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Guidance notes for the new Child Protection Model in Staffordshire

Background Context

I am Claire Cartwright, one of the Business Managers for Safeguarding and Review in Staffordshire. The other Manager for the service is Caroline Dunn. Caroline and I manage the Independent Chairs who chair child protection conferences and looked after statutory care plan reviews.

I have had operational lead for the Newcastle Child Protection Pilot in early 2017 and I have both developed and delivered the training for the new model to Families First staff and partner agencies across the County.

These guidance notes should be read in conjunction with the PowerPoint presentation attached which sets out the rationale for the new child protection model. The presentation also includes a video of an Initial Child Protection Conference which was developed to show the process of the new model.

In 2015 the lead HM Inspector for Looked After Children Mathew Brazier, delivered a presentation to a regional workshop for Independent Reviewing Officers entitled: Independent Reviewing Officers: Improving outcomes for children and young people. The presentation identified key themes from a number of Ofsted inspections. A consistent theme was the lack of SMART outcome focused plans for looked after children and those requiring a child protection plan. This ultimately meant that some parents / primary carers had no sense of what was expected of them in both the child protection and looked after arenas.

With this borne in mind, Caroline Dunn and I undertook an audit of initial child protection conference recommendations from a 4 week period held in late 2015 from across the County in order to establish if our findings mirrored the themes identified by Ofsted. The audit findings did mirror those of Ofsted's. For example, the risks to the child were not clear and expectations of parents and professionals were not clear. The audit activity was repeated three months later following a training event in

relation to SMART planning held within our service. Whilst some improvement was noted the need to pilot a new way of delivering child protection conferences was evident and subsequently supported by the Senior Leadership Team.

The priority during the planning stages for the pilot was to ensure the new model supported and empowered families to feel engaged in the process. The pilot required a whole systems change approach to the way conferences were delivered. For example, the formal 'board room' type table was removed from the conference rooms. Instead the chairs in the room were set out in a semi-circle and those chairing the conferences used flip charts on the wall to record key information conveyed during the conference. The primary aim of this was for parents / carers to experience the 'visual impact' of seeing the **concerns**, **positives** and **changes** required clearly displayed in front of them throughout the duration of the conference.

The New Model

The new model promotes a focused discussion in child protection conferences around the **worries**, **positives** and **changes** required in addition to establishing the pen picture / important people to the child and their daily lived experience. The new model is based on the principals of the Three Houses Model (Weld cited in Calder, 2008); however in the spirit of using jargon free language the above terms were considered to support a clearer discussion than the ones used in the Three Houses Model.

The Senior Leadership Team decided against adopting the signs of safety model for child protection conferences on the basis the authority chooses to use a number tools for the purpose of assessment and intervention.

In conjunction with the pilot, an internal business process review was undertaken and a leaner business support process has been developed for child protection conferences. This is now fully operational across the County.

The film of the new conference model

The Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board (SSCB) funded the video of the conference which is included in the PowerPoint presentation. The film which is a true story; is of an Initial Child Protection Conference held in respect of an unborn child. The end of the film also shows what happens for Review Child Protection Conferences. All family details have been anonymised to protect their identity.

The fact the film is in respect of an unborn child is in essence a 'red herring' on the basis the primary purpose of the film is to show the process of the new model i.e. the room layout, how the information is captured on the flipcharts and how the 'plan' is developed in the **changes** section.

NOTE: when watching the film please reflect on the following:

- **Staffordshire is not using the signs of safety model**; therefore comparisons should not be drawn to it.
- **The use of language** - listen to the words used i.e. 'allude'. Such words were deliberately left in the film to encourage critical self-reflection on the use of language. This was also to demonstrate that although the film was made in a very contrived setting how easily and quickly professionals reverted to using the 'professional language' despite the clear requirement for all us to use jargon free language.
- **How many recommendations are made for the mother** – for this particular ICPC little information was known in respect of the father hence recommendations were subsequently made for assessments to be undertaken in respect of him; however you will see despite the father being present there were a lot of **changes** being identified for the mother in the film. This reflects research and our audits. Always remember both parents and all of those with parental responsibility have a clear responsibility to ensure the welfare and the safety of the child not just the mother. It is important that fathers especially those who do not reside in the household (providing it is safe to do so) are included in the child protection process.
- **Contingency planning** – this is a critical aspect of the planning for all children and the **changes** section should always address this. For example, whilst domestic abuse was not a concern in this particular film, if it was a **worry**, the conference should be looking at contingency planning. If mother was the victim of domestic abuse and the father posed a risk to the mother and the children - what would be the safety plan today / tomorrow?
- **Parenting Assessments** – the '6 week' recommendation for the parenting assessment was an error. The timescales remain 12 weeks. Unfortunately the error wasn't identified until the film had been fully edited and we couldn't change it.

The PowerPoint presentation

The presentation developed for the purpose of the roll out training shows every stage of the process; therefore examples of the following documents are included to support the film:

- Agency invite letter
- Child's Social Work Assessment – report to Initial Child Protection Conference
- The Decision and Actions for the Initial Child Protection Conference
- The minutes of the Initial Child Protection Conference

Reports to Conference

To ensure parents / carers and children have an opportunity to fully engage in the process it is important for all agencies to adhere to the already existing agreed timescales by the SSCB for the sharing of their reports with parents/carers. 2 working days for Initial Child Protection Conferences and 5 working days for Review Child Protection Conferences. Furthermore all reports to conference should provide an analysis of your agencies **worries**, **positives**, and what **changes** you feel are required based on the identified **worries**.

It is important that all core groups ensure the child protection plans remain SMART following the conferences. Any additional required **changes** that the core group identifies must have a clear sense of what needs to happen, who will complete it and when it needs to be completed by. You should avoid using the terms “parents to engage” and “parents to engage in an open and honest way” which were identified in the audit highlighted above because no one knows what is meant by this. If you want a parent to ‘engage’ with One Recovery as an example, then the plan should state: “As of 1.3.2018 [insert parents name] to attend the weekly appointments with One Recovery and every core group will discuss [insert’s parents name] attendance”.