

Local Protocol For Assessment January 2014



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Contents

1	The Purpose of the Protocol	Page 4
2	Underpinning Vision, Principles and Values	Page 5
3	Warrington's Approach to Assessment and Planning with Children and Families	Page 6
4	Assessment and Planning for Early Help Services	Page 8
5	Assessment and Planning for statutory social work	Page 10

Appendices

Appendix One	Regional Model for Combined Assessment
Appendix Two	Warrington Combined Assessment Record
Appendix Three	Combined Assessment; Template for Stakeholder

1 Purpose of the Protocol

“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 with their partners and agreed with the relevant LSCB”
Working Together 2013 (Paragraph 62)

- 1.1 This Local Protocol for Assessment sets out how, in Warrington, we will assess, plan and manage cases when there are concerns about a child. It will outline how this will take place, both at the stage where early help and support is required, and also where it is recognised that there is a need for social work assessment and intervention.
- 1.2 A consistent message from cases involving harm to children is the importance of identifying problems early and taking rapid action to address them before they get worse. We also know that no single professional can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances.
- 1.3 If children and families are to receive the right help, everyone who comes into contact with them - midwives, health visitors, GPs, early years' professionals, teachers, youth workers, police, voluntary and social workers - has to play a role by identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.
- 1.4 Concerns about a child's welfare may arise in many different contexts and the nature of these concerns will vary greatly from child to child. What is important is that support is provided quickly so that a problem does not escalate.
- 1.5 Understanding families and the experiences of children within them can be complex and signs of low level abuse and neglect may be misleading. Professionals working in universal services - health, education, police and early years - have a responsibility to identify the early signs of abuse and neglect, to share that information and work together to provide children with the help they need.

Assessment should be a continuous process, which has the needs of the child at the centre. The assessment completed by a social worker will therefore build on information already known as a result of early help to the child and their family.

2 Underpinning Vision, Principles and Values

“Effective safeguarding arrangements in every local area should be underpinned by two key principles:

- *safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: for services to be effective each professional and organisation should play their full part; and*
- *a child-centred approach: for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children.”*

Working Together 2013 (Key Principles paragraph 8)

Our vision in Warrington is that children and young people in Warrington are safe, happy, resilient and optimistic about the future.

Our values

Assessment and planning should be

- child centred -where there is a conflict of interest, decisions must be made in the child's best interests
- be rooted in child development
- be focused on outcomes for children and ensure their voices are heard
- be holistic in approach - addressing the child's needs within their family and wider community
- be informed by evidence
- ensure equality of opportunity
- build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties
- be integrated in approach
- be a continuing process not an event
- be transparent and open to challenge



Our Principles

Work with children and families should:

- Keep children and young people at the centre of all we do
- Have ambition for children and young people
- Focus on front line services which make a positive difference
- Aim for excellence and continuous improvement
- Work together with children and families and partners
- Be open about our decisions and why we have made them
- Respond to changing needs and landscapes
- Deliver value for money

3 Warrington's Approach to Assessment and Planning with Children and Families

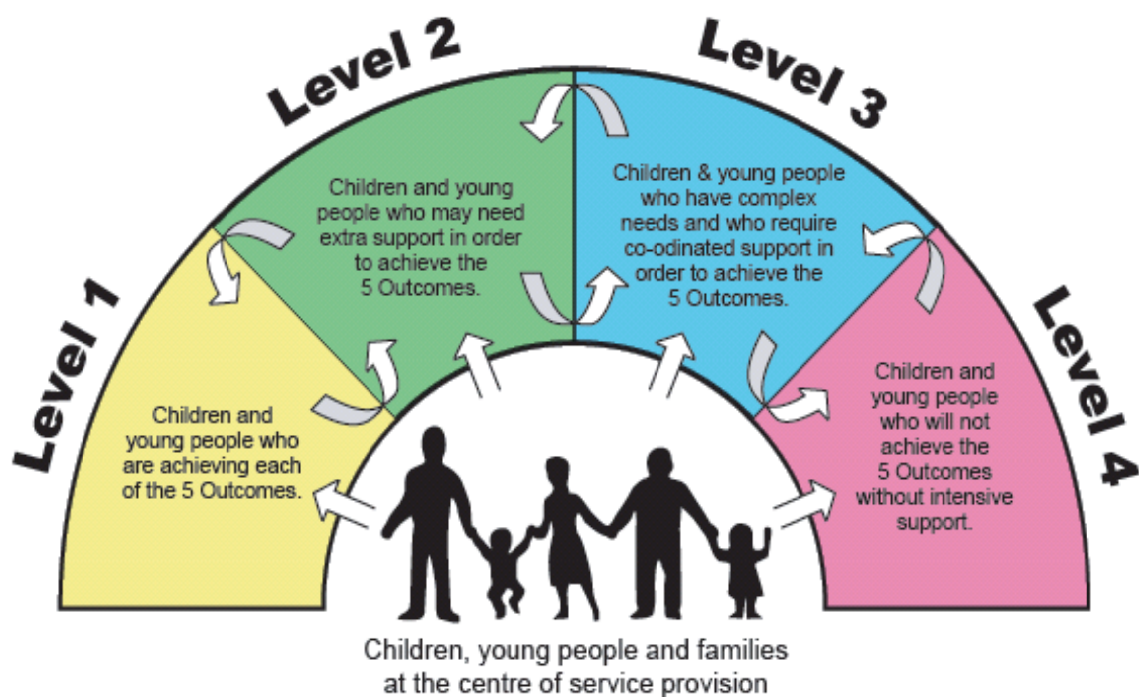
"Everyone who works with children - including teachers, GPs, nurses, midwives, health visitors, early years professionals, youth workers, police, Accident and Emergency staff, paediatricians, voluntary and community workers and social workers - has a responsibility for keeping them safe.

No single professional 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.

In order that organisations and practitioners collaborate effectively, it is vital that every individual working with children and families is aware of the role that they have to play and the role of other professionals. In addition, effective safeguarding requires clear local arrangements for collaboration between professionals and agencies".

Working Together 2013 (paragraphs 9-11)

- 3.1 Warrington's Family Support Model outlines the local approach to assessment and planning with children and families. Originally developed in response to the Children Act 2004 and the Every Child Matters Agenda, the model sets out Warrington's approach in supporting children and families to achieve their potential. The model incorporates all levels of support to families including 'early help' interventions at Levels 1 and 2, 'complex' interventions in line with Troubled Families developments at Level 3, and statutory social work support at Level 4.



- 3.2 The Family Support Model helps services to work together, particularly at Levels 1 to 3 (before statutory intervention is needed) by providing a common set of procedures and documents for assessment and planning - see Section 5 for more details.
- 3.3 There are clear procedures and working practices in place to support children and families whose level of need or risk has increased to level four and therefore needs social work intervention. These 'step up' procedures ensure that children and families can receive the right level of support and transfer from Family Support plans led by a led professional, to Children in Need plans led by a social worker without the need for re referral into social work services.
- 3.4 In addition, children and families who are receiving social work services and who no longer require statutory support can 'step down' from chid protection or children in need plans led by social workers, to family support plans led by professionals from services working at Levels 1 to 3. These procedures ensure that children and families receive on-going support, as appropriate, at their transition from statutory services without experiencing repetition or duplication of processes.
- 3.5 Warrington's Family Support Strategy promotes agencies working together, under one performance management framework, to deliver measurable outcomes for families. At the centre of the strategy, underpinning all service delivery and development, is the ability of staff to 'think family.' This ensures that all services work together to ensure the whole family's needs are identified and supported, regardless of where the family asks for support this approach.



- 3.6 This approach is supported by the Pan Cheshire Safeguarding Children Procedures which outlines for all agencies their responsibilities in respect of their work with children and families, particularly in relation to safeguarding.
<http://warringtonscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/contents.html>

4 Assessment and Planning: 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.

Effective early help relies upon local agencies working together to:

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

Local agencies should have in place effective ways to identify emerging problems and potential unmet needs for individual children and families. This requires all professionals, including those in universal services and those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other professionals to support early identification and assessment.

Working Together 2013 (page 11)

- 4.1 In Warrington, partners have worked together to agree a local definition of early help, and have agreed that early help :-
"Refers to the offer of any information, advice or support to children, young people and their families as soon as possible in their lives, or when issues emerge, to help prevent problems from escalating."
- 4.2 This definition includes all services working at Levels 1 to 3 of the Family Support Model and outlines that it is everyone's responsibility to offer support to children and families at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.3 At Level 1 of the Family Support Model all practitioners are encouraged to be aware of the support available to children and families in order to ensure they sign-post service users to relevant, universal services. The model introduces a common interagency referral form (FSM01) that can be used to make single-agency referrals to appropriate services. Referrals are only made where the family are in agreement and requesting the support.
- 4.4 Levels 2 and 3 of the Family Support Model includes the use of Common Assessment Framework (CAF), co-ordinated support plans and the role of the Lead Professional to deliver more co-ordinated multi agency support to children and families. All agencies and practitioners working with children and families are encouraged (with the agreement of families) to undertake CAF assessments, agree support plans, hold regular reviews of the support on offer and act as an advocate and case-holder for the family.

- 4.5 The CAF assessment uses the Framework for Assessment (see section 6.2 of this document) to assess a child's or young person's needs and strengths, and identify risks and supportive factor in the family and their environment. Based on the findings from the CAF assessment, each child with identified needs will then have an individual support plan (FSM02) and a named Lead Professional to co-ordinate the support for them and their family. The support plan will be reviewed regularly on a review plan (FSM03) until the child's needs are met and/or support is no longer required.
- 4.6 In line with the national Troubled Families agenda, Warrington is currently expanding its Family Support Model to incorporate whole family working. This is resulting in a move from the 'team around the child' approach to become a 'team around a family' approach. This will result in assessment and planning in 'early help' adapting to reflect whole family working.
- 4.7 As part of the agreed 'early help' procedures and trials of whole family working, all CAF assessments and support / review / closure plans, completed by any practitioner, are registered with the local authority's CAF team. 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.



5 Assessment and Planning : Social Work

5.1 Statutory basis for Social Work Assessment

“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. ”
Working Together 2013 (paragraph 26)

5.1.1 The Children Act 1989 provides three specific statutory reasons for a social work assessment to be undertaken:-

- A child in need is defined under the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health and development will be significantly impaired, without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled. In these cases, assessments by a social worker are carried out under **section 17** of the Children Act 1989. Children in need may be assessed under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, in relation to their special educational needs, disabilities, or as a carer, or because they have committed a crime. The process for assessment should also be used for children whose parents are in prison and for asylum seeking children. When assessing children in need and providing services, specialist assessments may be required and, where possible, should be coordinated so that the child and family experience a coherent process and a single plan of action.
- Concerns about maltreatment may be the reason for a referral to local authority children's social work or concerns may arise during the course of providing services to the child and family. In these circumstances, local authority children's social work must initiate enquiries to find out what is happening to the child and whether protective action is required. Local authorities, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, also have a duty to make enquiries under **section 47** of the Children Act 1989 if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. There may be a need for immediate protection whilst the assessment is carried out.
- Some children in need may require accommodation because there is no one who has parental responsibility for them or because they are alone or abandoned. Under **section 20** of the Children Act 1989, the local authority has a duty to accommodate such children in need in their area. Following an application under **section 31A**, where a child is the subject of a care order, the local authority, as a corporate parent, 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.

- 5.1.2 Policies and procedures for the social work teams outline in more detail times at which social workers are expected to undertake and record assessments of children's needs. These include assessments being required for all children who are the subject of new referrals accepted by the Duty and Assessment Team; for all children who are the subject of section 47 investigations; for all children who have been subject to a child protection plan for 6 months; and in all circumstances where rehabilitation is being considered for children who are in care.

http://wired/Images/REFERRAL%20%26%20ASSESSMENT%20-%20POLICY%20%26%20PROCEDURES_tcm33-48662.pdf

- 5.1.3 In Warrington, if children's needs are such that they are identified as being at level four of the Family Support Model, then a referral to children's social work will be made and the level of need identified further by reference to the "Threshold criteria for the provision of services from social work teams" to identify if the need for assessment and planning is at level 4a (a child in need) 4b (child in need of safeguarding) or 4c (a child in need of care).

[http://wired/Images/3b\)%20Threshold%20Criteria%20-%20December%202010_tcm33-49427.pdf](http://wired/Images/3b)%20Threshold%20Criteria%20-%20December%202010_tcm33-49427.pdf)

- 5.1.3 Alternatively, as described in sections 4.3 and 4.4 of this protocol, children and their families may be transferred between early help and social work teams via the agreed "step up" and "step down" procedure.

5.2 The Local Framework for Social Work Assessment

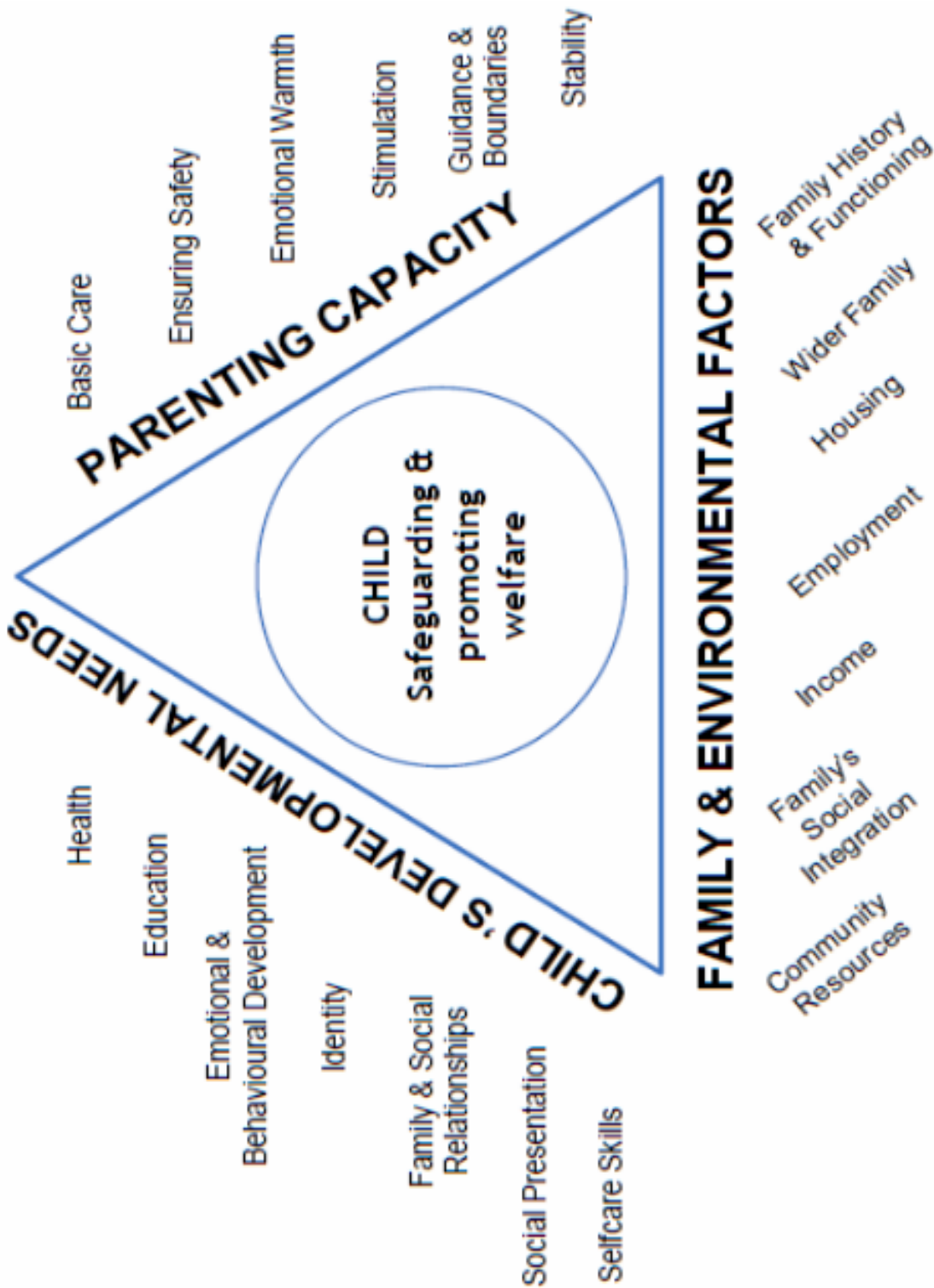
"Research has shown that taking a systematic approach to enquiries using a conceptual model is the best way to deliver a comprehensive assessment for all children. A good assessment is one which investigates the following three domains

- *the child's developmental needs, including whether they are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm;*
- *parents' or carers' capacity to respond to those needs; and*
- *the impact and influence of wider family, community and environmental circumstances"*

Working Together 2013 (paragraph 33)

- 5.2.1 As previously described, this conceptual model has been the agreed framework for assessment for both CAF and social work assessment in Warrington for some time. Warrington will therefore continue to utilise the Framework for Assessment referred to in Working Together 2013, as its conceptual model for the assessment of children and families. This framework is outlined by the diagram below:-

Assessment Framework



5.3 Combined Assessment and Planning

- 5.3.1 Warrington has worked with other local authorities across the North West to agree a regional planning and assessment model on which to base its practice. The regional model outlines an approach which enables social workers and their managers to undertake an assessment, and implement a plan based on the individual needs of each child or children. It also allows for consideration of the nature and level of any risk of harm faced by them and enables the review and revision of the assessment and planning throughout the process, both by the social worker and their manager.
- 5.3.2 The model allows practitioners and managers to make professional judgements regarding “timeliness” based on the child’s individual need within a framework which determines **maximum** timescales (described as “up to ...days”) that must be met. Local authorities have the discretion to require these timescales to be shorter than the agreed regional model should they choose to do so. Warrington has defined its practice in respect of timeliness to meet the requirements of the regional model. In two key aspects Warrington has set the maximum timescale to be a shorter period. Child in Need meetings must take place up to a maximum of 20 working days of the assessment commencing (the regional protocol states 30 working days), and the assessment must be completed in up to a maximum of 40 working days (the regional protocol states 45 working days). The model is Attached at Appendix One.
- 5.3.2 In line with the requirement in Working Together (2013) a decision about the type of response required for each referral **must** be made within 24 hours or one working day)of it being received.
- 5.3.3 How quickly an assessment is carried out after a child’s case has been referred into children’s social care, will be determined by the needs of the child and the level of any harm being suffered. This will require judgements to be made by the social worker in discussion with their manager on every case and should be clarified by the manager on allocation of the case.
- 5.3.2 The Combined Assessment Record requires the manager to outline the reason and purpose for the assessment, and then requires the social worker to outline the plan of how the assessment will be undertaken, including identifying those partner agencies and professionals who will need to contribute to the assessment; the assessment tools to be used and the number of days they will require based on the child’s individual needs. This plan will then be agreed by the manager before the work commences.
- 5.3.3 However, all children **must** be seen within 10 working days of the assessment and the date the child was seen must be entered by the social worker on the combined assessment form.
- 5.3.4 Managers **must** review the progress of the assessment no later than day 15. The manager must enter the date they reviewed the assessment and any comments on the combined assessment form. The manager and social worker should review and agree at this point the date by which the assessment should be completed (if not already completed) and if the case is to remain open the date for the multi agency Child in Need meeting must be agreed.