

Single Assessment Strategy

Children & Families Workforce

Version: 5.0

Date Issue: updated 28th April 2017

Review Date: 1st November 2019

Team: Children & Families

Author: John Coleman, Service Manager, Warwickshire County Council

Protective Marking: Public



Contents

1	Background.....	3
2.	Core principles – Single assessment, single plan.....	3
3.	Principles and parameters of a good Single Assessment.....	4
4.	The Assessment	5
5	Timely assessments	7
6	Partnership working – with parents, carers, children & young people.....	8
7.	Partnership working – with other professionals and agencies	10
8.	Communication	11
9.	Further Information	11
10.	Appendices	11

Single Assessment Strategy

1 Background

- 1.1 The Single Assessment has been developed as a response to the recommendations of the review of child protection 2011 by Eileen Munro, which was adopted within [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013](#). Eileen Munro recommended that there should be a reduction in statutory guidance relating to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in order to promote local autonomy and increase the scope for practitioners to exercise their professional judgement.
- 1.2 The Single Assessment replaces the previous early help assessment (referred to as a CAF – Common Assessment Framework) and initial and core assessments within statutory intervention.
- 1.3 The aim of this document is to set out Warwickshire's Single Assessment Strategy. It gives an overview of our approach to Single Assessment. This paper should be read in conjunction with Early Help Single Assessment Procedures and the Statutory Single Assessment Procedures.

2. Core principles – Single assessment, single plan

- 2.1 The introduction of the single assessment provides an opportunity to improve the child's journey. No matter what level of intervention, whether this is early help or statutory intervention at (child in need, child protection or looked after children) the assessment completed will be the same.
- 2.2 The aim of the single assessment is to reduce duplication and avoid children, young people and families having to repeat their story several different times. Instead we want a seamless approach, across the continuum of need from early help provision to specialist services and back again when needs have been met, commonly referred to as step up and step down. This allows for assessments to be built upon at every level of need. Therefore, every practitioner in Warwickshire working with children, young people and their families will be required to work within these procedures when identifying need to ensure that they are identified and addressed at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.3 The focus of the Single Assessment is for practitioners to draw on their professional judgement to analyse and reflect on information gathered regarding the child or young person and to focus the assessment on specific strengths and needs. The assessment is a fluid process that

considers the strengths of the family. It is vital that all practitioners recognise the strengths within the family and community and support to identify and address emerging needs. The assessment should be completed with the family, using an approach which seeks to enable families to identify issues and solutions. This will enable the sustainability of any change for the family.

- 2.4 The strategic and operational aim is to support the identification and delivery of the right service at the right time, to ensure families are supported so that children and young people achieve good outcomes. This will be completed through the single assessment, single plan approach, which will ensure an integrated, co-ordinated, multi-agency, empowering and solution focused approach.
- 2.5 The early help single assessment can be completed by any person who has completed the early help (previously known as CAF) training. This could include public or third sector, they may also a faith leader, community group or association member who has completed the training for Early Help Single Assessment. From this point forward the term practitioner will encompass those who are trained and who may complete the Early Help Single Assessment. A statutory single assessment will be completed by a social worker.

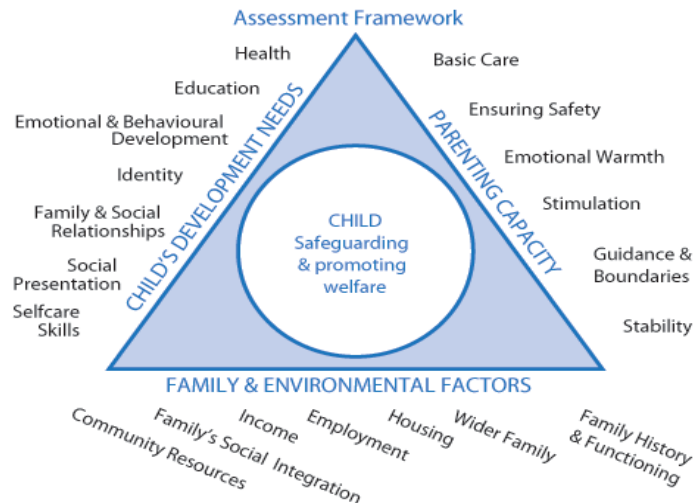
3. Principles and parameters of a good Single Assessment

- 3.1 The Single Assessment has been designed so that children and their families remain at the heart of the assessment, with the following principles:
- Strengthening the “voice” of the child through the assessment so that it is possible for anyone reading the assessment to understand the lived experience of the child, within their family.
 - Proactive and genuine involvement of children and families in the process. Children and families can be experts of their own situations and need assistance to identify issues and solutions, with guidance from professionals and community resources.
 - Helping the child and family to think about what they want and need, now and in the future.
 - Getting all the important people who support the child and family to work together to help make things happen in a proactive manner.
 - When planning with the child being assessed, the child’s wishes and aspirations must be central to the assessment and decision making.
 - Listening to the child about what they want for their life when they leave school.
 - Use of ordinary language. Ensure the printed or written assessment is accessible and family friendly to read and understand.

- Active identification of the child, young person and family's strengths as well as needs/risks.
- 3.2 Practitioners are able to write a family based assessment. This means within one report it is permitted to detail the individual needs of each child within the household. The same assessment report can then be duplicated onto each child's record. The assessment will gather important information about each child, taking account of their views through a range of means. Each child must be seen by the practitioner, taking the role as Lead Professional.
- 3.3 The assessment should be a dynamic process which analyses and responds to the changing nature and level of need and / or risk faced by the child. A range of relevant assessment tools may be applied during the assessment, e.g. environmental hazards tool.
- 3.4 The assessment will take into account historical and current information known about the child(ren) and family by relevant persons or agencies that may impact on the current and future needs of the child.
- 3.5 The assessment will summarise the information gathered as well as the practitioner's analysis. To include, the nature and level of the child's needs and the level of risk, if any, the child may be facing based on their professional judgement and research.
- 3.6 Where the assessment leads to a plan of intervention, within identified timescales, the intervention should be outcome focussed and agreed with the child(ren), parents and other professionals. The plan should be reviewed regularly to analyse whether sufficient progress has been made against the desired outcomes to meet the child(ren)'s needs and on the level of risk faced by the child(ren).

4. The Assessment

- 4.1 The assessment follows the Framework for the Assessment of Children and Families, as the diagram below:



4.2 The Assessment Framework requires practitioners to explore the interaction between or the influence of these three dimensions on each other in a child's life and allows professionals to discriminate effectively between different types, and different levels of need. The assessment process is ongoing or cyclical and can be summarised as follows:

- Gathering relevant information across all dimensions of the Assessment Triangle;
- Analysing the information and reaching professional judgements;
- Making decisions and planning interventions
- Intervening, service delivery and/or further assessment.
- Evaluating and reviewing progress.

4.3 The single assessment is supplemented by procedures to give more detailed guidance regarding the assessment process. The Early Help Single Assessment Procedure and statutory assessment procedures should be followed depending on the level of intervention at which the single assessment is being completed.

4.4 All assessment should be planned. Planning should identify the focus of the assessment including those who will be involved. It will often require a planning meeting to clarify roles and timescales as well as services to be provided during the assessment. Where there are a number of family members and agencies involved an early meeting with consent and involvement of the family may assist the assessment and planning process. Questions to be considered in planning assessments include:

- Who will undertake the assessment and what resources will be needed?
- Who in the family will be included and how will they be involved (including absent or wider family and others significant to the child)?
- In what grouping will the child and family members be seen and in what order and where?

- What services are to be provided during the assessment?
 - Are there communication needs? If so, what are the specific needs and how they will be met?
 - What are, if any, particular issues faced by black and minority ethnic children and their families, and disabled children and their families?
 - What method of collecting information will be used? Which questionnaires and scales will be used?
 - What information is already available?
 - What other sources of knowledge about the child and family are available and how will other agencies and professionals who know the family be informed and involved?
 - What be analysed and who will be involved?
 - When will the outcomes be discussed, and service planning take place?
- 4.5 The length and depth of the assessment is for the Lead Professional and manager to decide. An assessment ends when there is enough information to make a decision about a child. Certain core data will always be needed, and the rest will be a matter of individual judgment, in order to be able to take a decision about the right course of action.
- 4.6 The assessment must strike a balance between description and analysis. The most essential elements of the assessment is the practitioner's analysis, which must weigh up the risks and protective factors.

5 Timely assessments

- 5.1 Each Single Assessment should be completed with an appropriate depth and quality to reflect the circumstances and the urgency of the situation.
- 5.2 Once initiated it is Warwickshire's aim that all single assessments whether completed at an early help or statutory stage of intervention, that they should be completed within **thirty-five** working days. Only in exceptional circumstances should assessments be allowed to go over this timescale.
- 5.3 Every child should have a single assessment undertaken at least annually or more frequently where circumstances change. Every child looked after should also have an updated single assessment at each children's looked after statutory review meeting.

6 Partnership working – with parents, carers, children & young people

Early Help Single Assessment

- 6.1 The early help single assessment is a voluntary agreement between the child or young person, their family and agencies. It is important that practitioners gain consent from the family right at the start of the process. This will ensure that families have been informed about the need to share information so those practitioners and agencies working with the family can work together. Getting consent will allow practitioners and the County Council to complete searches to identify any agencies involved with the family and to gain permission to share the information gathered in the process.
- 6.2 A young person aged 16 or over, or a child under 16 who has the capacity to understand and make their own decisions, may give (or refuse) consent to share the information in the assessment. Practitioners should always encourage children under 16 to involve their mother, father or carer as appropriate. They should ensure that families have been given the opportunity to discuss what sharing and not sharing information will mean for them.
- 6.3 If a family refuse to engage with an early help single assessment and practitioners continue to be concerned for the child's welfare they should consider whether the concerns for the child would indicate that a referral is necessary to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for possible statutory assessment and intervention. Where consent for an assessment is withheld it is the role of the practitioner to explain the assessment process in a way that enables the family to understand the benefits of sharing information and working in partnership with other agencies. They should also explain to those with parental responsibility the concerns they have about the child's welfare.

Statutory Single Assessments.

- 6.4 Where a single assessment is initiated by children's social care following a concern or request for support being received by Warwickshire County Council Children & Families; a social worker will be assigned to complete a statutory single assessment. As a minimum the Single Assessment is a written record of the concern raised or request for support received, what information the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has gathered following the referral from other agencies, discussions held with parents, carers and where appropriate children and young people and include the social workers analysis of the situation and proposed actions (if any).
- 6.5 Consent for the completion of a Single Assessment by a social worker will always be sought. The best Single Assessments ensure the full engagement of parents, carers and children. Social workers will always

complete single assessments together with parents/carers and children/young people in an open and honest manner. Social workers will not speak to other members of the child or parents' family or friends unless specific consent is provided, or unless not doing so places children at risk of significant harm.

- 6.6 Where parents or carers refuse to engage in statutory single assessment social workers will need to explain that a report detailing the concerns and actions undertaken by the social worker will be undertaken. The report which will be in the single assessment format will be completed by the social worker and provided to parents so they have a copy of the information received and actions taken.
- 6.7 Following the completion of the Single Assessment the social worker may make recommendations to take no further action or to provide support on a child in need basis. This will involve a multi-agency plan of support, in which parents and carers will be involved. The social worker will explain the reasons for this and the areas of support to be provided. The provision of this service is voluntary, parents or carers are asked to consent to the provision of child in need support.
- 6.8 In exceptional circumstances if parents and carers refuse the provision of child in need support and if a social worker has concerns that a child or young person has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm they must follow [Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board \(WSCB\) procedures](#). Some statutory single assessments may highlight concerns around significant harm and may be completed on a child protection basis or the recommendation of the assessment is for child protection procedures to be initiated.

Key principles for all Single Assessments

- 6.9 All single assessments need to consider the individual child's perspectives on their life and experiences are essential to a successful assessment. The child's views should be reflected throughout the assessment, so this section provides some guidelines to help explicitly include the child's views. Where possible, include direct quotes of the child's views. Children have views about what is happening to them. They attach meaning to events. They have wishes and feelings which must be taken into account and they will have ideas about decisions and how those decisions are implemented.
- 6.10 During the assessment, the responsibility for trying to establish effective communication is firmly with the practitioner conducting the assessment. Some simple guidelines for talking with a child include:
- Explaining why you are talking with them.

- Ensuring that the professional(s) express themselves simply and clearly and use concepts which are familiar to children.
 - Matching explanations of new ideas to the children's age and levels of understanding.
 - Being aware of the possible impact of emotional distress on children's understanding.
 - Eliciting children's fears and worries, whilst providing reassurances.
 - Allowing children plenty of opportunities for asking questions.
 - Asking children for feedback to see if information and explanations have been heard and understood.
 - Repeat, simplify, expand and build on explanations if appropriate.
 - Use communication tools such as drawing, games, prompt cards, books and videos.
- 6.11 Those with parental responsibility for a child should be involved in the assessment process. This means they should be informed of the reasons for the assessment, have the assessment process discussed with them so they understand the process and have the opportunity to provide their wishes and feelings. A copy of the single assessment should be shared with those with parental responsibility for the child.

7. Partnership working – with other professionals and agencies

- 7.1 Good outcomes for children rely upon positive and solution-focussed discussions between all agencies involved working together. This could be professionals from across public sector, third sector or community based organisations. It is vital that all agencies have an understanding and appreciation for the role of each other in order to work effectively to support and safeguard children.
- 7.2 Practitioners must work together to obtain additional knowledge, skills and expertise from colleagues from a range of agencies to explore concerns and to decide upon how best to respond to needs and safeguarding concerns.
- 7.3 The Single Assessment **must** incorporate information shared and gathered from all agencies working with the child and their family. Practitioners need to make it very clear when information was shared, the source of information and clearly record and then analyse all information obtained.
- 7.4 In the event the practitioner experiences a lack of interagency co-operation and engagement in the assessment they must inform their manager and the Early Help Officer in their area who will seek to address the difficulties with their counterparts in partner agencies.

8. Communication

- 8.1 In planning an assessment and in providing the parent and child with feedback, the practitioner will need to consider and address any communication issues, for example language or impairment. Where a child or parent speaks a language other than that spoken by the practitioner, an interpreter should be provided.
- 8.2 Where a child or parent with disabilities has communication difficulties it may be necessary to use alternatives to speech. In communicating with a child with such impairment, it may be particularly useful to involve a person who knows the child well and is familiar with the child's communication methods. Where the child has had a communication assessment, its conclusions and recommendations should be observed. Consideration should be given to the child's preferred means of communication. If it is not possible to meet the child's communication needs, the reason should be recorded in the assessment.
- 8.3 How information is recorded is very important. Children and young people and their families have a right to see what is recorded about them and should be given the opportunity to comment on and make amendments to assessments. Some issues to consider:
- The need to separate opinion from fact; recording by practitioners needs to create trust.
 - Use plain language.
 - Avoid jargon and acronyms – full words should be used.
 - Recording should be clear and concise.
 - Recording should make clear whose opinion is being expressed.

9. Further Information

If you have any queries or feedback please contact Warwickshire County Council, Children & Families Business Unit.

10. Appendices

[Warwickshire Single Assessment Template](#)