



First Assessment Service

Decision Making Timescales

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Context

“Working Together” states the following about referrals:

Anyone who has concerns about a child’s welfare should make a referral to local authority children’s social care and should do so immediately if there is a concern that the child is suffering significant harm or is likely to do so. Practitioners who make a referral should always follow up their concerns if they are not satisfied with the response.

Within local authorities, children’s social care should act as the principal point of contact for safeguarding concerns relating to children. As well as protocols for practitioners working with children and families, contact details should be signposted clearly so that children, parents and other family members are aware of who they can contact if they wish to make a referral, require advice and/or support.

70. Once the referral has been accepted by local authority children’s social care, the lead practitioner role falls to a social worker. The social worker should clarify with the referrer, when known, the nature of the concerns and how and why they have arisen.

*71. Within **one working day** of a referral being received, a local authority social worker should acknowledge receipt to the referrer and **make a decision** about next steps and the type of response required.*

In a “one front door” approach, the application of this guidance is challenging, it specifically relating to timescales for “referrals accepted to children’s social care”, which technically all occurs after the involvement of the First Response team.

A clear, explicable and defensible system must be in place for classifying work into various types (Early Help requests, Advice or Information requests, Safeguarding requests / referrals to children’s social care), with clear and consistent timescales that we can measure our performance against. Our

system must be able to identify and prioritise immediate safeguarding concerns, evidence management oversight and avoid drift and delay. The system must also have room within it to allow further, time sensitive enquiries into the situation and support needs of children and their families who do not require a referral into a children's social care team, with a timescale structure in place which guards against drift and delay whilst allowing a reasonable window for enquiry to fully understand needs, strengths and support networks of the family, enabling a thorough and balanced child (rather than timescale) led decision to be made.

First Assessment Service Timescales:

- All contacts made with the front door will receive an initial rapid triage by the triage pod **within 4 working hours** of receipt. This rapid triage will result in: No further action; referral into Early Help pod; referral directly to social work unit; referral into "take" pod for further enquiries.
- Triage will ensure that all immediate safeguarding risk is identified rapidly.
- Referrals going directly from triage to social work units will be RAG rated "red" which will be a **4 working hour timescale** to get from triage to units with full checks and chronology.
- Referrals going from triage into "take" pod will be put into the pod with an initial RAG risk indicator. Within "take" pod, in depth DTM triage will occur (in strict order of initial RAG risk rating) and **final pod RAG rating applied:**
- **Green:** Non-safeguarding requests (ie. information, advice, guidance): **5 working days**
Green will always be allocated to the First Response Advisors.
- **Amber:** Requests requiring more enquiries to determine pathway: **3 working days.**
Amber will be allocated to advisors or social workers dependent on most appropriate professional to progress enquiries.
- **Red:** Safeguarding requests: **24 hours to final decision.**
Red will always be allocated to the pod social workers.
- Referrals into the Early Help Pod will be worked to a **5 working day enquiry** and final decision timescale. Deputy Managers can apply a higher RAG rating if required (ie. edge of care risk of breakdown case).

Monitoring of timescale compliance and decision making.

- Weekly compliance meetings for oversight on timescales and thresholds will be held between Service Manager and team managers, including weekly review of contacts progressed to referrals and focus on thematic topics such as Extra-Familial Harm outcomes.
- QlikSense reporting system will be utilised weekly to review compliance with the above stated timescales.
- Case auditing and thematic work will be completed monthly to explore quality of work and threshold of decision making.