**Practice Note for all SCT Practitioner*s,*** Managers**and Staff: ‘Starting with the End in Mind’: Plans**

Plans should be developed either in collaboration with the child and family with support from professionals. Creating plans that are developed either with children, young people and their families in a way that they can understand using their own words, pictures and their voice ensures they are at the centre of everything we do.

A plan is a way for children and families and all those involved to understand what needs to change, how the family will be supported and who will help them to make changes to happen. Plans should be dynamic and identify the family’s strengths and show how these can be utilised within the child and young person’s plans, to ensure their plans are bespoke and tailored to their individual needs. There are several different types of plans that we create with families such as a Child in Need, Child Protection, Care Plans, Pathway Plans, Child Exploitation Plans and Team Around the Family (TAF) plans, which will be the focus of this note.

The purpose of this practice note is to outline what is a plan and why they are an important part of the processes we follow when working with our families. Next, the note illustrates how using our doing wheel and elements of Practice Framework and Model strengthens the quality of children and young people’s plans. Practitioners will be able to understand the importance of the child’s participation throughout their plans, referring to the 4 x I’s Involve, Inform, Influence and Invest alongside the family and their network including partner agencies. Finally, the importance of using reflective spaces such as supervision when considering the plan within reviews is outlined in addition to some good practice points and further reading.

**What is a plan?**

A plan is a working tool that is developed following a robust analysis of information gathered within an assessment of the child and their family’s holistic needs and identifies any needs and risks to children, young people and their families that should be addressed to ensure positive outcomes. It is a document developed and used with children, young people and their families and partner agencies to identify what needs to be done, how it will be done, who else needs to help achieve it and when it needs to be done by.

Good plans should identify what immediate steps are required to assure the child’s safety in the short term, whilst thinking about where we want to get to, including the steps required. Plans should include what should be addressed and specific actions/tasks for the case to be stepped down or closed, or, a Care Order discharged in cases of family reunification.

A good plan should be developed in partnership with children, their families, wider networks and key partner agencies this ensures ownership by all those involved. Families will feel that the plan has been ‘done with’ them rather than ‘done to’ them. It enables professionals to understand their roles and responsibilities. A partnership approach should start with an understanding of what families want for themselves, and what they can do to achieve their goals. This should include having plans that are SMART and achievable outcomes and clear timelines, so families can see the progress they are making and see the end in mind. Plans should also include:

**The views of the child** (according to age and stage of development) and the family/carers

**What needs to be done and by whom?** Being clear about who needs to be involved in developing the plan is important - The name and designation of all the partners to the plan including parents and children and how they can be contacted. This will also include the Named Person and/or Lead Professional and any members of the core group who will be taking actions forward.

**Reason for the plan -** Why agencies or families believe a child needs a plan, including any issues of concern to be addressed.

**Summary of the worries, strengths and desired outcomes -** It should highlight the positives in the child’s world as well as the needs and risks, to provide an evidenced, balanced, view of the child that builds on strengths. The needs should be expressed in terms of what is missing to make the child safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected and responsible.

**Timescales for action and change –** usingSMART principles (See Appendix).These timescales should relate directly to a child’s circumstances and the help that will be provided.

**Contingency arrangements -** A statement of what will happen if agreements, actions and outcomes are not met, or if risks increase or support needs change.

**Arrangements for reviewing the plan** - Building in details of how the plan will be reviewed makes sure everyone knows how and when this will be done.

**Why are plans important?**

* Plans are important as they are a tool we use with children, young people and their families to help them reduce the need for unnecessary and long-term intervention in family’s lives, by building resilience within families to enable them to develop their own safety plan throughout our involvement and beyond. Plans help keep us all on track and motivated to make a difference to the lives of our children, young people and families and support practitioners to evaluate the capacity of parents to change.
* When we are developing plans with children in Sandwell, we should think about ‘Starting with the end in Mind’, as part of our trajectory setting, thinking about the end goal or desired outcome. This is similar to a car journey, where we plan our direction of travel. When we set off with our families, we all need to be clear about where we need to go and how long we might need to get there. Planning the journey together helps us to keep on the right route. It helps us think about the signposts and landmarks that we need to see that will help us understand that we are going in the right direction.
* From the outset, we need to be clear with children and their families what alternative plans may need to be considered if they are not able to affect changes within the child’s timescale. This is often referred to as contingency planning. We will know if things are getting better for our children and families, as some of our worries will start to reduce, the child will feel safer and we will start to see a difference in the child and the family’s behaviours. Throughout this journey, there may be times where we need to think about a different route to enable the family to affect positive change and for the child to be afforded safe and consistent care.
* Thinking about a child or young persons permanence should be at the forefront of our minds when we first start working with families. This can be achieved by thinking about the different routes - within existing or reconstituted birth families, with friends or relatives, through adoption, long-term fostering or for a minority of children, residential homes. Permanence in the context of our work relates to children and young people having a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and into their adulthood. Developing plans that have considered a child and their families desired goals, what changes are required to assure a child’s safety and reduce risks and the timescales for which such changes should be made essential.
* Plans are important as part of the process we follow, as well as our interventions with children and families and should consider actions and outcomes that are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely). By applying SMART principles means that practitioners will prevent drift and delay in securing positive outcomes for our children and young people, with interventions that have been identified as part of a robust assessment. Plans for children and young people that are evidence-based, realistic, child-centred plans within a review timeline, will manage and reduce identified risks and meet the needs of the child, whilst identifying additional resources and strengths within the family’s network.
* The importance of completing plans from a statutory perspective is governed by various legislation some of which includes the United Convention on the Rights of the Child was ratified and has been embedded in legislation and policy initiatives, including the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004. The Statutory Guidance for the Children Act 1989 refers to the importance of Care Planning and that assessing the needs of children and deciding how best to meet those needs is a fundamental part of our practice
* Children’s Participation in relation to their plans is important as it means that we are more likely to achieve better outcomes which makes a difference to their lives, whilst empowering them to own their plans (See Practice Note on Children’s Participation). Children want to be respected, to have their views heard, to have stable relationships with practitioners built on trust and to have consistent support provided for their individual needs.
* Practitioners within the Participation Team have had regular consultations with children and young people in Sandwell, who have consistently told us that they want to be involved in decisions that are made about them.

Some of the children and young people’s views include:

* Plans should be colourful and suit all our ages, and suit the situation we are in like, fulltime education, working or unemployed.
* There should be a plan B if things go wrong in our lives like relationship breakdown, abuse, breakdown in family relationships.
* We should be told if our plans change.
* I have never seen any plans about me.
* No one had told me why I was in care and I was never invited into my review and I am now leaving care.

**Using reflective spaces such as Supervision to think about plans**

Using Supervision as a space to reflect on how we develop plans with families and professionals whilst reflecting upon balancing our processes (the things we do with the family), alongside our interventions (how we will work with the family) is important. It ensures that the plan developed with children and families offer the right type of support, focusing on the child or young person’s timescales for change.

Where there are issues about drift and delay or additional risks or needs identified, supervision provides a space to think about the quality of our intervention and identify what might be needed either in terms of the quality of the intervention, review process or whether an updated assessment is required.

Using the Practice and Framework helps to structure how we think about the quality of our interventions with families when developing plans. The Practice Framework and Practice Reflective Questions includes 106 questions that are relevant and can be used within supervision, group supervision and other reflective spaces to help us undertake an appreciative enquiry when developing plans. These questions provide a framework to develop our skills in critical thinking and analysis to our intervention with a child/young person/young adult and family (See pages 42-50 Practice Framework and Model Booklet). For example, the questions linked to the intervention aids are helpful when thinking about whether we have achieved the right balance with following the process and making a difference for children.

Using reflective spaces such as supervision, with your peers and other reflective spaces can really help to talk about good practice when developing plans and think about any strategies to address barriers if identified.

**Good Practice Points:**

* A good plan should be completed in partnership with children, young people and their families, wider networks and key partner agencies. This ensures ownership by all those involved and should outline clear roles and responsibilities from the multi-agency and family.
* Children, young people and their families should receive a copy of their plans within a timely manner, so they know what the worries are, the strengths and what changes need to be made, how they can be supported to make changes, by who, and when by.
* For those children and young people who are pre-verbal or have learning needs and unable to verbalise their views practitioners need to use their observations of the child, other professionals and parents’ feedback to show evidence of the child’s feelings or to capture theirviews.

**Further information and reading**

* <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175391/Munro-Review.pdf>
* <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.812158!/file/Sheffield_Solutions_Clear_Blue_Water_Full_Report.pdf>
* <https://www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org/practice-framework>
* Free subscription to Community Care Inform <https://www.ccinform.co.uk/> and Research in Practice <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/> by creating an account
* Practice notes on Assessment, Updating Plans, Reviews, Impact Chronologies, Practice Framework and Model
* Practice Learning workshops on Children’s Plans, Partners and Partnership working

**Appendix 1: SMART Planning Principles**



**Appendix 2: Good Practice Examples**

**Child in Need/Child Protection Plan examples:**

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**Exploitation Plan examples:**

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**Child in Care/Pathway Plan examples:**

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**Date of Practice Note: April 2022**

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**Authorised by:**