

# Children in Need Policy

## The right support at the right time

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# 1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this policy is to:

- Define Child in Need;
- Establish the principles and aspirations underpinning the delivery of services to children in need in Warwickshire;
- Set out Warwickshire's ambition for children in need;
- Establish the service access criteria and theory of change approach.

1.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following procedures:

- [WSCB procedures](#);
- [Warwickshire Thresholds for Services](#)
- [The Stepped Approach](#)
- [Strengthening Families Practice Guidance](#)
- [Children with disability delivery model](#)

1.3 It is recognised that effective safeguarding of children can only be achieved by putting children at the centre of the system; and by every individual and agency playing their full part, working together to meet the needs of Warwickshire's most vulnerable children. The aim of this policy is to ensure that children, young people and families within Warwickshire are effectively supported so their needs continue to be met in a timely manner to avoid escalation of concerns.

## 2. What is the definition of Children in Need?

### 2.1 What is Child in Need?

2.1.1 All children and young people are unique and have differing needs. Similarly, parents/carers also differ in their capability to respond to and meet their child's needs. When considering child in need services, the local authority is expected to provide help and support to children in their area as part of a continuum of need, in this order:

- Early Help services;
- Targeted Support Services;
- Children In Need - [Section 17 Children Act 1989](#) support for more complex needs;
- Action under [section 47](#) if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

### 2.2 The legal definition of a child in need

2.2.1 Under [Section 17 Children Act 1989](#), a child will be considered in need if:

- they are unlikely to achieve or maintain or to have the opportunity to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without provision of services from the local authority;
- their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of services from the local authority;
- they have a disability.

#### 2.2.2 Children in need may be:

- children with special educational needs;
- young carer;
- children who have committed a crime;
- children whose parents are in prison;
- children in private fostering arrangements;
- asylum seeking children;
- children within a [family who have no recourse to public funds](#).

## 2.3 The duty of children's services under section 17 to a child in need

#### 2.3.1 Every local authority has a general duty:

- to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and
- so far as is reasonably consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs.

2.3.2 Under Section 17, where necessary a 'child in need' [single assessment](#) will identify the needs of the child and ensure that the family are given the appropriate support in enabling them to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

## 2.4 Requesting a child in need assessment and service

2.4.1 [Warwickshire Thresholds for Services](#) document sets out the criteria and level of need for when a child or young person's circumstances should be referred to the [Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\)](#) for an assessment. A parent, carer or child can also request an assessment directly by contacting the MASH. (See Mash Practice Guidance and [Strengthening Families Practice Guidance](#) for further detailed information).

### 3. The current profile of Children in Need in Warwickshire

- 3.1 Over the last 30 months, December 2015 to April 2018; the number of children open to Warwickshire with a child in need category (children subject to child in need, child protection and children looked after) have increased from 3482 in December 2015 to 4364 in April 2018, . This is an increase of 25.3% from December 2015. Figures suggest that the current data is the highest in the 30 month period.
- 3.2 The average re-referral from 1st April 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 for Warwickshire is 36.3%. This is of 14.4% higher than the national average.
- 3.3 On reviewing the data from 2016/2017, 2017/2018 there is an 11.6% increase for re-referrals. When considering trends for re-referrals, Warwickshire re-referral trends suggests that MASH is most likely to receive a re-referral within 1 month of making the recommendations.
- 3.4 The figures below suggest that Warwickshire needs to focus on preventing escalations and sustaining de-escalation and further work needs to be completed around strengthening locality based resources and better use of locality panels as this is not at present consistently used. Some work is already underway with the introduction of Strengthening Families Team and also with the introduction of Children and Family Hubs in 2019.

#### **Re-referral trends:**

<b>Within 1 month</b>	<b>34.2%</b>
<b>Between 1 month and 3 months</b>	<b>19.1%</b>
<b>Between 3 months and 6 months</b>	<b>17.8%</b>
<b>Between 6 months and 12 months</b>	<b>28.9%</b>

- 3.5 The average caseload for frontline children and families social workers within Warwickshire was 16.08 in March 2016 and the highest was 20.3 in July 2017. Caseloads in May 2018 are 21.3 which is an increase of 26.8% from March 2016. The average for the last 12 months from April 2017- May 2018 is 20.1%.

## 4. Warwickshire's approach and ambition for child in need services

### 4.1 The stepped approach

4.1.1 Warwickshire's approach is to ensure the right support at the right time is provided. In particular it is vital that any intervention is proportionate to the support, need and risks identified. See [Warwickshire's Step-up/Step Down Procedure](#) for further information.

### 4.2 Commitments and principles

4.2.1 These are the things Warwickshire County Council will commit to and the principles it will adhere to:

- Clear **referral pathways** and **thresholds** that are understood by all partners and well communicated to families and communities. A common understanding;
- Parents must **consent** to receive a children in need service;
- Helping children, young people, families and communities to build the capacity to support themselves. Looking at **strengths** and **resilience**;
- Families will be supported to establish their own solutions and actively engage with assessment, planning and reviews. **Owning their plan of support**;
- To continue to **engage** with and **listen** to children, young people, families and communities as policies and services develop. In particular to improvement engagement of fathers and ensure strengths of wider family and friends are utilised through family group conferences;
- **Do what we say** by providing a clear, well communicated offer to families;
- Provide a **whole family** approach. Not considering the child or family in isolation which will allow **hidden needs or harm** to be identified and addressed;
- **Right support by the right people at the right time**. This will be evidenced through a reduction in re-referrals and improved feedback from parents and partner agencies;
- Recognising all families are different, ensuring a **culturally competent approach** is taken and seek to **understand the individual needs** of each family;

- Addressing structures to ensure services are designed with a **shared vision** in mind, rather than being service led;
- Focus on supporting families to make desired and necessary changes in a **proportionate** and **timely manner**;
- Promoting the **culture change** that all this will involve, through shared **training, support** and regular **peer discussions** about the practical application of this policy;
- Developing the directory/online offer/Family Information Service so that information is **easily accessible** for families and professionals. Thinking about **pathways from the family's perspective** and asking families to help with this;
- Build **strong working relationships**: with partners to ensure seamless delivery of services in Warwickshire, and with communities to help them support themselves;
- Reviewing of child in need plans will work on the principle of **positive impact and life improvements achieved for the child** rather than merely monitoring actions, and decisions to step up or down will be balanced against the need to **maintain relationships** and support within existing services. Outcomes need to be **sustainable**;
- Build the **children and family centre locality model in preventing escalation and sustaining de-escalation**. Supporting families to **sustain change** but reengage in support easily if needed;
- Enhance opportunities for **peer support and mentoring**, within each locality;
- Children with special educational needs or a disability: families will be supported through direct payments to **take control of the support they need**; ensuring easy access to support when children, young people and families need it putting in place and will help ensure **smooth transitional arrangements** where lifelong support is required.

### 4.3 Partnership and accountability

- Warwickshire's approach will be to utilise the skills and knowledge of all practitioners. Not just social workers. This means social workers will remain responsible for the Child In Need plan but they will work together to support families with family support workers, youth workers and other agencies including police, health and voluntary organisations (See [Strengthening Families Procedure](#)). The only exception to this will be with the Children with Disability Team, where the Review and Intervention Hub supports a specific service provision e.g direct payments (See [CwDT Delivery Model](#)).

- All partners need to be **held to account** for support to children in need through the [Warwickshire Safeguarding Children's Board](#) and children and families partnership board.
- Strengthened partnership arrangements at a strategic level **and** local practice level is crucial. **Clear expectations** from each partner is required to ensure accountability.
- To ensure **unmet needs are identified** with commissioning partners and consider the most effective and efficient ways of delivering children in need services based on need.

#### 4.4 **Warwickshire's child in need pathways and services**

- 4.4.1 Following the decision by the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) for an assessment to be completed. Children and their families will be offered a single assessment which will be completed by a social worker from the Assessment & Intervention Team. If a child has a disability the assessment will be completed by the CwDT.
- 4.4.2 Following completion of the single assessment, if the threshold for intervention at a child in need level is agreed and the family consent to child in need support this will be initiated by the assessing social worker as a priority within a maximum of 20 working days from the initial home visit.
- 4.4.3 Depending on the level of support required, the family will transfer to one of three locality based child in need support services. These are:
- Strengthening Families – for child in need provision where risk is assessed as low to medium;
  - Safeguarding and Support – for children on the edge of care or edge of child protection services;
  - CwDT.

## 5. **Strengthening Families Team**

- 5.1 Warwickshire County Council's Children and Families business unit has a new service which incorporates Targeted Family Support and Child In Need and is called Strengthening Families. The service is for families with children and young people aged 0-18 years old who need support to improve their life chances or to avoid escalating concerns. Depending on the level of need they will either receive targeted support or child in need support. Strengthening Families builds upon the principles and evidence from other local authorities such as the Innovation Unit's Project Crewe. See Strengthening Families



## **6. Safeguarding and Support**

- 6.1 Safeguarding and support services are based in each locality and will work with children and their families where the level of need and/or risk means the child is on the edge of care or edge of child protection services. The service is for families with children and young people aged 0-18 years old that need support to improve their life chances or avoid issues escalating.

### **6.2 The Safeguarding and Support delivery model**

- 6.2.1 Allocated social workers will have, on average 15 children allocated to them at any one time. The social worker is the lead professional with statutory responsibility for child in need cases and will oversee the Child In Need plans. The social worker will undertake direct intervention which will include regular family visits, liaising with professionals and closely managing the plan. The social worker will work together with other professionals and a family support worker may work with the social worker to complete specific pieces of work or tasks.
- 6.2.2 The safeguarding and support team may be supported by a member of the Family Focus team. The Family Focus Team provide edge of care services which includes intensive solution focused family brief therapy to support children and young people to remain at home where it is safe to do so. Other enhanced support to families and children who are at the edge of care or child protection may be provided on behalf of the safeguarding and support team by the family focus team.

## **7. Children with disability team (CwDT)**

- 7.1 CwDT will work with children and families where a child has a disability. The CwDT has a north and south team and provides services for families.

### **7.2 The CwDT delivery model**

- 7.2.1 The level of intervention and need required will determine which part of the team will be responsible for acting as lead professional. There are essentially three parts to the team Strengthening Families, Safeguarding and Support and Targeted Support and Direct payments. Target Support and Direct Payments provide a 'pod' system to promote collaboration and support to ensure families are provided with

appropriate intervention and to prevent escalation of concerns/risks. Family support workers will undertake family visits, liaising with professionals and supporting families. In circumstances, where a direct payment is being made to the family; support may be as little as an annual review of the direct payment but at times more intensive support may be required during periods of crisis or escalation in concerns or support needs.

## **8. Warwickshire's Vision**

8.1 Warwickshire's approach to delivering the child in need policy by March 2020 will be focused on the following areas:

- Building resilience via stepped approach;
- Utilising our physical assets – children and family centres and youth and community centres;
- Strengthen locality panels;
- Develop peer and mentoring opportunities;
- All child in need plans to be reviewed in timescale and assurance processes should evidence plans are SMART.

## **9. Desired outcomes**

9.1 **Children and will families say:**

- I know where to go if I need help;
- I was listened to during the assessment process;
- I now feel better equipped to manage my family's problems.

9.2 **Professionals and partners will say:**

- I/my staff are clear where to access services from;
- I/my staff are clear when an early help assessment should be completed;
- I/my staff are clear when to make a referral into the MASH to request a child in need assessment;
- I/my staff find the MASH consultation process helpful;
- The MASH has assisted when there has been a request for services under child in need;
- I/my staff are consulted when a child in need assessment is completed;
- I/my staff are involved in multi-agency meetings for children subject to child in need plans;
- I/my staff understand about the role of Strengthening Families Team;
- I/my staff find the locality panels helpful;
- I/my staff are clear about the step down procedure from social care to early help.

### **9.3 Desired performance and assurance outcomes:**

- Reduction in the number of re-referrals to the MASH;
- Reduction in the number of children being made subject to child protection plans and looked after plans;
- Increase in the number of sustainable step downs to Early Help;
- Increased use of Family Group Conference;
- SMART plans will be seen to have made an improvement to children's lives;
- Regular and sustained visits and multi-disciplinary review meetings.

## **10. Management responsibility**

- 10.1 Staff and managers working with children and families together with partner agencies have responsibility for the delivery of services identified as children in need.

## **11. Monitoring and review**

- 11.1 The monitoring of children in need takes place on a monthly basis using data produced by Insight Service and reviewed by the senior leadership team to ensure that Warwickshire are in line with statistical neighbours.
- 11.2 A qualitative audit occurs through quality and assurance audits undertaken by senior managers in Children's Social Care Service Development & Quality Assurance Team.

## **12. Further information**

- [Strengthening Families Practice Guidance](#)
- [Single Assessment Procedure](#)
- [Warwickshire's Children's Safeguarding Board Procedures](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)
- [Protocol for the Transfer of Work Children's Teams](#)
- [Social Work Quality Standards](#)
- [Supervision Policy](#)
- [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) – the Local Offer](#)