**From:** Deborah Richardson <deborah.richardson@buckinghamshire.gov.uk> **On Behalf Of** Palvinder Kudhail  
**Sent:** 12 January 2022 09:51  
**Subject:** No. 15: Bi-weekly communication from Service Director- All staff must read this

Colleagues,

Happy New Year! I hope that many of you had some well-deserved time to relax and rest over the festive season. As we move into the next stage of our improvement journey, it is important to take stock of the distance we have travelled and how much we have accomplished. You have all worked incredibly hard and with each passing day, the service afforded to our children and young people is strengthened.

Just in case you missed the comms just before Xmas (although I hope you read every comms that comes out!), we are pleased with the outcome of the Ofsted inspection. I would like to thank everyone again for the hard work, preparation and exceptional conduct in the lead up to and during the inspection. The inspection report will be published in February 2022.

Our children and young people have faced, and continue to face, extraordinary challenges which have profoundly disrupted their sense of normal life. We are continually navigating these waters, learning and adapting our practice to better safeguard and support. The New Year brings fresh opportunity to really reflect on what our children and young people really need and build for them, the service we want them to experience. I want to hear from as many of you as possible your ideas, reflections, thoughts, things we could do better, things we do really well. I will be setting up further staff sessions in the coming weeks and visiting teams regularly. I am always happy to hear any suggestions or feedback, so please do attend a session or get in contact with me directly.

Let’s make 2022 the best yet!

**Self-harm and suicidal ideation**

You will be aware that across the service we are seeing significant increases in young people aged between 12 and 17 harming themselves. In some cases there have been clear attempts at suicide. The numbers of young people being referred to the service are unprecedented.

The actions that have been taken to address this have been:

* Information sharing with all schools, especially secondary schools, to encourage them to do more about the emotional well-being of their pupils and to also get clear information out to parents on what they can do to prevent further instances.
* One to one conversations with schools when one of their pupils has harmed themselves/tried to take their own life.
* Briefing to central Government politicians via our own elected members on what is happening.
* Close liaison with CAMHS and other partners locally on ensuring the response to individual young people is robust.

In relation to our practice, we have a number of expectations that are non-negotiable in this area. These are:

1. When it is reported to us a young person has attempted to take their own life, self-harmed or expressed suicidal ideations then we must understand this behaviour as the young person experiencing **significant harm** and/or are **likely to experience significant harm** in the future. This is irrespective of the fact this has (allegedly and on the face of it) been self-inflicted.
2. This means our response to all these incidents must start under our obligations under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
3. S.47 is a very useful process to achieving the first and most pressing task; to **gather and share** what has happened with all relevant partners via an immediate **strategy discussion**. In practical terms this will include the school, CAMHS and any other agency involved. Talking to those that know the child and potentially the family will allow known information to be triangulated (i.e. what the parents may have said at A&E when the child was brought in), to understand the history and allow a judgement to be made on future risk. The meeting/discussion should tease out what the triggers to the event may have been, when the act of self-harm happened, what may have been the influencing factors etc.
4. The outcome of the S.47 strategy discussion has to set out a view **about presenting risk** (there may be some actions to find out more about this), who is best placed to **speak with and assess** the child and critically the creation of a **safety plan** designed to mitigate risk.
5. The write up of the strategy discussion must include a clear account of:

* Presenting risk.
* Who will speak with the child and by when to assess further.
* The safety plan.
* Where the child or young person has been taken to A&E/Hospital, the name and contact details of the assessing clinician from PIRLS or CAMHS.

Remember to use the guidance for strategy discussions which can be found [here.](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fproceduresonline.com%2Ftrixcms%2Fmedia%2F6711%2Fformat-for-strategy-discussions.doc&data=04%7C01%7Cromilly.knight%40buckinghamshire.gov.uk%7C9586a8041f144b86386708d9d5b109e6%7C7fb976b99e2848e180861ddabecf82a0%7C0%7C0%7C637775779200025991%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=GihD8vZDfT3ptj5hZyFisJyaA%2Be2Y0Ho%2BevFlbEknLw%3D&reserved=0)

1. It maybe that there is no further role for our service from this point, or that this ends the S.47 enquiry and involvement continues under S.17. There is no expectation that these cases will proceed to case conference. This should be considered if a parent is found to be failing to protect the child in question.

Please ensure your staff fully understand what is expected of them. If you have any questions or require more detail about any aspect of this difficult work please ask your Head of Service.

**Booster Vaccine Roll-out**

A booster dose of the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine helps improve the level of protection you have from your first 2 doses of the vaccine and helps give you longer-term protection against getting seriously ill from COVID-19. Everyone aged 18 and over can now [book a COVID-19 booster](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nhs.uk%2Fconditions%2Fcoronavirus-covid-19%2Fcoronavirus-vaccination%2Fbook-coronavirus-vaccination&data=04%7C01%7Cromilly.knight%40buckinghamshire.gov.uk%7C9586a8041f144b86386708d9d5b109e6%7C7fb976b99e2848e180861ddabecf82a0%7C0%7C0%7C637775779200025991%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=uz3JNtr8EqulBz0ldCu6mJmxuothxs7tjATgq5O4c1k%3D&reserved=0) at a local vaccination site. We would encourage any staff who have not yet had the vaccine or the booster vaccine to book a slot.

**Case Summaries**

Our audit activity continues to highlight that case summaries on children’s records vary in content and quality. Case summaries should be completed for every child that is open to the service. Case summaries must be reviewed and updated as appropriate when circumstances change, but as a minimum every 3 months. When a case summary is updated, information that is **out of date must be removed** so when doing this ensure that the entire case summary content is reviewed. The content of the case summary must be **succinct** and follow the guidance which you can access [here.](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fproceduresonline.com%2Ftrixcms%2Fmedia%2F6666%2Fcase-summary-guidance.docx&data=04%7C01%7Cromilly.knight%40buckinghamshire.gov.uk%7C9586a8041f144b86386708d9d5b109e6%7C7fb976b99e2848e180861ddabecf82a0%7C0%7C0%7C637775779200025991%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=m7IcWM%2FCzMV8PulEFenWK3G742qO7qqE%2B9TJdErasl0%3D&reserved=0)

**Unaccompanied asylum seeking children**

Attached are 3 training material documents focused on the age assessment process for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.  There are some key points to note for those of you routinely involved in assessing and supporting this cohort of children.

* If a young person challenges an initial Home Office decision regarding their age assessment, the Local Authority must complete their own age assessment. It cannot seek to rely solely upon the original Home Office decision.
* Short form age assessments may only be completed where the young person appears to be ‘obviously’ over 23. If the young person appears younger, a full age assessment must be completed.
* Full age assessments must be completed in a timely way and there should be no delays to this process.
* If the Local Authority believes that, after assessment, the young person is in fact an adult (and the young person is disputing this) due consideration should be given to the safeguarding arrangements in accommodating what *may* be an adult.
* It is important to ensure the correct language/dialect are used by the interpreter and that if at all possible the interpreter speaks to the child/young person ‘in person’. Where possible the same interpreter should be used for each interaction.

Please also be aware of a [recent change](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nrpfnetwork.org.uk%2Fnews%2Fnrpf-policy-update-november-2021&data=04%7C01%7Cromilly.knight%40buckinghamshire.gov.uk%7C9586a8041f144b86386708d9d5b109e6%7C7fb976b99e2848e180861ddabecf82a0%7C0%7C0%7C637775779200025991%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=y01XM43dCdxpDUIxBkNvxDdA4jAXAeFGnPCeicIKTTY%3D&reserved=0) to the Home Office guidance regarding ‘no recourse to public funds’ (NRPF) which now says that the Home Office must not impose NRPF status where a person:

* Is destitute (does not have adequate accommodation or any means of obtaining it and/or cannot meet their other essential living needs)
* Is at risk of imminent destitution
* Has an income that is not sufficient to meet a child’s particular and essential additional needs
* Is faced with exceptional financial circumstances.

If a parent therefore has previously been assessed as NRPF, they should now be encouraged to reapply (no funding should be withdrawn whilst this process occurs).







**Domestic Abuse**

In November 2021, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman published a [summary report](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lgo.org.uk%2Fassets%2Fattach%2F6178%2FFR-Domestic-abuse-F.pdf&data=04%7C01%7Cromilly.knight%40buckinghamshire.gov.uk%7C9586a8041f144b86386708d9d5b109e6%7C7fb976b99e2848e180861ddabecf82a0%7C0%7C0%7C637775779200025991%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=Nozs8D7ZfTOzpfLQAZ%2Fyz5WGK2i4JXPN9oyRcbSX%2Fpw%3D&reserved=0) detailing learning for Local Authorities on the support given to victims of domestic abuse.  The report provides case studies of where councils have failed to respond appropriately to cases of domestic abuse.  The most important learning point highlighted is the need for local councils to provide services for victims of domestic abuse as soon as they ask for help. Delays, ignoring disclosures, or failing to notice the signs of abuse can leave vulnerable people at risk for longer than necessary. Please take the time to read this informative report and consider how to apply this learning when working with families impacted by domestic abuse.

**Helping Hands Referrals**

Referrals to the Helping Hands team to support families with food and finance should now be made via the online referral form (which can be accessed [here](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.buckinghamshire.gov.uk%2Fhousing-and-benefits%2Fsupport-with-food-bills-and-finances%2F&data=04%7C01%7Cromilly.knight%40buckinghamshire.gov.uk%7C9586a8041f144b86386708d9d5b109e6%7C7fb976b99e2848e180861ddabecf82a0%7C0%7C0%7C637775779200025991%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=Na8aIN10rkZMxTZM%2FV1ErmmVMc2h1OS9RfLcEWJFCxc%3D&reserved=0)) or via telephone on 01296 531151. The team are no longer able to accept referrals made via the helping hands email address.

The Household Support Grant continues until 31st March 2022 and the team are able to assist with the following (subject to verification checks taking place):

* Food
* Fuel (gas/ electric/ water)
* Grants to assist with debt – particularly but not exclusively – rent/ council tax/ gas/ electric/ water arrears
* White goods
* Beds/ Mattresses
* Winter clothing

Referrals can be made by professionals or by the public so please continue to access support via this route for those children, young people or families that are in need.

**Barnardo’s RU Safe**

Following a recent round of competitive tendering, I am pleased to announce the Barnardo’s have successfully been awarded the contract to deliver the County’s **Return Home Interview Service**, providing support to children and young people who go missing from home or care.  This means that there will be no changes to the way return home interviews are delivered in Buckinghamshire.  Please be aware however that from 31 March, the Barnardo’s RU Safe service will no longer be commissioned to provide specialist interventions for children at risk of exploitation.

Any children receiving exploitation interventions from Barnardo’s RU Safe will be closed prior to 31 March. Any of those with outstanding areas of need will be referred back to the lead agency to identify the most suitable provider or professional to deliver the support required.

Please remember that if you are working with a child and there are current exploitation concerns, you should refer directly in to the exploitation hub, for children already open to Children’s Social Care. The referral form can be located in ‘Forms’ on LCS. Those not already open to Children’s Social Care should be referred in via the MASH. The case will then be screened at a weekly touchdown meeting. All suitable cases will be discussed at the MACE meetings where a multi-agency discussion will determine the most appropriate course of action to manage the risk for that child. If you are unsure about this process please contact the missing and exploitation hub at: [exploitationreferrals@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:exploitationreferrals@buckinghamshire.gov.uk). For any cases where you are unsure if threshold for referral is met, please email the missing and exploitation hub for a case consultation.

**Mind of My Own (MOMO)**

Please be advised that we are no longer using the Mind of My Own app (MOMO). If there are any queries in relation to this, please contact Louise Mumcular ([Louise.Mumcular@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:Louise.Mumcular@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)) or  Michelle King ([Michelle.King@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:Michelle.King@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)). A range of other direct work resources can be accessed [here.](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fproceduresonline.com%2Ftrixcms%2Fbuckscs%2Fdoc-library%2F%23collapse1_8&data=04%7C01%7Cromilly.knight%40buckinghamshire.gov.uk%7C9586a8041f144b86386708d9d5b109e6%7C7fb976b99e2848e180861ddabecf82a0%7C0%7C0%7C637775779200182227%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000&sdata=CGRSi75JXmPYW26WPYeUuVebWkjgt2NdQT75p9D8x1o%3D&reserved=0) We are exploring how to improve on the planning for, undertaking and recording of direct work as a priority over the coming months. If anyone would like to be involved or has any good practice suggestions to share, please let me know.

Have a great week everyone.

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