

***The guidance concerns use of the Eva Armsby Family Centre (EAFC) assessment service and the LBTH approach to parenting assessments in public law contexts.***

The EAFC Family Assessment Service primarily undertakes parenting assessments for families whose children are subjects of care proceedings or on the pre-proceedings (PLO) pathway.

The timescale for assessments should be set by the needs of the child and individual circumstances of their family. Their length will be determined by the ground already covered, the complexity and evidential requirements of the assessment and the timeframe for the achievement of the child's permanency.

EAFC assessments are usually undertaken in 8 weeks for a standard assessment and 12 for one using the *Parenting Assessment Model (PAMS)*. With the above proviso they can be completed in fewer weeks but rarely more.

### ***Referral***

The referring children's SW should open the EAFC Fwki episode & upload the single referral form used to present the case to the standing Legal Planning Meeting (LPM) – along with the supporting documents required by the LPM – genogram, chronology, s31 *analysis of harm* (sec 3 of SWET), the most recent single assessment.

***The referral form should be prepared so that it supports an assessment referral with full family details and a rationale for the proposed assessment along with a comprehensive risk assessment.***

All referrals to EAFC must include a risk assessment that provides full details of the known risks that will be faced by practitioners working with the children, their family and wider network.

The EAFC team cannot generate a timescale for the assessment without having received the entirety of the specified referral documentation.

Notification of acceptance of the referral with proposed timescales will be given by the EAFC Duty Manager within 48 hrs – in time to be included in the *Letter before Proceedings (LBP)* or the draft *case management order (CMO)*

Any subsequent variation of the proposed timescales must be shared, discussed and agreed with the EAFC management team by the child's social worker (CSW), their team manager and the court work case manager (CWCM) (for example at court, the Pre-Proceedings Meeting (PPM) or Legal Planning Meeting (LPM)).

The CSW should include in their referral a rationale for the assessment and identify the main themes, gaps in the evidence and their current analysis as areas for exploration in the assessment.

***EAFC assessments for families on the pre-proceedings (PLO) pathway***

For cases following the PLO track the EAFC management team must be notified of dates of pre-proceedings meetings (PPMs) and the Assessment Agreement Meeting (AAM) should take place immediately after the PPM. The EAFC team will attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of an integrated PPM/AAM.

***Conduct of the assessment***

The children's SW should attend the AAM, to identify areas for focus, as well as the mid-way review and final review meetings. They should aim to participate in some of the assessment appointments or activities.

The EAFC assessing SW should attend the final care planning meeting (CPM) held prior to the filing of the final evidence and care plan.

Any proposed variation in the length of the assessment should be discussed and agreed with the SW team and the relevant service managers.

Set timescales (directed in case management orders) should not be varied without the approval of the service manager and Divisional Director.

*Procedure in case of delay –*

- EAFC to indicate any potential delay at the earliest opportunity
- The management of the timetable is the responsibility of the relevant team and service managers (SM)
- We will endeavour always to adhere to court orders and judicial case management. Any proposed variation to the court timetable must be approved by the Divisional Director (DD) before a variation of the order can be sought
- The DD's approval will be sought by the SM. The SM will instruct the legal team to apply to vary the order.
- The court work case manager (CWCM) is to be copied into all emails sent regarding delay and non-compliance

### **Character of the assessment**

Assessment reports should be concise and summarise their findings. They should give clear recommendations about whether the children can remain with their parent(s) or not and if favourable should outline any additional support that might be required.

The assessment should be informed by the statutory Assessment Framework<sup>1</sup> and focus on four areas

1. The needs of the children
2. The parents capacity to meet the identified needs
3. The parents' insight into the concerns of the local authority
4. The prognosis for change and any recommendations for treatment, intervention or support.

The assessment should not repeat local authority evidence (in the SWET, single assessment) or other expert or professional opinion but rather use it as a foundation for additional expert opinion building on fresh evidence gleaned from the assessment activity. Support, guidance and in some circumstances intervention can be provided to test the parents' ability to change.

If other expert opinions, psychiatric, psychological, medical are required, including cognitive assessments, they should be shared with the EAFC team before the completion of the assessment so they can inform the analysis of parenting capacity. This should not cause undue delay. Except in the case of cognitive assessments an opinion on parenting capacity should be available independently of other expert opinion.

### **Commissioning of Independent Social Workers (ISWs)**

The only reason an ISW should be commissioned is when a part 25 application made to the court by another party has been successful.

The child's social worker should be able to comment on attachment behaviour, assess risk, child development and describe and analyse parenting capacity in accord with the Assessment Framework and Professional Capabilities Framework. Their evidence is all the more compelling because it derives from an extended episode of direct work. They are the expert.<sup>2</sup>

Social work assessments in care and pre-proceedings should be carried out by either by the EAFC team, the allocated social worker or another children's

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<sup>1</sup> Principles and parameters of a good assessment p24-37 *Working Together to Safeguard Children* DFE HM Gov 07/2018

<sup>2</sup> 'Social workers are experts' p6 *The process of reform: The PLO and the local authority* Sir James Munby, President of the Family Division *View from the President's chambers* (2) [2013] Family Law 548 29/05/2019

social worker in the service. Where EAFC do not have capacity to carry out the assessment, the offer of support and advice from the EAFC team to the CSW including their joint-working will be explored.

In very exceptional circumstances an ISW might be commissioned where particular expertise is needed for example about a specific country (where the child might be placed) or a specialist area of practice (online sexual abuse for example). In many cases local authority CSWs may have this expertise.

### ***When and how to commission an ISW***

The need for an ISW should be considered at the LPM stage and explored in the LPM and the initial care planning meeting (CPM) in readiness for the case management hearing (CMH).

If there are issues of capacity for either the EAFC or the CSW the social work team should explore all alternatives, joint-working, conduct of the assessment by another SW in the team/service (as indicated above) should be explored and exhausted.

The request for an ISW should be discussed with the relevant service manager and the CWCM. The responsible budget holders will only approve commissioning an ISW if the full details, CV, costs and timescales have been made available to them. The selection of the ISW must be approved by the service manager and the CWCM.

### ***Letters of instruction***

Letters of instruction should be prepared if an ISW is being commissioned within care proceedings and for the exceptional cases where ISWs are commissioned within the pre-proceedings (PLO) track. They should be prepared for EAFC parenting assessments directed in care proceedings.

A draft letter of instruction should be prepared by the allocated CSW. It should be succinct and focussed upon the gaps in the evidence/analysis and pose 4 to 5 key questions and include a brief synopsis of the case.

The draft LOI should be prepared in readiness for the CMH and agreed by the time of the AAM.



