Lead Professional will deal with the situation.

What are the expectations for Child in Need Meeting minutes?

It is expected that all professionals in attendance at Child in Need meetings take their own notes of the meeting as well as actions agreed to be undertaken. Minutes of the meetings will be formally taken by an agreed member of the group (not the chair) and distributed to those invited to attend.

The minutes will be distributed by the minute taker to all in attendance within 10 working days of the date of the meeting and should be stored securely by each agency on the child's record, along with the notes/key information recorded by the professional who attended the meeting. Please note, the child's record should link family members, to ensure that the whole family record can be easily accessed.

The Child in Need meeting minutes (and the plan) should cover:

- The reason for the meeting
- Updates since any previous meetings
- Development and/progress of the Child in Need Plan
- Needs to be addressed
- Desired outcomes to be achieved and timescales
- Actions and persons responsible, services identified and timescales
- Any contingency planning as necessary
- A summary of the main points of the meeting and decisions made
- A date (within six weeks) to update the Child in Need Plan.

If the parents or carers are not at the meeting

All attempts will be made to ensure a parent/carer is able to attend the meeting. If, however, parents/carers are not at the meeting, minutes should be provided and discussed with them following the meeting. This will allow their continued agreement and involvement. The minutes should be shared with the parents and all attending professionals within 10 working days.

If the child/ren are at an age where they will understand and be able to cope with the meeting, they should also be invited. Supported should be offered through the use of an advocate.

What are possible outcomes of a Child in Need Meeting?

Step-down from Child in Need of Statutory Intervention: The child is no longer a Child in Need requiring statutory intervention. This is ideally a multi-agency decision and will be subject to Children's Social Care management scrutiny. The parent and child/ren may continue to receive services from a single agency or under a multi-agency plan not involving Children's Social Care (such as schools, services in the community or early help services). The child/ren will therefore step down to an identified lead professional, who must be identified and named in the meeting. In some cases, a lead professional may not need to be identified and the child may continue to access universal services. These decisions and the supporting information must clearly be recorded on the child's electronic Children's Social Care file and involved agencies recording systems. **To note:** A Child in Need Plan should remain open for a minimum of 3 months following step down from Child Protection or from the point the plan was initiated.

Child in Need Plan continues: That the child continues to be a Child in Need requiring the same level of services, resulting in the continuing provision of services, and any amendments to the Child in Need plan identified to provide additional support to progress the plan. Where the outcome is an amendment to the Child in Need Plan, the Lead Professional will circulate a copy of the amended plan to the child, parents, and other agencies/professionals involved in providing the services set out in the amended plan, including any new services to be provided.

Step-up to Child Protection: That the child appears to be at risk of suffering or likely to suffer Significant Harm, resulting in the need for a strategy discussion/meeting and possible [Section 47 Enquiry](#).

These decisions should be made as a multi-agency group, to ensure that all practitioners involved with the family have been consulted, and views sought. If there is a difference of opinion, the [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Difference of Opinion and Escalation Policy](#) must be used to resolve the issue with the best solution for the child and family.

How often do Child in Need meetings take place?

Initial Child in Need meeting

An initial Child in Need meeting must be convened within 10 working days of a decision a Child in Need Plan is required. This decision may be made during or on the completion of the Single Assessment or step-down from a Child Protection Plan or when a Supervision Order is made.

Child in Need review meetings

The frequency of subsequent review Child in Need meetings will be determined at the initial Child in Need meeting. However, review Child in Need meetings in Reading and Wokingham should be held at least every six weeks depending on need, or at least every 3 months in West Berkshire.

The Child in Need review meetings should always be held to optimise parents' and children's attendance and arranged around their availability.

A decision to exclude a family member or withhold information must be endorsed by a Team and/or Assistant Team Manager and recorded formally within the minutes of the meeting and recorded on the child's file within Children's Social Care. The views of excluded family members must still be sought outside of the meeting and recorded on the electronic file.

At review meetings, the plan must be amended and updated as required and action taken if risks escalate/de-escalate.

To note: It is assumed that most Child in Need plans with intervention provided will end within six months, apart from children subject to Supervision Orders when the Child in Need Plan will last for the duration of the order and Child in Need Short Breaks plans. However, some children and families may require longer term support, for example children with disabilities.

What happens in between the Child in Need meetings?

In between meetings, practitioners are expected to deliver and work on the actions assigned to them. If there is a change in family circumstance, which can include the child moving to a different educational setting or team, or an issue escalates but is not cause for significant concern, then the practitioner should speak to and share this information with the Lead Professional.

Appendices

Appendix one – Statutory requirements

Statutory requirements for Child in Need, as detailed in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#).

- Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to provide services for Child in Need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare
- Local authorities undertake assessments of the needs of individual children and must give due regard to a child's age and understanding when determining what, if any, services to provide. Every assessment must be informed by the views of the child as well as the family, and a child's wishes, and feelings must be sought regarding the provision of services to be delivered. Where possible, children should be seen alone
- A Child in Need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled. Child in Need may be assessed under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 by a social worker
- Some Child in Need may require accommodation because there is no one who has parental responsibility for them, because they are lost or abandoned, or because the person who has been caring for them is prevented from providing them with suitable accommodation or care. Under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority has a duty to accommodate such Child in Need in their area
- When assessing Child in Need and providing services, specialist assessments may be required and, where possible, should be co-ordinated so that the child and family experience a coherent process and a single plan of action
- Under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, where a local authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child (who lives or is found in their area) is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, it has a duty to make such enquiries as it considers necessary to decide whether to take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. Such enquiries, supported by other organisations and agencies, as appropriate, should be initiated where there are concerns about all forms of abuse and neglect. This includes female genital mutilation and other honour-based violence, and extra-familial threats including radicalisation and sexual or criminal exploitation
- There may be a need for immediate protection whilst an assessment or enquiries are carried out

Appendix two - Children previously subject to a Child Protection Plan

Where families have made good progress under a Child Protection Plan and the multi-agency meeting decides they no longer need a Child Protection Plan, the family will step down to a Child in Need Plan. In some circumstances a Team Manager, in consultation with the multi-agency professionals might decide that a Child in Need Plan is not required, following a Child Protection Plan. For those families, the Team Manager must clearly record their decision in the child's record to evidence how the child will be safeguarded without this additional monitoring period.

There might also be a situation where the parents themselves do not consent to a Child in Need Plan, post Child Protection Conference. The Child in Need Plan can therefore not be imposed on the family, as this is consent based.

In most cases a Child in Need Plan with children coming off Child Protection would last for at least three months.

The family will continue to be considered at supervision where the Assistant Team Manager will make decisions about when it is appropriate to end the Child in Need Plan.

Appendix three - Supervision Orders

A court will have made a decision, usually as an outcome of care proceedings, that a child should remain living at home but that there is still an element of risk with that arrangement. Children are made subject to a [Supervision Order](#) to ensure that the local authority continues to actively support the child.

These children are recorded as Child in Need on the Mosaic system; however, it should always be remembered that these children have met threshold for significant harm and a Supervision Order was granted by the Court. Therefore, it is an expectation that children will be regularly seen and that the Child in Need Plans will continue to be reviewed. Visits should take place at a minimum of every three weeks.

Appendix four - Child in Need Visits

The purpose of Child in Need visits is to support parents and children with those identified areas that cause the child/ren to be in need of statutory services, to review progress, the intervention support offered and the implementation of the plan. These visits can be announced and unannounced, but the nature of these visits should be explained to the parent and child, at the start of the Child in Need process. When a social worker visits the parent/carers and child/ren it is to work collaboratively with them, using evidence-based parenting intervention support tools that will build on a parents' strength. The social worker will continue to ensure the child's welfare needs are met, assess the home environment, address specific issues and work directly with the parent and child.

For Child in Need Plans, visits will:

- Take place, face to face, at a minimum of every 3 weeks. However, they could be more frequent depending on the circumstances
- Be written up on the child's electronic social care record within two working days of the visit taking place.

For Child in Need Short Breaks plans, visits will:

- Take place at a minimum of every six months (separate to the Child in Need meetings). However, they could be more frequent depending on the circumstances
- Be written up on the child's electronic social care record within two working days of the visit taking place.

Appendix five – Level of need threshold

The level of need threshold has been taken from the [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership](#) Threshold guidance document.

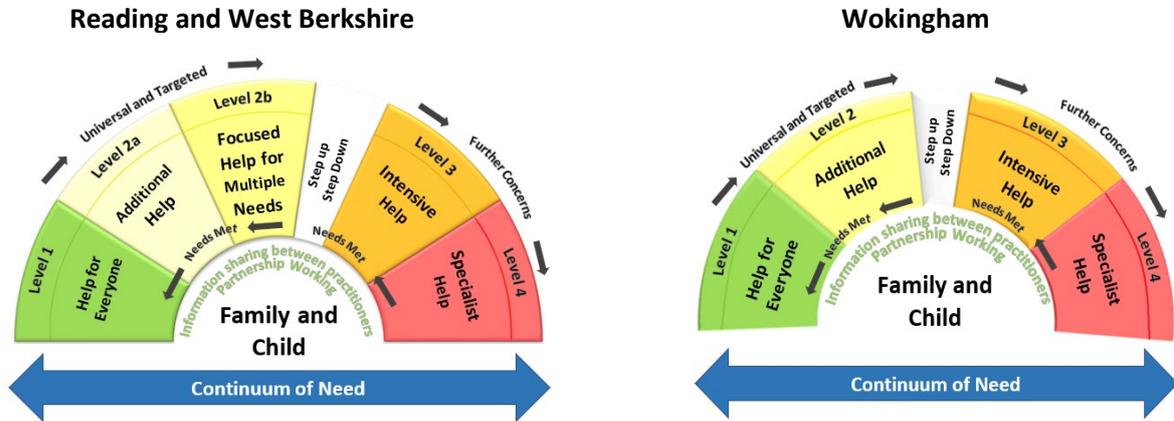
Our framework follows the 'windscreen' model illustrated below. It is a model of practice whose aim is to assist practitioners and managers in assessing and identifying a child's level of need, what types of services/resources might meet those needs and the process to follow in moving from the identification of need to the provision of services. It is important to say that each child is an individual within their own context and realise that each child's situation is unique and specific to them. The model provides a guide to support professional judgements in determining the next course of action to meet those needs.

Our approach is underpinned by the following key principles:

- Children at levels 2 to 4 can also benefit from, and should access, universal services (for example education and healthcare services) and voluntary sector organisations
- Children can be at different levels for education, health, and care within the continuum of need diagram
- Children should be enabled to move quickly and effortlessly to the required service response without necessarily going through each level

- Families should only have to tell their story once
- Children and their families have a right to have their voices views heard, including children who are non-verbal – and this should have a strong influence on what happens next and be at the centre of what we do
- Our services should be child focused but also operate within the context of whole family working

Threshold Windscreen Diagrams:



Appendix six - Available resources

All safeguarding procedures and guidance are available on the local Children's Services procedures (which include Early Help processes such as the step up to Children's Social Care process), or the Pan Berkshire Child Protection procedures – links are below. It is a requirement that you familiarise yourself with the procedures and access the resources as they are the most up to date.

- [Brighter Futures for Children Procedures Manual](#)
- [West Berkshire Children's Services Procedures Manual](#)
- [Wokingham Children's Services Procedures Manual](#)
- [Berkshire Child Protection Procedures Manual](#)
- [Working Together 2018](#)
- [BWSCP Threshold Guidance](#)
- [BWSCP Escalation Guidance](#)