**Children First:**

**Early Help- Duty and Allocation Practice Guidance**

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6. **Introduction**

1.1 The Early Help Service within West Sussex is committed to providing a consistent and accessible family focussed service for children, young people and their families. In order to achieve a high-quality service, we will ensure the child/young person and their safety and well-being is kept at the centre of everything we do.

1.2 To improve the experience of children, young people and families who require support from Children’s Services and for those who work with them, the integrated front door is one single point of contact to access support across the continuum of need.

1.3 This document has been written to support practice that ensures children, young people and families receive the right support at the right time.

1. **Reaching Early Help Support**

2.1 All referrals into Early Help will arrive via the Integrated Front Door (IFD), a triage process will determine the level of response offered:

* **Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)** If the IAG cannot be given at the front door or the family require crisis support (food parcels, support with electric, charitable fund application etc.) a referral will be sent to the local duty inbox for the duty manager to distribute accordingly. Please refer to Crisis Support and IAG Guidance.
* **Level 2- Enabling Families and Schools team support:** Referrals for Enabling Families will arrive via the IFD using the ‘Level 2’ outcome function on Mosaic. There will be six locality inbox facilities within the Mosaic function where the referral form will be placed. The IFD will send the family a letter informing them that a local hub will contact them in due course. There is a specific inbox facility for each hub where the IFD can direct young parents and young people’s referrals- these are priority for allocation and where appropriate, young people can be invited to attend the Find It Out drop-in facility. The duty manager will screen the inbox once a day for their area and allocate to the team of Family Support Assistants within their hub accordingly.

Oversight of Enabling Families will be completed within supervision between the Family Support Assistant and their line manager who will oversight a portion of the support they are delivering. Please refer to the Enabling Families Guidance.

* **Schools team:** Where there is a need for a response from the Dedicated School’s Team (DST) the information will arrive via the IFD into the local duty inbox where the work will be passed directly to the Dedicated Schools Team Manager by the manager on duty. The Dedicated Schools Team Manager will distribute the work accordingly to their team. In their absence, the duty manager will carry out this function.Please refer to the Dedicated Schools Team practice guidance
* **Level 3 – Early Help Plans:** Referrals triaged to require an Early Help Plan to include those accepted at step-across panel, will arrive via the IFD unless the family are already receiving support via Enabling Families and a whole family plan is more appropriate. In this instance, the Family Support Assistant will refer to their line manager who will agree, complete management oversight and end the L2 intervention by choosing the L3/L3+ outcome. The manager will ensure this plan is moved to the locality hub inbox and add to the agenda of the next allocations meeting.

Otherwise, a plan will be created at the point of contact with the family by the IFD and an email will arrive in the local duty inbox for the duty manager to review. There will be some information including the family details, their current situation and oversight, rationale and initial actions created by the Senior Early Help Practitioner. The hub duty manager will add any additional information required to the initial assessment and add oversight within 48 hours. The inbox will be reviewed twice a day as a minimum standard.

Early Help plans will be reviewed and allocated based on need on a weekly basis during the allocations meeting and will be logged on the hub’s workbook. Please refer to the Supporting Families Guidance.

*NB: The Team Manager on duty will be responsible for answering and taking action to resolve any queries that come in the inbox as well as carrying out checks for step-across and multi-agency missing and exploitation operational group (MEOG) meetings*.

1. **Allocations**
   1. One Team Manager from each hub will be on duty for their hub area and will have access to members of their team to support the duty function based on local need.

*NB: Although other tasks can be carried out during this duty week by the manager and duty worker(s), please do not book supervisions or other meetings that cannot be moved. Please also note that the staff member on the rota may not be part of the duty managers team. If there is a reason why the worker may need to be absent from duty they must discuss cover with their line manager.*

3.2 An allocations meeting will be held on a weekly basis for each hub, ideally attended by the Service Manager, Team Managers for the hub and Early Help Senior Practitioners.

3.3 The objective of the meeting is to allocate children, young people and families to appropriate support, to identify those who are priority, manage capacity, identify themes and risk and to support plans to close with successful outcomes.

3.4 At the end of their duty period, the Team Manager will complete a full handover to the Manager taking over duty to ensure a timely and safe response to children, young people and families requiring support.

**Allocations meeting Agenda:**

Welcome and apologies

Closure review

New families requiring Early Help Plan support

Review of families unallocated, allocate and priority set based on need

Review of 5 min Enabling Families referrals

Themes and issues arising

Update on capacity and reviewing caseloads

AOB

1. **Unallocated**

4.1 Where an Early Help Plan is required and it is not possible to allocate straight to a worker, a family will receive ‘keeping warm’ support. The Team Manager will decide whether it is appropriate at this stage for the duty worker to have direct face-to-face contact with the family dependant on their needs. Team Managers are responsible for providing management oversight on the unallocated plans in line with Supporting Families practice standards.

4.2 For families awaiting allocation to a Family Support Worker, it is expected that they will receive a two weekly call and for families awaiting a Keyworker, they will receive a weekly contact. During these calls the worker will establish whether there are any new or escalating worries, if there is existing family support in place via family members or other agencies and they will agree how and when the family will be contacted during the ‘keeping warm’ period. It may be appropriate to re-visit a safety plan or refer to other support agencies such as young carers for example.

Where the family have been stepped across via panel from Children’s Social Care, a plan will be created or re-opened by the hub coordinator and sent to the locality inbox for management oversight and allocation.

4.3 If there are further worries or concerns raised by other agencies via the IFD such as a police SCARF report or a school referral, a duty worker will make contact via the telephone and if required complete a home visit.

4.4 If we are unable to engage the family via a telephone call or text within 2 weeks of referral, the duty team will send a letter to explain that a referral has been received and asking them to make contact. If there is no response to the letter, the duty worker will contact the referrer to support engagement. If contact is not successful within 4 weeks of referral, a duty worker will complete a home visit.

*NB: If the duty worker completes a home visit and are still unable to see the family, they will seek management support and oversight to determine next steps.*

4.5 If the child(ren) in the family is not engaged in education or early years provision and there are no other professionals involved, a home visit will be completed within 4 weeks of referral by the duty worker.

4.6 Where children and families are unallocated for longer than 4 weeks but have engaged in keeping warm arrangements, the duty worker will inform the referrer. If we are unable to allocate a family within 10 weeks of referral, a home visit will be competed by the duty worker.

1. **Escalation**

5.1 If the worries for the child(ren) escalate and we are worried that they are at risk of harm, the worker will seek management support and make are referral to the IFD for level 4 intervention or call 999 for immediate action if imminent harm is identified.

**RAG Rating Guidance: to support decision making and priority setting**

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