

Swindon Borough Council Children Services Care Panel Procedures

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1. Introduction

Swindon Borough Council's Children Services will have as its first priority the safeguarding and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. Swindon Borough Council's Children Services will manage access to resources through a Care Panel process alongside an available funds financial approach.

The panel is a Swindon Borough Council internal panel and is not attended by any third parties beyond the agreed membership found in the ToR, nor will any information be made available to any third party beyond panel membership. The panel is a mechanism to support the delivery of seamless, timely and needs led services for children and families and to ensure effective use of resources across the whole of the service.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

The Director of Children's Social Work has overall responsibility for ensuring that budgets within the service are managed appropriately in accordance with these agreed standards.

The Director of Children's Social Work alongside the Children Services Management Team ensure the robust implementation and compliance to these panel arrangements to secure a clear governance structure that is able to oversee resource allocation and consistent and timely decision making in care planning.

The Children and Service Management Team (CSMT) is responsible for:

- Directing and reviewing this procedure
- Ensuring that there is effective consultation, communication and compliance on all related matters in terms of adhering to this procedure
- Promoting the Care Panel.
- Ensuring compliance with published standards, procedures, working practices expected within the service.

The Director of Children's Social Work and Service Managers are responsible for the day-to-day management of the whole of service delivery including ensuring implementation of the standards.

All Children Services staff are responsible and accountable for ensuring that they comply with and understand this procedure.

3. Swindon Borough Children Services' Care Review Panel

The Children Services' Care Panel drives resource allocation and management and is the key forum to identify and support the management of risk, or presenting needs following a social work assessment. It is not a case management panel. It contributes to the following areas:

- Managing the threshold for access to a child becoming Looked After

- Agreeing funding and monitoring resource intensive, alternative intervention strategies to secure good outcomes and value for money
- Supporting exit, transition and step down points for all children and young people known to the service
- Monitoring care planning to secure risk mitigation and reducing drift and delay
- Ensuring that all Children Services resources are appropriately allocated.
- Supporting the development of multi-agency working and its influence on care planning

The purpose of Swindon Borough Council's Children Services' Care Panel is to scrutinise the allocation of resources according to the needs of children being identified as requiring a statutory social work intervention with presenting complex, specialist and/or high risk needs.

4. Membership

Core Panel Review Members

- Director of Children's Social Work (Chair)
- Service Manager for Children Service Looked After & Permanency (Vice Chair)
- Service Managers , Localities
- Service Manager, SEN inclusion and Disabled Children (as necessary)
- Senior Accountant/Assistant Accountant, Children Services
- Head of Transitions , Adult Social Care
- Designated Nurse For Children Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group
- Strategic Commissioner, Children's Services
- The Team Manager. The Family Service
- Team Manager, Fostering Team
- Team Manager, Placement Team
- Head Teacher, Virtual School
- Panel Administrator

5. Roles and Responsibilities at Care Review Panel

Chair Person

- To Chair the meeting and direct discussions ensuring the views of all the members are brought to bear on how best to meet the assessed needs as presented by the social worker
- Agree the recommendations, proposals and action plans of the meeting, which promotes best practice within the resources available and the timescales that must be met
- Agree the allocation of tasks to the Panel members that may facilitate the care/service plan, and ensure completion, within agreed timescales
- Constructive questioning and challenge to the plans presented in order to ascertain whether there is a better, more effective, or more cost

effective way to provide the required service, whilst achieving the desired outcome

- Offer a solutions approach to challenging circumstances
- Feedback to practitioners on their presentation, and share good practice examples to aid learning
- Identify unmet need

Senior Accountant/Assistant Accountant

- To record agreements on designated panel sheets
- Advise on costs relating to agreed packages
- Confirm costs associated with any existing packages
- Constructive questioning and challenge to the plans presented in order to ascertain whether there is another, more effective, or more cost effective way to provide the required service, whilst achieving the desired outcome
- Advise as to the likely long term projections on costs and to bring to the discussion consideration of the available funding model employed
- Provide feedback on the cumulative financial impact of agreed packages on the Services Funds Available Model

Strategic Commissioning Manager

- To advise the proposed placement and advise on contract options
- Constructive questioning and challenge to the plans presented in order to ascertain whether there is a better, more effective, or more cost effective way of provide the required service, whilst achieving the desired outcome
- Feedback to practitioners on their presentation, giving them good practice examples to aid learning

Social worker presenting the case

- The allocated professional who has submitted the Panel report will present the application. The worker's supervisor or Team Manager may also attend.

Panel Administration

A Panel Administrator is appointed with responsibilities to include, but not necessarily limited to:

- Implementing systems to disseminate the required paperwork to Panel members within the agreed timescales
- Ensuring there is an efficient and effective information point for booking application submissions and agenda planning
- Ensuring that decision sheets are recorded and distributed to the agreed membership within agreed timescales
- Ensuring decision sheets are uploaded to the child or young person's ICS file and the Social Worker and Team Manager are notified

Other attendees

- To contribute to discussions based on the proposed intervention, from the point of view of their specific specialist skills and experience
- To offer professional advice and guidance ensuring a solutions focused approach is applied

Meeting dates and times

- The Panel will meet once a week, for up to three hours subject to review. Should there be any deviation from this all panel members will be advised at least 24 hours in advance
- Ordinarily around 10/15 minutes will be set aside to discuss each application to panel. If a complex case is identified this will need to be allocated a longer slot allowing 20 minutes to discuss the complexities involved
- Applications will be submitted by 5pm on the Wednesday before the panel date and no late applications will be considered.
- Failure to attend a panel date after submission of an application could result in the application being deferred and/or resources being stopped, unless to do so would put the child or young person at risk
- In exceptional circumstances out of panel applications may be required. Requests for these should be discussed as soon as possible with a Service Manager and appropriate advice taken. The Director of Children's Social Work may as an exception take decisions outside of panel and the decision will need to be ratified by the panel at the first opportunity
- All panel applications should be submitted to: twells@swindon.gov.uk
- The Panel administrator will construct the agenda. They will not be in a position to chase applications, but will highlight to the Chair those expected that have not been received and the Chair, through the relevant Service Manager, will require feedback at that point
- Any cases being submitted to panel must have the agreement of the relevant Service Manager and any cases that are withdrawn from panel must be in agreement with the relevant Service Manager

6. Cases that should be presented to the Care Panel

The following cases should be brought to the panel:

- Where an assessment identifies that a child or young person's needs may require a full time Looked After Placement

- Where an assessment or circumstance identifies a need for a placement move
- Where any court related matters may require specialist assessment or intervention including pre proceeding periods
- Where an assessment identifies that a child or young person's needs may require crisis intervention to avert accommodation under Section 17, 18 or 20 of the Children Act 1989, except children allocated to a Children with a Disability Team whose case meets the Children with Complex Health Needs Panel criteria
- Where an assessment identifies the need for resourcing requirements (upwards of £500) in addition to the allocated social workers intervention

The panel will not agree funding for:

- Holidays for children
- Child-minding (unless this is required longer than three months and part of a wider package of support)
- Low level transport under £500 in total
- Low level home support (note that for disabled children, this is agreed by the Children with Complex Health Needs Panel)
- Day care (unless over £500 in total and as part of a high level family support package).

In all other cases it is anticipated that unless agreement has been granted by the Director of Children's Social Work that any package of support will require a full and complete agreed application through the panel process.

7. Special Guardianship Orders, Child Arrangement Orders and Adoption Order Support

Requests for a Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangements Order or an Adoption Order package of support will be overseen by the Director of Children's Social Work or Service Manager who may chair the panel for these cases to secure a shared agreement about the support package suitability to meet the future needs of children within policy, procedures and relevant regulations.

Consideration in regard to packages of support must specifically take into account the child's ongoing education, health, social and emotional needs. Support and advice can be sought from the Virtual School and CLA nurse to assist in this area.

All support package requests in these instances should be presented to the panel prior to the plan being submitted to court to secure a consistency of approach

Documentation submitted to Panel

- Applications must be submitted in a complete fashion – with all information, including the cost requested filled out in full on the appropriate request form no later than 5pm on the Wednesday before the panel date.
- Additional information is required if there is the potential for funding from other sources including education, health, CAMHS, YOT and Adoption Support Fund
- Inaccurate or incomplete applications to panel can result in the form being returned to its originator and the application being deferred

Other considerations

- All panel members must ensure that attendance is prompt and regular so that panel considerations can begin on time and take place when booked to do so
- All attendees must arrive in good time for their allotted slot
- Attendees presenting cases must be the social worker submitting the panel application and their line manager. If they are not able to attend and the case cannot be deferred then they must make arrangements for the case to be presented by an alternative team member who has been fully briefed
- Any urgently needed resources committed outside of panel can be agreed as an emergency but then presented at the following panel for review

Placement Options

- It is important that placements are being made with a good understanding of the provider market. It is incumbent upon the panel to ensure robust procedures are in place when seeking good placement options for Children Looked After that provide value for money

8. Accommodation and Resources Panel Decisions

Decisions will be made on the day in most cases, but where this is not possible, clear time-scales for a decision will be made and a clear timeframe given by the Chair of the panel.

Decisions will be recorded on the decision part of the Request Form, typed and then scanned into the child's electronic record and social workers alerted. This will normally occur no later than the Wednesday following panel.

Normally all service provisions agreed will be subject to review and review dates will be set on the day of the decision being made if required and at the discretion of the Chair.

It is the responsibility of the allocated social worker to inform the parents/carers and young person of the decision. Any feedback about the decision, including disagreement should be discussed with the social worker's Team Manager and resolved in most cases prior to leaving panel.

Where there is a disagreement about the outcome of decisions by parents or young people they should be viewed as a Stage One complaint without exception and addressed within the statutory complaints resolution processes.

9. Emergency placement/Exceptions to Panel

In exceptional circumstances applications for resources may be required outside of the panel process. In these circumstances, advice and approval for resources must be sought from the Service Manager. Where the application relates to a high cost placements approval should be sought from the Director of Children's Social Work. Applications should be submitted to the following panel for formal review and approval.

Exceptional circumstances are deemed to be where an emergency care need has been identified.

10. The Assessment Framework

The Assessment Framework emphasises that assessment is not an end in itself but a process which is aimed at ensuring an improvement in the well-being and/or outcomes for a child or young person. The conclusion of an assessment should result in:

- An analysis of the needs of the child and the parenting capacity to respond appropriately to those needs within their family context;
- Identification of whether and, if so, where intervention will be required to secure the well-being of the child or young person; and
- A realistic plan of action (including services to be provided), detailing who has responsibility for action, a timetable and a process for review.

Generally, all these phases of the assessment process should be undertaken in partnership with the child and key family members, and with their agreement. This includes finalising the plan of action. There may be exceptions when there are concerns that a child is suffering or may be suffering significant harm.

Analysis

The panel will rely on good and thorough analysis to identify the underlying needs of the child and family. The analysis stage should therefore take the following into account:

- A child's needs must be based on knowledge of what would be expected of this child's development
- Parenting capacity should draw on knowledge about what would be reasonable to expect of parental care given to a similar child
- Family and environmental factors including historical and background factors should draw on knowledge about the impact these will have on both parenting capacity and directly on a child's development

Outcomes

Clear outcomes are required by panel to enable targeted allocation of resources according to the actual needs of the individual child and their family. Critical at this phase will be judgments about a number of key issues:

- Understanding the voice of the child and the views of the family
- Determining what has been happening and whether this is a child in need and who also is in need of protection (and which thresholds for services criteria are met)
- Understanding the child and family context sufficiently to be able to secure the child's well-being or safety
- Assessing the likelihood of change
- Reviewing whether such change is being achieved
- Determining what is needed to meet need
- Determining what is needed to mitigate risk effectively
- Determining what is required to enable the family to help themselves

11. Decision Making

In drawing up a plan of intervention, careful distinction should be made between judgments about the child's developmental needs and parenting capacity and decisions about how best to address these at different points in time. These decisions will have to take account of a number of factors including:

- How existing good relationships and experiences can be nurtured and enhanced
- What types of interventions are known to have the best outcomes for the particular circumstances of the child who has been assessed as being in need
- What the child and family can cope with at each stage
- How the necessary resources can be mobilised within the family's network and within professional agencies
- What alternative interventions are available if the resources of choice cannot be secured
- Ensuring interventions achieve early success and have a beneficial impact. The self-esteem of children and parents is critical to the outcome of longer-term intervention
- There may be an optimal hierarchy of interventions, which will require distinguishing between what is achievable in the short term, what will

have maximum impact on the child and family's well-being and what are the long term goals

- Identifying what the child regards as highest priority
- It will be essential to achieve some parts of a proposed intervention within a predetermined timescale, in order to meet the child's needs. Other components of a plan will be less pressing and although desirable to achieve, not considered necessary for the prevention of future significant harm

Underlying these critical considerations is the importance of keeping the child at the centre of the planning process. Three key aspects of a child's health and development must inform the content and timing of the plan.

- Ensuring the child's safety
- Remembering that a child cannot wait indefinitely
- Maintaining a child's learning

The panel should work in conjunction with the statutory and managerial care planning process, which has a central role in the Child Care Planning and decision making process. However, it is not there to change the case management and decision making process. Case management decisions and accountability remain within the current structure and decisions in care planning are subject to usual procedures.

12. Threshold for becoming a Child Looked After

The panel should ensure a consistent approach for children who become looked after. For the threshold for access to the looked after system to be met the Panel must consider:

- That the proposed plan will bring substantial benefits to the child's long-term well-being in terms of health, development and educational achievement
- All potential alternative Family and Friends placements have been considered and found to be unsuitable
- That a Family Group Conference has been convened (or there are exceptional reasons not to)
- That the Partnership route through the provision of services has been exhausted
- That the risk of significant harm is such that a Court Order is needed and a Legal Planning Meeting is urgently required, or has been held already
- Remands to local authority care as per 2012 legislation
- In instances whereby Family and Friends arrangements are in place or being recommended they are properly assessed and approved if appropriate
- That Section 20 Arrangements are clear with consent issues secured and legal advice was sought
- That all elements of the plans have been implemented in a timely manner and within statutory timeframes

- That clear supervisory support has been accessed
- That the Director of Children's Social Work has agreed this period of accommodation
- That the IRO, if there is one, has clear oversight of the child and young person's circumstances

NB: If issues of risk are clearly evidenced outside of the panel the Director of Children's Social Work will make a decision for a short period with the expectation that an application is immediately submitted to the panel for review. Clearly where there is immediate substantial risk to life, there will be no delay.

13. Specific Duties in Relation to Children Looked After

Every effort will be made to provide services that will enable children and young people to remain within their own family or community. In seeking to deliver services in this way Swindon Borough Council's Children Services will:

- Provide services in a planned way, responding to individual need, with identified outcomes and not constrained by those types of service which are easily available
- Will match needs to service interventions and will aim to provide good long-term outcomes in terms of health, development, educational achievement and economic well being
- Meet needs by considering a number of different service interventions thereby ensuring suitability
- Ensure that the Director of Children's Social Work in consultation with the Service Managers and operational teams will make the final decision about accommodation
- Consideration of the views of children young people and their families/carers

The Service Manager and Team Manager will ensure that before a decision is made about a child or young person who is being Looked After, or in the process of being Looked After; the child or young person has had their wishes and feelings clearly taken into account and those of their parents/carers. Those with parental responsibility must have their views clearly recorded.

That due consideration is given to such wishes and feelings, as we have been able to ascertain (in the case of the child or young person having due regard to his/her age and understanding).

To the child or young person's race, religion, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Section 22 (4) and (5) of the Children Act 1989) disability and sexual orientation (where relevant) as amended by the Children and Families Act 2014.

The panel will ensure that in the case of any child or young person who is accommodated, our duty to safeguard and promote his/her welfare is considered and that any resources required from the panel promotes and safeguards his/her welfare.

The panel will ensure that where we provide accommodation for children or young people being Looked After, where possible the accommodation is near to the child or young person's family home, and is with any siblings who are also accommodated, so far as this is reasonably practicable, and is consistent with the child or young person's welfare and our duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989.

The educational needs of children must also be considered in planning arrangements, particularly in trying to retain the consistency and school place held by the child prior to becoming Looked After. The Virtual School should be fully involved in the decision-making to minimise any possibility of a child being out of education.

Care planning regulations 2014 now requires the Director of Children's Services or their delegated officer to give permission for placements made in excess of 20 miles from home. The panel will make recommendations in these instances with final sanction of placement being secured through the Director of Children's Services or their delegated person. In addition, the panel will ensure that our duties in relation to the promotion of contact are considered and that the decision made is consistent with those duties.

The panel will ensure that, in so far as is reasonably practicable, where we provide accommodation for a disabled child or young person who is being Looked After, the accommodation is suitable for his/her particular needs.

Any proposal for a placement out of area must first have been agreed by the Director of Children's Social Work. The social worker will complete the actions outlined in Swindon Borough Council's Children Services' policy and procedures and complete the Out of Area report for the Director of Children's Social Work consideration.

In addition, the panel will ensure that when a placement is being considered, our duty to make immediate and long-term arrangements for the placement of the child or young person, who is to be placed is considered; and that regard is given to the immediate and long-term arrangements for the child or young person, previous arrangements in respect of the child or young person, and whether a change in those arrangements is needed, and consideration of alternative causes of action.

Appendix 1 Flow Chart for Application to Panel

