

## Children's Social Care

# Local Assessment Protocol

July 2025



# Croydon Local Assessment Protocol

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## Related Guidance

This document should be read alongside.

- [London Safeguarding Procedures](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#)

## Introduction

This protocol aims to ensure the cooperative working that is essential for the effective assessment of needs and the identification of the services to be provided.

It sets out how the London Borough of Croydon and partner agencies, working in partnership with parents/carers, children and young people, will assess, plan and respond when there are concerns about a child and where the threshold for a social care Child and Family Assessment (Children Act 1989) is met.

## The Local Protocol for Assessment

### What is a Local Protocol?

The Local Protocol is a 'handbook' that describes what the Local Authority (LA) will do when a child is referred to the LA for support. It is a map that guides the child's journey through assessment and planning. It sets out the critical importance of timely information sharing and collaborative working practices amongst the multi agencies working in Croydon, to ensure the best outcomes for children and families.

The Local Protocol for Assessment sets out the arrangements for how cases will be managed once a referral has been received by the London Borough of Croydon Children's Services. The Local Protocol will also explain what help or support a child can receive before the thresholds are met for statutory assessment, such as when children and families can be supported by Early Help Services. For the purposes of this protocol, a child is defined as anyone who has not reached their 18th birthday, including unborn children. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection (Definition provided by Working Together 2023).

### **What is an Assessment?**

An assessment is a process of collecting information that allows somebody to understand what is happening at that point in time so the child can be helped or supported. It is the story of the child's life, who they are, who they know and their lived experiences. Whilst it is the parents' responsibility to bring up their children, they may need assistance from time to time to do so. The assessment will normally be completed in partnership with parents and will involve a range of professionals who will contribute to keeping the child safe and support them if they have additional needs, such as those arising from a disability.

### **Principles of Assessments**

High quality assessments are timely, transparent and proportionate to the needs of individual children and their families. All assessments should:

- Identify what is working well in the family.
- Identify worries about the children and young people in the family through meeting them directly and eliciting their wishes, views and feelings or through observation of relationships.
- Identify what needs to change for the care of children to be safe and stable in the long term.
- Be undertaken in partnership with family members, ensuring that each child and family member understands the type of help offered and their own responsibilities, to improve the child's outcomes.
- Be undertaken using a whole family approach which takes account of the perspectives of family and extended family, professional and naturally occurring networks.
- Include multi-agency views and perspectives.

The purpose of assessments is to enable effective, evidence-based decision making.

### **Why have a Local Protocol for Assessment?**

In December 2023, the Department of Education published '[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023; A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children](#)'.

Working Together explains what the LA and other organisations should do to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The government has asked all Local Authorities, with their partners to write and publish a 'Local Protocol for Assessment'.

This protocol should reflect the local practice framework for work with children and their families. The local authority is publicly accountable for this protocol and all organisations and agencies have a responsibility to understand it.

### **Who is the Local Protocol for Assessment for?**

The Local Protocol ensures children, young people, their families and everyone who works with them understand exactly what to expect whilst children are being helped or supported by the London Borough of Croydon.

## **Thresholds and Referrals**

A threshold is a point at which something might happen, stop happening or change, in relation to providing services to a child, young person and their family to make sure the child or young person has the right people doing the right things to keep them safe, healthy and achieving the best in life we and they could hope for.

The Pan London [Threshold Document: Continuum of Help and Support](#) ensures that we access the right assessments and services for children and their families in times of need and supports the right conversations to happen at the right time to identify children in need of help and protection.

## **Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub**

Croydon [MASH](#) acts a single 'front door' for children in need of additional support and/or protection. Croydon's MASH is a partnership of professionals from a range of agencies including the police, health, education, children's social care, and other partners who work together to share and analyze information held on multiple client data systems.

Croydon MASH aims to ensure that:

- All safeguarding referrals are dealt with in a timely and effective manner to ensure the immediate protection of children.
- Decisions are timely, sound and based on high quality, multi-agency information sharing arrangements.
- All agencies have the ability and skill set to share information safely and securely.
- Risk is identified through robust analysis of a wide range of historical and current information and concerns.
- Children, young people, and their families are referred to the right services first from the outset and in a timely way.
- Professional agencies working with children and their families have access to information that is proportionate and relevant to their involvement in a child's life.
- Allocation of resources for children and families is timely, coherent, and transparent.
- Professionals/Practitioners have rapid access to qualified and experienced social work professionals for safeguarding advice, information, and guidance on access to local resources.
- MASH is well understood and accessible to those that need it.
- Referrers are informed of referral outcomes that supports good partnership working.
- Our partnership arrangements are continually reviewed and built upon to improve access and promote seamless delivery throughout the borough.

Referrals or requests for advice can be made to the MASH:

- Online via [Croydon Access Portal](#)
- Calling the MASH Line 0208 255 2888 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)
- After 5pm and at weekends contacting the Out of Hours Emergency Duty Team by phone on 0208 726 6400.

### **Information Sharing – referral and assessments (including consent)**

The starting point for any sharing of information is that practitioners should be open and honest with individuals and families from the outset about why, what, how and with whom information will or could be shared.

Consent should be obtained from a person who is legally competent to do so. The Data Protection Act 2018 together with the GDPR identifies that a child of 16 years and over can consent to their information being shared. The local authority is responsible for clarifying that the partnership has received consent for relevant cases before any action is decided.

### **Children and young people**

In most circumstances for those under 16, specific consent must come from a parent who holds parental responsibility or a carer who has obtained this from a court. There should be consideration about whether there is capacity to consent for a parent or 16-18 years olds as per the [Mental Capacity Act 2005](#).

Consent should not be a barrier to sharing information where an agency believes there is a safeguarding response required or to promote the welfare of a child provided that there is a lawful basis to process any personal information required as detailed in Working Together 2023.

***It is good practice to seek consent from the parent/carers before any referral is made to the local authority.***

**There are a few exceptions in the following circumstances:**

#### **Police referrals and notifications -**

Police referrals and notifications are made on the basis that there is a considered need for a safeguarding response or to promote the welfare of a child.

#### **Where there are child protection concerns -**

When suspected that if attempts are made to seek consent this will place the child at risk of significant harm the referrer must stipulate safeguarding concerns in writing and indicate the escalation of need, risk, or harm to the child for a decision to be made to override consent based on the concerns raised.

#### **When the referrer has sought consent, and the parent has refused permission –**

If this is the case and the referrer believes that by not referring the concerns it is likely to escalate and may place the child at risk of significant harm/potential harm the referrer must consider and record the overriding of consent.

If the rationale for a refusal to consent is unclear to the LA, the case should be immediately discussed with the referrer and a decision should be made as to whether to proceed or not.

Decisions to overrule consent must be recorded and clarified based on safeguarding concerns.



Where it is believed the aims of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children might be compromised if agencies were to seek consent, the disclosing agency must consider and record the grounds to override consent.

If there is a significant change in the way the information is to be used at any time, or a change in the relationship between the agency and the individual, consent should be sought again. It is also important to remember that individuals have a right to withdraw or limit consent at any time.

When consent is obtained, all agencies and professionals involved have a responsibility to contribute to the assessment process. Eg: providing information in a timely manner, and/or direct or joint work. Differences of opinion between professionals should be resolved speedily but where this is not possible, the [local arrangements for resolving professional disagreements](#) should be used

## How MASH Works

The 'Decision Maker' for all contacts received into the Croydon MASH are the MASH Team Managers. The Decision Maker will review all contact records to establish the level of need. Key information will be passed to the statutory partners within the MASH for further analysis.

The Decision Maker must decide **within 1 working day** as to what needs to happen next and record the outcome. All contacts that require further information via the MASH process will be given **an initial RAG** (Red, Amber, Green) rating which will provide a framework for prioritizing agency checks, decisions and actions.

MASH partners, including Children Social Care, will gather information about a family using their own individual electronic agency database systems and pass this information back to the Decision Maker with their agency RAG rating. It is expected that the MASH social worker will analyze the information provided by the multi-agency and provide a recommendation.

The Decision Maker will consider the contributions, advice, guidance and expertise available within the partnership and will make a final decision. This management oversight will be clearly recorded on the contact record. Final decisions must be fed back to the referrer as soon as practicably possible and no later than **1 working day** after a decision has been made to ensure that referrers are aware of the next steps, including rationale for NFA (no further action) decisions. The outcome will be provided by the allocated MASH Practitioner directly to the referrer.

RAG	Priority	Action & Timescale	Decision to
<b>Red</b>	High	<b>Immediate – Within 4 hours:</b> Contacts rated as Red could be passed directly to Children's Social Care without having MASH checks undertaken to avoid delay where significant risk is considered, however some ragged as Red will have MASH checks undertaken for a statutory Child & Family Assessment of risk and need to be undertaken or a strategy discussion.	Progress to a Child & Family Assessment (C&FA) and/or Strategy Discussion / S47 investigation
<b>Amber</b>	Medium High	<b>Within 24 Hours post initial decision:</b> Contacts rated as Amber may require further agency checks to gather historical and current information. The Decision Maker may ask a Social Worker to speak with the young person (when appropriate) or parent(s) to gather	MASH for further information to decide whether the contact should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress to a C&amp;FA)</li> <li>Progress to Early Help</li> </ul>

		or clarify further information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress to Universal Early Help.</li> <li>No further action</li> </ul>
Green	Medium Low	<b>Within 48 hours post initial decision:</b> Contacts rated as Green may require a level 1 or 2 response. The Decision Maker may ask an Early Help Navigator to speak with the young person (when appropriate) or parent(s) to gather or clarify further information.	MASH for further information to decide whether the contact should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Progress to a Child &amp; Family</li> <li>Assessment.</li> <li>Progress to Early Help</li> <li>Progress to Universal Early Help.</li> <li>No further action</li> </ul>

## Early Help Assessments

### Universal Services

Universal services have an important role to play in identifying and providing early help or support to children and families. Practitioners within universal services such as schools, children's centers, CAMHS, and health are well placed to identify emerging needs. In most cases it will not require any additional support (for example from an allocated Local Authority Social Worker). Our assumption is that at any given time the majority of children, young people and families in Croydon are thriving and their needs can be best met within universal services through the receipt of information, advice and guidance or being signposted to appropriate services. Children, young people and families have access to a range of services within the local community and settings that is universally available to all. In some circumstances, some children will require support which is additional to, or different from that which is normally provided at the universal level.

If a MASH contact identifies that the presenting need of a child meets threshold for Early Help the contact will be allocated to the Early Help Triage Team to analyze the information, contact the family and gain consent for checks, then a decision is made to navigate to the right pathway which may include Universal Early Help, Family Hubs, and/or targeted Early Help with the Family Solutions Service.

There is a distinction between targeted Early Help services within the LA and Universal Early Help Services which will be considered when making recommendations. Where families are agreeable, a referral can be made, or families will be provided with information and signposted to community services. Croydon has many services and groups that can help children and families with various needs. The [Croydon Early Help Directory](#) provides information from a wide range of voluntary, community, and faith organisations who can also offer support and advice.

### Targeted Early Help: The Family Solutions Service

In some circumstances, a child or family's presenting needs cannot be met at the universal level and may require targeted and time limited support to prevent problems from escalating further and help re-build their resilience and capacity to manage.

The Family Solutions Service work with children, young people and families that have additional or complex needs that require multiagency support but do not meet the threshold for statutory involvement. The service provides targeted early help and support to families for a 3–6-month period, where one or more of the following factors is impacting on the child or young person's wellbeing:

- Parental domestic abuse

- Parental mental ill-health
- Parental substance misuse
- Parents with learning disabilities/difficulties
- Family conflict
- Children at risk of exclusion or those who have already been excluded from school, including children not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Young people at risk of exploitation in the community
- Young people with emotional well-being difficulties
- Young people perpetrating domestic abuse against their parents

### **How the Family Solutions Service is allocated**

Targeted Early Help services are most likely to be allocated if a family has additional or complex needs that require a multiagency response, the family consents to engagement and where needs cannot be met entirely at the universal Early Help level.

Where allocated, the Family Solutions Service will be shaped by the following principles:

- A Child and Family Wellbeing Assessment will be used to engage the family, understand strengths, needs and risks, establish goals, and record the work undertaken by all agencies in partnership with the family. This will be completed within 30 working days and will be signed off by a Team Manager.
- The multi-agency Team Around the Family (TAF) meeting will agree a coordinated plan of support and a Family Solutions keyworker will continue to work with and coordinate work with the family.
- To work in collaboration with universal services to provide a coordinated package of support and work to help the child, young person or family to build capacity and resilience to sustain changes.
- To act as the lead practitioner for the family, taking responsibility for ensuring that the agreed family plan progresses and is reviewed regularly in partnership with the family and involved agencies.
- To seek to understand the child or young person's lived experience by engaging with the child, young person, family and other professionals, and maintain regular contact with the child and/or family via face-to-face contact and/or other means of communication.
- To undertake regular and timely multiagency reviews at least every six weeks by holding Team around the Family (TAF) meetings, to review progress against any identified actions established within the plan to ensure they are meeting the identified needs.
- Families choosing to decline early help services does not mean that specialist safeguarding services will become involved except where there is a risk of significant harm to the child concerned or where they may present a significant risk to others.
- If safeguarding concerns arises as part of the targeted work with family, then these will step up to the Family Assessment Service with the full knowledge and consent of the family as appropriate.



## Statutory Assessments and Review

### What is a Statutory Assessment under the Children Act 1989?

Local Authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. They undertake assessments to determine what services to provide and what action to take. It's a multi- agency assessment carried out under Section 17 of the [Children Act 1989](#). This requires working together with children, young people, families and partners and it will requires consent to progress. In Croydon, a social worker is responsible for leading the assessment and has a duty to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings and take account of them when planning the provision of service.

At the start of the assessment, the social worker will see the children individually, discuss with the team manager and agree with the family the length of time it will take for the assessment to be completed (within 45 days).

If information provided at the outset or gathered during an assessment (which may be brief) results in the social worker suspecting that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, then the Local Authority, under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 is required to make enquiries to decide what action must be taken, with partners, to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. There may be a need for immediate protection whilst the assessment is carried out.

The assessment must be completed within 13 days of the first strategy discussion to enable the assessment report to be available to an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) at least two days prior to it being held. The ICPC must be held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion at which the decision to initiate a Child Protection Enquiry was made.

The social worker will go through the Social Work Assessment and chronology with the child/ children and family at least 2 days prior to the Initial Child Protection Conference.

Following an application under Section 31A of the Children Act 1989, where a child is subject of a Care Order, the Local Authority must assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services which will be provided to meet the child's identified needs.

Where a child is accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, the Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to assess the child's needs and draw up a care plan which sets out the services to be provided to meet the child's needs.

Assessments carried out for looked after children will also be completed within 45 days and focus on the child's developmental progress, including his/her health, and the desired outcomes for the child, taking account of the wide range of influences which affect a child's development both positively and negatively, using the Assessment Framework. These assessments take place in consultation with family members and carers and well as the child themselves and will be shared accordingly. This assessment will be the baseline for work with the family while the child is away. Any needs which have been identified must be addressed before decisions are made about the child's return home.

An assessment by a social worker is required before the child returns home under the [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review England Regulations 2015](#). This will provide evidence

of whether the necessary changes and improvements have been made to ensure the child's safety when they return home.

### **Child & Family Assessments and S47 enquiries.**

A children's social care (statutory) assessment in Croydon is called a Child and Family Assessment. All assessments will use the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (as set out in Working Together 2023).



This assessment framework provides a model to examine how the different aspects of the child's life and context interact and impact on the child. It is important that:

- Information is gathered and recorded systematically.
- Information is checked and discussed with each child and their parents/carers where appropriate.
- Differences in views about information are recorded.
- The impact of what is happening to the child is clearly identified.

The purpose of an assessment (whether carried out under s17 child in need or s47 child protection threshold) is to understand what is happening in the child's life (including unborn), exploring how they are cared for by the adults around them and how their health, education and wellbeing needs are being met. Where there has been, is, or is likely to be unmet need, or the child is suffering harm, the assessment should identify what help and support the child and family require to meet the need and prevent further harm.

For cases where there are concerns about neglect, assessments should include use of the [SWL Neglect Strategy & GCP2 Tool](#) to monitor the impact on the child's development and check progress is being made.

## The Assessment Process

**History/chronology:** The family history is critical to understanding the child's experience and considering possible continued patterns of behaviour or future harm/risks/needs. As the first step in the assessment process the social worker should review referral information, MASH research and any history available to them, starting or updating the chronology, which should continue to be routinely updated.

**Planning the assessment:** The social worker should plan how they intend to carry out the assessment, including identifying the focus of the assessment, when, where and how the assessment will be conducted. Who will need to be spoken to, what information will need to be gathered, any additional considerations (e.g. communication aids, interpreters) and what resources will be needed. The social worker should estimate how long the assessment may take to complete, this should be agreed between the social worker and manager, then reviewed regularly, however not take longer than 45 days.

**Engaging the child & family:** The assessment should be undertaken in partnership with the child and family, with their consent and full participation. The social worker should carefully explain the reason and purpose of the assessment and keep the family informed throughout the process. If this is not possible, the reasons should be clearly recorded.

**Information gathering:** The assessment is holistic and requires information sharing from a number of sources, by all those involved with the child and family. Wherever possible, multi-agency checks should take place through discussion with key professionals in the child's life, not relying solely on database checks or standardised letters. The assessment should be balanced, identifying strengths and protective factors as well as need and harm. When gathering information, consideration needs to be given to how reliable the information and/or source is. Information should not be taken at face value; it should be verified through checks. Fact, opinion and hearsay should be differentiated.

**Visits/talking to the child:** Understanding the child's perspective, wishes and feelings is central to the assessment. The social worker should see and speak to each of the children

separately in their first language and wherever possible they should be seen on their own. If this is not appropriate or possible, the reasons should be clearly recorded. The child/ren should be seen as quickly as possible and no later than 5 days after the referral. Thereafter, the number and frequency of visiting should be proportionate to the complexity of the situation and threshold of engagement.

**Parents, carers and the wider family:** The assessment should explore the child's whole family, friendship and community network as there may be significant people in the child's life beyond those living in the household. Every assessment should include a genogram and/or ecomap which highlights key people in the child's life. The genogram should be routinely updated whilst the case remains open. Particular attention should be paid to include fathers, partners and other key family members in the assessment.

**Analysis:** The Analysis is a critical component of the assessment and informs decision making about level of need and planning. The social worker will analyse the information gathered and come to a professional judgement about whether or not the child/ren are presently safe and predict the likelihood of this remaining the same or changing in the future. The analysis should consider the following:

- The strengths and protective factors in the child's life.
- The need/harm or potential need/harm to the child. Separating the issues e.g. drug misuse, emotional abuse, mental health difficulties.
- The 'significance' of any harm experienced, exploring how long the need/harm has been going on for (Duration). How often it is happening/has happened (Frequency). The context in which it happens/has happened. The seriousness of the incident/s or situation.
- If the child has been harmed or at risk of harm, what the harm is attributable to (Cause) i.e. (a) the parenting/parent's behaviour (b) the environment or harm in the community (c) the child is beyond parental control.
- What has been or will be the impact on the child's health and wellbeing in the immediate, medium and long term.
- Where there are multiple concerns, is there a correlation, do they compound each other?
- The parent's response to the concerns raised. E.g. Recognition and insight into the concerns. Do they accept responsibility? Have they been able to offer alternatives? How able are the parents/carers to manage the risk factors themselves?
- The level of engagement from the parents. E.g. Their level of co-operation or resistance. When considering the parents behaviour, is there a genuine commitment to change, compliance with requirements, disguised compliance and/or overt non-engagement.
- Whether any professional intervention thus far has made any difference. Has anything changed in relation to (1) the child's experience (2) the parenting being given. What is it? If little or nothing has changed.

- What is parent's ability & motivation (capacity) to change, what is the likelihood of change in the future? How soon is that change likely to occur and is this soon enough for the child?
- If change is present what is the likelihood of change being sustained when professionals are not present? Being clear about what level of engagement helps to predict this. If there is genuine commitment, the likelihood of maintenance is higher than if you only have compliant behaviour.
- Triggers for relapse? If some change has been achieved, what might cause the situation to return as before? E.g. The return of an abusive partner triggering a return to alcohol misuse.

**Professional judgement:** Once the issues have been weighed up, the social worker, alongside their managers oversight, needs to consider 'on a balance of probability' and with a safe level of uncertainty, the likelihood of the concerns continuing or re-emerging in the future and what factors are likely to increase the risk of harm.

**Timeliness of assessment:** The length and depth of the assessment should be proportionate to the complexity of the child's situation and the level of need/harm. The social worker and manager should estimate the number of visits and the expected length of time it will take to complete the assessment at the point of allocation. This should be reviewed after the first visit and any extension authorised by the manager. All assessments should be completed, and the final report shared with family and wherever possibly multi agency colleagues, ideally within 35 days, and no later than 45 days of receipt of the referral (this may be less as directed by the manager).

If there are valid reasons for the assessment not being completed within the agreed timeframe, this will be recorded, and a revised timeframe will be set if appropriate. The reason for delay must be valid and approved by the Team Manager.

It is the responsibility of the social worker to clarify to the child and their family how the assessment will be carried out and shared with the child, their family and relevant partners within the agreed completion date.

Whatever the timescale for assessment and where particular needs are identified at any stage of the assessment, the social worker will not wait until the assessment is completed before commissioning services to support the child and their family. In some cases, the needs of the child will mean that a quick assessment will be required.

Providing services or initiating Care Proceedings should not be delayed until the assessment is completed, as this can have a detrimental impact on the child's development. It is important for the child that they are able to reach their full developmental needs at the right time throughout their life.

Where child protection concerns become evident in the course of a S17 assessment then the Practice Leads will convene a multi-agency strategy discussion in accordance with the [Pan London Safeguarding Children Procedures and Guidance](#).



## Assessment Outcomes

**Provision of information, guidance and signposting:** Where the assessment concludes the child is not in need or at risk of harm, the family should be provided with advice and signposted to a service for support as required. This should take place without delay and should be completed no later than 5 days from the end of the assessment.

**Plans:** If the assessment has identified unmet need or harm, the social worker should recommend what needs to change and what, if any, help or services the family need to make those changes. This informs the child's plan which the social worker should develop with the family. The initial plan will provide any subsequent lead professional, Family Solutions Service keyworker or statutory social worker with a clear outline of what help and services are required.

**Transferring the family to the Early Help Service:** If the family require an Early Help service and provide consent for this to happen, a referral to the service should be made, a transfer discussion should take place with the allocated worker and a joint visit to the family to handover. This should take place without delay and should be completed no later than 10 days from the end of the assessment.

**Providing further s17 Child in Need statutory services to the family:** Where the assessment concludes the child is in need the family will need to be transferred to the Social Work With Families Team (SWWF). This should take place without delay and should be completed at the first Child In Need meeting following the conclusion of the assessment as per Croydon Children's Services transfer protocol.

**Providing further s47 Child Protection statutory services to the family:** Where the assessment & s47 enquiry concludes the child is at risk of harm and requires an intervention service. An Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) should be requested without delay and should be completed no later than 15 days from the strategy meeting. The social worker will complete their report for ICPC and transfer the family to the Social Work with Families Team at the ICPC as per Croydon Children's Services transfer protocol.

**Providing Services to Children Subject to Child Protection Plans -** The first Core Group meeting takes place within 10 working days of the ICPC with accurate written record of this meeting shared with all core group members. The Core Group meets at least every 6 weeks to review the progress and impact of the child protection plan with written record of this meeting shared with all core group members. Statutory visits are undertaken every 10 working days. Child protection reports for review child protection conferences (RCPC) are completed and shared at least 5 working days before conference with the conference chair, parents/carers, children/young people, and the involved professional network. The first review conference should be held within 12 weeks on the ICPC and review conferences should be held a maximum of 6 monthly thereafter.

## Specific Circumstances

### Assessing family from abroad

An increasing number of cases involve families from abroad, necessitating assessments of family members in other countries. However, the Court of Appeal has pointed out that it might not be professional, permissible or lawful for a social worker to undertake an assessment in another jurisdiction. Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB) advise that enquiries should be made as to whether the assessment can be undertaken by the authorities in the overseas jurisdiction. UK social workers should not routinely travel overseas to undertake assessments in countries where they have no knowledge of legislative frameworks, cultural expectations or resources available to a child placed there.

See also [Accessing Information from Abroad](#) in the Pan London Procedures

### Statutory Return Home from Care Assessments

Regular assessments are a core part of the care planning process for looked after children. It is also essential that an up-to-date assessment informs any decision-making and trajectory planning for a child to return home. Return home from care will be perceived as a positive option as long as the return home step is assessed as safe and where, for older young people, the risk associated with a return home is outweighed by the risk associated with placement in care.

These principles are:

- The nature and level of the harm that triggered entry to care is fully understood in the present.
- The nature of any change, since entry to care, in family or extended family composition and functioning is understood in relation to past harm.
- The child's level of resilience and ability to self-protect is understood in relation to the past harm.
- The nature and level of any future danger is understood.
- The proven willingness, ability, and motivation to make and sustain changed behaviour in parents and family networks is understood.
- The proven willingness to engage honestly with protective and supportive services on the part of the parents in the future is understood.
- A plan has been developed that includes the views of the child, parent(s) and other significant adults, and has been shared with the family, the child, and key professional networks.
- Birth parent(s) agree in writing to support the planned contact arrangements between the child and protective adults and professionals outside the family.
- The child has a safety plan and/ or support plan specific to them.

The decision-making process requires:

- The history of harm, the changes that have taken place since entry to care, the identified risks for the future and the protective plan for the future have been understood and agreed by the Service Manager, who is not the line Manager for the case.

- The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will be notified of the outcome of the assessment in relation to the above and plan for a child to return home in a timely manner to enable a final LAC Review.
- Where a Looked After Child is discharged from care at very short notice (e.g. Placement breakdown leading to decision by parents/Local Authority to return S20 child home) time constrictions mean that a LAC Review cannot always be arranged prior to a child returning home. In such cases LAC status will end when a child returns home and a Child in Need Review will be held within 20 working days of the child's return.
- The Director of Children's Social Care must approve the ending of LAC status for any young people aged 16 and 17 years who had a previous Care Plan to remain Looked After long term until 18 years.

### **Assessing Specific Children**

Where a child is involved in other assessment processes, it is important that these are coordinated so that the child does not become lost between the different agencies involved and their different procedures. All plans for the child developed by the various agencies and individual professionals should be joined up so that the child and family experience a single assessment and planning process, which shares a focus on the outcomes for the child.

### **Pre-birth Assessments**

Assessments may also need to take place before a child is born to ensure that the child will be safe following their birth and that their needs will be met. Pre-birth assessments are a proactive means of analysing the potential risk to a newborn baby when there is concern about a pregnant woman, her partner or ex-partner and where relevant, her immediate family.

The main purpose of a pre-birth assessment is to identify what the risks and potential needs of the unborn child and his/her family may be, whether the parent(s) are capable of changing so that the risks can be reduced and if so, what supports they will need.

Where there are concerns about the safety and welfare of an unborn child, it is vital that pre-birth assessments are carried out as early as possible so that professionals can recognise potential and future risk of harm to the child and to plan effectively to promote their welfare following birth.

The London Safeguarding Procedures consider that the following circumstances might indicate an increased risk to an unborn child. A referral should be made to Croydon MASH to decide if a pre-birth assessment needs to be undertaken in the following circumstances: -

- A child has previously sustained non accidental injuries in the care of either parent / carer (this includes the sudden, unexpected death of a child where safeguarding concerns were raised);
- Previous children in the family have been removed from the care of the parent(s) either by a private arrangement or by a court order.
- A child in the household is the subject of a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan or is a Looked after Child.
- Either parent is the subject of a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan or is a Looked after Child or Care Leaver.
- The mother is a child aged under 16 who is found to be pregnant (see Sexually Active Children Procedure and Sexual Exploitation Procedure).

- A parent or other adult in the household, or regular visitor, has been identified as posing a risk to children (see Risk Management of Known Offenders Procedure).
- There are concerns about the parent(s) ability to protect the baby.
- There are concerns regarding domestic violence and abuse (see Domestic Abuse Procedure).
- Either or both parents have mental health problems that might impact on the care of a child (see Mental Illness (Parenting Capacity) Procedure).
- Either or both parents have a learning disability that might impact on the care of a child (see Learning Disability (Parenting Capacity) Procedure).
- Either or both parents abuse substances; alcohol or drugs (see Parents who Misuse Substances Procedure).
- Any other concerns exist that the baby may be at risk of Significant Harm including a parent previously suspected of fabricating or inducing illness in a child (see Fabricated or Induced Illness Procedure) or harming a child.
- The mother had not registered for antenatal care.
- If the pregnancy is denied or concealed.

This list is not exhaustive, and professionals will need to apply their judgement.

For more information about risk factors, see “The myth of invisible men: safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers.

### **Disabled Children: Education, Health & Care Plan Assessments**

A disabled child in a family will receive a Statutory Assessment as any other child. Any service eligibility assessment, carer assessment or special educational need assessment will be taken into consideration by the assessing social worker before concluding the analysis and agreeing with the family any future multi-agency plan.

Any Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) assessment will consider any statutory assessment that has occurred within 3 months. Where a child is known and open to a social worker or child and family worker, then the EHCP Co-Ordinator leading the assessment will initiate contact and receive an update of the child's progress and family circumstances as identified in the last review of any plan so that assessments of educational, social and health needs are coordinated.

If a young person aged 13+ has a disability which means they may receive a service when they become an adult, the assessing and reviewing social worker will undertake further assessment of needs prior to the young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to identify need for services into adulthood, giving consideration to timely transition planning.

### **Young Carers and Families**

Young carers are children under the age of 18 who provide regular and ongoing significant unpaid care or emotional support to a family member or friend who is physically or mentally ill, disabled, or misuses alcohol or other substances.

The child or young adult has caring responsibilities that are important and relied upon within the family in maintaining the health, safety, or the day-to-day wellbeing of the person receiving care or of the wider family. It does not apply to the everyday and occasional help around the home that may be often expected of or given by children and families and is part of community and family cohesion.

Young adult carers are aged 16 to 25 years and have specific needs and rights as they make the transition to adulthood.

The Children and Families Act 2014 amended the Children Act to make it easier for young carers to get an assessment of their needs and to introduce 'whole family' approaches to assessment and support. Local authorities must offer a young carer's needs assessment if a child or their parent requests it or where it appears that a child is involved in providing, or intending to provide, care. This legislation is aligned with similar provision in the Care Act 2014 requiring local authorities to consider the needs of young carers if, during the assessment of an adult with care needs, or of an adult carer, it appears that a child is providing, or intends to provide, care. In these circumstances the authority must consider whether the care provided by the child is excessive or inappropriate; and how the child's caring responsibilities affect their wellbeing, education and development. These duties were implemented on 1st April 2015 and are reflected in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

No care package for a child or adult should rely on excessive or inappropriate caring by children and young adults. The Local Authority can combine the needs assessments of more than one family member if everyone agrees. To do this effectively requires local services working together across the statutory and voluntary sectors to consider the whole family's needs. Working Together 2023 includes principles for working with parents and carers that center the importance of building positive, trusting and co-operative relationships to deliver tailored support to families.

A young carer's needs assessment must include an assessment of whether it is appropriate for the young carer to provide, or continue to provide, care for the person in question, in the light of the young carer's needs for support, other needs and wishes. A local authority, in carrying out a young carer's needs assessment, must have regard to the extent to which the young carer is participating in, or wishes to participate in education, training or recreation, and the extent to which the young carer works or wishes to work.

Assessments of a young carer must always consider the capacity of their parents to offer a level of care necessary to respond appropriately to the child's needs. Parenting capacity will need to be assessed in the context of the family's structure and how family members relate to one another and to their wider community. Where the person is a young carer, caring for their parent (or a parental figure) it will be important to protect the child from taking on a role in which they feel responsible for "parenting" the adult who would usually be caring for them.

The results of a young carer's needs assessment will include establishing whether the child should be provided with services as a Child in Need (under section 17 of the Children Act 1989).

The starting point for any assessment will always be ***children are children first***.

Referrals for Young carers in Croydon should be made to:

[Youngcarersreferrals@talkofftherecord.org](mailto:Youngcarersreferrals@talkofftherecord.org)



## **Children involved in the Youth Justice System: Youth Justice Assessments**

Where the Youth Justice Service (YJS) is involved, the YJS case manager will be expected to contribute to the statutory assessment. All specific youth justice assessments will take account of any statutory assessments and plans in place for the young person.

Youth Justice Teams carry out assessments for young people in a range of circumstances: young people at risk of offending (i.e. prevention services), triage and diversion, out of court disposals (e.g. Youth Cautions) and statutory interventions. The main framework for the assessment of young people in the youth justice system is AssetPlus and more recently PDAT a child first approach towards assessment for those children on Out of Court disposals. AssetPlus is an assessment and planning framework approved by the Youth Justice Board and mandated by National Standards 2023. AssetPlus provides a framework for practitioners to analyse the young person's offending and anti-social behaviour and identify factors or circumstances which may contribute to similar behaviour in future. AssetPlus places a focus on identifying strengths and factors which may help or hinder the process of desistance. The information gathered from AssetPlus is used to inform court reports and help formulate plans of intervention to address needs, safety and wellbeing and future offending, including harm to others.

Youth justice assessments follow many of the key principles of assessment described in detail above, including effective engagement with young people and parents/carers (which involves the use of specific self-assessment tools), obtaining information from a wide range of sources, and assessing parenting capacity. In all cases, a judgement will be made in respect of the likelihood of further offending, overall safety and wellbeing and risk of harm to others. In relevant cases, following a period of intervention, an additional assessment will be made in respect of young people who present an ongoing risk of harm to children.

Where young people have admitted or been convicted of sexual offences, the AIM2 assessment framework will be used to identify strengths and concerns, which will inform intervention plans and reunification arrangements.

Under section 3 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 a child becomes looked after by the London Borough of Croydon when they are remanded into Local Authority Accommodation by a Criminal Court or made subject of Youth Detention Accommodation. The statutory guidance for care planning and eligibility for services therefore also applies in these circumstances. Where a child is remanded to Youth Detention Accommodation a Detention Placement Plan will be prepared in addition to standard youth justice assessments and plans. The Detention Placement Plan will be undertaken by a qualified Social Worker in the relevant social care team. Visits to the secure establishment may take place in conjunction with the YJS Case Manager to avoid multiple assessment interviews for the young person and to encourage a joint approach to assessment.

## **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children - age assessments**

It may be necessary to carry out an age assessment if there is uncertainty about the age of a person seeking asylum as an unaccompanied child (UASC). Age assessments will be carried out in accordance with guidance to ensure they are Merton Compliant.

## **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

FGM is child abuse. If a girl has experienced or is assessed to be at a high risk of being subjected to FGM, a strategy discussion will be convened, and Pan London Child Protection Procedures will be followed.

Support and guidance for women and girls who live in Croydon is available from the NHS and information is available from the [Calabash Clinic](#).

### **Contextual safeguarding**

Extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking, online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. Extremist groups make use of the internet to radicalise and recruit and to promote extremist materials. Any potential harmful effects to individuals identified as vulnerable to extremist ideologies or being drawn into terrorism should also be considered.

Any child or young person may be at risk of exploitation, regardless of their family background or other circumstances. For some, their homes will be a place of safety and security; for others this will not be the case. Whatever the child's home circumstances, the risks from exploitation spread beyond risks to the child. Their families or siblings may also be threatened or be highly vulnerable to violence from the perpetrators of exploitation.

**Child exploitation is defined as:** ***Criminal exploitation*** occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

***Sexual exploitation*** is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity

(a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or

(b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

***Serious youth violence.*** There are several definitions that describe 'serious youth violence' but the one element that they all have in common is that they all focus on the age of the person involved in the incident and the gravity of the offence: The Home Office develops the notion of 'serious youth violence' being associated with children who are involved or at the periphery of 'county lines' and negative peer groups and concerning children involved in 'county lines' and other related activities as per the definition above. For the purposes of this strategy, in Croydon we are treating serious youth violence as any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime involving a young person under the age of 18 in an extra-familial setting. This may be in relation to county lines and/or criminal exploitation or in a separate contextual setting.

Children who are referred to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub with contextual Safeguarding needs will be the subject of an Exploitation & Serious Youth Violence Screening Assessment.

This screening assessment is informed by multi-agency information sharing with Police, Youth Justice, Health & Education. The outcome of this screen will determine the appropriate response to the presenting risks & needs of the child:

Non child criminal exploitation (CCE) child sexual exploitation (CSE) serious youth violence (SYV) Vulnerable to exploitation/SYV	No evidence of exploitation or exposure to serious youth violence. At this stage there is no evidence or reasonable cause to suspect that the child is exposed to exploitation or serious youth violence. However, there are concerns that without support the child could be exposed to exploitation or serious youth violence in the future due to the presence of identified vulnerability factors or warning signs. The child/young person requires support to increase resilience. Early Help or Child & Family Assessment required. Review screen every 6 weeks.
Medium (at risk of exploitation/SYV)	There is evidence or reasonable cause to suspect that the child is at risk of being targeted for exploitation or exposed to serious youth violence. The risk to the child is such that they would be unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development without the provision of support or that the child/young person's health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired, without the provision of support. Strategy Discussion & Child & Family Assessment required. Review screen every 6 weeks.
High (experiencing exploitation/SYV)	There is evidence or reasonable cause to suspect that the child is currently exposed to exploitation or serious youth violence. The risk to the child's safety is significant and immediate provision of support is needed to safeguard the child. Strategy Discussion & Child & Family Assessment Required. Review screen every 2 weeks.

In the London Borough of Croydon Child and Family Assessments of children in such cases will consider whether wider environmental factors are present in a child's life and are a threat to their safety and/or welfare. Children who may be alleged perpetrators will also be assessed to understand the impact of contextual issues on their safety and welfare. Interventions will focus on addressing these wider environmental factors, which are likely to be a threat to the safety and welfare of a number of different children who may or may not be known to Croydon Children's Services children's.

Assessments of children in such cases should consider the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child and look at the parental capacity to support the child, including helping the parents and carers to understand any risks and support them to keep children safe and assess potential risk to child. When a child is considered to be experiencing exploitation a referral to the National Referral Mechanism is required.

Children who are vulnerable to radicalisation, a referral should be made to Channel Panel to assess the risk; Channel is a multi-agency panel that aims to prevent vulnerable individuals from being drawn into extremist or terrorist ideologies. All referrals for children are managed through MASH. Imminent threats of harm must be reported directly.

## Other Specialist Assessments

The Child and Family Assessment is informed by other specialist assessments. It may trigger another agency assessment or contribute to them.

When a Child and Family Assessment is triggered, the social worker will ensure that any other current or ongoing assessments by other agencies are identified and requested from partners. This means that all relevant information, assessments and plans, made by professionals with the child and family, informs the Child and Family Assessment.

Professionals who have contributed to the Child and Family Assessment will be recorded on the assessment form and their analysis of the main strengths and concerns of the current circumstances for the child and family will be explicitly considered throughout.

### **Court related assessments**

If a Court has concern for the welfare of a child during proceedings in a private law application, then they can ask a social worker to conduct a Section 37 assessment. The information gathered during this assessment will assist in the decision making and care planning for the child.

Where a child is currently in receipt of or has received a service from the London Borough of Croydon, the court may ask the London Borough of Croydon for a Section 7 Assessment when they are considering any private law application under the Children Act 1989. Otherwise, social workers from the Child and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) may produce such reports for the court.

### **Private Fostering Assessment**

A Private Fostering Assessment must be completed when a child under the age of 16 years (18 years if the child has a disability) has been cared for by someone who is not a close relative for longer than 28 days. The statutory assessment is to ascertain the carer's suitability to care for the child/young person and must also consider the child's needs to ensure the carers are able to provide suitable day to day care of the child/young person.

### **Assessment of Prospective Adopters and Special Guardians**

Assessment of prospective adopters including step-parent adopters are different from a statutory assessment of a child's needs, but the child's need must be considered when completing these assessments to ensure the adopters are able to care for the child and meet their needs.

Special Guardianship Order/Child Arrangement Order assessments of friends or family capacity to become Special Guardians or exercise parental responsibility via a Child Arrangement Order for a child. This is different from a statutory assessment of a child's needs, but the child's needs must be considered during any relevant private law or public law proceedings to ensure the carers are able to care for the child and meet their needs.

### **Health Assessments**

Health assessments can provide valuable input and insight into the wider assessment process and should be considered for all children where a section 47 assessment is being undertaken. Health assessments should be performed in a timely manner by health professionals.

Where children have made either an allegation of physical or sexual abuse, a child protection medical should be considered. These are usually undertaken by professionals who have the experience and capacity to undertake a comprehensive medical and developmental history and perform an appropriate physical examination.

Practitioners undertaking the assessment of sexual abuse require additional forensic training and have relevant experience and competencies.

The child's social worker should be in attendance at the child's CP Medical to ensure that the child is supported, and that all relevant information is shared with the assessing doctor.

## Problem Resolution Procedure

### Dissent and disagreement

Disagreements could arise in a few areas, but are most likely to arise around:

- thresholds
- roles and responsibilities
- the need for action
- communication

In the context of assessments, attention will be paid to 'drift and delay' and all parties contributing to the assessment will be responsible for full and timely completion of their component parts. If drift or delay in information sharing or completing key actions is having an impact on the outcomes for the child, there is accountability for all agencies to the Croydon Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard and promote the well-being of children/young people.

It is every professional's responsibility to "problem solve". The aim must be to resolve a professional disagreement at the earliest opportunity as swiftly as possible, always keeping in mind that the child and young person's safety and welfare is the paramount consideration.

The London Borough of Croydon Safeguarding Partnership is clear that there must be respectful challenge whenever a professional or agency has concern about the action or inaction of another. If a professional disagreement arises and the issue cannot be resolved between practitioners, the matter should be referred to the line manager who will discuss with their opposite number in the other agency, in the hope that the issue can be resolved. Failure to resolve problems between line managers must be further escalated to Senior Managers within the respective organisations.

Where there is a delay, or any other issue of concern, [the Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership Escalation Policy](#) should be used. Individual agency complaint processes are available for professionals, parents and children also. A clear record of all discussions, agreements and actions must be kept by all parties.



All agencies contributing to the statutory assessment process will have a responsibility to ensure that their staff work within the Local Assessment Protocol and that their staff have received the necessary safeguarding training.

## Compliments & Complaints

The London Borough of Croydon's social care practitioners work alongside children, young people, families, carers and other professionals in order to promote the best possible outcomes for the children. This means communicating, engaging, involving and acting on views appropriately. Asking for feedback is one of the best ways to understand how well this has been done and where it could be better. Gathering and using feedback promotes a reflective 'learning' culture. It provides evidence of our progress and should be regularly discussed within supervision. Gathering children, family and carers feedback is an integral part of Children's Service bi-monthly Windows into Practice auditing cycle.

Service user feedback is different from, and in addition to, 'direct work' with children and families, for example asking children, young people and parents/carers about their views on the reason for social care involvement and the 'plan' for the child. Collecting and recording information which demonstrates how service users have been properly included and involved in social care processes is built into all assessment forms and plans within the electronic recording system. It is a vital part of working with children and families. In addition, we seek to use information from compliments and complaints to inform practice development.

### Compliments

A compliment is defined as a customer statement of positive recognition or praise for a service or individual. Where appropriate, officers may acknowledge compliments. Any verbal or written compliments will be recorded by the member of staff receiving the compliment and will be passed to the Complaints and Feedback team for collation and passed to senior leaders to share and celebrate.

### Complaints

Service users' views are important to us. We are committed to providing a high-quality service to our residents and users. Our aim is to offer the correct services and encourage people to ask for our help. We think we get it right most of the time, however there may be times when things go wrong. If this happens, we want to hear so we can try and put things right.

A complaint about Children's Services will not have a negative effect on any services already being provided, or any applied for. Service users have a right to complain, and the results of complaints can improve our services.

If service users are not happy with the service they have received, or the way they have been treated, they should first talk to a member of the team or their manager. However, if service users remain unhappy, they can pursue a formal complaint via the [Children's Social Care Complaints website](#).

Version	Author	Name	Approval By	Name	Date	Review Date
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**Children's Social Care - Local Assessment Protocol**

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