

Local Assessment Protocol

Warrington Children's Services - September 2018

warrington.gov.uk



WARRINGTON
Borough Council

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Local protocols for assessment

Local authorities, with their partners, should develop and publish local protocols for assessment. A local protocol should set out clear arrangements for how cases will be managed once a child is referred into local authority children's social care and be consistent with the requirements of this statutory guidance. The detail of each protocol will be led by the local authority in discussion and agreement with the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies where appropriate.

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Introduction

In 2017/18 over 1200 children in Warrington were referred to our children's services by individuals who had concerns about their welfare. Every child has the right to a full and productive life. It is up to all of us to ensure that the children in Warrington grow up in safe environments that build confidence, friendship, security and happiness. We want the best for each and every child and young person and will work in partnership to remove barriers to achievement and narrow the gap so that everyone can reach their potential.

Our Pledges

Opportunities for the most vulnerable

Priorities	What we will do	What success looks like
 Ensure the safety and wellbeing of our vulnerable adults and children	Support our vulnerable adults and children to live fulfilling and rewarding lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Successfully deliver the SEND strategy and action plan ensuring quality of services and outcomes for service users, carers and families• Successfully address the need for early and immediate help for children and adults in need• Reduce the number of children in care• Reduce the number of adults in out of borough placements• Tackle sexual exploitation of children and vulnerable adults through timely support and intervention• Monitor and track numbers of missing children• Offer free, focused re-ablement support to adults who can be helped to get 'back on their feet' – physically or mentally• Implementation of the THRIVE model, improving children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing• Develop an autism strategy and action plan and complete an autism annual self-assessment• Positive Ofsted and CQC* inspections

1. Purpose of the Local Assessment Protocol

Professionals help best when all local agencies have carried out a thorough assessment and drawn up a plan for support. To keep children safe from harm a vigilant and informed professional community, confident in making judgements and assertive in taking action is required. All practitioners working with children and young people need to understand their role in protecting children and have the confidence to respectfully challenge issues to ensure timely and proportionate intervention for children who are in need or who may be at risk of harm.

- 1.1 The aim of this protocol is to support a unified and consistent approach to assessment that defines roles and responsibilities and contributes to the protection and wellbeing of all children within Warrington. It sets out how we, the local authority and its partner agencies along with parents/carers and young people, will assess, plan and manage cases when there are concerns about a child and where the threshold for a children's social care assessment (under the Children Act 1989) is met.
- 1.2 It also aims to explain the journey that children will take through the assessment process, providing support to them and their families on the way by developing quality relationships and purposeful interventions. All assessments and interventions with our children will consider plans for permanence from the first contact.

A child-centred approach to safeguarding

This child centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. A child centred approach means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families.

All practitioners should follow the principles of the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 - that state that the welfare of children is paramount and that they are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary.

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1.3 What is a Local Assessment Protocol?

- The Local Assessment Protocol is a 'handbook' that describes what the Local Authority (LA) will do when a child is referred to the LA for support. It is a map that guides the child's journey through assessment and planning.
- The main purpose of the Local Assessment Protocol is to set out the arrangements for how cases will be managed once a referral has been received by Warrington's Children's Services.
- The Local Assessment Protocol will also explain what help a child receives before the thresholds are met for statutory assessment, such as when children and families require early help known as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

1.4 Warrington's approach to Assessment

A co-ordinated approach – safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe. No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances and, if children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.

2. Assessment and planning – Early Help

2.1 Early help

Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years and up to 25 for a young person with SEND. Early help can also prevent further problems arising; for example, if it is provided as part of a support plan where a child has returned home to their family from care, or in families where there are emerging parental mental health issues or drug and alcohol misuse.

2.2 Effective early help relies upon local organisations and agencies working together to:

- identify children and families who would benefit from early help
- undertake an assessment of the need for early help
- provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to improve the outcomes for the child.

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2.3 Identifying children and families who would benefit from early help

In Warrington we use the Early Help Assessment to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs of individual children and families. We work with organisations and agencies to develop joined-up early help services based on a clear understanding of local needs. It requires all practitioners, including those in universal services and those providing targeted services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other practitioners to support early identification and assessment.

2.4 Practitioners working in both universal services and specialist services have a responsibility to identify the symptoms and triggers of abuse and neglect, to share that information and provide children with the help they need. To be effective, practitioners need to continue to develop their knowledge and skills in this area and be aware of the new and emerging threats, including online abuse, grooming, sexual exploitation and radicalisation.

2.5 Practitioners should, in particular, be alert to the potential need for early help for a child who:

- is disabled and has specific additional needs
- has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan)
- is a young carer
- is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups
- is frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home
- is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking or exploitation
- is at risk of being radicalised or exploited
- is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse
- is misusing drugs or alcohol themselves
- has returned home to their family from care
- is a privately fostered child

2.6 Effective assessment of the need for early help.

Children and families may need support from a wide range of local organisations and agencies. Where a child and family would benefit from co-ordinated support from more than one organisation or agency (e.g. education, health, housing, police) there should be an inter-agency assessment. These early help assessments should be evidence-based, be clear about the action to be taken and services to be provided and identify

what help the child and family require to prevent needs escalating to a point where intervention would be needed through a statutory assessment.

2.7 A lead practitioner should undertake the assessment, provide help to the child and family, act as an advocate on their behalf and co-ordinate the delivery of support services. A GP, family support worker, school nurse, teacher, health visitor and/or special educational needs co-ordinator could undertake the lead practitioner role. Decisions about who should be the lead practitioner should be taken on a case-by-case basis and should be informed by the child and their family.

2.8 For an early help assessment to be effective:

- It should be undertaken with the agreement of the child and their parents or carers, involving the child and family as well as all the practitioners who are working with them. It should take account of the child's wishes and feelings wherever possible, their age, family circumstances and the wider community context in which they are living
- Practitioners should be able to discuss concerns they may have about a child and family with a social worker in the local authority.

2.9 In cases where consent is not given for an early help assessment, practitioners should consider how the needs of the child might be met. If at any time it is considered that the child may be a child in need, as defined in the Children Act 1989, or that the child has suffered significant harm or is likely to do so, a referral should be made immediately to local authority children's social care. This referral can be made by any practitioner.

- 2.10 Early help services supports all referrals from Level 1 - 4 on the Threshold of need. Early Help services are lead practitioners on all levels 1-3. Please refer to the Threshold of need guidance around the understanding of the levels of need, responses and procedures.
<http://warringtonlscb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Threshold-of-need-guide-high-res.pdf>
- 2.11 As part of the agreed 'early help' procedures and reviews of whole family working which supports and embeds the National Troubled Families agenda, all Early Help Assessments/ action plan / review / closure plans, completed by any practitioner, are registered with the local authority's Early Help support team.
earlyhelpsupport@warrington.gcsx.gov.uk
- 2.12 If a child or family require early help services again and/or should they 'step up' into statutory social work intervention, their early help record can help to inform practitioners about what worked well before and can form the basis of a continuous assessment process which will continue into a social work assessment.



3 Assessment and planning - Social work

3.1 Statutory Assessment under the Children Act 1989

A statutory assessment is an assessment required by law under the Children Act 1989. Local Authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. Local Authorities undertake assessments of the needs of individual children to determine what services to provide and action to take.

3.2 A children's social care assessment is a multi-agency assessment carried out under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, this requires working together with children, young people and families and it will require their consent to progress. A Local Authority social worker is responsible for leading the assessment and has a duty to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings and take account of them when planning the provision of service.

3.3 If information gathered during an assessment (which may be brief) results in the social worker and their manager suspecting that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, then the Local Authority, under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 is required to make enquiries to decide what action must be taken, with partners, to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. There may be a need for immediate protection whilst the assessment is carried out.

3.4 Following an application under Section 31A of the Children Act 1989, where a child is subject of a care order, Warrington Borough Council must assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services which will be provided to meet the child's identified needs.

3.5 Where a child is accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, Warrington Borough Council has a statutory responsibility to assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services to be provided to meet the child's needs.

3.6 Where a child becomes looked after, the assessment will be the baseline for work with the family while the child is away. Any needs which have been identified must be addressed before decisions are made about the child's return home.

3.7 An assessment by a social worker is required before the child returns home under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review England Regulations 2010. This will provide evidence of whether the necessary changes and improvements have been made to ensure the child's safety when they return home.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-care-planning-placement-and-case-review>

3.8 Multi Agency Statutory Assessment in Warrington

A children's social care (statutory) multi-agency assessment in Warrington is called 'A Child and Family Assessment' (C&F Assessment).

3.9 The Government assesses the effectiveness of all Local Authorities through 4 critical elements. The LA will use these 4 critical elements to measure the effectiveness of the C&F Assessment.

- Timeliness;
- Focus on need;
- Views of the child;
- Outcomes

<http://warringtonlscb.org/professionals/introduction/>
<http://warringtonlscb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Threshold-of-need-guide-high-res.pdf>

4. Referrals to Warrington Children's Services

Professionals should use the multi-agency request for services (MARS) form to refer a child or young person who may be vulnerable or at risk.

Multi-agency request for services (MARS) form [pdf] - Internet Explorer only

MARS guidance note [pdf]

4.1 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

Within 24 hours the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) will make a decision as to whether a contact requires a statutory response and becomes a referral to LA Children's Services (Section 17 or Section 47). If a statutory response is not required, advice will be given to the referrer in relation to other services and a referral for early Help Support will be considered. If a Statutory response is required the MASH Manager will refer to the Assessment and Intervention Team (AIT).

- 4.2 In some situations the social work manager may not have sufficient information to make the best decision as to whether the contact requires a statutory response. In these circumstances the 24 hour decision will be that a statutory response will be initiated; however if further information gathered indicates that this is not warranted, the assessment can be a proportionate one which is ended quickly. The child may not have been seen in these circumstances, but the social worker and the manager will document the full reasons for the decision in the progress review section of the assessment document.

4.3 Assessment and Intervention Team (AIT)

A social work manager in AIT will make a decision about the type of response that is required. In urgent and very serious cases (mostly Section 47) the decision will be made immediately and will be prioritised without delay. For less urgent cases (Section 17) the child must be seen by a social worker within 10 working days of the referral decision. For children who require immediate protection, action must be taken by the social worker (or the police if removal is required), as soon as possible after the referral decision has been made (Section 44 and 46 of the Children Act 1989).

4.4 Timeliness

The timeliness of an assessment is a critical element of the quality of that assessment and the outcomes for the child. The speed with which an assessment is carried out after a child's case has been referred into local authority children's social care should be determined by the needs of the individual child and the nature and level of any risk of harm they face. Adult assessments, for example, parent carer or non-parent carer assessments, should also be carried out in a timely manner, consistent with the needs of the child.

- 4.5 A judgement will be made by the manager, in discussion with the allocated social worker on each individual case but an assessment will not exceed 45 days (as required by WT). There will be a progress review by a manager at not later than 10 days following the start of the assessment, which will ensure the assessment is undertaken in a timely way and any immediate intervention that may be required is in place as soon as possible. At this point the manager will set a date by which the assessment should be completed. If, in discussion with a child and their family and other practitioners, an assessment exceeds 45 working days, the social worker should record the reasons for exceeding the time limit.

- 4.6 Whatever the timescale for assessment, where particular needs are identified at any stage of the assessment, social workers should not wait until the assessment reaches a conclusion before commissioning services to support the child and their family. In some cases, the needs of the child will mean that a quick assessment will be required.
- 4.7 Once the referral has been accepted by local authority children's social care, the lead practitioner role falls to a social worker. The social worker should clarify with the referrer, when known, the nature of the concerns and how and why they have arisen.
- 4.8 Within **one working day** of a referral being received, a local authority social worker should acknowledge receipt to the referrer and **make a decision** about next steps and the type of response required. This will include determining whether:
- the child requires immediate protection and urgent action is required
 - the child is in need and should be assessed under section 17 of the Children Act 1989
 - there is reasonable cause to suspect that the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, and whether enquires must be made and the child assessed under section 47 of the Children Act 1989
 - any services are required by the child and family and what type of services
 - further specialist assessments are required to help the local authority to decide what further action to take
 - to see the child as soon as possible if the decision is taken that the referral requires further assessment
- 4.9 It is the responsibility of the social worker to make clear to the child and their family how the assessment will be carried out and shared with the child/family and relevant partners within the agreed completion date. The child and family must be informed of the action to be taken, unless a decision is taken on the basis that this may jeopardise a police investigation or place the child at risk of significant harm.
- 4.10 The child/children **MUST** be seen and spoken to alone by the Social Worker for every C&F Assessment (unless a proportionate assessment has been agreed with the manager as detailed in 5.5. above). The voice of the child must be the focus the assessment and their wishes and feelings ascertained and accurately reflected.
- 4.11 Where requested to do so by local authority children's social care, practitioners from other parts of the local authority such as housing and those in health organisations have a duty to co-operate under section 27 of the Children Act 1989 by assisting the local authority in carrying out its children's social care functions.
- 4.12 For children who are in need of immediate protection, action must be taken by the social worker, or the police if removal is required, as soon as possible after the referral has been made to local authority children's social care (sections 44 and 46 of the Children Act 1989).

5 What makes a good assessment?

5.1 The principles and parameters of a good assessment

Assessment should be a dynamic process, which analyses and responds to the changing nature and level of need and/or risk faced by the child from within and outside their family. It is important that the impact of what is happening to a child is clearly identified and that information is gathered, recorded and checked systematically, and discussed with the child and their parents/carers where appropriate.

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- 5.2 In order to carry out good assessments, social workers should have the relevant knowledge and skills set out in the Knowledge and Skills Statements for child and family social work.

Relationships and effective direct work

Build effective relationships with children, young people and families, which form the bedrock of all support and child protection responses. Be both authoritative and empathic and work in partnership with children, families and professionals, enabling full participation in **assessment, planning, review and decision making**. Ensure child protection is always privileged.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/708704/Post-qualifying_standard-KSS_for_child_and_family_practitioners.pdf

5.3 Assessment Tools

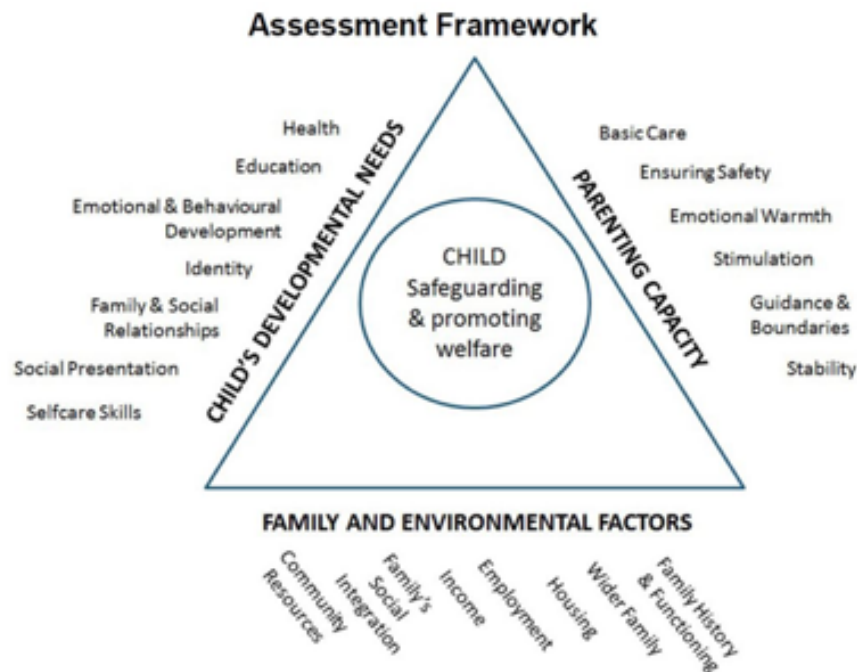
Our practitioners have available, and are trained to use, a number of key tools that support relationship, strengths based assessment and interventions, including;

- Motivational interviewing
- Attachment and trauma informed practice
- Solution focussed training
- Systemic practice foundation training
- Thrive Model
- Adolescent Childhood Experiences
- Effective direct work
- Theraplay
- Solihull Approach
- Graded Care Profile training
- Safe Base training
- C-change strengths based assessment and risk management tool
- Graded Care Profile
- Multi Systemic Therapy
- Family Group Conferences
- Pan-Cheshire Child Exploitation Screening Tool

5.4 Strengths Based Assessment Models

These should be integrated within existing processes e.g. C&F assessment, and are not intended as stand-alone documents. The use of strengths based relationship assessment models helps to support the assessment of parents' capacity to change in the context of child welfare by assessing particular defined behaviours.

See www.rip.org.uk for guidance notes and assessment tools on specific areas of risk.



5.5 Focusing on the needs and views of the child

Every assessment should reflect the unique characteristics of the child within their family and community context. Each child whose referral has been accepted by children's social care should have their individual needs assessed, including an analysis of the parental capacity to meet those needs whether they arise from issues within the family or the wider community. Frequently, more than one child from the same family is referred and siblings within the family should always be considered. Family assessments that include all members of the family should always ensure that the needs of individual children are distinct considerations.

- 5.6 Where the child has links to a foreign country, a social worker may also need to work with colleagues abroad.
- 5.7 Every assessment, including young carer, parent carer and non-parent carer assessments, should draw together relevant information gathered from the child and their family and from relevant practitioners including teachers and school staff, early years workers, health practitioners, the police and adult social care. Where a child has been looked-after and has returned home, information from previous assessments and case records should also be reviewed.

5.8 Developing a clear analysis

The social worker should analyse all the information gathered from the assessment, including from a young carer's, parent carer's or non-parent carer's assessment, to decide the nature and level of the child's needs and the level of risk, if any, they may be facing. The social worker should receive insight and challenge to their emerging hypothesis from their practice supervisors and other relevant practitioners who should challenge the social worker's assumptions as part of this process. Social workers and their managers must make informed decision on the nature of any action required and which services should be provided. Social workers, their managers and other practitioners should be mindful of the requirement to understand the level of need and risk in, or faced by, a family from the child's perspective and plan accordingly, understanding both protective and risk factors the child is facing. The analysis should inform the action to be taken which will have maximum impact on the child's welfare and outcomes.

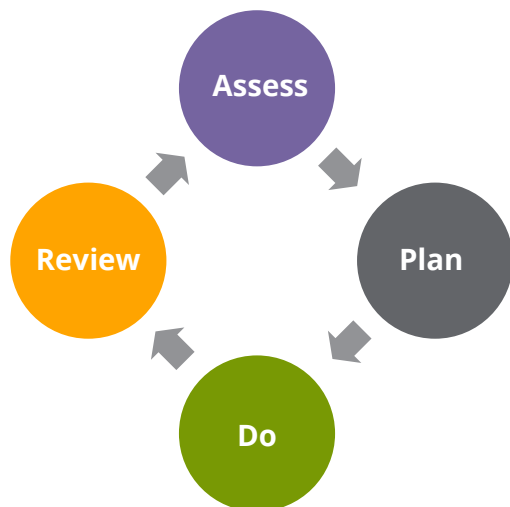
- 5.9 No system can fully eliminate risk. Understanding risk involves judgment and balance. To manage risks, social workers and other practitioners should make decisions with the best interests of the child in mind, informed by the evidence available and underpinned by knowledge of child development. Critical reflection through supervision should strengthen the analysis in each assessment.
- 5.10 A desire to think the best of adults and to hope they can overcome their difficulties should not subvert the need to protect children from chaotic, abusive and neglectful homes. Social workers and practice supervisors should always reflect the latest research on the impact of abuse and neglect and relevant findings from serious case and practice reviews when analysing the level of need and risk faced by the child. This should be reflected in the case recording.
- 5.11 Assessment is a dynamic and continuous process that should build upon the history of every individual case, responding to the impact of any previous services and analysing what further action might be needed. Social workers should build on this with help from other practitioners from the moment that a need is identified. A high quality assessment is one in which evidence is built and revised throughout the process and takes account of family history and the child's experience of cumulative abuse.
- 5.12 A social work chronology is an important tool to inform the assessment process and should be started from the first contact and continue throughout the child's journey.

Contextual safeguarding

As well as threats to the welfare of children from within their families, children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from outside their families. These extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking, online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Extremist groups make use of the internet to radicalise and recruit and to promote extremist materials. Any potential harmful effects to individuals identified as vulnerable to extremist ideologies or being drawn into terrorism should also be considered.

Assessments of children in such cases should consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child's life and are a threat to their safety and/or welfare. Children who may be alleged perpetrators should also be assessed to understand the impact of contextual issues on their safety and welfare. Interventions should focus on addressing these wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to local authority children's social care. Assessments of children in such cases should consider the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child. They should look at the parental capacity to support the child, including helping the parents and carers to understand any risks and support them to keep children safe and assess potential risk to child.

5.13 A social worker and their manager may arrive at a judgment early in the case but this may need to be revised as the case progresses and further information comes to light. It is a characteristic of skilled practice that social workers, with good supervision from their manager, revisit their assumptions in the light of new evidence and take action to revise their decisions in the best interests of the individual child.



5.14 Decision points and review points involving the child and family and relevant practitioners should be used to keep the assessment on track. This is to ensure that help is given in a timely and appropriate way and that the impact of this help is analysed and evaluated in terms of the improved outcomes and welfare of the child. The social work manager is responsible for providing supervision and quality assurance of social work practice and assessment.

High quality assessments:

- are child-centred. Where there is a conflict of interest, decisions should be made in the child's best interests: be rooted in child development; be age-appropriate; and be informed by evidence
- are focused on action and outcomes for children
- are holistic in approach, addressing the child's needs within their family and any risks the child faces from within the wider community
- ensure equality of opportunity
- involve children, ensuring that their voice is heard and provide appropriate support to enable this where the child has specific communication needs
- involve families
- identify risks to the safety and welfare of children
- build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties
- are integrated in approach
- are multi-agency and multi-disciplinary
- are a continuing process, not an event
- lead to action, including the provision of services
- review services provided on an ongoing basis
- are transparent and open to challenge

5.15 Focusing on outcomes

Every assessment should be focused on outcomes, deciding which services and support to provide to deliver improved welfare for the child.

5.16 Where the outcome of the assessment is continued local authority children's social care involvement, the social worker should agree a plan of action with other practitioners and discuss this with the child and their family. The plan should set out what services are to be delivered, and what actions are to be undertaken, by whom and for what purpose.

- 5.17 Many services provided will be for parents or carers (and may include services identified in a parent carer's or non-parent carer's needs assessment). The plan should reflect this and set clear measurable outcomes for the child and expectations for the parents, with measurable, reviewable actions for them.
- 5.18 The plan should be reviewed regularly to analyse whether sufficient progress has been made to meet the child's needs and the level of risk faced by the child. This will be important for neglect cases where parents and carers can make small improvements. The test should be whether any improvements in adult behaviour are sufficient and sustained. Social workers and their manager should consider the need for further action and record their decisions. The review points should be agreed by the social worker and their manager with other practitioners and with the child and family to continue evaluating the impact of any change on the welfare of the child.
- 5.19 Social workers should have time to complete assessments and have access to high quality practice supervision. Principal social workers should support social workers, the local authority and partners to develop their assessment practice and decision making skills, and the practice methodology that underpins this.
- 5.20 Effective practitioner supervision can play a critical role in ensuring a clear focus on a child's welfare. Supervision should support practitioners to reflect critically on the impact of their assessment and intervention on the child and their family. The social worker and their manager should review the plan for the child. They should ask whether the help given is leading to a significant positive change for the child and whether the pace of that change is appropriate for the child.

