



London Borough of Newham

Children's Social Care Local Assessment Protocol

February 2014

Authorisation	
Newham Safeguarding Children Board	
Interim Director of Children and Young People's Services	

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Section 1: Introduction

Working Together (2013) states that:

"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. The local authority is publicly accountable for this protocol and all organisations and agencies have a responsibility to understand their local protocol."

This document is the London Borough of Newham's local assessment protocol and it sets out the local arrangements for how cases will be managed once a child is referred to Children's Social Care (CSC).

This document aims to outline how:

- Assessments will be timely, transparent and proportionate to the needs of individual children and their families;
- Assessments will meaningfully include relevant professionals, including but not limited to, Police, Health (Community, Adult Mental Health, Acute).
- Professionals should support children and families to actively contribute to assessments;
- Assessments can be informed by other specialist assessments, such as the assessment of children with special educational needs (Education, Health and Care Plan) and how multiple assessments should be coordinated so that the child and family experience a joined up assessment process and a single planning process focused on outcomes;
- Desired outcomes are identify, and measured.
- The progress of assessments should be reviewed along with other professionals, the child and family;
- The process for the assessment of children who are returned from care to live with their families;
- The youth justice system will be addressed within the applicable assessment processes;
- Decisions should be recorded in line with the CSC recording policy.
- Case recording should include a routine focus on the child's development in order that developmental progress can be monitored;

- Each child and family should be assisted to understand the type of help being offered to them and their own responsibilities within any child plan;
- Children and families can challenge professional decisions and how they can make complaints about the services they receive.

Section 2: The Single Assessment in Newham

- 2.1 The development of a single assessment to replace the initial and core assessment process is one element of a broader programme of social work improvement in Newham. This programme seeks to strengthen the practice of frontline workers, deliver better outcomes for children and families and respond to the Munro Review of Child Protection.
- 2.2 Changes to statutory requirements in Working Together 2013 remove the distinction between initial and core assessments and replace this with ongoing, locally developed assessments of need. The introduction of the single assessment process in Newham reflects this change.
- 2.3 The completion of one single assessment per child is required to ensure that needs are fully considered. The single assessment eliminates the need for practitioners to complete multiple risk assessments and additional reports to conference by introducing a process that serves multiple functions. The form has been streamlined by including fewer tick boxes and sub sections for each of the domains. The single assessment replaces initial and core assessments and the social work reports to initial/review child protection conference.
- 2.4 The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need remains the basis upon which information within the new form is collected and analysed. The single assessment incorporates elements of the Strengthening Families model that is used for child protection conferences in Newham. The information held by other agencies, including education, GPs and other health professionals, police and adults services continues to be critical in informing these assessments.
- 2.5 Working Together 2013, describes high quality assessments as having the following features:
 - Child centred. Where there is a conflict of interest, decisions should be made in the child's best interests
 - Rooted in child development and informed by evidence
 - Focused on action and outcomes for children
 - Holistic in approach, addressing the child's needs within their family and wider community

- Ensure equality of opportunity
- Involve children and families
- Build on strengths as well as identifying difficulties
- Integrated in approach
- A continuing process and not an event
- Leads to action, including the provision and review of services
- Transparent and open to challenge.
- 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, set out in the diagram below. It is essential that the assessment is informed by information held by other agencies that have current contact or a history of contact with the child and their family.



- 2.6 The interaction of these domains requires careful investigation during the assessment. The aim is to reach a judgment about the nature and level of needs and/or risks that the child may be facing within their family. It is important that:
- Information is gathered from all sources including Children's Services themselves and recorded systematically
 - Information is checked and discussed with the child and their parents/carers where appropriate
 - Differences in views about information are recorded
 - The impact of what is happening to the child is clearly identified.
- 2.7 Every assessment should be child centred. Where there is a conflict between the needs of the child and their parents/carers, decisions should be made in the child's best interests.
- 2.8 Each child who has been referred into CSC by Triage should have an assessment to respond to their needs and to understand the impact of any parental behaviour on them as an individual. Local authorities have to give due regard to a child's age and understanding when determining what (if any) services to provide under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, and before making decisions about action to be taken to protect individual children under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
- 2.9 Every assessment must be informed by the views of the child as well as the family. Children should, wherever possible, be seen alone and the CSC social worker has a duty to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings regarding the provision of services to be delivered. It is important to understand the resilience of the individual child when planning appropriate services. In some cases, other professionals may be better placed to support children and families to contribute to assessments. Professional judgment should be employed to determine when and how other professionals work with social care professionals to gather the views of children and families.
- 2.10 Every assessment should reflect the unique characteristics of the child within their family and community context. The Children Act 1989 promotes the view that all children and their parents should be considered as individuals and that family structures, culture, religion, ethnic origins and other characteristics should be respected.
- 2.11 Every assessment should draw together relevant information gathered from the child and their family and from relevant professionals including teachers, early years workers, health professionals, the police and adult social care.

2.12 Every assessment should consider the reasons professionals are involved with the child and family, and what outcomes are being sought.

2.13 A high quality assessment is one in which evidence is built and reviewed throughout the process. Professionals 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 best practice that professionals revisit their assumptions in the light of new evidence and take action to revise their decisions in the best interests of the individual child. The aim is to use all the information to identify difficulties and risk factors as well as developing a picture of strengths and protective factors.

Section 3: Referral Process

3.1 Role of Triage

Newham is committed to making sure that children and families receive the right help at the right time. Newham's Children's Triage plays a critical role in ensuring this commitment is achieved.

Children's Triage provides a single place to make a referral to about a child or family. In Newham, triage is comprised of a core range of services including CSC, Police, Youth Offending, Probation, Health and Families First (part of the borough's early intervention offer). Triage also has strong links to other services including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Early Start, the borough's early intervention offer for under 5's and their families.

Triage aims to provide an integrated offer which facilitates access to a range of services, including statutory intervention, dependant on the needs of the child and family.

3.2 Access

The Triage online portal is accessed via www.newham.gov.uk/triage. Please note you will have to create an account in order to make a request for support or protection. Referrers will need to enter a PIN number to authenticate their requests, or by:

- Fax on 0208 430 1003
- Email at SSD-IRO@newham.gov.uk

3.3 Decision Making

The Children's Triage Service will make a decision about which service is best placed to respond and pass requests on accordingly within 24 hours where a child appears to be in need of protection or 48 hours for all other cases. Requesters will be notified automatically by email once this has happened.

Police MERLINS are created when a child comes to the notice of the police and there are concerns about that child's vulnerability. There are currently over 4,000 MERLINS created in Newham a year. These MERLINS will be passed to the Children's Triage Service and dealt with in exactly the same way as an online request for support and protection.

3.4 What happens to Triage referrals?

All requests for support or protection for Newham children are assessed by the Children's Triage Service which includes representatives from Children Social Care, Community Health, Youth Offending and the Police. Each member of triage will check what information they currently hold about the child and family to enable a collective, informed decision about which service is best placed to respond. In other boroughs, the triage service is being referred to as a MASH - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. London Councils, the Metropolitan Police and NHS London are committed to rolling out MASH across London.

3.5 Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

3.5.1 Newham's MASH function takes place within Triage: The MASH **core** agencies include:

- Children's Social Care
- Police Public Protection Desk (MET Police)
- Community Health

3.5.2 The MASH **satellite** agencies include:

- The Youth Offending Service
- Probation

3.5.3 The benefits of the MASH approach are:

- An improved ability to safeguard vulnerable children;
- An improved analysis and focus on 'problem solving' – especially where several referrals are received regarding the same child or family;

- Better quality and more complete risk assessments based on the availability of more information at an earlier stage;
- Increased efficiency - risk assessments can be completed jointly with other agencies, reducing the need for duplication and enabling swifter decision-making.

Each agency identifies the information they hold on a child, including information that may be held by the police. Each agency then assesses whether it is appropriate for this information to be shared (in line with the information sharing arrangement) and a decision is made based on the level of need and a summary is provided to the initial referrer.

Section 4: The Children's Social Care Assessment

All statutory assessments of children and their families, must be planned and coordinated by a social worker and will be conducted based on the Assessment Framework.

4.1 Planning the Assessment

Good planning at the outset of the assessment process leads to a better assessment and, where required, a better plan for the child. Planning an assessment means identifying the aims of the assessment, who should be involved and what information needs to be obtained (and how). At a minimum, the plan for the assessment should be agreed between the assessing social worker and line manager, however best practice would involve a professionals meeting agreeing the process for assessment.

Questions to be considered when planning assessments include:

- Who will undertake the assessment and what resources will be needed? What information is already available?
- Who in the family will be included and how will they be involved (including absent or wider family and others significant to the child)?
- In what grouping will the child and family members be seen and in what order and where?
- What services are to be provided during the assessment?
- Does anyone in the family have additional communication needs and if so, how will these be addressed?
- How will the assessment take account of the particular issues faced by black and minority ethnic children and their families, and disabled children and their families?
- What methods and tools will be used?
- What other sources of knowledge about the child and family are available and how will other agencies and professionals who know the family be informed and involved?

- How will the consent of family members be obtained?
- What are the timescales for completing the assessment?

4.2 Starting the Assessment

A single assessment should be completed:

- On receipt of a referral on a new unknown case or known closed case - if it is deemed referral has met threshold
- On an open case for a review child protection case conference.
- On an open case where significant incident has occurred – i.e. on a s.47 child protection concern, birth/death of family member impacting on care and wellbeing of subject child.

A single assessment must be opened:

- Same day as decision to progress referral (but no later than 24 hours)
- At point closest to incident. For section 47 this must be on same day of strategy meeting/discussion.
- If the referral is child specific, then the referral record for siblings should be explicit and detail the reasons for not progressing their case beyond referral
- If a referral is not child specific then a single assessment must be completed on all children in the household. All children who are subject to assessment will have an 'activity' opened on Carefirst to indicate that the assessment has commenced.

4.3 Strategy Discussions and Strategy Meetings

In all circumstances where there is risk of significant harm, a strategy discussion/meeting must be held. The timescales and process as set out in the London Child Protection Procedures and Working Together 2013 must be adhered to.

Working Together 2013 states:

'Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm there should be a strategy discussion involving local authority children's social care, the police, health and other bodies such as the referring agency. This might take the form of a multi-agency meeting or phone calls and more than one discussion may be necessary. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral or at any other time, including during the assessment process'

Professionals should refer to Working Together 2013 for further information on requirements relating to strategy discussions/meetings.

4.4 Timescales for completion of Single Assessment; Other Requirements

- 4.4.1 A single assessment must be completed in the timescale that is right for the child and family and proportionate to the level of risk but will usually be completed within a maximum of 45 days.
- 4.4.2 For single assessments within the S47 process, the single assessment must be completed at least 48 hours before the initial child protection conference (ICPC). This allows for sharing of the information with Parents/people with parental responsibility and the chair in advance of ICPC.
- 4.4.3 For review child protection conferences (RCPCs) assessments should be completed and shared at least 3 days prior to the conference.
- 4.4.4 Single assessments must be reviewed by TM/PM on a minimum of 2 occasions, these being the 10 day review and on completion.
- 4.4.5 The child must be seen and spoken to alone to ascertain their views, wishes and feelings. For non verbal children recording must evidence clear observations of the child in relation to their parents, siblings and family environment.
- 4.4.6 If for any reason the assessment goes beyond 45 days, there must be a management rationale for this recorded on the assessment document and also detailed within observations. This should also detail the timescale for the completion of the assessment.

4.5 Assessing Systemically

Newham CSC promotes the use of systemic approaches in assessing and intervening in child protection. The following principles should be considered throughout any assessment:

- In order to develop a better understanding of the experiences of children, families and the potential for change, assessors should consider the relevance of family dynamics and relationship patterns.
- Assessors should contextualise children's experiences within the family and wider community. Assessments and ensuing plans should consider how wider networks can be engaged to create change.
- Assessors, supervisors and the wider professional network should consider hypotheses throughout the assessment process, which help to understand causal factors and routes to change.

- Assessments should reflect upon the 'family life cycle' and how this concept can be utilised to understand stresses in a family network.
- All assessments must include a genogram and chronology, to ensure that family history and structures are effectively considered in assessments. Assessments should consider and reflect on circularity in the family system.
- Assessors should consider how relationships between professionals may impact family dynamics, and vice versa.

4.6 Coordination with other agencies and professionals (including consent)

All agencies and professionals involved with the child and family have a responsibility to contribute to the assessment process. This might take the form of providing information and direct or joint work. Differences of opinion between professionals should be resolved swiftly but where this is not possible, local arrangements for resolving professional disagreements should be implemented (See Appendix 1 – NSCB Conflict Resolution Policy).

It is entirely possible that different professionals will have different experiences of the child and family and understanding these differences can actively contribute to the understanding of the child and family. Key professionals should be involved from the outset of any assessment and through an agreed and regular process of review.

The social work manager will have a key role in supporting the practitioner to ensure all relevant agencies are involved.

It is the assessing social worker's responsibility to seek information from other agencies. Requests for information should be made in writing, with the proviso that more urgent requests can be made verbally and followed up in writing at a later date.

Outside of s.47 enquiries, consent of service users must be sought prior to information sharing requests being made. Within s.47, it remains best practice that consent to share/receive information is sought.

While requests for information are to be made in writing, this should not replace timely professional dialogue about the child and family.

Professionals should be given sufficient context about the concerns to enable them to make relevant contributions to the assessment. Agencies providing services to adults who are parents or carers or who have regular contact with children should also routinely consider the impact on the child of the adult's particular needs.

4.7 Analysing Strengths and Risk

The assessment should involve a robust professional judgment about the nature and significance of any unmet needs and/or risks that the child and family may be facing.

An assessment should seek to establish:

- Any significant harm the child has already suffered;
- Any significant risk that the child may suffer further significant harm in future;
- Whether the child and family are experiencing any significant unmet needs.
- Strengths and protective factors which could lead to change and mitigate risk.

Through the use of systemic approaches, a range of information should be gathered in relation to family structures, beliefs, relationships and circular causality. Assessors should also consider any previous or concurrent assessments. The assessment process should also draw on all available information from the professional network.

The assessment should then include an analysis of this information, potential hypotheses and routes to change.

Analysis must underpin the entire assessment process, and conclude the following:

- Risks/Needs - What, if anything, are we worried about?
- Strengths and Protective Factors - What is working well for the child and family?
- Plan - What needs to happen now?
- Continuous Assessment - What further questions, if any, have arisen from the assessment that should now also be addressed?

4.8 Thresholds

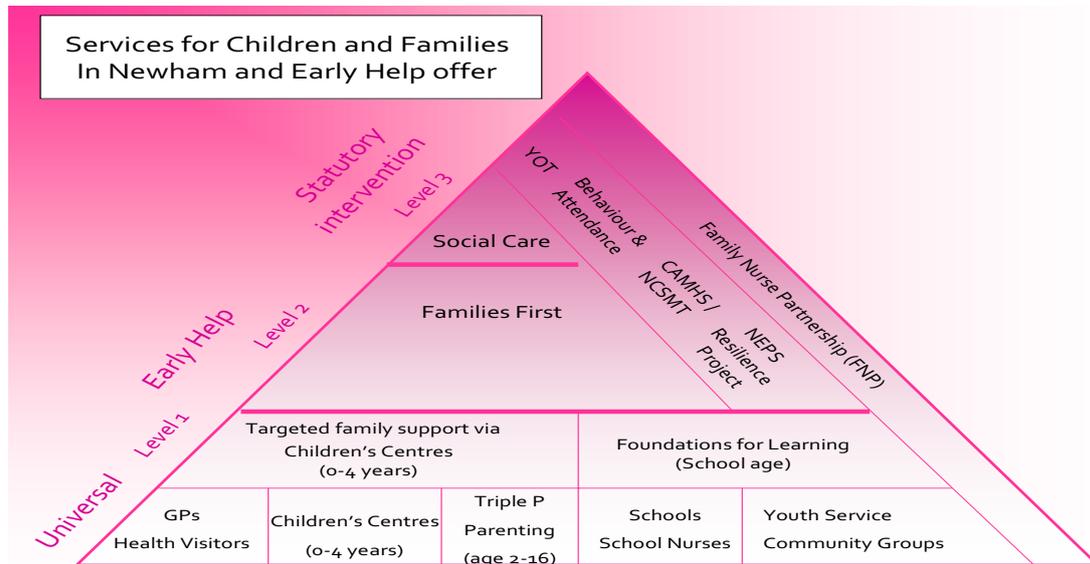
The partnership in Newham has a mutually agreed and understood approach to thresholds, which guide decisions about service provision.

Service offer	Levels of need	Summary of features
Universal services All Children and Young People in Newham	Level 1a Universal	Children with no identified additional needs and whose development needs are met by universal services (schools, nurseries, children's centres, health visiting, school nursing, GPs, Integrated Youth Services)
Early Help Is provided by a range of services	Level 1b Early warning	Children with low level additional needs, likely to be short term. Signposting by universal service or delivery of support
	Level 2a Emerging Vulnerability	Additional needs requiring multi-agency intervention needing lead professional/significant adult.

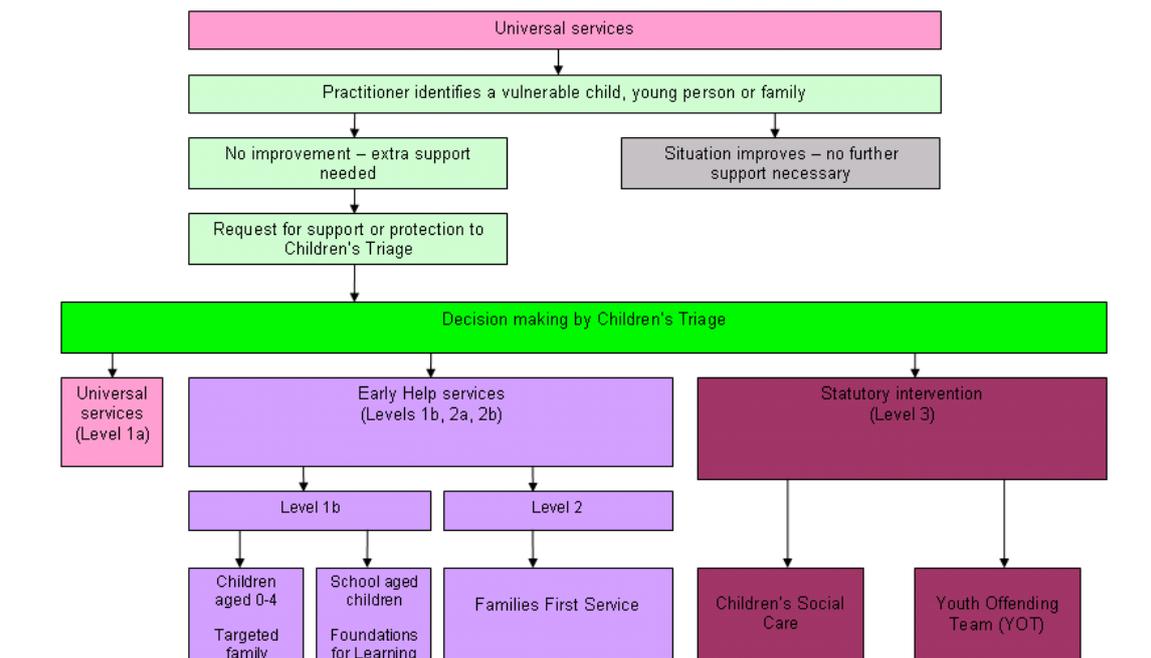
	Level 2b Escalating Vulnerability	Children meet the definition of children in need in the Children Act 1989 and are at risk of moving to a high level of risk if they do not receive more intensive early intervention.
Statutory Intervention A statutory framework for young people and families who need protection and work with young offenders.	Level 3a Intensive Family Support	Children and families require specialist/ statutory support e.g. child protection or youth offending
	Level 3b Legal Intervention & Corporate Parenting	

At the end of the assessment process, professionals, with input from the family, will decide on the threshold of risk and need and eligibility for ongoing service provision.

The diagram below highlights specialist, targeted & universal services:



The diagram below shows the possible progression routes for service users post assessment.



4.9 Outcomes

4.9.1 Each assessment should be focused on outcomes with decisions regarding services, help and support made on this basis. In the course of the assessment, the social worker and their manager should determine:

- Is the child a Child in Need? (Section 17 Children Act 1989);
- Is there reasonable cause to suspect that this child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm? (Section 47 Children Act 1989);
- Is this a child in need of accommodation? (Section 20 or Section 31A Children Act 1989).

4.9.2 The possible outcomes of an assessment are as follows:

- **No further action** – universal services can meet needs and the cases will close to CSC.
- **Targeted support required** – in such circumstances, the 'step-down' of the case should be agreed between agencies, with lead professional responsibility transferring from CSC to the receiving targeted services, e.g. Families First, Early Start.
- **Child in Need services required** – in such circumstances, case responsibility will be transferred from the Assessment Service to the receiving CSC team, i.e. Intervention Service, Disabled Children and Young People's Service (DCYPS) or Intensive Youth

Intervention Team (IYIT). All cases must have a Child in Need Plan at the point of transfer.

- **Child Protection services required** – At any stage during the assessment, it may be considered that the significant harm threshold is met. In such circumstances, a CSC manager will convene a strategy meeting (or in very urgent circumstances, hold a strategy discussion with police) and plan a single of joint s.47 enquiry. If it is decided that the case should proceed to initial child protection conference (ICPC), it may be decided that the child should be made subject to a child protection plan. Once subject to a CP plan, case responsibility will transfer to the Intervention Service or DCYPS. As part of the transfer process, it is expected that the receiving team will attend the ICPC.
- **Emergency action** to protect the child at any point during the assessment process.

4.9.3 The outcome of the assessment should be:

- Discussed with the child and family and provided to them in written form. Exceptions to this are where this is likely to place a child at risk of significant harm or jeopardise an enquiry;
- Taking account of confidentiality, provided to other professionals.
- Should the child and/or family disagree with the assessment, they should be supported to share their concerns in writing, and this will be added to the social care record.

4.9.4 Professionals should also consider the desired impact of planned services on children and families—what do we want to be different and how will be know. CSC professionals have access to an outcomes measuring tool and should make use of this in order to establish if desired outcomes are being achieved.

4.10 Disabled Children

A non-statutory early help assessment may be sufficient on its own to establish the kind of help and support needed for disabled children but in some cases, a specialist assessment may be required (for example an Occupational Therapy assessment or a health assessment). If it becomes apparent that there are concerns about the child's safety, then a CSC assessment will be completed by a social worker.

Disabled children are 'children in need' and may require assessment in order to establish what kind of help and support they need, if any. Disabled children may also need an assessment to be completed by a social worker, because of concerns about their safety and welfare.

The majority of single assessments of disabled children will be undertaken by the specialist Children's Social Care Disabled Children's Young Peoples Service.

The referral pathway to Disabled Children's Young Peoples Service is via Children's Triage.

4.11 Children returning home from care

When a child is voluntarily in care (section 20) and the decision is made for him/her to return home, a care plan must be drawn up in order to support the child once they return home with the primary aim of reducing the likelihood of the child having to be accommodated again in future. Good practice suggests that this care plan should be agreed between the child, the child's family and any involved professionals at a planning meeting.

This following process relates to young people for whom the plan is long term care, not those where the plan was always rehabilitation

Planned return

The social worker will complete an assessment when the question of possible rehabilitation is identified and this will need to address the level of support that would be required should the child return home. Such an assessment will must be authorised by the social worker's team manager and service manager.

If the outcome of the assessment is positive – it identifies that the child can return home - then the change in the plan for the child will need be agreed at the next LAC review, which may need to be re-arranged so as to take place sooner than planned.

If the child is the subject of a Section 31 Order, a 'placement at home agreement' will need to be signed by the Deputy Director, CSC. This will take the form of a child and family assessment with a covering confirmation sheet. A rehabilitation plan will be agreed at the next LAC review including increased overnight stays at home as a precursor to a full return. However, if the child is the subject of a Section 31 Order, any over night stays must not take place until the Deputy Director has signed the 'placement at home agreement'.

If the child is the subject of a Section 31 Order, the LAC review following the return home, and all subsequent LAC reviews, must consider the revocation of the Order.

Section 5: The revised Public Law Outline (PLO) for Court proceedings and pre-proceedings work

5.1 Background

The Public Law Outline (PLO) was introduced in 2008 with the primary aim of reducing delay in public law proceedings (when local authorities apply to the family courts for care or supervision orders). In 2010, this framework

was significantly revised with the aim of ensuring that all public law cases would be completed within 26 weeks (from the date of issue by the local authority to the final court hearing). In mid-2013, as part of the East London Court Project, Newham began to pilot this new framework. The aim of the pilot is to ensure that the 26-week timescale is met in the majority of cases but also to help ensure that local authorities offer the best possible support for children prior to initiating court proceedings, including the completion of high quality assessments.

Under this new framework, apart from the focus on reducing delay, there is also an expectation that, should court proceedings be necessary, the professionals working with the family will be in the best position to assist the court and that the need for independent or external experts will be much reduced. This will mean, for example, that where a parent has mental ill health, the court will expect to receive a statement or report from the treating psychiatrist.

5.2 PLO Requirements

Apart from in emergency situations, the expectation is that local authorities will not initiate court proceedings without first completing all the documents in the Pre-proceedings Checklist:

- A Court statement
- A family genogram
- A chronology
- Current assessments of the child and his or her family
- A proposed care plan
- A threshold statement (setting out the concerns regarding significant harm to the child)

The safety and welfare of the child may be jeopardised if the start of the proceedings is delayed until all of the documents in the Pre-proceedings Checklist are available. The safety and welfare of the child should never be put in jeopardy because of lack of documentation, and immediate action such as an application for an Emergency Protection Order should be taken where necessary.

As any proceedings issued by the local authority must be completed within 26 weeks (other than in exceptional circumstances), this means that there can only be limited time during court proceedings to undertake further assessments or to work with the family in order to achieve positive change. Following a Legal Planning Meeting where the threshold criteria is met, then a 'letter before proceedings' is to be sent to the parents which triggers the availability of public funding for legal advice during this pre-proceedings stage. The Local Authority's concerns and timely plan should be clearly set out in the 'letter before proceedings' and a meeting set up with the family and their legal representative so that they are clear about what is expected of them and what they can expect from professionals. The work completed in this pre proceedings stage must be of a high standard able to stand up to

potential court scrutiny – clear, thorough and multi-agency assessments must be completed, leading to a clear plan for the family, with clear targets and expectations of what needs to be done, by when. The implementation and success of the pre-proceedings plan must be regularly and robustly reviewed. The right support must be arranged with the family in order to help them achieve the required improvements and all professionals must work together effectively, sharing information as required. Additionally there should be pre-proceedings work focussing on identifying and evaluating possible alternative family carers. Therefore work completed in the period pre-proceedings is vital for two reasons:

- it may divert a case along a route which avoids the need for proceedings;
- When that is not possible, and proceedings have to be commenced, the preparatory work will facilitate the smooth running of the case.

Given the focus on reducing delay for the child, the revised PLO framework does not mean that local authorities can now take significantly longer before deciding to initiate court proceedings (in effect, this would mean transferring the delay from within the court proceedings to beforehand). This means that our formal child protection procedures need to work congruently with the PLO framework and decisions following a Legal Planning Meeting are tracked to ensure that cases do not drift once within the pre-proceedings stage.

Section 6: Assessment and Role of Supervision

Effective assessment is underpinned by good quality, consistent, reflective supervision.

Reflective supervision is the process by which supervisor and supervisee step back and take a constructively critical look at the progress of a case and ensure that plans are sound and good outcomes achieved.

The purpose of reflective supervision is to develop applied practice wisdom and thereby maximise the impact of the practitioner on the safety and well-being of the children and families for whom they are responsible. It does this through a two-way process of reflection and challenge which promotes curiosity, appropriate skepticism, and critical and systematic thinking, and the exercising of confident professional judgment.

It is expected that all assessing social workers will receive practice supervision throughout the assessment process, in line with the CSC Supervision Policy.

Section 7: Partnership with Children and Families

Children should be seen and listened to and included throughout the assessment process. Their ways of communicating should be understood in

the context of their family and community as well as their behaviour and developmental stage.

Assessments, service provision and decision-making should regularly review the impact of the assessment process and the services provided for the child and family. Any services provided should be based on a clear analysis of the child and family's needs and with a view to achieving the identified objectives.

Children should be actively involved in all parts of the process based upon their age, developmental stage and identity. Direct work with the child and family should include observations of the interactions between the child and their parents / carers.

All agencies involved with the child, the parents or carers and the wider family have a duty to collaborate and share information to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

7.1 The Child

The child should participate and contribute directly to the assessment process based upon their age, understanding and identity. They should be seen alone and if this is not possible or in their best interest, the reason should be recorded. However, seeing a child on their own is not sufficient. The social worker should seek to understand the child's wishes, feelings and perspectives, and how they function within the family system.

Direct work with children is integral to effective assessment. A 'direct work toolkit' is available for social workers to support effective practice.

The pace of the assessment needs to be based upon the pace at which the child can contribute. However, this should not be a reason for delay in taking protective action. It is important to understand the resilience of the individual child in their family and community context when planning appropriate services.

Every assessment should be child centred. Where there is a conflict between the needs of the child and their parents / carers, decisions should be made in the child's best interests. The parents / carers should be involved at the earliest opportunity unless to do so would prejudice the safety of the child.

7.2 The Parents

The nature and extent of the parents / carers' involvement in the assessment will be central to its success. At the outset, they need to understand how they can contribute to the assessment, what is expected of them and what is likely to happen if change is not achieved. The assessment process must be open and transparent and this includes being open with parents / carers where we doubt the veracity of what they have told us, where we see inconsistencies between different sources of information and where we have concerns about their parenting. All parents

/ carers should be involved equally in the assessment and should be supported to participate.

Section 8: Challenging and complaining

If children, young people and their families wish to challenge the outcome of an assessment they can use the Complaints and Compliments Procedure for Children and Young People's Services. A copy of the leaflet will be given to children, young people and their families during the assessment process and is also available in leaflet form in all council receptions and libraries. This leaflet also contains details about how to contact an advocate for a child or young person.

Customer Relations Team, Newham Dockside,
Third Floor East, 1000 Dockside Road,
London E16 2QU

If needed, an interpreter will be provided.

If professionals wish to challenge or complain about the assessment process or outcome they can use the Newham Safeguarding Children Board Conflict Resolution Protocol. For further information, please visit the NSCB website (link to be added) or contact the LSCB.Administrator@newham.gov.uk or telephone 0203 373 3392.

