

## **Buckinghamshire Children's Services Practice Standards**

**1** Children are spoken to alone and worked with by child-focused professionals who have the tools to directly engage with them.

Are you speaking to children alone?

**2** All children have an assessment of their needs, reflecting how their experiences, wishes, feelings and needs are known and understood.

Does your assessment reflect this?

**3** All children have an assessment reflecting the wishes, feelings, needs and capacity of parents and carers; enabling them to fulfil their responsibilities.

Does your assessment reflect this?

**4** All children have a plan which explains what needs to happen; by when; by whom; what outcomes we are seeking together; how risk is managed; and what the contingency plan is.

Does your plan explain this?

**5** All case records are analytical, well written and timely, so everyone can understand significant events that have happened; what the plan is; the purpose of actions and contacts; and what difference has been made so far for the child.

Are your records well written and timely?

**6** Every child is supported by timely management oversight of the professionals' working with them. Including reflective supervision; checking that work has been done to agreed standards; seeing what difference it is making; and what needs to happen next.

Have you had reflective supervision? Has your manager checked that your work is up to standard?

**7** Use the Strengthening Families approach to resolve issues and improve children's outcomes

Are you using this approach?

**8** We will be professionally curious about all families we work with to ensure we know and understand them and their lived experience.

Are you asking questions? Do you know what the child's lived experience is?

**PRACTICE STANDARDS - VISITING FRAMEWORK**

<b>Practice Expectations</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>
<p>Visits to children and young people are to be considered Statutory Visits <b><i>only</i></b> when the child/young person has been seen at their home or placement, seen alone, and spoken to meaningfully.</p>	<p>Manager Social Worker</p>
<p>Timescales for visiting children are driven by the child’s plan, urgency of their situation or level of risk. Where risk is escalating, there will be clear management oversight to consider increasing the frequency of visits, with these decisions recorded on the case record and in the child’s plan.</p>	<p>Manager</p>
<p><u>Children we are notified about: contacts made to children’s services:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decision about the type of response the child needs and feedback to the referrer is made within 72 hours of a referral being received.</li> <li>• If a Section 47 enquiry is triggered, the child is visited according to risk and need, within a maximum of 24 hours.</li> <li>• Where a Child and Family assessment is started for a child under Section 17, the child is to be visited within a maximum of 5 working days (1 week) of the referral being opened and then every 10 working days (2 weeks).</li> </ul>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p><u>Child in Need:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least every 20 working days (4 weeks).</li> <li>• This can be increased, depending on the level of risk/concern.</li> <li>• An unannounced visit should be completed as a minimum of once every 3 months.</li> </ul>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p><u>Children subject to a Child Protection Plan:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within a maximum of 5 working days after the Child Protection Plan being made at Initial Child Protection Conference.</li> <li>• At least every 10 working (2 weeks) days thereafter.</li> <li>• An unannounced visit should take place at a minimum once every 20 working days (4weeks).</li> </ul>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p><u>Children Looked After:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the day the child is placed, then within 5 working days (1 week) of the beginning of the placement.</li> <li>• Intervals no longer than 30 working days (6 weeks) during the first year of any placement.</li> <li>• Every 30 working days (6 weeks) during subsequent years unless formally agreed as a permanent placement and once agreed, at intervals of not more than three months.</li> <li>• Whenever reasonably asked for by a child or foster carer, regardless of placement status.</li> <li>• Where the child has a series of short breaks, they are seen, as a minimum twice a year in that setting (at least once unannounced).</li> </ul>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p><u>Children and young people who are placed in a series of short breaks (short break care arrangements, or short stays with relatives):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the first 7 placement days then within 3 months of the first placement day.</li> <li>• Intervals of no less than six months after the first visit</li> <li>• Unannounced at least once a year if placements interval is more than six months</li> <li>• At least annually the child’s sleeping arrangements will be seen</li> </ul>	<p>Social Worker</p>
<p><u>Children placed in an adoptive placement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child’s Social Worker to visit within the first week of placing the child, and weekly thereafter until the first Adoption review.</li> <li>• Thereafter, the frequency of visits is determined at the child’s Adoption Review or, if not specified, every six weeks for the first year and after this,</li> </ul>	<p>Social Worker</p>

<p>three-monthly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional visits are arranged where there are any concerns.</li> <li>• The adopter's Social Worker visits as per Placement Plan, until Adoption Order made or placement ended.</li> </ul>	
<p><u>Privately Fostered Children:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within 5 working days (1 week) from the date of notification to the local authority of the private fostering arrangement</li> <li>• Intervals of not more than 30 working days (6 weeks) during the first twelve months</li> <li>• Intervals of not more than 12 weeks in any 2nd or subsequent year.</li> </ul>	Social Worker
<p><u>Children with temporarily approved foster carers or parents under an Interim Care Order:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly until the first review</li> <li>• At the first review, decision to be made in conjunction with a Manager and Independent Reviewing Officer in respect of whether visits can be reduced to a maximum of 10 working days (2 weeks) thereafter until the carer is approved or final hearing completed.</li> </ul>	Social Worker
<p><u>Children made subject to a Care Order and placed at home with parents:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the first week of being placed at home under a Care Order</li> <li>• Intervals of no more than 10 days (2 weeks) thereafter.</li> </ul>	Social Worker
<p><u>Children made subject to a Supervision Order as the outcome of Care Proceedings:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the first week of being made subject to a Supervision Order</li> <li>• Intervals of no more than 10 days (2 weeks) thereafter for at least the first 3 months of the Supervision Order. This should be reviewed every 3 months, and only decreased to a maximum of every 20 working days (4 weeks) with agreement from Head of Service.</li> </ul>	Social Worker
<p><u>Children reported missing (including children missing from Care):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visited by allocated worker within 24 hours of the child's return. This is to be considered as a separate visit to the Return Home Interview which should be completed by someone independent of the child's Social Worker within 72 hours of the child's return.</li> </ul>	Social Worker
<p><u>Children in more than one placement - residential school and foster care or residential home:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visited in each living situation, at least every 60 working days (12 weeks)</li> </ul>	Social Worker
<p><u>Young people aged 18-25:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least every 40 working days (8 weeks) by their personal advisor.</li> <li>• In addition, keeping in touch by phone, text or email based on the young person's preference every 2 months.</li> <li>• The frequency and type of contact is to be agreed with the young person and set out in their Pathway Plan.</li> <li>• Take all reasonable steps to keep in touch with young people leaving care, particularly where they are outside of the Local Authority boundaries.</li> </ul>	Social Worker Personal Advisor
<p><u>Children remanded into custody:</u></p> <p>Visited by a social worker at the earliest opportunity, but <b><i>no later than</i></b> 72 hours after being remanded.</p>	Social Worker

**PRACTICE STANDARDS - DIRECT WORK WITH CHILDREN**

<b>Practice Expectations</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>
Children and young people are seen alone, in a variety of settings, observed and communicated with according to their age, understanding and developmental needs, as part of assessment or intervention.	Social Worker
Every child knows who their Social Worker is, why they have a Social Worker, how to contact them, how often they will see them and what their plan is.	Social Worker
Practitioners arrive on time and if they are going to be late, they will tell the child/family/carer as soon as possible to apologise.	Social Worker
Practitioners are familiar with and use a variety of direct work approaches appropriate to the child's age, understanding and preferences; and understand that "direct work" includes both play materials/ engagement tools <i>and</i> relationship building conversations.	Social Worker
All children and young people will receive and have explained details on how to make a complaint.	Social Worker
Staff make appropriate arrangements for the use of translators, interpreters and communication tools to meet any specific sensory or language needs including use of braille, sign language, hearing loops etc.	Social Worker
Communication with children is recorded as though the worker is speaking to them, reflects their views and is appropriate to be shared with them.	Social Worker
All key assessment/planning documents reflect the views of the child or young person including where a child declines to share any information. The reason why the sharing of information was declined is recorded.	Social Worker
When children express a desire not to see the social worker, the reason for this and consideration of how to overcome it is given careful consideration and unsuccessful attempts to see a child are recorded.	Manager
Other than in an emergency (e.g. the worker is absent from/leaves work unexpectedly), all children will be notified of a change in worker, the reason for it and have the opportunity to be introduced to their new worker by their existing worker.	Manager
Families and carers will be notified both verbally and in writing and all those involved including the child, family, carers and other agencies will be informed of the new workers contact details and the date of the change in writing/by email.	Social Worker
New workers will read the child's file before meeting the child and family. A case discussion will also take place with the manager to ensure that any questions or queries are explored.	Social Worker

**PRACTICE STANDARDS - ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING**

<b>Practice Expectations</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>
When there are concerns that a child has or is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, a Strategy Discussion/Meeting is used to determine whether a Section 47 enquiry is required, as well as safety planning. These discussions/meetings will be attended by Police (statutory requirement), Health and Education. It is good practice to invite any other professional or agency who is known to the family for their contribution and collaboration of assessment of risk.  A Strategy Discussion/Meeting will be held within 24 hours of the risk/concern being identified and is chaired by a Manager. Where possible, all efforts should be made for the child's allocated social worker to attend this discussion/meeting.  A safety plan will be formulated as part of the strategy discussion/meeting, if there is a delay in the strategy meeting taking place the safety of the children must be considered during this time and any actions required to ensure their safety needs to be implemented immediately.	Manager  Social Worker

If a Section 47 investigation is triggered, the timescale for completion is determined by the level of risk and need. The investigation will be completed within a maximum of 15 working days.	Social Worker
The child and family assessment will include all aspects of the child's life, including their wishes and feelings. Both parents and other relevant adults will be included in the assessment except for circumstances when this increases the level of risk to the child. The views of partner agencies will be obtained and included in the assessment. The assessment will be based upon the Strengthening Families model and will explore the family strengths and risks, and explore what the grey areas or complicating factors are in order to identify the actions that are needed to ensure that the child is safe. A contingency plan will also be included and based upon the Strengthening Families model. Child and Family assessments for children under the age of 5 will be updated every 6 months.	Social Worker
Where an Initial Child Protection Conference is deemed to be required, this will be requested within 5 working days, and held within 15 working days of the initial strategy discussion. The Conference will consider the strengths, risks and grey areas for the family in the Strengthening Families approach.	Social Worker Manager
Where it is determined that a plan of support or protection is required for a child, the reason for and purpose of the plan are clearly set out.	Social Worker
The plan flows from the analysis made in the preceding assessment, or earlier plan.	Social Worker
The plan clearly addresses needs and risks as well as building on strengths.	Social Worker
It conveys the views, wishes and desired outcomes of the child, parents/carers and other relevant parties.	Social Worker
The plan is based on evidence and research directly relevant to the child's circumstances and stages of development.	Social Worker
Plans for children separated from parents/siblings or significant others include arrangements for contact and permanence.	Social Worker
Plans result in action. Actions are agreed by all parties and each person is clear about the part of the plan they are responsible for.	Social Worker
The plan is SMART ( <i>specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely</i> ), clear what needs to change and includes clear timescales that meet the changing needs of the child.	Social Worker
The plan has clearly identified intermediate outcomes that can be used to evidence progress and minimise drift.	Social Worker
It includes a contingency plan should it fail to achieve the intended outcomes to keep the child safe in the event of an emergency or where a carer places the child at risk.	Social Worker
The plan contains clear arrangements and timescales for review.	Social Worker
There is evidence of management oversight of the plan to ensure the practice expectations above are met before the plan is signed off.	Manager
In reviewed plans, the progress in meeting outcomes is clear and evidenced.	Social Worker
Children subject of Child Protection Plans have an outline plan established at the Initial Child Protection Conference which is then reviewed and updated at every core group meeting.	Social Worker Child Protection Advisor
Child in Need plans are reviewed regularly – no longer than 8 weekly intervals. The first and last Child in Need Review will be chaired by a manager to ensure clear management oversight on case closures.	Social Worker Manager
Child Protection plans are reviewed regularly – no longer than 4 weekly. The first Core Group Meeting following Initial Child Protection Conference will be chaired by a manager to ensure clear oversight and drive of the plan and intended actions.	Social Worker Manager
Children subject to a Supervision Order will have a relevant identified plan in place alongside, for at least the duration of the Supervision Order. The Supervision Order plan will be reviewed at regular intervals in line with the plan running alongside it. Where lack of progress is identified, the social worker and	Social Worker Manager

manager will consider whether the matter needs to be returned to Court. Every 3 <sup>rd</sup> review will be chaired by a manager to ensure progression of the plan.	
Children in Care have a Permanence Plan ready for consideration at the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Looked After Review (incorporated into the Care Plan).	Social Worker IRO
Care Leavers have their Pathway Plan reviewed initially within 3 months and thereafter within a maximum of six months.	Social Worker Personal Advisor
Children receiving Short Breaks have their plans reviewed initially within 3 months and thereafter within a maximum of six months.	Social Worker Manager

### **PRACTICE STANDARDS – RECORDING**

Practice expectations	Person responsible
Information is written and stored in line with information sharing protocols and the principles of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR): <i>fairly and lawfully processed; for a clearly defined, legitimate and limited purpose; adequate, relevant and not excessive; accurate and where necessary kept up to date; processed in accordance with the data subject's rights; stored with appropriate technical and organisational security.</i>	Social Worker
Social workers ask adults and young people (16+) for written consent in respect of information gathering/sharing and ensure the consent is placed on the child's file.	Social Worker
Children's records are kept up to date, with significant events recorded within one working day of the event occurring. In emergency and significant risk situations, recording is completed on the same day as the event or early next morning.	Social Worker
A chronology is started for every child subject to a Child and Family assessment, completed before the assessment is approved by a manager, and thereafter kept up to date by the allocated social worker. Staff should read, understand and adhere to the procedures and guidance on chronologies set out in the <i>Children's Services Procedures Manual</i> .	Social Worker
The chronology is used as an analytical tool to help understand the impact, both immediate and cumulative, of key events and changes in a child or young person's developmental progress.	Social Worker
Where a child's plan is changed following a review, it is updated on the child's records within 48 hours.	Social Worker

### **PRACTICE STANDARDS - EXPECTATION OF MANAGERS**

Practice Expectations	Person Responsible
Work is allocated to suitably trained and qualified staff, with the necessary skills and capacity to undertake the task. When allocating cases, complexity and number of cases should be considered to ensure workable caseloads.	Manager
Supervision is held regularly. This means, for newly qualified social workers fortnightly for the first 6 months, and thereafter a minimum of monthly. For other practitioners, supervision will take place on a minimum of a monthly basis. The frequency of supervision sessions is also determined by the complexity of the work. There is a signed supervision agreement in place, reviewed annually.	Manager
Supervision encompasses wellbeing, health & safety, professional development and standards, and casework supervision.	Manager
Casework shows evidence of reflection, impact of intervention and management oversight. It includes clear case direction from the point of allocation, through to any transfers or closure.	Manager
Managers will lead by example and support their staff to embed the Strengthening Families approach into their daily practice. This includes direct and written work.	Manager
A record of supervision is available to both parties in respect of professional supervision, relevant sections of which (casework supervision) are recorded on	Manager

the child's file within one working day of casework supervision.	
Management oversight is recorded at all stages of work with a child and there is a clear audit trail of decision making.	Manager
Management oversight ensures that timescales for visiting children are driven by the child's situation and plan, and that published timescales are not just "targets to work to".	Manager
Managers check performance data and audit children's records on a regular basis to have ensured that identified action is taken to improve practice where necessary.	Manager
Managers maximise opportunities for training and development, overseeing that staff attend mandatory training and participate in other agreed professional development as identified in supervision and appraisal.	Manager
Formal observation of practice by the supervising Manager will be recorded in supervision at least once a year. This will inform the appraisal process.	Manager
All staff have annual appraisals and agreed targets are reviewed through the year. Appraisal formally notes achievements in the past 12 months and records any actions needed to address development needs identified during ongoing supervision and case discussions. The appraisal sets goals for the coming year.	Manager

**PRACTICE STANDARDS - PROFESSIONAL CULTURE**

<b>Practice Expectations</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>
<p><b><u>Preconditions for Good Practice</u></b> Managers ensure staff work in a professional environment conducive to good professional practice. This includes support, challenge and bringing professional rigour to daily practice.</p>	<p>Head of Service Managers</p>
<p><b><u>Support</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers will lead by example and cultivate a staff atmosphere that is mutually supportive and draws on the professional strengths of all staff.</li> <li>Managers will provide good lines of communication, ensuring that important service policy and procedures are shared, understood and acted upon.</li> <li>Managers will provide meaningful supervision and annual appraisals that take account of staff strengths and areas for improvement and seek to ensure that the service continues to invest in staff's professional development.</li> <li>Managers will be approachable to staff, and will encourage more experienced staff to support those with less experience to promote peer learning.</li> </ul>	<p>Head of Service Team Manager Assistant Team Manager</p>
<p><b><u>Constructive Challenge</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers will monitor the quality of the service they are responsible for through regularly scrutinising practice and auditing children's case recording and take steps to rectify poor quality when identified.</li> <li>Managers will look for opportunities to bring about improvements in practice, and support staff in delivering those improvements.</li> <li>The Practice Development Team will work to bring about improvements to practice and support senior managers in the development of staff skillset and knowledge. The Practice Development Team will review case files and escalate cases where unacceptable levels of risk are identified, or where the standard of social work practice is deemed to be below the Core practice standards identified within this document. The team will also provide coaching and reflective sessions with workers to aid their development.</li> </ul>	<p>Head of Service Team Manager Assistant Team Manager Practice Development Team Child Protection Advisor Independent Reviewing Officer</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where concerns are identified by a Child Protection Advisor, Independent Reviewing Officer or Family Group Conference Coordinator in relation to practice, care planning, implementation of plans or decision making, they will attempt to resolve the issue with the allocated worker initially in an informal way (i.e. face to face discussion).</li> <li>Should the concern be significant or not resolved to the point that the plan for the child is likely to drift; the concern will be escalated to the attention of managers using the agreed resolution process.</li> </ul>	<p>Family Group Conference Coordinator</p> <p>Social Worker</p>
<p><b><u>Professional rigour</u></b></p> <p>Managers keep up to date on research findings in practice and policy documents relevant to their area of work. They will expect staff to develop their professional skills and expertise by keeping up to date with applied research.</p>	<p>Head of Service</p> <p>Team Manager</p> <p>Assistant Team Manager</p>
<p>All staff uphold their professional responsibility to be accountable for their own conduct, development and delivery of a high-quality service. This includes being accountable within their own roles and responsibilities, supporting and holding others to account and seeking appropriate assistance when needed.</p>	<p>All Staff</p>

**PRACTICE STANDARDS – MISSING**

<b>Practice Expectations</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>
Any allocated child who is reported missing will be visited by their allocated worker within 24 hours of their return. This is to be considered as a separate visit to the Return Home Interview.	Social Worker
Return Home Interviews will be completed by RU Safe for all children over the age of 10 who go missing within Buckinghamshire. For children under the age of 10, these Return Home Interviews will be completed by a social care member of staff.	Social Worker Social Care staff
Return Home Interviews for allocated children who are placed (as a Child Looked After) within 20miles of the Buckinghamshire borders will be offered by RU Safe. The Social Work team responsible for the child will refer to RU Safe within 24 hours of the child being found.	Social Worker Manager
All Return Home Interviews will be completed within 72 hours of the child's return.	Social Worker
The Return Home Interview form will be read by the allocated social worker and any identified risks acted upon. A safety plan will be formulated to address these concerns and the child's Child in Need/Child Protection/Child Looked After plan will be updated with relevant actions to be taken.	Social Worker Independent Reviewing Officer/Child Protection Advisor/Manager
Strategy meetings will be held as per the missing protocol.	Manager Social Worker
Need to Know notifications will be completed for the high-risk missing children, as per the missing protocol.	Manager