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Children and Families

Case Conference

A Child Protection Case Conference is held following an investigation under section 47 of the Children's Act 1989 (a child protection investigation), where there are concerns that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer neglect or sexual, emotional or physical abuse.

Initial Assessment

When social services receive an allegation of child abuse, they have 24 hours to decide what to do next. If social services decide that there is a need to look at the allegation in more detail, they will make an 'initial assessment' within 7 working days.

Core Assessment

A Core Assessment provides a structured, in-depth assessment of a child or young person's needs where their circumstances are complex. The Core Assessment provides a structured framework for social workers to record information gathered from a variety of sources to provide evidence for their professional judgments, facilitate analysis, decision making and planning.

A Core Assessment should be completed within 35 working days of its commencement.

A completed Core Assessment Record is then used to develop the plan for the child or young person.

Its overall purpose is to support social workers in recording and analyzing information gathered during an assessment. This should enhance the quality of decision making and plans for children in need.

Care Plans

The Care Plan is the plan for children looked after. It sets out clearly the objectives for the care of the child or young person, and the steps by which the objectives will be reached.

Wherever possible, the Care Plan should be completed before a child or young person is looked after. If this is not possible, the Care Plan should be completed as soon as possible after the child is placed.

Care Plans can only be changed following a statutory child care review.

Pathway Plan

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 requires a Pathway Plan for all eligible and relevant young people.

The Act defines an eligible young person as one who is aged 16 or 17, who has been looked after by the local authority for a total of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and remains looked after. A relevant young person is defined in the Act as a young person who was previously an eligible young person but who is no longer looked after and is under the age of 18.

The Pathway Plan differs from the Care Plan as it is regularly reviewed and updated.

The Pathway Plan is a detailed assessment of;

- Nature and level of contact and personal support to be provided and by whom to the young person.
- Details of the accommodation for them.
- Plan for education or training.
- How the responsible local authority will assist in relation to employment.
Support to be provided to enable the young person to develop and sustain appropriate family and social relationships.
- A programme to develop practical and other skills necessary for living independently.
- Financial support to be provided, in particular with respect to accommodation and maintenance needs.
- Health needs, including (mental health) needs of the young person and how they are to be met.
- Contingency plans for action by responsible local authority if the Pathway Plan for any reason cease to be effective

Referral and Assessment

The Referral and Assessment team is the main point of contact for members of the public and professionals from other agencies.

The referral and assessment teams provide brief intervention and support to children in need and their families. These teams are involved in and responsible for the initial work, which includes child protection, legal proceedings and children that are looked after by the local authority.

The referral and assessment teams work in conjunction with other agencies, such as Health and Education in order to provide the best services for children and families.

Children In Need

The Children in Need service is provided to children and families in need and to Children on the Child Protection Register.

The children in need teams take cases from the referral and assessment teams and develop plans to support children and families and progress assessments in order to further understand the needs of children and their families. In doing so the children in need teams are able to provide specific support for individual families. While the referral and assessment teams provide brief intervention, the children in need teams provide more in-depth work for children and their families.

The children in need teams are also involved in legal work, child protection and in-depth assessments. Additionally, these teams work in partnership with other agencies, such as Health, Education and other agencies such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

See Pathway Plan for further details

Looked After Children (LAC)

The term 'looked after' is a general term introduced by the 1989 Act. This covers all children who are accommodated, detained or in care to a local authority. The children may be in a variety of placements including foster care, residential care or residential schools.

Leaving Care / Care Leavers

The Care Leavers Team provides services for young people leaving care to make sure that they are supported, both practically and emotionally. The team work with young people aged over 16, living in and leaving care, and continue to support them until they are 21, or 24

The team support and advise young adults, according to their individual needs, in preparation and planning for becoming successfully independent and responsible citizens. They continue to encourage care leavers to develop their independent living skills to enable them to maintain their tenancy when they move into their own accommodation at 18 years.

Further services include supporting young people to help achieve their potential in education, employment or training, and provide appropriate financial support to encourage this. Social workers will also promote a healthy lifestyle by encouraging Care Leavers to take increasing responsibility for their own health and support attendance at local sports and leisure centres

Disabled Children's Team

This Team delivers services to children in need and their families, looked after children and children in need of protection and those children with a disability or a substantial health or medical condition.

The Disabled Children's Team work in a multi-disciplinary way, which includes social workers working closely with carers, statutory and voluntary agencies and Health and Education.

Section 8

Under the Act all possible efforts are made to resolve problems by voluntary means. Court orders are only sought if they will be of positive benefit to the child.

Residence Orders - settling where a child lives

Contact Orders - the child's right to contact

Prohibited Steps Orders - restricting parental responsibility.

Specific Issue Orders - deciding a dispute.

Local authorities cannot apply for or be awarded a Section 8 Order; they are a private law Order which would normally be used in family disputes and so forth.

Section 17

Requires the local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need.

A child shall be taken to be in need if: -

- he/she is unlikely to maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority
- his/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision to him of such services
- he/she is disabled.

Section 20

Section 20 states that a local authority shall provide accommodation for any 'child in need within their area' who appears to require accommodation as a result of: -

- there being no person who has parental responsibility for him/her
- the child being lost or abandoned; or
- the person who has been caring for the child is being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing him/her with suitable accommodation and care.

Section 37 - Court Reports

A Section 37 Report considers that when any family is going through proceedings in which a question arises with regards to the child's welfare this information is presented to the court. The court will then decide as to whether an investigation of the child's circumstances should go ahead or not. They will also decide as to whether a care or supervision order should be put in place.

Section 47-CP Investigation

Section 47 Enquiry means that social services must carry out an investigation when they have reasonable cause to believe that a child living in their area has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.

The purpose of this investigation is to decide what should be done to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

Schedule 1 Reports

Financial Provision for Children - Orders for financial relief against parents

Schedule 2 Reports

Local Authority Support for Children and Families

What are Care Proceedings?

'Care proceedings' is the phrase used to describe the legal process by which social services ask the court whether or not a young person should go into care.

To begin with, social services will ask the court to make temporary orders (called 'interim care orders') while matters are investigated further and plans are made. In the end, if social services still think a care order is necessary, they will ask for a full care order to be made.

Interim Care Orders – (ICO's)

An Interim Care Order is made by the court when a social worker has applied for a Care Order but everyone concerned is not ready for the full case to be heard. If an interim Care Order is made the child will remain in care.

Emergency Protection Orders (EPO's) - Section 44 Children Act 1989

These orders are obtained from the court by the local authority or other authorized body, where there is an immediate danger to the child and steps need to be taken urgently to protect the child.

The court will only make an order if it considers that doing so would be better for the child than not making an order.

An emergency protection order is only a short order granted for up to a maximum of 8 days. The order grants the applicant parental responsibility but only permits him to take such action as is reasonably required to safeguard the welfare of the child

Supervision Orders - Section 31 Children Act 1989

What is a supervision order?

If the judge makes a supervision order it means that the social services department will have to help and advise whoever is looking after the child and make sure the child is well looked after. The child may live with their mother or father, or both, or another person. A social services department does not acquire parental responsibility under a supervision order. A supervision order lasts for twelve months but can be extended up to a maximum of three years.

Supervision Order Specifics

These orders are made on the same basis as Care Orders i.e. that the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

When there is a supervision order in force it is the duty of the supervisor to:

- Advise, assist and befriend the supervised child
- Take steps that are reasonably necessary to give effect to the order **and**
- Where the order is not complied with or the supervisor considers that the order is no longer necessary and therefore consider whether or not to apply to the court to vary or discharge the order.

In contrast to a care order during the life of the supervision order the child is usually living at home with the parents who retain parental responsibility.

Secure Accommodation Orders - section 25 Children Act 1989

These orders enable a local authority to place a child in a secure setting for their own or other people's safety.

The court can make a secure accommodation order where:

- A young person has a history of running away and is likely to run away from any other kind of accommodation; or
- If the young person is not kept in secure accommodation he is likely to injure himself or other people.
- Only children aged up to 18 years, who are in local authority care or accommodated by the local authority can be placed in secure accommodation.

Care Orders - Section 31 Children Act 1989

A care order is a court order that places a child under the care of a local council. The local council then shares parental responsibility for the child, with the parents.

- These orders are usually sought by a local authority in respect of children who they believe are suffering or are likely to suffer significant harm and:
- The harm is attributable to the care being given to the child not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give him or
- That the child is beyond parental control.

Care orders continue until the child is 18 years, unless discharged earlier. Orders can only be obtained on children under 17 years (or 16 if they are married).

Adoption and Fostering

The New Adoption and Children Act 2002

The new Act, which came into force on 30th December 2005. This Act has been the first major overhaul of adoption legalisation since The Adoption Act 1976.

The new Act relates to adoption and the provision of adoption services.

The key principles of the Act are:

- It makes the child's welfare the paramount consideration in all decisions relating to their adoption by adoption agencies and courts.
- Emphasises the need to prevent delay in planning for permanence and adoption when children cannot be cared for by their own birth family.
- Introduces a new permanence option called a Special Guardianship Order. This is covered by an amendment to the Children Act 1989.
- Widens the range of people who can be considered as prospective adopters by allowing unmarried couples to adopt jointly.
- It acknowledges the lifelong impact of adoption on all parties.

What is an Adoption Panel?

An adoption panel is a body of people who are empowered to consider whether:

- A child in the care of a local authority should be made available for adoption
- Prospective adopters should be approved to adopt
- Particular adopters are suitable for a particular child or children

The panel's written recommendation is passed to the agency's decision maker for a final decision to be made.

In order for an Adoption Panel to commence the following reports must be produced;

- Child's Permanence Report (CPR)
- Prospective Adopter's Report (PAR)
- Adoption Placement Report (APR)
- Adoption Support Plan

Child Permanence Report (CPR's) – Form E's

The purpose of this Form is to enable the adoption panel and the agency decision-maker to discharge their functions under the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. In other words the form ultimately recommends whether or not a child should be placed for adoption

Prospective Adopters Report (PAR's) – Form F's

Prospective Adopters Reports are a standard way of collecting, analyzing and presenting information about prospective adopters. It aims to address all the areas to be considered during the preparation and assessment process and to facilitate the provision of information.

Adoption Placement Report – (Form APR)

This is a report that the adoption agency must take when it is considering placing a child with particular prospective adopters.

Adoption Support Plan

The child's social worker creates an adoption support plan for the child and their new family. This support plan takes into account the ongoing needs of the child following adoption. It includes arrangements for post adoption and counselling as well as adoption financial support

Adoption Order

This removes the parental responsibility of the child's parents and passes it to the adopter

Placement Order

An order made by the court under section 21 of the Act that confirms that a child has been placed