

Proposals for an Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention Service

The Context

Proposals for the development of integrated arrangements for customer access to services across Children's Social Care and YorOK partner providers were first considered by the Directorate Management Team (DMT) in March 2009.

The case for change has been driven by a number of considerations:

National social policy drivers

- The current Government continues to support the emphasis in Every Child Matters on prevention & early intervention and the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).
- The national roll-out of an electronic version of the Common Assessment Framework (eCAF) has commenced.
- Although there is still no clarity about a replacement for ContactPoint, it is expected that some form of national signposting system for vulnerable children will eventually emerge.
- The recent unannounced Ofsted inspection of the City of York Council's contact, referral, assessment and safeguarding arrangements has validated our plans for a new 'front door' service.

Local policy drivers

- There is a recognition that a more co-ordinated and integrated approach is needed across the YorOK partnership of providers, in order to ensure that there is truly 'no wrong door' to services.
- The revised YorOK Integrated Working Threshold Guidance emphasises the contribution of all agencies and practitioners to improving outcomes for vulnerable and at risk children and young people.
- Although impressive progress has been made over the past eighteen months in the take-up and use of CAF to co-ordinate Tier 2 services, further work is needed to ensure the growing strength and effectiveness of integrated working arrangements across the YorOK partnership of agencies.
- It is important that we build on the learning from the YorOK Broker project and the related information sharing arrangements with schools.

- There is a continued commitment across the YorOK partnership to supporting a range of Tier 2 services that are targeted on vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Performance and service delivery issues

- Current arrangements do not fully allow for information about children and young people to be gathered, considered and responded to in a way that consistently ensures a well targeted, proportionate and timely response across all the providers who make up the YorOK partnership.
- Current arrangements for referral to the Children's Social Care (CSC) Service and other Tier 3 services do not place enough emphasis on the value of earlier interventions to support vulnerable families.
- Over the year 2009/10, CSC were contacted with concerns about the welfare of 2360 children & young people. Only 1280 of those concerns met the threshold for an assessment for a Tier 3 intervention.
- It is likely that no additional services were offered to many of the remaining 1080 children & young people, indicating the need for a more effective, constructive and supportive response to those children & young people whose needs do not meet the threshold for a Tier 3 intervention, and to make optimum use of the range of universal and Tier 2 services that are available across the City.
- For those children & young people who are judged to be most vulnerable, there is room for further improvement in the quality and timeliness of initial & core assessments of need.

The Vision for the new Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention Service

It is proposed to establish new integrated multi-disciplinary arrangements for access to services at tiers 2 & 3 of the Pyramid of Needs that will:

- bring together under one line management structure the functions of the current Children's Social Care Referrals & Assessment Team, the Children's Trust Unit's Integrated Working Team and the Education Welfare Service;
- provide a single point of contact for professionals and members of the public who have a concern about a child or young person, or wish to seek advice and/or information about available services;
- ensure an effective, proportionate and co-ordinated response to identified and/or assessed need;
- deliver the right help to the right children and young people at the right time; and
- maintain the development of integrated working arrangements across YorOK partner agencies.

The Core Business of the Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention Service

The proposal is to combine, in a single Service Unit, the functions that have been separately undertaken by the Children's Trust Unit's Integrated Working Team, including management of the Child Index, the Children's Social Care Referral & Assessment Team, and the Education Welfare Service.

The Service's core business will be:

- to support and further strengthen multi-agency integrated working arrangements, in order to ensure that children & young people whose circumstances and/or behaviour are giving rise to early professional concerns receive timely and appropriate professional support;
- to facilitate access to appropriate services for vulnerable or at risk children and young people, with a presumption that, in accordance with existing integrated working arrangements, partner agencies will have attempted to address causes for concern at tier 2 before an exploration of the need for tier 3 services is pursued.

As a general rule, practitioners will be expected to offer evidence of an early intervention at tier 2 (e.g. multi-agency CAF and action plan), and indicate why intervention at that level is no longer considered sufficient to promote and/or safeguard the child or young person's welfare, before a tier 3 service is considered. However, it is acknowledged that there will always be circumstances, such as safeguarding concerns, that will require an immediate tier 3 response.

The Service Manager, Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention, will be a registered social worker, with a background in children's social care and substantial experience of safeguarding practice, but with a sound knowledge and strategic understanding of the early intervention agenda and of integrated working arrangements.

The Service Manager will have overall operational responsibility for the effective functioning of the Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention Service. The two Practice Managers will report directly to the Service Manager.

The Service Manager will also have a key strategic role in promoting and further developing local integrated working arrangements across the YorOK partnership.

The Core Business of the Assessments Team

- delivering a fast track response to child protection concerns – undertaking child protection investigations under s.47, C&YP Act 1989, including the completion of core assessments; and taking immediate protective action, as necessary
- undertaking initial and/or core assessments of need in more complex cases where children & young people may require longer-term support from a tier 3 specialist service

- following assessment, transferring appropriate cases to the Children's Social Care Service for longer-term support; or taking cases back to the daily meeting for consideration of a brokered support package at tier 2; or taking no further action
- responding to other enquiries that might require the attention of a social worker but not an initial assessment of need (e.g. access to files requests; background checks on behalf of Cafcass and Ofsted, or in connection with public protection issues)

The Practice Manager, Assessments, will be a registered social worker, with a background in children's social care and substantial experience of safeguarding practice.

Practitioners in the Assessments Team will be registered social workers, preferably with prior experience in a children's social care setting.

The Core Business of the Advice & Early Intervention Team

- making the first response to all enquiries/expressions of concern
- determining with the caller the most appropriate and proportionate response to identified need, including:
 - providing advice & information about available services and the operation of local integrated working arrangements, including completion of CAFs
 - signposting to universal services
 - fast tracking child protection concerns, or other complex family situations that might require an immediate social work response, to the duty social worker in the Assessments Team
 - checking the Child Index, RAISE and other customer databases, as appropriate
 - inputting information on the RAISE database and the Child Index
 - tracking the progress of all on-going work across the Service
 - brokering package of support at tier 2, and encouraging the completion of a single or multi-agency CAF and the identification of a Lead Practitioner;
 - accepting referrals for a tier 3 service for discussion in the daily meeting
- promoting and supporting the engagement of the YorOK partnership of providers in the continuous improvement of effective integrated working arrangements
- providing named workers to act as a first point of contact for schools

In effect the Advice & Early Intervention Team will offer a triage service, with practitioners undertaking the full range of roles and tasks that are outlined above.

The Practice Manager, Advice & Early Intervention, will be responsible for ensuring that all enquiries to the Service receive a timely, appropriate and proportionate response, and that cases involving risk to children and young people are quickly identified and fast-tracked to the duty social worker. Accordingly, it is likely to be a

requirement that the Practice Manager is a registered and experienced social worker, with a background in children's social care.

Given the breadth of the role, **practitioners** may come from a variety of disciplines within the children's social care field, but will have a good understanding of the early intervention/integrated working agenda and will be able to deal confidently and authoritatively with a wide range of practitioners and managers from agencies across the YorOK partnership. Ideally, practitioners within the Team should have some experience of brokering/delivering packages of support to vulnerable children & young people and of delivering training.

Administrative & ICT Support to the new Service

It is envisaged that the Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention Service will have dedicated administrative support, within the overall administrative arrangements for the Children's Social Care Service. Decisions about the nature and extent of support to the Service will be determined through the on-going review of current administrative arrangements under phase 2 of the Children's Social Care re-structure.

Maintenance of the Child Index and its interface with other systems, the monitoring of integrated working arrangements, and the maintenance of the Integrated Working web pages are currently supported by the ICT Project Co-ordinator post. This post is jointly funded by the Children's Trust Unit and the Family Information Service. The Trust will not be able to sustain its contribution to the costs of the post beyond 31 March 2011, and discussions are currently in progress to explore how the management information functions of the post might be picked up by the Management Information Service. Further work will be needed to ensure that the other functions of the post are also picked up.

Functions currently undertaken by the Education Welfare Service

Consistent with the ambition to start moving towards the creation of a single 'front door' for a much wider range of services for children & young people, a decision has been made more recently to integrate the functions of the current Education Welfare Service within the new 'front door' arrangements from 1 April 2011.

Work is on-going to explore how best this integration might be achieved, consistent with the remit of the new AA&EI Service. The advice, guidance, signposting and brokerage elements of the current Education Welfare Officer role sit very well within the remit of the Advice & Early Intervention Team. However, there are other aspects of the role (e.g. longer-term casework with children and young people who are regularly absenting themselves from school; enforcement activity; other specialist functions such as the EOTAS role) which do not sit easily within the remit of the A&EI Team. Quantifying the nature and level of activity around these functions, and determining the best organisational arrangements for supporting them, will be key discussion points through the formal consultation process.

Accordingly, and subject to further exploration of the options, the current proposals envisage a transfer of some, but not necessarily all, of the Education Welfare Service's functions to the Advice & Early Intervention Team. Work is continuing with EWS colleagues to clarify this aspect of the proposals.

