

Item: 6

Orkney Health and Care Committee: 29 March 2018.

Children and Families Social Work Services – Eligibility Criteria.

Report by Chief Officer/Executive Director, Orkney Health and Care.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider eligibility criteria in relation to delivery of Children and Families Social Work Services.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

The proposal to introduce criteria that prioritises service delivery for those most in need within the community.

It is recommended:

2.2.

That the eligibility criteria for Children and Families' social work services, outlined in section 5.8 of this report, be approved.

3. Policy Aspects

The proposals in this report support the undernoted Council values:

- Promoting Survival – to support our communities.
- Promoting Sustainability – to make sure economic, environmental and social factors are balanced.
- Working Together – to overcome issues more effectively through partnership working.
- Working With Communities – to involve community councils, community groups, voluntary groups and individuals in the process.
- Working to Provide Better Services – to improve the planning and delivery of services

4. Background

4.1.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 reaffirms that Children's Social Work is a targeted service for children and families who need the skills and expertise of a social worker.

4.2.

The role of the Social Worker remains reserved in legislation and where either children or adults are:

- In need of protection.
- In danger of serious exploitation or significant harm.
- At risk of causing significant harm to themselves or other.
- Unable to give informed consent.

4.3.

A registered social worker must retain accountability for:

- Carrying out enquiries and making recommendations where necessary as to whether or not a person requires to be the subject of compulsory protection measures.
- Implementation of the social work component of a risk management plan and take appropriate action where there is concern that a multi-agency plan is not being actioned.
- Making recommendations to a children's hearing or court about whether a child should be accommodated away from home.
- Making recommendations on behalf of the local authority to a children's hearing or court about permanence or the termination/variation of supervision requirements.
- Carrying out the measures identified in the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

4.4.

Other reserved roles of the Social Worker exist for criminal justice and mental health services.

4.5.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 also imposes a duty on local authorities to provide relevant services to "eligible children or qualifying person" where there is a risk of a child becoming looked after. This duty enshrines good social work practice and recognises the responsibility on local authorities to do all they can to support children to remain within their birth family where it is safe to do so.

4.6.

The Integration Joint Board's Strategic Commissioning Plan commissions Social Work services with the aim of delivering the following outcome:

- The Integration Joint Board wishes to be assured that appropriate action is taken to support the life chances of children and young people who are identified to be at risk through Child Protection and Looked After Children processes. The Integration Joint Board wish to see the highest standards of integrated assessment, planning and intervention taking place with a clear focus on achieving safe and stable care for children, preferably at home/within the family network or, where this is not possible, in a permanent alternative care placement.

5. Children and Families Social Work Eligibility Criteria

5.1.

It is important that the Council uses its resources to support those families whose needs are most impacting on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Eligibility criteria are the rules that are used to make sure this happens.

5.2.

These criteria help make it clear how the Children's Social Work service responds to new referrals. Eligibility criteria cannot be applied in too rigid and bureaucratic a fashion and flexibility in their application is required in order to allow for the exercise of some degree of professional social work judgement.

5.3.

The production of eligibility criteria and a threshold for Children's Social Work services is a very complex task. Ultimately it may be necessary to adjust the thresholds to accommodate new legislation and government policies, changes in the availability of resources or significant changes in organisational/societal expectations both locally or nationally. Careful monitoring and periodic review are essential to ensure supportive professional responses to organisational and/or demographic change.

5.4.

The main priority is to ensure that those children and families in the greatest need receive the services that they require when they need them. In order to achieve this, difficult decisions about limiting the availability of help to some children and families have to be made in order to ensure that those in the greatest need can be properly provided for.

5.5.

The introduction of the eligibility criteria, set within the context of the tiered intervention framework, should ensure that services are appropriately targeted to those children who are most vulnerable, and therefore most in need and should clarify where other services' responsibilities lie in relation to those children, young people and their families.

5.6.

Levels at which children and families social work services will be provided, following an assessment of need, are:

5.6.1.

Level 2: refers to the significant number of children and young people who at any given time may be considered vulnerable and in need of support services. This group are referred to as 'vulnerable children with moderate priority needs'. Children and young people at this level most commonly require time limited targeted intervention.

5.6.2.

Level 3: refers to children and young people with specialist needs. The characteristics that indicate they will meet the threshold for social work assessment and time-limited, targeted intervention are:

- Acute family breakdown.
- Self-harming.
- Very challenging behaviour or situations where harm has been averted but intensive specialist support is still required.

The majority of these examples relate to situations that would escalate into the acute level (4) without timely intervention.

5.6.3.

Level 4: described as acute needs, these will have a significant impact upon a child or young person's safety and well-being. It most commonly will include: children at risk of suffering actual or likely significant harm, frequently associated with immediate concerns of physical or sexual abuse or severe neglect requiring child protection measures.

5.7.

Children and families at Level 1 will be signposted to universal services while agencies referring at this level will also be offered professional support, advice and guidance where required from the duty service. The Children's Social Work management team will continue to support the local multi agency forums where decisions to support families are made before higher levels of need emerge.

5.8.

The eligibility criteria for the service is therefore recommended to be as follows:

- Level 1 – no direct service provision, signpost to other services.
- Level 2 – provision of services to meet assessed needs, most likely to be targeted, time limited intervention.
- Level 3 – provision of services to meet assessed needs, most likely to be targeted, time limited intervention of a more substantial input than level 2.
- Level 4 – provision of services to meet assessed needs which may be acute and interventions may be substantial and enduring.

5.9.

Guidance has been produced to support the application of this approach and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

6. Equalities Impact

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

7. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

8. Legal Aspects

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 all place duties on local authorities in relation to the promotion of children's wellbeing and to provide services to protect children. The proposed eligibility criteria ensure Orkney is targeting its services to meet these duties.

9. Contact Officers

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Children's Social Work Services – Guidance on Eligibility Criteria.

Appendix 2: Equality Impact Assessment.