



## Specialist Assessment Service (SAS)

***“You are the expert within the area of your professional training,  
which is Social Work”***

HHJ Sir James Munby: President of the Family Division of the High Court

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## 1. What the Specialist Assessment Service (SAS) is

The Specialist Assessment Service (SAS) provides 'access' via the commissioning manager<sup>1</sup> to a range of external specialist assessments which cannot be provided from within the Children's Trust.

Types of specialist assessments could be;

- Psychological assessment.<sup>2</sup>
- Psychiatric assessment.
- Sexual abuse risk assessment.
- Cognitive functioning assessment.
- Parent and child residential assessment.
- Parent and child fostering assessment.
- Parenting Assessment Manual (PAMs) assessment.

## 2. The Specialist Assessment Service is not

- A substitute for any assessment which could and should be provided internally by the Children's Trust. ***Please be mindful of the above quote by HHJ Munby, which clearly states that Social Workers are experts within the area of their professional training.***
- A source of funding for any parent and child placement, which does not include a clear and agreed specialist assessment component.
- A source of 100% funding for any assessment which is jointly agreed and funded by party's subject of care proceedings. For reasons outlined below in section (4) any court ordered assessment should be the exception.

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie O'Hara, Case Progression Manager, including SAS commissions.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A, for a list of suggested questions to ask a psychologist to address.

### 3. Thinking about what type of Specialist Assessment is required

As well all know, the purpose of any assessment is to help inform the care planning process and assist as far as is possible in developing an informed evidenced based action plan, care plan, etc.

It is therefore essential that as part of this process we begin by thinking and discussing with our colleagues about what is the best type (s) of assessment which will help us achieve this aim.

Examples might be:

- Increasingly we are asking our approved residential assessment partners to provide our families with tailor made combination assessments, which begin as a 3 - 4 week residential assessment which then transitions into a 4 - 6 week community based assessment. In many cases, these types of assessments are not only more realistic assessment processes which test various parts of a parent's abilities, but they are also a better use of the limited available resources.
- When considering various types of psychological assessments (Cognitive, Full, Capacity, Risk); to prevent duplication and/or repetitive similar assessments you may want to consider requesting a generic psychological assessment which addresses specific questions / areas / types of the above.

### 4. Timing of a Specialist Assessment.

The statutory guidance '[Court Orders and Pre-Proceedings for Local Authorities](#)' published by the Department for Education (April 2014), makes it very clear in Appendix A, Page 5, that the commissioning of any external specialist assessments should begin at the earliest possible stage and **should not** be left until a case ends up in pre or care proceedings.

### 5. Birmingham Children's Trust Social Worker and Team Manager involvement in the assessment process

Commissioning an external specialist assessment is a dynamic process which should wherever possible involve the active participation of the allocated Social Worker and Team Manager.

In respect of residential, community and PAMs assessments: wherever possible the Social Worker and/or Team Manager should make arrangements for an initial, midway and final reviews.

In respect of psychological, cognitive and psychiatric assessments: wherever possible the Social Worker and/or Team Manager should make arrangements for a preliminary (if appropriate also a midway) and final discussion.

## **6. What the Specialists Assessment Service funding arrangements are**

There are three routes by which BCT will fund 100% of the assessment costs:

- 1) For planned assessments - through the area resource or court resource panel (ARP / CRP).
- 2) For unplanned / last minute assessments - through the HOS/AD.
- 3) Where the court has ordered that the Birmingham Children's Trust commission or arrange the assessment. These situations should be the exception as outlined above in section 4.

There is one route by which BCT will part-fund the assessment costs:

- 1) Where an assessment has been jointly agreed<sup>3</sup>, including funding by all parties as part of care proceedings. These situations should be the exception as outlined in section 5.

N.B. Whilst a Legal Planning Meeting (LPM) might 'recommend' a specialist assessment it cannot make a decision on this matter; any recommendation needs to be considered by the local area resource panel.

## **7. The Specialist Assessment Service referral process is**

- 1) Once funding has been agreed, the allocated Social Worker or Team Manager will email the SAS commissioning manager a copy of (whichever applies):

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<sup>3</sup> Where BCT is expected to pay 100% or contribute towards the cost of a court instructed expert, BCT are contractually obliged to approach their own BCT approved, impartial, regulated providers of independent court experts first, before we can agree to any non BCT approved provider. As a result wherever the issue of instructing an expert arises in court proceedings, the lawyer representing BCT must be aware of and adhere to this protocol and seek the agreement of either the SAS Manager or AD (south) before agreeing to the instruction of any non BCT approved expert.

- The area resource panel referral form<sup>4</sup>/court resource panel notification and a reference to a positive decision<sup>5</sup>.
  - Where the case has not been presented to the area resource panel/ court resource panel, the paperwork confirming a HOS/A/D has made a decision for the assessment to be commissioned.
  - The paperwork/court order confirming a court order/direction for a specialist assessment (noting if the assessment is to be joint funded by other parties or not).
  - A completed SAS Referral Form outlining any relevant dates/timeframes which need to be adhered to.
  - A clear letter of instruction.
- 2) Upon receipt of the above funding confirmation, referral form and where applicable, a letter of instruction, the commissioning manager will then contact the BCT approved providers to see who can provide the service within the required timeframes. If the BCT approved provider cannot provide the required service within the desired timeframe, the commissioning manager or the A/D South need to agree the commission of a non BCT approved provider.
  - 3) Once the commissioning manager receives details of potential assessors from the preferred approved providers, these details will be relayed to the allocated Social Worker and Team Manager.
  - 4) The allocated Social Worker and Team Manager, (or if the case is jointly funded as part of care proceedings - all parties agree), then decide who they want to carry out the assessment.
  - 5) The allocated Social Worker and Team Manager inform the commissioning manager who they have chosen to complete the assessment and then liaise directly with the preferred approved provider.

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<sup>4</sup> This should be filed in Cafefirst, E-records under 'Referral and Advice'.

<sup>5</sup> This should be Carefirst under the 'Budgetary Approval Process'.

- 6) The commissioning manager then completes a SAS 1 funding form which is sent to the preferred approved provider confirming funding for the assessment has been agreed.
- 7) The allocated Social Worker and Team Manager will inform the commissioning manager of:
  - a. The start and finish date of any assessment.
  - b. Any problems which might arise during or after the assessment.
- 8) The approved preferred provider will send all invoices relating to the agreed assessment to BCT finance, who will then seek authorisation to pay from the commissioning manager.
- 9) Where there is a change of allocated Social Worker and Team Manager during the course of the above process/assessment (because of case transfer from SG to CIC, etc), it is really important that the initiating Social Worker or Team Manager notify the commissioning manager of these changes to prevent any confusion over the commissioning process.

## **8. Who the current approved Specialist Assessment Service providers are**

- Carter Brown Experts (Nationwide)
- Phoenix (Birmingham)
- Dudley Lodge (Coventry) & Bonner House Residential (Birmingham)
- Living Springs Residential (Stourbridge)
- Crown House Residential (Malvern)
- Mother and baby foster placements. These are usually arranged by the Placements Team. The SAS will fund mother's costs if there is a clear time limited assessment component to the placement.

### **For further information please contact:**

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## Appendix A

### Suggested questions for the psychologist (Please edit as required)

#### Child

1. Undertake a psychological assessment of the child focusing on his cognitive functioning, intellectual, educational, emotional, social and behavioural development and comment on any matters of concern.
2. Comment on the child's level of understanding of his situation.
3. Comment on any harm which the child may have suffered in respect of his psychological, intellectual, educational, emotional, social and behavioural development and assess what the cause of such harm may be.
4. Assess the child's understanding of domestic violence and what the effect of witnessing such violence has had on him/her.
5. Assess and comment on the nature and quality of the attachment relationship between parent and child.
6. Comment on the quality of the relationship between the child and the mother/father.
7. Advise on the support services which should be put in place to assist the child.

#### Mother/Father

1. Does the mother/father, whether in her/his history or presentation, have any psychological/emotional difficulties (including mental or personality disorder) and if so what is the diagnosis?
3. Assess mother's/father's understanding, insight and acknowledgement of the concerns of the Trust relating to domestic abuse and the educational, emotional, social and developmental needs of her/his child and the impact that this has had upon the child.
5. Assess the mother's/father's parental capacity to identify and recognise risk and to keep her/his child safe from harm both in the past and in the future.
6. Is mother/father capable of remaining physically and emotionally separated from mother/father and is she/he able to identify risk factors in respect of current or future relationships that may place the child at risk of harm?
7. Assess whether mother/father is able to prioritise the needs of her/his child and whether she/he will be able to provide for and meet the child's current and future needs.

8. Assess the ability of mother/father to promote the child as being independent and autonomous.
9. What treatment is indicated (if any) and if so, what is its nature and the likely duration?
10. What is mother/father's capacity to engage in/partake of such treatment/therapy or accept other professional support?
11. Are you able to indicate the prognosis for, time scales for achieving, and likely durability and sustainability of any necessary change?
12. What other factors might indicate positive change?
13. Comment on any other matter relevant to the Court's determination of these Proceedings.