

# Strengthening Families Procedure

## Procedure for staff in Children and Families

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# 1. About this document

- 1.1. This document is intended to support all staff working with children and families (within the County Council and its partners). To understand how the Strengthening Families Team (SFT) functions, the criteria and the process of referrals into the service; and how children and families are supported until the intervention aims are met.
- 1.2. The following children/young people are not included within the remit of this document and have separate pathways in place for support:
  - who have been assessed as child in need and meet criteria for Children with Disabilities Team (Social Care);
  - on the edge of care;
  - subject to child protection procedures/child protection plan;
  - looked after;
- 1.3. Children and families who are entitled to [no recourse to public funds](#) and have a Child in Need Plan in place are included within the remit of this document.
- 1.4. This document seeks to set out the processes for referrals into the Strengthening Families Team. This procedure should be read in conjunction with:
  - [Warwickshire Thresholds for Services](#);
  - [Child in need policy](#)
  - [WSCB procedures](#);
  - [The Stepped Approach](#);
  - [Single Assessment Process](#)
  - [Children's Social Care Quality Standards](#)
  - [Transfer Protocol](#)
  - [Warwickshire's Safeguarding Children Board Escalation Policy](#).

## 2. Values and principles

### 2.1 Building strong relationships

- Creating and maintaining respectful and trusting relationships;
- SFT will work WITH people, rather than just “doing to” or “doing for”. Keeping the child(ren) central to the work with the family and everything SFT do;
- Recognising that families are the experts in their lives and their strengths and goals will be central when providing support.

## **2.2 Helping communities and families to find their own solutions**

- Creating one timely plan together, focusing on strengths within the family and their network, as well as being open and honest about what needs to change;
- Promoting health, well-being and education for child (ren) and their family.
- SFT will work together to manage needs, concerns and risks and identify solutions together to keep the child (ren) safe.

## **2.3 Being the “best we can be”**

- We will work together to provide high support and high challenge with you, ourselves and partner agencies.
- We will support each other to develop the services we provide, learning from all feedback to improve our services for everyone.
- We will work together to resolve difficulties quickly and restoratively, by finding the right way to support families.

## **2.4 Priorities**

- Ensure resources are allocated effectively and consistently through the use of clear policies and procedures;
- Develop and embed a joined up approach of working collaboratively within the business unit to deliver effective services to children/young people and families;
- Ensure children/young people who are subject to child in need and targeted plans have effective and rigorous review processes in place to deliver good outcomes;
- Ensure staff have the relevant training and support to deliver an effective theory of change;

# **3. Strengthening Families Team (SFT)**

3.1 Strengthening Families is a CIN service that works with children aged between 0-18 and their families. The original pilot service in May 2018 was built on the principles and evidence from other local authorities such as the innovation units of Project Crewe.

3.2 [Project Crewe](#) demonstrated that a staffing model not wholly reliant on social work qualified staff could achieve positive outcomes for child in need. The

approach to the staffing model, using family support workers supported by qualified social workers and a pod support system, was highly valued by staff who felt supported to enact sustainable change with their families and was effective.

- 3.3 Strengthening Families is provided at tier 3 of the [WSCB Threshold for Services](#) either as a child in need service to children with a child in need plan. Intervention from the Strengthening Families service for children in need will be provided following a social work single assessment which concludes that tier 3 services are appropriate.
- 3.4 Families will need to consent to receiving a service from Strengthening Families and referral pathways are detailed within this procedure. Those children who are subject to support from the Children with Disabilities Team, edge of care or child protection have existing pathways of support and monitoring.
- 3.5 An important role for the service will be that of the Strengthening Families social worker, who will work closely with a small group of family support workers and their team manager to deliver support to families.
- 3.6 The Strengthening Families social worker will be responsible for reviewing the child in need plan every 4-6 weeks to ensure the plan remains SMART and effective. Family support workers will work the individualised plan for the child/young person intensively and robustly with clear reviewing timescales to prevent drift and escalation in concerns.

## **4. The delivery model**

- 4.1 The SFT team will work with 450 children. The SF SW will be allocated a safe and manageable caseload at around 40 children per FTE and the FSW will be assigned a safe and manageable caseload of 15 children per fte.
- 4.2 When Strengthening Families Team are full, the child in need work will need to move between assessment and intervention teams (A&I Teams) and the children's safeguarding and support children's teams (CS&S Children's Team), in line with the current [Transfer Protocol](#), as capacity allows and in line with the view that all teams support each other to manage demand and workload.
- 4.3 The Strengthening Families' social worker will take the lead and responsibilities and accountability for overseeing and reviewing child in need plans. The family support worker will undertake the direct intervention which will include regular child in need visits to see the child/young person and family, liaising with multi-agency professionals and intensively working the child in need plan.

- 4.4 The Strengthening Families social worker will be responsible for risk management and case decisions making. There will be opportunity for co-working and specific focussed pieces of work for SW when concerns increase and in order to understand and manage risk. The family support worker role is important to the delivery of the service. They are multi-disciplinary workers, without requiring social work qualifications; and work with up to 16 children/young people at any one time with mixed caseloads categorised as child in need. They work with the family to identify strengths and what already works well, and then agree what needs to change alongside the multi-agency group including the social worker within child in need work. They have an input in making plans to achieve changes, as well as identifying any risks and concerns.
- 4.5 The Strengthening Families team will be led and managed on a day to day basis by a FSW Team Manager who will be responsible for allocation of work and providing supervision to the family support workers. The social work team manager will provide supervision to the social workers within the team. All team managers will be responsible for ensuring children/young people and families are receiving appropriate services and ensure resources are allocated appropriately throughout the locality. This will include co-ordination of the weekly workflow meetings to manage the allocation, closure and transfer of work.
- 4.6 In order to manage the flow of work a 16 week timescale should be the primary timescale. Regular reviews should clarify timescales for intervention and any cases open longer than 6 months should be reviewed with a team manager.
- 4.7 Cases that require longer term intervention e.g. NRPF, parents with learning difficulties and Supervision Orders where a longer term CIN plan is required will need to be agreed with a Strengthening Families team manager and with the family.
- 4.8 Workers will have a mixed caseload and this work will not be held in a separate team within Strengthening Families. Where this work has been agreed as longer term work e.g. Strengthening Families Plus an additional agreed service user category for reporting will be added by the manager.

## 5. Threshold for intervention of Strengthening Families

- 5.1 Strengthening Families will be involved with a child/young person and family following the completion of a [Social Care Single Assessment](#) where it is evidenced that the threshold is met for ongoing intervention and clear needs and risks are identified. The team completing the single assessment or responsible for the child in need plan will determine the level of intervention required from Strengthening Families. The family has to consent for ongoing support and intervention from the Strengthening Families Team and this will need to be recorded on the child's file by the transferring team. Where families do not consent to intervention by the Strengthening Families Team, the CS&S Children's Team and/or IR Team is responsible for reviewing the intervention and making decisions regarding closure or escalation.
- 5.2 Following the completion of a single assessment by a social worker, and where the social worker has, as an outcome of the single assessment, determined that the child or young person is a 'child in need' in line with the Children Act 1989; there must be a proposed plan of intervention making clear the purposes and changes to be sought. If the outcome of the single assessment is that the threshold for child in need is not met and the family can be supported by an [Early Help](#) response then the Initial Response will follow the [Early Help Step up Step Down Procedure](#) with the Early Help Officer.
- 5.3 Planning and establishing the intervention requires the social worker completing the single assessment to involve the family, and to reflect upon the information gathered through the assessment. A referral to the Strengthening Families Team will require a proposed plan which has been completed with the family and details a clear and measurable plan of intervention at child in need level.
- 5.4 In circumstances where the family does not engage with the Strengthening Families Team, the strengthening families' social worker will review the intervention with the family, taking into account historical information and risks to consider if threshold for escalation is met; this will be completed with oversight by the strengthening families' social work team manager. If it is assessed that no further intervention is required; this will need to be evidenced on the child/young person's file with a clear rationale for ending the involvement. If escalation is required for further assessment, the social worker will liaise with relevant team and will provide a clear summary of risks and clear recommendations to initiate an assessment and/or [Section 47 enquiries](#) under Children Act 1989.

## **6. The role of the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Emergency Duty Team (EDT)**

- 6.1 In the event, the MASH or Emergency Duty Team receive information or concerns in relation to a child, young person or family who have an allocated Strengthening Families social worker within the Strengthening Families Team all referrals and notifications will be sent to the Strengthening Families Team inbox on Mosaic to review and action. The social workers within the Strengthening Families' Team and social work team manager are responsible for reviewing the information on Mosaic and initiating any safeguarding actions or support that maybe required as a result of the concerns or information shared.
- a. In respect of immediate welfare concerns or Section 47 investigations; following the above; it is the responsibility of Strengthening Families' social worker and team manager to liaise with the relevant Safeguarding and Support duty team manager.
  - b. In the event, EDT receives concerns or notifications; the EDT team will send all safeguarding referrals and notifications the Strengthening Families Team. The Strengthening Families Team to review and action, as appropriate.
  - c. The 12 week rule will apply for re-referrals to Strengthening Families Team where the referral is not edge of care or child protection,

## **7. Definition of a child in need**

- 7.1 [Section 17\(1\) of the Children Act 1989](#) defines what is meant by children in need. Please see [Child In Need Policy](#) for further detail.

## **8. Pathways of transfers into Strengthening Families Team**

### **8.1 Child in need transfers from county safeguarding and support children's team (CS&S) and/or Initial Response**

- 8.1.1 In order to receive a service from the Strengthening Families Team; following the completion of a single assessment of the threshold for



Intervention by a social worker, a child in need plan should be prepared, outlining the reasons for threshold being met, strengths and difficulties within the child/young person and family's network. The child in need plan should outline the proposed outcomes to be achieved and the consideration for referral into the Strengthening Families' Team. This will need to be endorsed by the team manager from the referring team to enable the transfer request to be made. The Strengthening Families' team will review the request for transfer at the weekly workflow meeting and confirm if transfer is accepted.

- 8.1.2 In the event, the child/young person has been involved with the Initial Response team for a period of 4 weeks or more and work has been completed following the completion of a single assessment, a transfer summary which outlines the concerns, the aims, the objectives and any work that is outstanding should be completed.
- 8.1.3 For children/young people transferring from CS&S children's teams; in the event there is no recent single assessment then relevant documents will be required e.g., recent review minutes, a social worker report to case conference, a SMART child in need Plan and a clear transfer summary on the child/young person's file.
- 8.1.4 Following assessment, if it has been identified that the child/young person and family would benefit from receiving a service from Strengthening Families Team, the referring team manager/operations manager can add the children identified to the transfer list [Template Document for Strengthening Families child in need Transfer list](#) . (Please [note this is not the live document do not add names](#)) to enable the case transfer to be considered at the weekly workflow meeting which will be attended by a SW and FSW Team manager from Strengthening Families.
- 8.1.5 Once it has been agreed that the case should transfer, the team managers for Strengthening Families will provide a family support worker and Strengthening Families social worker who will take the case at the next arranged child in need meeting or agreed earliest point. The case responsibility will transfer to the Strengthening Families social worker for oversight and the family support work as the assigned worker. Further details of the transfer process are highlighted within the [Transfer Protocol](#).

## **8.2 No Recourse to Public funds**

- 8.2.1 The Strengthening Families Team will support and work with children/young people and families who are identified following the

completion of a single assessment to have [no recourse to public funds](#). The child/young person and the family will be supported by the Strengthening Families social worker who will take the lead role in supporting the family and in the review of the child in need plan. The transferring team will be responsible for ensuring a child in need plan is agreed prior to transfer which includes financial support to be provided to the family. This plan will be reviewed by the Strengthening Families social worker in line with the assessment process.

8.2.2A family support worker within Strengthening Families Team can be requested to undertake specific pieces of work; however the Strengthening Families social worker will be the lead professional.

8.2.3 The child in need plan will need to be reviewed on a regular basis and child in need visits completed; see section 10 and 11 for more details.

## **9. Child in Need Plans**

- 9.1 Following the completion of the assessment, where the outcome is child in need, an interim plan must be in place within a maximum of 10 working days after the assessment is completed.
- 9.2 A child in need planning meeting should be convened within 20 working days which will also review any services already in place. Families should be kept informed and updated during the period before the first child in need meeting.
- 9.3 Upon completion of the assessment, a cohesive plan should be prepared outlining the outcomes to be achieved and services delivered to meet the assessed needs. The interim plan should be completed within 10 days and confirmed at the first child in need meeting to ensure that services are co-ordinated and delivered to the child/young person and family in a timely manner.
- 9.4 The plan will be SMART and explicitly detail:
  - The outcomes to be achieved;
  - The actions required to achieve the outcome;
  - Timescales for actions to be completed, either a target date or frequency;
  - Who is responsible for the implementation of the action.
- 9.5 The actions outlined in the plan should be specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic and have set timescales. The plan will state the minimum visiting frequency required by Strengthening Families Team and who will be responsible for completing this. The minimum visiting frequency should be

individually determined based on the needs of the child but should not be less than three weekly.

- 9.6 The plan is prepared in consultation with the child/young person and his/her parent/carer and their views are recorded on the plan and agreed at the child in need meeting along with agencies.
- 9.7 The objectives of the plan and how they will be achieved are discussed with all relevant family members, agencies and professionals and their details recorded. The plan should be implemented by the team around the child, led by the family support worker/lead professional and as such, it is essential for other professionals working with the child/young person to know what services are being provided to the child/young person and family by whom and when. This ensures that there is no duplication of service delivery that services provided are complimentary and everyone working with the child/young person and family is aware of who is doing what.
- 9.8 The responsible Strengthening Families social worker will ensure a copy of the plan is distributed to the child/young person, his/her parent/carer and all key family members and agencies within 5 working days of the meeting. .

## **10. Review of child in need plans**

- 10.1 Following the initial child in need plan being developed by the responsible social worker, subsequent child in need plans will be reviewed by the responsible Strengthening Families social worker and the multi-agency team around the child/young person to ensure that the plan remains relevant, the services delivered are effective and timescales for action are being achieved. The plan will be implemented and delivered by the family support worker alongside multi-agency team.
- 10.2 Reviews of the plan should take place at no less than 6 weekly intervals. The review monitors progress against the implementation of the plan and this is explicitly recorded with any concerns or changes to the plan. The review will generally take place within a meeting, unless the manager agrees otherwise and this should be in exceptional or rare circumstances. Any new information received about the child/young person is evaluated and responded to. Through the child in need review process, the team around the child should share information about the child/young person and family and this information evaluated in the context of the assessment and plan. Assessment should continue throughout the period of intervention and professionals need to keep their judgements under constant critical review, being willing to respond to/and challenge new information.

- 10.3 The review plan will state the minimum visiting frequency required by Strengthening Families Team and who will be responsible for completing this. The minimum visiting frequency should be individually determined based on the needs of the child/young person and family but should not be less than 3 weekly.
- 10.4 The child/young person and his/her parent/carer are supported to participate in the review process. The plan will clearly indicate how their wishes and feelings have informed planning and service delivery. Family members and other agencies/professionals are engaged in the review process, where necessary. The views of the child/young person and his/her parent/carer and the views of partner agencies are then reflected in the documentation.
- 10.5 The responsible Strengthening Families social worker will ensure a copy of the plan is distributed to the child/young person, his/her parent/carer and all key family members and agencies within 5 working days of the meeting. The plan will be signed by the parent/carer, child/young person where old enough and agencies and should not be uploaded onto Mosaic as completed until this is done.

## **11. Child in need visits**

- 11.1 All children/young people should be visited by their family support worker in line with the agreements made in the child in need plan but no less than every 3 weeks. The Strengthening Families social worker may also visit where support needs arise as a result of a change in circumstances or an event.
- 11.2 All child in need visits to the child/young person must be recorded on the child/young person's file. The worker completing the visit must ensure case recording is child focussed. The child/young person must be seen alone with parental agreement and kept in focus throughout the intervention. It is imperative that the child/young person's circumstances are seen through the child/young person's personal experience. What does it feel like to be this child/young person living in this particular set of circumstances? The voice of the child/young person must be listened to and the worker should ask themselves what the child/young person is telling them. Direct work with the child/young person is essential to achieving child focussed intervention to ascertain their views and understand the meaning of their experiences to them.
- 11.3 In the event, the family support worker is concerned about the child/young person's welfare; they can seek consultation from the team manager and the social worker to review the child in need visit and also the child/young person's file. Any reviews will need to be recorded on the child/young

person's file as management oversight/consultation with the strengthening families' social worker.

## **12. Chronology**

- 12.1 During the intervention within Strengthening Families' Team, all responsible workers should maintain and contribute to the child/young person's chronology and where required, significant events should be utilised to record significant concerns and should also be informed by the child/young person's views.
- 12.2 Any ongoing work with the child/young person and family should take into account any previous involvement with the child/young person. Any previous involvement and concerns may highlight any emerging patterns or indicators of risk or harm in this family. All of this is critical information to support the ongoing evaluation and assessment of the current presenting needs and should be reviewed and updated at supervision.

## **13. Consultation with the Strengthening Families social worker**

- 13.1 Being available to support and provide consultation to family support worker in respect of their child in need or targeted support cases is key role for the Strengthening Families social worker. This is an addition to the one to one supervision provided by their line manager.
- 13.2 This support can be face to face or at times over the telephone; where this occurs the social worker will be responsible for recording a summary of the discussion and advice given on mosaic using the "Strengthening Families Consultation "case note". Relevant managers can be copied into this case note for oversight and action, if required.
- 13.3 At times, the Strengthening Families social worker will also be responsible for providing consultation/discussion in respect of thresholds for children/young people who are open to targeted support within the team; this will also need to be recorded using the above process.

## **14. Concern about a child/young person**

- 14.1 At times, external agencies may call to report immediate welfare concerns in respect of a child/young person e.g. injuries. If the child/young person has an allocated social worker within Strengthening Families and assigned family

support worker, the social worker will need to take the lead in managing this concern. There should be no delay dealing with this concern and the duty system within Strengthening Families should be utilised in the event the allocated social worker is not available.

- 14.2 In circumstances where there are allegations/information indicating a child/young person is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm; request for a child/young person to be accommodated into local authority care and/or section 47 enquiries are necessary. In the event, the concerns are highlighted for child in need/child protection then the Strengthening Families Team Manager will liaise with the relevant Safeguarding and Support Team Manager/ Operations Manager team to chair a Strategy Meeting , Section 47 investigation. The responsibility of initiating and chairing a strategy meeting will rest with the Safeguarding and Support team. However the Strengthening Families social worker and the family support worker will attend and contribute to the information sharing and risk discussion. Where appropriate, the family support worker and the Strengthening families' social worker will remain involved and complete particular pieces of work, such as child/young person's wishes and feelings and parenting work until the outcome of Safeguarding and Support to minimise disruption to the child/young person and the family.
- 14.3 Following the outcome of the strategy meeting and any subsequent completion of section 47 enquiries, if it is agreed that threshold for a child protection case conference is met; the assessing social worker/team is responsible for progression to Initial Child Protection Conference and transfer of the case to the relevant CS&S team. The social worker is also responsible for completion of statutory visits in line with the interim/child protection plan. The Strengthening Families' Social worker and the family support worker will contribute to the report and the most relevant worker will attend the meeting to contribute to the risk discussion. This will act as the transfer point and the role of the family support worker will end.
- 14.4 There may be occasions where the needs or risks escalate during the course of the intervention with a child/young person and family. The family support worker needs to discuss this with their manager, and the Strengthening Families social worker may need to become more involved with the family to reduce risks or needs. This might include a joint visit or more complex work with the child/young person and family; liaising with other professionals in order to reduce the risks or at times manage professional expectations and anxieties. Any management oversight/consultation will need to be recorded on the child's file on Mosaic.

## 15. Escalation

- 15.1 In the event there is a disagreement between the family support worker and the strengthening Families' social worker about threshold/management of case; this can be escalated internally to the line manager or the operation manager.
- 15.2 If the transferring team disagree with the thresholds for intervention by the Strengthening Families Team; this can be escalated to the team manager and the operations manager. For more details, see [Warwickshire's Safeguarding Children Board Escalation Policy](#).

## 16. Closure of Intervention

- 16.1 Decisions to close the intervention on a child in need basis needs to be clear and accountable and the multi-agency group of professionals will “own” the decision to close the child in need intervention.
- 16.2 All threshold discussions should be resolved at the point of closure of the child in need plan and any disagreements documented. However the Strengthening Families social worker may need to support the family support worker, if there is dispute over thresholds.
- 16.3 In the event, a particular agency is unhappy with the plan to close the child in need intervention; this will be documented within the minutes of the child in need meeting. The multi-agency group of professionals will “own” the decision to close the child in need intervention. Professionals can escalate their concerns in line with the [WSCB Escalation Policy](#), if required.
- 16.4 The rationale for closing the child/young person's file must be reflected and recorded on the child/young person's record. Managerial agreement and oversight is required for all case closures. The strengthening Families social worker is responsible for completing the closure summary.

## 17. Step down to early help/targeted support

- 17.1 Following the completion of Strengthening Families intervention and/or child in need plan, the appropriateness of an early help plan should be considered and/or whether the case should transfer to a particular universal service. In such circumstances the [Early Help Step down process](#) is to be followed.
- 17.2 If the family no longer require oversight from a Strengthening Families social worker as part of a CIN plan; consideration can be given for the case

responsibility to short term step down support within Strengthening Families. The family support worker will remain involved as the 'lead' professional and the Strengthening Families social worker relationship will close. The child in need review will act as the transfer point of case responsibility. This plan should continue to be worked in a robust and intensive manner to prevent any drift and escalation and be completed within 6 weeks of end of CIN plan.

- 17.3 The rationale for closing the child/young person's file must be reflected and recorded on the child/young person's record. Managerial agreement and oversight is required for all case closures. The strengthening Families social worker is responsible for completing the closure summary.

## **18. Management responsibilities**

- 18.1 Staff and managers working with children and families together with partner agencies have responsibility for the delivery of services identified as within the Strengthening Families' procedures.

## **19. Monitoring and review**

- 19.1 The monitoring of children in need will take place on a monthly basis using data produced by the Insight Service and reviewed by the senior leadership team to ensure that services are being delivered effectively to children in need and targeted support.
- 19.2 Case File Audits, Moderation and Supervision audits will be completed in line with quality assurance procedures.

## **20. Further information and references**

- [Warwickshire Thresholds for Services;](#)
- [Step up/step down processes;](#)
- [Single Assessment Guidance and Procedures](#)
- [Child in Need Policy](#)
- [Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub procedures](#)
- [Transfer Protocol](#)