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**Halton Safeguarding Children Board**

**Step up / Step down Protocol**

**Interface between Early Intervention Team Around the Family (TAF) and Children’s Social Care (CSC)**

1. **Introduction**

1.1 The interface between Early Intervention (TAF) and Children’s Social Care (CSC) is an essential component of a robust service for children and families. Whilst Early Intervention 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 Intervention. 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. CAFs. It covers the continuum of need from Early Intervention 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:

1. Cases which step up from Early Intervention to Children’s Social Care
2. Cases which step down from Children’s Social Care to Early Intervention
3. **Cases coming down (de-escalating) from Children’s Social Care to CAF, 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 Intervention Team representative to the CIN meeting via sending an e-mail to the relevant team inbox. E-mail 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 CAF Lead Professional 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 one of the following:

1. **Child and family needs remain at level 3 and the case will remain open to CSC.**
2. **Child has some outstanding needs and would benefit from a step down to early intervention/CAF:**

The minutes of the final CIN meeting will become the new CAF document, and must include a section stating if there are any specific indications that would require the case to be stepped back up to CSC. Once the CIN documentation is complete, the social worker should forward this to the locality early intervention team who will ensure it is uploaded onto the EIS (E-CAF) system and will share it with the new lead professional. There is no need for the lead professional to populate a CAF, as the CIN meeting minutes and plan act as the CAF in this instance.

The final CIN meeting should agree the appropriate timescale for the first CAF 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 CAF review meeting the delivery plan and review documentation should be completed within EIS (E-CAF).

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

Where this is the case, the locality early intervention team 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.

The final CIN meeting should clearly indicate if there are any circumstances that would lead to the case needing to be stepped back up.

1. **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 early intervention teams can support and advise CSC social workers on universal services available for families.

2.3 Locality representative completes Early Intervention Step-down 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.

1. **Cases stepping up from CAF to CSC (planned – no immediate risk identified)**

3.1 Where a family is being actively supported at CAF level, and there is concern from the multi-agency group supporting the family that needs are increasing to level 3, the lead professional should complete an iCART referral form and state that they are requesting a step up. Details of the CAF (step up) meeting should be included – 2 week’s notice is required.

**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 intervention, advice is offered. If it is agreed that the case is level 3 (no immediate concerns) an iCART Social Care Manager or Social Worker will then attend the meeting to gather further information and make appropriate recommendations. If a Social Work assessment is required an R & I will be loaded and the case transferred to a Social Work area team for a SAP. The CAF Lead Professional should close the CAF appropriately.

**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 CAF**

 **(Unplanned Step- Ups)**

4.1From time to time iCART or EDT will receive referrals for children/families with an open CAF. 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 CAF group as appropriate. The CAF would close at that time.

**5. Monitoring and Management oversight**

5.1 There are clear systems in place to ensure strong management oversight within CSC and Early Intervention, with all teams adhering to the Children’s Services 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 (one in Runcorn and one in Widnes) and the weekly referral meeting.

1. **Weekly ‘Working Together’ Meetings**: These meetings are facilitated by the Locality Early Intervention Managers or seniors and enable partners to come together to discuss new families (with their consent) where additional needs have been identified. Actions are agreed with the aim of making sure that families receive the support they need. The meeting enables partners to raise any concerns they may have re families that appear stuck or are drifting at a CAF level. 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.
2. **Contact Challenge Meeting**: this meeting is able to discuss cases that have been referred to iCART, where the level of needs of the child/family are unclear or professionals are not able to reach a consensus as to the level of need. With attendance of both the Divisional Manager for CIN and Divisional Manager for Early Intervention/TAF, this meeting ensures management oversight of decision making.

5.3 There are quality assurance process in place that scrutinises the quality and effectiveness of early intervention. Multi-agency audits take place twice per year and are facilitated by a Think Family Principal Manager. Additionally, agencies are expected to conduct their own quality assurance processes.

5.5 As part of the performance management of the locality early intervention teams there will be scrutiny and monitoring of step ups and step downs, analysing if the decision making on levels of need at first referral, and step-up step-down seem to be appropriate. Numbers of re-referrals and numbers of families maintained at a CAF level and/or stepped further down to universal services after both CSC and CAF involvement will be monitored.