**Agency Checks**

Through the work of the Practice Development Team, service audits and dip sampling we have identified that agency checks are not routinely being undertaken. This can lead to risks not being identified and fully explored, and families then not receiving the appropriate support at the right time.

Agency checks are a fundamental part of enabling us to triangulate information shared by parents/carers. No single practitioner will have a full picture of the child’s needs and circumstances and therefore it is imperative that we carefully consider who should be consulted as part of our assessments and ongoing work either under a Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan.

Working Together 2018 stipulates –

*‘Effective sharing of information between practitioners and local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe. Serious case reviews (SCRs13) have highlighted that missed opportunities to record, understand the significance of and share information in a timely manner can have severe consequences for the safety and welfare of children’*

Local Information Sharing Protocols have been agreed by the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Partnership. They can be found here - <http://bscb.procedures.org.uk/tkosx/the-safeguarding-children-partnership-and-organisational-responsibilities/information-sharing/#s3934>

When completing an initial or updating an assessment, consider who else is working with this family, who will be able to share information about the child or parents. If parents have been referred to adult services for support with their mental health, drug/alcohol addiction or domestic abuse, you should contact the relevant agencies to ensure that you have up to date information about the parent’s engagement with the service, as well as any identified risks and treatments/services they are providing. For families where domestic abuse has been a concern, consider contacting housing providers to ascertain if there have been any complaints from neighbours about arguments/disagreements. When adding the information gathered, ensure you add the name and source of the information.

Information can be requested from agencies known to be involved with the child and their parent/carer, such as:

* Adult Social Care
* Border Force
* British Transport Police
* CAFCASS
* Childminder
* Drug and Alcohol Services
* GP
* Health Visitor
* Housing Association
* Immigration
* Police
* Mental health services
* Nursery
* Prison Service
* Probation Service
* Sports clubs/organisations
* Schools, colleges and further and higher education providers
* Youth Offending Service
* Voluntary groups

Agency checks are a vital part of the dynamic assessment process. It ensures we have a clear understanding of the child’s needs and circumstances to help us in deliverying the appropriate provision of services are implemented at the right time to enable us to ultimately improve outcomes for children.

The Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR do not prohibit the collection and sharing of personal information, but rather provide a framework to ensure that personal information is shared appropriately. In particular, the Data Protection Act 2018 balances the rights of the information subject (the individual whom the information is about) and the possible need to share information about them.

Sandra Carnall, Principal Social Worker March 2020.