



## **Level of Need Review (Step up / Step down) Protocol**

### **Interface between Early Help Team around the Family (TAF) and Children's Social Care (CSC)**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The interface between Early Help (TAF, Team around the Family) and Children's Social Care (CSC) is an essential component of a robust service for children and families. Whilst Early Help and Children's Social Care systems and practice can be individually sound, it is the pathways between these two models that are key to ensuring all children are safe, wherever they are within Halton's levels of need.
- 1.2 The two elements of children's services need clearly understood procedures and protocols for decision making about the pathways between the levels of need particularly the interface between levels 2 and 3 on the Halton levels of need framework. Pathways between the two must be simple, with roles and responsibilities, and lines of accountability explicit, with clear management oversight.
- 1.3 This protocol details what is required of staff within Children's Social Care and Early Help. It includes services across the whole of the Children and Families Department, and all partners who may be involved in early intervention plans i.e. MAP's. It covers the continuum of need from Early Help to statutory services (Children in Need / Child Protection).
- 1.4 Decision making within this protocol should always be child and family focussed. The child's needs should be kept paramount and the protocol and procedures should be used as guidance for our decision making.
- 1.5 Safeguarding procedures would always override anything within this document. If a child was at risk or believed to be at risk nothing within this protocol should be used to delay seeking help, support, guidance or services for a child or family.

1.6 The protocol details the processes and systems relating to:

- i. Cases which transfer from Early Help to Children's Social Care
- ii. Cases which transfer from Children's Social Care to Early Help

## **2. Cases transferring from Children's Social Care to MAP, or directly to universal services**

2.1 When a case is open to CSC and the level of need reduces Social Work intervention will no longer be necessary. Where this is the case, continued professional input may be needed to meet an identified need(s) following the closure of the case to CSC. CSC Social Worker is required to invite a Locality Early Help senior or a Children Centre Early Help Senior if the child is under 5 to the CIN meeting via the level of need review form on eclipse. The level of need review form should include date/time/venue of meeting, brief synopsis of work completed, outstanding actions identified and a view of who is best placed to adopt the MAP Navigator role, where appropriate.

2.2 At the final CIN meeting, any outstanding needs will be shared and future plans will be agreed with the family and partners. The outcome of the meeting will be agreed by all partners including the family and will be one of the following:

- i. **Child and family needs remain at level 3 and the case will remain open to CSC.**
- ii. **Child has some outstanding needs and would benefit from a transfer to early help/MAP for continued support at level 2**

The minutes of the final CIN meeting will become the new MAP document, and must include a section stating if there are any specific indications that would require the case to be transferred back to CSC.

The final CIN meeting should agree the appropriate timescale for the first MAP review meeting, and the final CIN meeting documentation will need to be received at least 2 weeks prior to this date. This will ensure a seamless transition and an appropriate package of support continues for the family. After the first MAP review meeting the delivery plan and review documentation should be completed within eclipse

- iii. **Child has some outstanding needs that can be met via Universal Plus services**

Where this is the case, the locality or children centre senior can advise the social worker and family regarding further support services available,

including services that have engagement officers to support families to access their entitlement to universal services.

iv. **Child has no outstanding needs and can continue to access their universal entitlement**

Where this is the case, the family will be advised of universal services available to them locally. Locality or children centres can support and advise CSC social workers on universal services available for families and the wider early help and support offer in Halton.

2.3 Locality or Children Centre representative completes Eclipse **EARLY HELP: Level of Need Review Form** after the meeting. This gives a brief overview of actions agreed and specifies the outcome agreed. The Social Worker also completes their CIN minutes, as usual.

**3. Cases transferring from Level 2 to CSC (planned – no immediate risk identified)**

3.1 Where a family is being actively supported at MAP level, and there is concern from the multi-agency group supporting the family that needs are increasing to level 3, the MAP navigator should complete an iCART referral form and state that they are requesting a level of need review with request to step up. Details of the MAP (step up) meeting should be included – 2 weeks' notice is required. If there is a case open at early help that may require SW oversight or advice and guidance on steps to take before step up then the navigator will seek advice from their principal manager and advice from a social worker in iCART.

**N. B. This protocol does not override any safeguarding policies and all professionals working with children who suspect that a child is or has been at risk should follow their own agency safeguarding procedure and take immediate action.**

3.2 iCART will review the information supplied and will complete an iCART contact form. If it is screened and the outcome is early help, advice is offered. :

**N. B. The procedure of holding a step up meeting should never delay any professional from taking the appropriate action to safeguard appropriately and ensuring social work involvement when necessary.**

***In cases of possible s47, due to perceived immediate risk, agencies should implement safeguarding procedures. This would supersede the above step-up process.***

**4. Incidents or events that lead to an iCART contact or referral for a child/family with a MAP (Unplanned Step- Ups)**

- 4.1 From time to time iCART or EDT will receive referrals for children/families with an open MAP. If there is no need for any CSC involvement the contact will be recorded and sent to the lead professional for information. Depending on the nature of the incident that led to the contact/referral this may indicate that the lead professional should call a review meeting to ascertain if the child/family requires more support.
- 4.2 If the referral/contact warrants CSC involvement, then a SAP would be instigated without the need for a planned step up meeting as this would only lead to delay for the family. The social worker allocated would be expected to contact the lead professional and members of the MAP group as appropriate. The MAP would close at that time, the early help family worker may stay involved with the family if needed to ensure consistency for the family, and this is done on a case by case basis and the best needs of the child/family are considered.

## 5. Monitoring and Management oversight

- 5.1 There are systems in place to ensure strong management oversight within CSC and Early Help, with all teams adhering to the Children's Services Audit framework and supervision policy. Additionally iCART activity and decision making is subject to management authorisation.
- 5.2 There are also forums for professional discussion of decision making; the weekly locality Working Together Meetings and the weekly referral meeting.

**Weekly 'Working Together' Meetings:** These multi agency meetings are facilitated by the Locality Early Help Managers or seniors and enable partners to come together to discuss new families (with their consent) where additional needs at level 2 have been identified. Actions are agreed with the aim of making sure that families receive the support they need. The meeting can help identify the most appropriate MAP Navigator – this is a role that any organisation can take on and ideally it should be the professional most relevant to the child and/or presenting concern. The meeting enables partners to raise any concerns they may have re families that appear stuck or are drifting at a MAP level.

- i. If there is concern that change cannot be achieved within meaningful timescales this may be an indication that more intensive support is needed or may warrant discussion with CSC re the potential for a step –up.
- ii. **Contact Challenge Meeting:** this meeting is held to discuss cases that have been referred to iCART over the previous month. The cases are

selected at random from the administration team and multi-agency professionals are asked to review the cases prior to the meeting. Each case is discussed and the outcome and the screening is scrutinised.

- 5.3 There are quality assurance process in place that scrutinises the quality and effectiveness of early help. Multi-agency audits take place twice per year and are facilitated by an iCART Early Help Principal Manager. Additionally, agencies are expected to conduct their own quality assurance processes.
- 5.5 As part of the performance management numbers of re-referrals and numbers of families maintained at a MAP level and/or stepped further down to universal services after both CSC and MAP involvement will be monitored through regular PIMMS