



Early Help and Permanence Strategy 2016

Introduction/Background

The purpose and aims of the strategy

This Early Help and Permanency Strategy focuses on how we will improve and promote outcomes for children and young people in Bridgend. The term early intervention has been replaced by the term early help. The successful delivery of early help to children, young people and families in Bridgend is reliant on the strength of partnership working, leadership and management commitment, and having a clear, robust and agreed framework from which to work.

This strategy supports the delivery of the priorities in the Authority's Corporate Plan and associated Directorate Business Plans. The scope of this strategy includes a clear focus on supporting families to stay together wherever it is safe to do so, and minimising the need for children to become "Looked After" in the first instance or receive other statutory interventions.

The Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate along with the Education and Family Support Directorate are driving a 'whole system' approach to support children, young people and families.

The focus of this strategy is on describing what will change in relation to our work with children, young people and their families at the earliest possible stage. The strategy contains an action plan for the future rather than an attempt to cover every detail of our current services and support.

There is wide agreement in Bridgend that we want all our children and young people to:

- thrive and make the best of their talents;
- live healthy and safe lives;
- be confident and caring individuals throughout their lives;
- know and receive their rights.

Early Help and Permanence

The Social Services and Wellbeing Act, Section 15, requires that Local Authorities must provide or arrange for the provision of a range and level of preventative services which they consider will achieve the following purposes:

- a) Contributing towards preventing or delaying the development of people's needs for care and support
- b) Reducing the needs for care and support of people who have such needs

- c) Promoting the upbringing of children by their families, where that is consistent with the well-being of children
- d) Minimising the effect on disabled people of their disabilities
- e) Contributing towards preventing people from suffering abuse or neglect
- f) Reducing the need for:
 - i. proceedings for care or supervision orders under the Children Act 1989
 - ii. criminal proceedings against children
 - iii. any family or other proceedings in relation to children which might lead
 - iv. to them being placed in local authority care, or
 - v. proceedings under the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court in relation
 - vi. to children
- g) Encouraging children not to commit criminal offences avoiding the need for children to be placed in secure accommodation;

Early intervention is about taking action as soon as possible to tackle problems for children and families before they become more difficult to reverse. Early help with families will ensure that children, young people and families who are at risk or vulnerable to poor outcomes are identified early and that their needs are effectively assessed and met by agencies working together.

There is a substantial body of evidence that demonstrates that particular early interventions can be very effective at improving outcomes for young people and families.

Our Ambition

Know which children need safeguarding

Know which children need early help

Help individuals, families and communities to help themselves

Work in strong partnerships

Swift, sensitive and effective intervention;

Understand how successful we are

Key Objectives in Early Help and Permanence Planning

The aim of early intervention is to prevent the needs of the children and families from escalating rather than to respond only when the difficulty has become so acute as to demand attention to:

- Improve outcomes and life chances for children, young people and families placing the well-being of the child / young person at the centre of all that we do.
- Increase access to timely, targeted and appropriate services.
- Manage highly predictable risk better (e.g. parents who have been in care themselves and parents who have previously had children removed.)
- Refocus resources and expenditure from crisis intervention to early help, investing in proportion to need.
- Provide a focus on the whole family and the role of the family in the planning and delivery of early help.
- Ensure interventions have a strong evidence base and any services commissioned are able to evaluate and demonstrate impact and outcomes.
- Further develop multi-agency and integrated working, including using and sharing data and information more effectively.
- Strengthen the role of universal services provision in early help.
- Communicate the early help offer and how it can be accessed
- Develop skills and management support/supervision for early help workers

Underpinning principles of Early Help

- A focus on identification of need and swift access to appropriate early help.
- Support available for the child/ young person's journey throughout all key life stages offering continuity and flexibility wherever possible.
- Equality of access to early help provision.

- Families recognised as central to defining and addressing problems and empowered as partners in the process of early help.
- Work with the whole family, including fathers and other carers.
- Promotion of personal responsibility and resilience rather than dependency.
- Active engagement of children, young people and families in the planning and delivery and evaluation of services.
- Commitment to collaboration, joint commissioning and multi-agency working and to overcoming organisational barriers to achieving better outcomes.
- Shared systems in place to provide effective early help.

Strategic Plan for Early Help

- High quality universal services are the building blocks of effective early help.
- Childrens workforce is able to identify additional needs at an early stage.
- Childrens workforce has a clear understanding of the levels of need, and how services and support may be accessed.
- There is a clear process in place to support effective multi- agency co-ordination of targeted support.
- There is a clear step up and step down process in place.
- A co-ordinated delivery programme of early help services and support across all ages and stages of a child's development.

If good outcomes are achieved, the different needs of children and young people – social, physical, emotional, cultural and learning – will have been met. However, not all children and young people have the benefits of good health, a stable and nurturing family, the necessary personal and social skills or other attributes which will secure their safety and wellbeing.

Striving for stability and permanence for “Looked After” children.

“Looked After” Children are those children and young people aged between 0 to 18 years who cannot safely remain with their family and are cared for by the Local Authority. Children are accommodated by the Local Authority either as a result of

Court proceedings because they have been or are in danger of being harmed, or with parental agreement. A significant proportion of children who become “Looked After” have a history of neglect or abuse. The majority of children and young people “Looked After” by Bridgend are placed in foster care, with only a small proportion of young people placed in residential care, usually due to their more complex needs.

All the research indicates that, in general, outcomes for children who have been “Looked After”, particularly for long periods of time or after a long period of poor parenting and neglect are not as good as those for other children. Children and young people who have been exposed to very poor parenting, neglect and/or abuse require not just care but also support in coming to terms with those experiences which often will have been extremely traumatic and harmful. We also know that the difficulties and negative behaviours experienced by “Looked After” children and young people may be repeated when those young people become parents themselves, often with consequent negative impacts on their children and their children’s children.

Hence, we must intervene as early as necessary to ensure that children and young people do not suffer; we need to provide good parenting and (often specialist) support when children are in our care; and we need to put in place plans which will ‘turn around’ children’s lives as quickly and permanently as possible. All these things will help to reduce the likely repetition of harmful behaviour with future generations.

However, being a good corporate parent is expensive. In a world of finite, and diminishing, resources, it is critical that we act swiftly and effectively to ensure we use those scarce resources as efficiently as possible

To achieve these aims, all partners - the young person, his or her family and the support services – must each understand that they have a responsibility to put the interests of the child or young person first. This is not the same as saying that the child’s wishes will always be met, but that his or her views are respected and taken account of when any decisions are made which affect his or her life.

The increase in the number of children and young people becoming “Looked After” in Bridgend is not unique but we know, from national studies, that some authorities appear to be managing the difficulties more successfully than others, despite similarly challenging socio-economic circumstances. A number of research studies have been undertaken in Wales and England to identify the characteristics of such successful Local Authorities. Hence, we have looked closely at these studies and the situation in both Bridgend and other Authorities has helped us refresh both our strategic approach and our practice.

Research suggests that some variation in the numbers and rates of “Looked After” children across Local Authorities can be explained by differences in the demographic and socio-economic profile of each Local Authority. This is especially the case in relation to population size, deprivation and the proportion of households that are lone

parent families. Other aspects affecting the numbers and rates of “Looked After” children relate to factors more within the control of the Local Authority and their partners – especially the way that local areas lead, organise and deploy their services for vulnerable children and families.

A Welsh study, published in June 2013, concluded that there is no ‘magic number’ for the rate of “Looked After” children that would help a local area calculate whether numbers are ‘too high’ or ‘too low’

The study, in which Bridgend participated, highlighted five main areas that can contribute to local efforts to reduce the number of looked after children, i.e.:

- strategy and leadership;
- prevention and early intervention;
- approach to practice;
- partnership working, and
- information and intelligence about performance.

The Permanency Team will drive the opportunities to promote Special Guardianship Orders, Child Arrangement Orders, and track and monitor other long term arrangements with foster carers or extended family. We will rigorously pursue the discharge of Care Orders where these are no longer necessary and work towards increasing the number of children who are to be adopted.

Promoting a collective responsibility and response to rising numbers in Looked After children.

Historically, activity to manage the increasing “Looked After” population has primarily focussed on Social Services’ responses and systems. This has included continuous review of the threshold criteria for admission into accommodation, tight gate keeping by Senior Managers to ensure threshold criteria for admission are adhered to, with a clear focus on permanency policies and procedures.

Whilst Social Services intervention is targeted at the most vulnerable children and their families, a number of other agencies across the borough have a role to play in supporting families in their task of raising children safely. To succeed, the scope of this strategy to reduce the “Looked After” population must be sufficiently broad to encompass the role of partner agencies to ensure that there is a shared responsibility across agencies for its development and implementation. This will require continued commitment from all agencies to multi-agency working, so that the provision of preventative family support services ensures early intervention before families reach crisis status.

USING A THRESHOLDS OF NEED MODEL TO SUPPORT PRACTICE (See Appendix 1)

Because a child or family can experience an array of problems all at once, early intervention requires a multilevel, holistic approach. For example, at a local level early intervention may involve Family Engagement officer and a youth offending team working together to get to the root of a family's issues and refer them to the best support for their particular situation.

Threshold levels of Intervention act as a guide to professional decision making aiming to maximise opportunities for the right level of support to be offered at the right time, to ensure that a child or young person's needs are met in a proportionate, robust and timely way, improving life chances and keep children and young people safe. The thresholds should always be viewed as a clear and fluid continuum, responsive to changing circumstances and environments through which children may travel both down and up and will on occasion be accessing services across the continuum, as need determines.

As we know the needs of children & young people and their families are not static, these may escalate e.g. in the face of a crisis or unanticipated incident, equally they may diminish, e.g. as a result of a successful intervention, an increase in protective factors, reduction in risk and enhancement of resilience.

Evidence tells us in such circumstances a seamless integrated transition between thresholds is indicated, which can assist a family to maintain positive momentum or indeed manage a crisis or incident, without additionally and instantly losing the input and support of the lower threshold agencies.

It is also intended that this model be used to enable practitioners and their partner agencies to communicate their concerns about children using a common format, language and understanding of levels of need, concern and/or risk for children, young people and their families.

USING THE MODEL TO IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE SERVICES

Having identified an overview of a child and family's needs, practitioners will be able to use the detailed threshold examples to reach a collective understanding of the most appropriate services to respond to identified need this is expected to aid consistent and rationalised decision making.

PERMANENCE

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. It is also important to remember that older children and young people also need to achieve permanence in their lives although they may not wish (for a variety of reasons) to be in a foster home or to be adopted. For example, they may prefer to live in a children's home where they can also achieve a sense of security and belonging.

The question "how are the child's permanence needs being met?" must be at the core of everything we do.

Where it is necessary for a child to leave his or her family:

- This should be for as short a time as needed to secure a safe, supported return home; or
- If a child cannot return home, plans must be made for alternate permanent care. Family members and friends should always be considered in the first instance with the permanence secured through the appropriate legal order to meet the child's needs;
- Where it is not in the child's best interests to live within the family network, it will usually be in the interests of the child for alternative permanent carers to be identified and the placement secured through adoption, long term foster care, Child Arrangements Orders or Special Guardianship Orders;

- Residential group living is provided only when a need for this is identified within the Care Plan and when substitute family care is not appropriate;
- For older children arranging for their independent living must be considered.

Where it is clear that families and children are unable to live together, planning must be swift and clear to identify permanent alternative settings.

Wherever possible, care should be provided locally unless clearly identified as inappropriate.

Contact with the family, Connected Person and extended family should be facilitated and built on (unless clearly identified as inappropriate).

The professionals involved will work in partnership with parents/families to meet the above objectives. The wishes and feelings of the child will be taken into account. The older and more mature the child, the greater the weight should be given to his or her wishes.

Whilst it is important, when undertaking permanence planning, to promote the child's links with his or her racial, cultural and religious heritage, this should not be allowed to introduce delay in achieving permanence for the child. (Note that due consideration no longer has to be given to a child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background when matching a child and prospective adopters).

Joint Action Plan

JOINT EARLY HELP AND PERMANENCE- ACTION PLAN

	Resp. Officer	Due Date	Key Actions/Milestones	Outcomes	Evidence	Update
FRONT DOOR ARRANGEMENTS						
1	DW/JC	Implementation Date: Dec 2016	Revise current multi-agency referral forms to ensure fit for purpose and compliant with the SSWB Act	Children and Young People's (YP) needs are identified and met in a more timely manner	New referral form which is Act-compliant	Draft multi agency referral form going through consultation prior to implementation
2	JC/ML	Nov-2016	Agree and promote a clear referral pathway for both Safeguarding and Early Help Services	Children and Young People's needs are identified and met in a more timely manner	New referral pathway in place	Promotion and engagement events to be held Oct, Nov.
3	LK/JD	Sep-2016	Implement DEWIS to develop a directory of community and voluntary services	Families become more self-reliant	DEWIS implemented across the Authority	Complete DEWIS is now live

	Resp.	Due Date	Key Actions/Milestones	Outcomes	Evidence	Update
4	JC\ML	Jul-2016	Review and agree skills and staffing levels required for joint front door	Records of action and decision are clear and up to date.	Staff have appropriate skills to identify risk and individual needs compliant with the recommendations within the Act	Complete: Staff have been realigned to meet the new requirements
5	JC/ML	Sep-2016	Explore the provision of a Health Visiting post being part of screening and information sharing at the earliest opportunity.	Children and Young People's needs are identified and met in a more timely manner	Health Visitor part of the front door arrangements	Interviews held w/c 12 th Sept
6	ML/JC	May-2016	Agree a timescale for Early Help screening practitioner to be located within the IAA service.	All referrals screened and allocated to appropriate service in a timely manner	EH screener located within IAA service	Complete May 2016
7	JC/ML/D W	Jul-2016	Agree transfer points into Early Help Services from Safeguarding.	Families receive a consistent seamless service with clearly defined transfer points	Agreed transfer points in place	Complete Process in place
8	JC/ML	Jun-2016	Put mechanisms in place to alert Early Help services to any children\YP that become looked after	Increase in the number of children ceased to be looked after	Early Help Managers and BS included in Stable Life email group	Complete June 2016
9	JC/ML	Nov-2016	Review process for how PPNs are screened on open cases to Early	Clear procedure for responding to PPN's and	Revised EH guidance	In Progress Process is been

	Resp.	Due Date	Key Actions/Milestones	Outcomes	Evidence	Update
			Help	risk to children and young people are assessed and dealt with appropriately		reviewed: awaiting new staffing arrangements which will reflect the new process
INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION						
10	ML	Jun-2016	Review EH thresholds to determine trigger for Team Around Family (TAF) work	Help is provided early in the emergence of a problem and is well coordinated and recorded through multi-agency arrangements	Amendment to existing EH guidance	Complete
11	ML/DW/JC/WW	Jul-2016	Review and put arrangements in place for Early Help practitioners to attend appropriate meetings e.g. strategy meetings, Accommodation & Permanency Panel, Legal Gateway meetings	Early Help and Central hub will be aware of possible transfers at an earlier stage	Representation agreed	EH Managers currently attend all relevant key meetings in order to prevent escalation into Safeguarding or being looked after

	Resp.	Due Date	Key Actions/Milestones	Outcomes	Evidence	Update
12	DW	Oct-2016	<p>Review of Connecting Families service to assess its fit for purpose with regards to the focus on front door/preventative services i.e. to avoid step up to Safeguarding Teams</p> <p>To prevent children from becoming looked after and to increase reunification numbers</p>	Decisions about children and young people becoming looked after are made using high-quality assessments about the risk of harm or actual harm to them and the likelihood of change in their family	Fewer children becoming accommodated	Review underway
13	ML	Mar-2017	Western Bay Region Work: Review of Bridgend IFSS to offer support to a broader range of families open to Safeguarding Team	Children and families are able to successfully access education, employment, training and safe housing	Reduction in looked after numbers	Regional workshop scheduled Sept 16
14	ML	Mar-2017	Utilise existing preventative resources to facilitate Early Help services at Primary School stage e.g. early indicators of neglect, poor school attendance, domestic violence, challenging behaviour	Children and Young People's needs are identified and met in a more timely manner	<u>Longer term</u> reduction in looked after children numbers	This will be looked at in line with Recommissioning of Families First
15	ML/DW	Sep-2017	Identify services to work with parents between pregnancies where their children have been removed from their care through SSD involvement	Improved outcomes for children, YP and families	<u>Longer term</u> reduction in looked after children numbers	A scoping exercise in respect of a pilot needs to be carried out with a resource analysis exercise to determine requirements

	Resp.	Due Date	Key Actions/Milestones	Outcomes	Evidence	Update
16	ML	Aug-2016	Recruit a practitioner to engage and develop programmes of work with fathers	Fathers become more involved in working with agencies to improve their parenting	Dad's worker in post	Complete June 2016
17	NS	Dec 16	Review of the Support Care service and whether it can be used to facilitate rehabilitation of children home as well as preventing children coming into care	Children and families could be supported when they return home from foster care in a planned way	Review paper	A pilot exercise is underway. Progress report and review paper will follow
18	SCDWP/ SWP/EW J	Jan 17	To develop training for the Chairs of Strategy meetings to ensure thresholds are consistent and consideration is given to support services as a safety preventative measure	To reduce the number of cases escalating to the Child Protection process and reduce the number of children and YP being looked after	Training Plan	New action – Oct 16
REHABILITATION AND PERMANENCE						
19	DW NS	TBC	Agree a work plan to engage young people who are/have been Looked After in educative work around child development and parenting	Looked after children will have the skills and support when they become parents themselves	<u>Longer term</u> reduction in looked after children numbers	A scoping exercise in respect of staffing capacity to be carried out with a resource analysis exercise
20	RW/JLJ Safeguarding Practitioners and	Jan 17	Continue to identify and assess potential carers for Special Guardianship Orders	Permanency is achieved for more children and young people and they will no longer be Looked After by the Local	Reduction in looked after children numbers	Existing JDs in Permanence Team to be expanded to address the whole spectrum of LAC and re-alignment

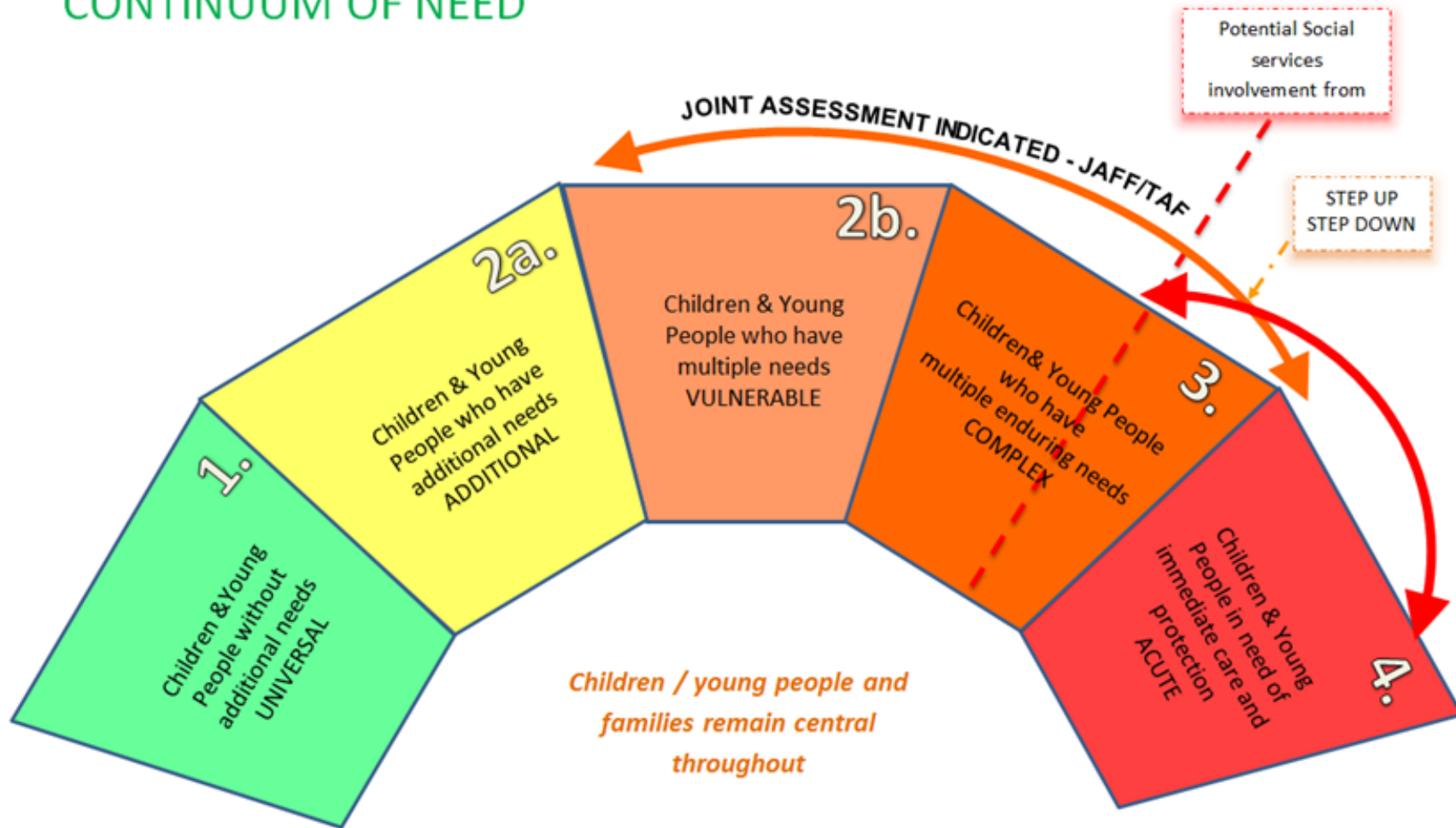
	Resp.	Due Date	Key Actions/Milestones	Outcomes	Evidence	Update
	nce Team					of management structure
21	NS/EWJ/ DW & Permanence Team	Ongoing	Continue to review Children and Young People accommodated subject to Section 76 SSWBA	They return home with the support they need and when it is safe for them. If this is not possible, they live in stable placements where they are helped to build positive relationships and maintain contact with their family and friends where this remains in their best interests	Reduction in looked after children numbers	Ongoing
22	WW/JM /EWJ & Permanence PO	Completed Tracker – work will be ongoing	Continue to review Children and Young People subject to the Public Law Outline to prevent drift and ensure appropriate legal Orders are considered	Care plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that the child or young person's current and developing needs continue to be met	Reduction in looked after children numbers	Complete Legal Gateway Tracker produced
23	JC/WW/E WJ & Western Bay Adoption Rep	Ongoing	Continue to review Children and Young People subject to placement orders for over 2 years	Appropriate care plan in place and potential reduction in looked after children numbers	Children's Permanence plan remains focussed and suitable to meet their needs	Ongoing
MULTI AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB						
24	WW/DW/ BW	When MASH is established	Staff in the Early Help hubs to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of children with	Enable disabled children live within their families with support if assessed	Disabled children and their families have appropriate	Updated training options to be explored and

	Resp.	Due Date	Key Actions/Milestones	Outcomes	Evidence	Update
			disabilities and their families to enable preventative work to be undertaken with the families	as a need	support and intervention	raising awareness to staff

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Appendix 1

CONTINUUM OF NEED



CONTINUUM OF NEED

1.

At this level, support is 'universal', which means that it is generally available to all children and young people, such as schools, leisure centres, GP surgeries. Children and young people are making good overall progress across all areas of development. It is likely they live in a protective environment where their needs are well understood and met. These children need no additional support other than those universally available within public services.

2a.

Children and young people who need additional support, this may relate to their health, educational or social development. Support is required to improve the chances of reaching their full potential, if not identified and addressed at an early stage, these issues may escalate and become increased concerns under level 2b or 3.

2b.

Children, young people and their families have a range of needs. Multi-agency support is required to reduce levels of vulnerability and/or to reduce risk taking behaviours. If needs are not met then children's health, social development, or educational attainment may be significantly impaired. A Joint Assessment (JAFF) is required along with the appointment of a Lead Professional who will coordinate the support through the establishment of a Team around the Family (TAF).

3.

Children with complex needs which appear chronic and enduring, these children are considered highly vulnerable or living in the greatest level of adversity. The needs of many of these children and young people can be met through a Joint assessment and plan (JAFF) with a lead professional coordinating support. There will be occasions when a child or young person requires a STEP UP* specialist assessment and support from a range of specialist agencies.

** See STEP UP Procedure*

4.

Children in need of immediate care and protection, this is the most urgent category and always requires an immediate referral to children's social care. These are children and young people whose care is so compromised as to place them at risk of significant harm and in need of a Child Protection Plan, and all children and young people already subject of a Child Protection Plan.

This level includes children and young people who are identified as at risk of becoming looked after by the local authority, and all children and young people already looked after by the local authority. These children/young people will be subject to the 'STEP DOWN' process once safety is secured. **See STEP DOWN Procedure*

Step Down Process – Appendix 2

