

LSCB Multi-agency Thresholds / Decision Making Audit (July 2016)

The focus of this audit was on partner agencies understanding of thresholds, decision making and the effectiveness of practice and systems in the identification and responses to the needs and presenting risks of children/young people. It also considered how well agencies work together once a child is in the child protection system and the quality of core groups in monitoring and implementing child protection plans.



About the Audit

The LSCB commissioned an independent auditor to undertake this piece of work and it was a three stage approach.

Stage one was to review 13 randomly selected case file concerning children and their families who were receiving services from Early Help through to Children's Social Care. The analysis of cases was undertaken using Frameworki and Early Help documents along with interviews with lead professionals.

Stage two involved speaking to children and their families whose files were selected for the audit in order to ascertain their views on what it was like to be in receipt of multi-agency services.

Stage three was feedback on the findings of the report to frontline practitioners and managers, whilst collating their views about local multi-agency working.

What did the families say?

- "Professionals need to look at the bigger picture and not assume the worst"
- "Professionals have walked away thinking I am okay and that I can cope. Sometimes it would be nice for those people to think, but for how long, as I have been paddling hard"
- "Working with professionals can be intimidating though this time the help we have received has been good".
- "A big thank you to them (Children's Social Care) for all they did last year when I was in hospital"
- "I have received lots of confusing messages. I would get some information and my ex something different"
- "Previous support "helped me to realise that I couldn't stay in my former situation"

Key Messages

Thresholds

- Examples of successful multi-agency working at all levels.
- Professionals work best together when they already have a relationship.
- Strong Early Help infrastructure and widespread commitment to support children and young people who present with additional needs.
- Evidence of some robust planning for children subject to Child Protection plans.
- Consensus from all bar one professional interviewed that children are being supported at right level of need.

Lead Professional

- Newly qualified social workers have greater capacity to support children in need.
- Care plans can drift due to workload pressures and staff turnover.
- Having a child in need status can restrict the parenting help and other support services available to families.
- Multi-agency co-operation and action key to successful outcomes for families.

Revolving Door

- Some families stuck in toxic patterns of behaviour
- Blurring of line between Children's Social Care and Early Help as families with more complex needs bounce between the two
- Query whether some families are being de-escalated too soon when supported by Children's Social Care

De-escalation

Possible reasons de-escalation happening too quickly:

- Over optimism on part of case holder and their agency partners
- Disguised compliance on part of families
- Professional fatigue
- Genuine progress

Relapse

- Returning to former patterns of thinking and behaviour as these are a default position with changes not embedded for long enough to become the new norm.

Audit Conclusions

- Evidence that joined up multi-agency practice can hold and contain families.
- Strong lead professional with capacity to undertake role key to successful intervention.
- Family empowerment critical to engagement.
- A poor professional experience can cause long-term damage to engagement.
- A good experience can build trust.
- Connection between worker and family member instrumental in influencing change.
- Families should feel heard; with an open dialogue between professionals and family members (transparency is key).
- Systems and services must work for families.
- Families with the most toxic and entrenched patterns of behaviour will likely need intensive long-term help to make sustainable change.

Audit Recommendations

1. Ensure all professionals have a shared understanding of current need thresholds and appropriate service responses to these.
2. Strengthen families earlier, using their wider family, friendship and community networks to manage the challenges affecting family life.
3. Ensure those most vulnerable and in need of such support are receiving the services they require.
4. Review and evidence impact of local early help and prevention.
5. Know what services are available to local children and families within the community to complement those from statutory services.
6. Relevant agencies to provide assurance on the steps taken to ensure the needs of families are adequately addressed during periods when they are awaiting services from the Family Intervention and CAMHS Team.
7. Ensure that Child in Need visits are undertaken within local timescales.
8. Partner agencies should ensure the use of practice tools, assertive decision making and adherence to statutory guidance contained within Chapter 1 section 49, Working Together 2015 (HMGov 2015).

Following on from the audit recommendations; what can we do now?

Ensure you are familiar with thresholds document and animation
www.bflscb.org.uk

Wherever possible utilise wider family, friendships and community networks to support families

Ensure your agency is familiar with the tools available under Signs of Safety Approach

Be sure your agency continues to support the child and family whilst waiting for services.

Whilst working with the family use evidence based tools to continue to assess the level of intervention required

Ensure a family's commitment and capacity to break 'toxic' cycles of behaviour has been fully reviewed before de-escalation