



Halton Safeguarding Children Board Step up/ Step down Protocol

Interface between Early Intervention (Team Around the Family-TAF) and Children's Social Care (CSC)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The interface between Early Intervention (TAF) and Children's Social Care (CSC) is an essential component of a robust service for children and families. Whilst Early Intervention and Children's Social Care systems and practice can be individually sound, it is the pathways between these two models that are key to ensuring all children are safe, wherever they are within Halton's levels of need.
- 1.2 The two elements of children's services need clearly understood procedures and protocols for decision making about the pathways between the levels of need particularly the interface between levels 2 and 3 on the Halton levels of need framework. Pathways between the two must be simple, with roles and responsibilities, and lines of accountability explicit, with clear management oversight.
- 1.3 This protocol details what is required of staff within Children's Social Care and Early Intervention. It includes services across the whole of the Children and Families Department, and all partners who may be involved in Team Around the Family plans (i.e. CAFs or Family Assessments). It covers the continuum of need- from Early Intervention to Children in Need/ Child Protection.
- 1.4 Decision making within this protocol should always be child and family focussed. The child's needs should be kept paramount and the protocol and procedures should be used as guidance for our decision making.
- 1.5 Safeguarding procedures would always override anything within this document. If a child was at risk or believed to be at risk nothing within this protocol should be used to delay seeking help, support, guidance or services for a child or family.

- 1.6 The protocol details the processes and systems relating to:
- i. Cases which step up from Early Intervention to Children's Social Care.
 - ii. Cases which step down from Children's Social Care to Early Intervention

2. Cases coming down (de-escalating) from Children's Social Care to CAF/TAF, or directly to universal services

- 2.1 When a case is open to CSC and the level of need reduces Social Work intervention will no longer be necessary. Where this is the case, continued professional input may be needed to meet an identified need(s) following the closure of the case to CSC. In such cases the CSC Social Worker needs to contact the Locality Early Intervention Team to:
- i. Discuss the fact that the case is being considered for a step down to CAF/Early Intervention, clarify outstanding needs within the family and the services at an early intervention level that could support the family and discuss the need for the identification of a new Lead Professional.
 - ii. Agree possible next courses of action that will be shared and discussed with partners at the final Child In Need (CIN) meeting, including any indicators that would lead in the future to the case being stepped back up to CSC.
 - iii. Discuss and agree appropriate services where it is agreed that a CAF is not necessary and that the family can step down directly to Universal Plus or Universal services.
- 2.3 Where the lead professional has been identified and agreed in advance they will attend the final CIN meeting. If the case is to be managed via the locality early intervention team they will attend as the new lead professional. If it has not been possible to agree in advance a lead professional for the family a representative from the locality early intervention team will attend the final CIN meeting.
- 2.4 At the final CIN meeting, any outstanding needs will be shared and future plans will be agreed with the family and partners. The outcome of the meeting will be one of the following:
- i. **Child and family needs remain at level 3 and the case will remain open to CSC.**
 - ii. **Child has some outstanding needs and would benefit from a step down to early intervention/CAF:**

Wherever possible the Social Worker and the locality early intervention team should support with the identification of the CAF lead professional prior to the final CIN meeting, taking into account the child and family's wishes. The minutes of the final CIN meeting will become the new CAF document, and must include a section stating if there are any specific indications that would require the case to be stepped back up to CSC. Once the CIN documentation is complete, the social worker should forward this to the locality early intervention team who will ensure it is uploaded onto PSS via CAF admin and will share it with the new lead professional. There is no need for the lead professional to populate a CAF, as the CIN meeting minutes and plan act as the CAF in this instance.

The final CIN meeting should agree the appropriate time scale for the first CAF review meeting, and the final CIN meeting documentation will need to be received at least 2 weeks prior to this date. This will ensure a seamless transition and an appropriate package of support continues for the family. At the first CAF review meeting the delivery plan and review documentation should be completed and forwarded to the CAF inbox by the Lead Professional.

iii. **Child has some outstanding needs that can be met via Universal Plus services**

Where this is the case, the locality early intervention team can advise the social worker and family regarding further support services available, including services that have engagement officers to support families to access their entitlement to universal services.

The locality early intervention team will ensure that they monitor all such step down cases, to ensure that families are maintaining any changes and are accessing appropriate support in order to prevent re-escalation. Any cases that are stepped down by CSC directly to Universal Plus services must still be notified to the locality early intervention team so that appropriate follow up can be monitored.

The final CIN meeting should clearly indicate if there are any circumstances that would lead to the case needing to be stepped back up.

iv. **Child has no outstanding needs and can continue to access their universal entitlement**

Where this is the case, the family will be advised of universal services available to them locally. Locality early intervention teams can support and advise CSC social workers on universal services available for families. Locality early intervention teams will monitor as part of performance management the number of families stepped down directly to universal services and report on outcomes to ensure that families that are stepped down directly to universal services do not have less good outcomes than those supported via early intervention.#

3 Cases escalating from CAF (or other multi-agency assessment) to CSC (Planned Step –Ups)

3.1 Where a family is being actively supported at TAF/CAF level, and there is concern from the multi-agency team supporting the family that needs are increasing, and there is or may be a risk of harm or neglect the lead professional should contact the Contact And Referral Team (CART) to request CSC attendance at a step up CAF review meeting, clearly stating the evidence to support a possible step up.

N. B. This policy does not override any safeguarding policies and all professionals working with children who suspect that a child is or has been at risk should follow their own agency safeguarding procedure and take immediate action.

3.2 The CART Team will review the information supplied on the referral form and will pass on the request for attendance at a step up meeting to the CIN duty social worker. At the step up CAF/TAF review meeting the multi-agency team around the family will carefully review all the available evidence against the Halton level of needs framework, and the attending social worker will be responsible for making the final decision for a step up or that the case does not meet thresholds and can remain at a CAF/TAF level. The attending social worker is responsible for ensuring that the outcome of the meeting, and the rationale for the decision, are clearly and accurately recorded in the minutes. The lead professional is responsible for making the referral back to CART for CSC involvement.

N. B. The procedure of holding a step up meeting should never delay any professional or CART/CSC taking the appropriate action to safeguard a child or young person and ensuring social work involvement when necessary.

3.3 If the decision is that the case is allocated for a Single Assessment Process (SAP), the CAF is suspended whilst the SAP is undertaken. Any pre-arranged CAF meeting within the first 15 days of the SAP may go ahead provided the social worker undertaking the SAP is available to attend and the meeting can become part of the assessment process. Any meeting arranged to take place after this 15 day check point should be kept as it will either continue to be held as a CAF meeting; or it will become the initial Child In Need meeting.

3.4 If, at the 15 day check point, the assessment indicates that needs have escalated and risks cannot be managed via a CAF (Multi-Agency Planning) then the case will remain with CSC (Multi-Agency Plan to Protect from Harm) where a Social Worker will be allocated.

3.5 If following a step up CAF/TAF meeting the decision is that the case can remain at CAF/TAF level and professionals working with the child/family remain concerned as to the decision they should use their own agency escalation procedures. The Divisional Managers for CSC CIN and Early Intervention/TAF can be asked to review decisions made for step ups.

- 3.6 Where a family is being supported at CAF level and the outcome of a step up procedure has been that the case can remain at an early intervention level, but additional unmet needs have been identified, it may be appropriate for the CAF to be converted to a Family Assessment and the lead to transfer to the locality early intervention team.
- 3.7 If at any point in working with a child or young person a lead professional or an early intervention worker believes that a child has suffered harm or is at immediate risk of suffering harm they should follow their own agency safeguarding procedures and immediately contact CART and make a referral for the child or young person. If any professional is concerned that a referral has not been appropriately allocated they can request that the case is reviewed at the weekly referral meeting for further discussion and consideration. If a professional feels that to delay seeking further discussion to the weekly referral meeting could lead to a child being at risk, they should use their own agency escalation procedures, and if necessary the HSCB escalation procedures and/or refer to the Divisional Manager CIN and/or the Divisional Manager for Early Intervention/TAF.

4. Incidents or events that lead to a CSC contact or referral for a child/family with a CAF/Family assessment/TAF involvement (Unplanned Step- Ups)

- 4.1 From time to time CART or EDT will receive referrals for children/families with CAF/TAF involvement. If there is no need for any CSC involvement the contact will be recorded and sent to the lead professional for information. Depending on the nature of the incident that led to the contact/referral this may indicate that the lead professional should call a review meeting to ascertain if the child/family requires more support.
- 4.2 If the referral/contact warrants CSC involvement, then a SAP would be instigated without the need for a planned step up meeting as this would only lead to delay for the family. The social worker allocated would be expected to contact the lead professional and make full use of any current assessments and knowledge of the child/family held at early intervention level. In these cases a decision will need to be made on a case by case basis as to whether it is appropriate for an early intervention worker to remain involved during the social work assessment/involvement. This would be most appropriate if it was felt that the child/family was likely to be quickly stepped back down to early intervention.

5. Monitoring and Management oversight

- 5.1 There are clear systems in place to ensure strong management oversight within CSC and Early Intervention, with all teams adhering to the Children's

Services supervision policy. Additionally CART activity and decision making is subject to management authorisation.

- 5.2 There are also forums for professional discussion of decision making; the weekly locality Working Together Meetings (one in Runcorn and one in Widnes) and the weekly referral meeting.
- i. **Weekly ‘Working Together’ Meetings:** These meetings are facilitated by the Locality Early Intervention Managers or seniors and enable partners to come together to discuss new families (with their consent) where additional needs have been identified. Actions are agreed with the aim of making sure that families receive the support they need. The meeting enables partners to raise any concerns they may have re families that appear stuck or are drifting at a CAF level. If there is concern that change cannot be achieved within meaningful timescales this may be an indication that more intensive support is needed or may warrant discussion with CSC re the potential for a step –up.
 - ii. **Weekly Referral Meeting:** this meeting is able to discuss cases that have been referred to CART, where the level of needs of the child/family are unclear or professionals are not able to reach a consensus as to the level of need. With attendance of both the Divisional Manager for CIN and Divisional Manager for Early Intervention/TAF, this meeting ensures management oversight of decision making.
- 5.3 There is a quality assurance process in place that scrutinises the quality and effectiveness of CAFs across the borough. Multi-agency audits of CAF take place three times a year and are facilitated and overseen by a Senior Manager for Safeguarding, Quality and Review. In agreement with national guidance for the Quality Assurance of CAF, a minimum of 10% of the Halton CAF cohort are audited each time, with cases selected both randomly or based on a particular theme, which will include cases stepped up and/or down. The findings of each audit are reported to the Children’s Trust and Safeguarding Board. In addition the Divisional Manager Team Around the Family audits one CAF a month and reports the outcomes to the Early Intervention teams and the manager for Safeguarding, Quality & Review.
- 5.5 As part of the performance management of the locality early intervention teams there will be scrutiny and monitoring of step ups and step downs, analysing if the decision making on levels of need at first referral, and step-up step-down seem to be appropriate. Numbers of re-referrals and numbers of families maintained at a TAF level and/or stepped further down to universal services after both CSC and TAF involvement will be monitored.