

Step Up / Step Down Procedure

For all staff in Children and Families

Children's Social Care and
Early Help and Prevention

February 2023
For review August 2023

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1) Purpose, Scope, Aims and Vision

The interface between Early Help Services and Children Social Care is an essential component of a robust service for children and families ensuring they receive the right help at the right time. The pathways between these two approaches are key to ensuring all children are safe, wherever they are within the Herefordshire Levels of need.

This policy details what is required of staff within Children's Social Care and Early Help and Prevention workforce.

The pathways between the two must be simple, with roles and responsibilities, and lines of accountability explicit, with clear management oversight.

Decision making should always be child and family focused with the child's needs remaining paramount.

Prior to step down agreed and accepted, consent should have been obtained from the family. This is the social worker's responsibility to obtain and record consent on the child's file.

Safeguarding procedures would always override anything within this chapter. If a child is believed to be at risk, nothing within this protocol should be used to delay seeking help, support, guidance or services for a child or family. Any immediate safeguarding concerns should be communicated with [Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\) Procedure](#)

Where step up is considered, it is important that concerns have been discussed and explored with the parents/carers and consent obtained, unless there is increased risk of harm to the child/ren. Guidance to be taken from the Early Help and Prevention Service Manager and/or the MASH team.

2) Stepdown Process

❖ 2.1 Step down of families already open to Early Help (including First Steps and targeted support from Children Centre Services); following completion of Child and Family Assessment and/or Section 47 investigation

- The Social work Team Manager authorises Child and Family Assessment and agrees decision to step down to Early Help and Prevention Services, with a clear outline of 'what needs to happen', within the Early Help Service.
- Stepdown is agreed by the family and professional network and Social Worker requests a step-down via the Early Help Practitioners:
EarlyHelpAdvancedPractitioners@herefordshire.gov.uk

- Early Help Advanced Practitioner reviews file and develops Step-down plan (if appropriate threshold) using the recommendations from the Child and Family Assessment, to be agreed with the family and Social Worker. Consultation will only be required if there are no clear recommendations within Child and Family Assessment. **Step-down plan should be developed by the Advanced Practitioner and shared with the Social Worker within 4 working days of the request for step-down.**
- Social Worker shares the plan with the family, ideally this would be shared in person during a home visit and would be a joint visit between the Social Worker and Early Help allocated worker if this is possible and does not lead to any delay for the family. **The step-down plan should be shared with the family within 6 working days of the request for step-down.**
- **If agreed for Early Help support, there will be no delay as a worker is already allocated and will continue to support the family through the step-down plan and 6 weekly TAF meetings.**
- Where there is a disagreement on threshold Case Manager/Early Help Service Manager to refer to the weekly transfer meeting for threshold to be discussed. If the transfer meeting concludes that the threshold remains at Level 4, step-down will not be accepted.

❖ **2.2 Step-down of Families not open to Early Help following Child and Family Assessment and/or section 47 investigation;**

- If during the course of the Child and Family Assessment it would be helpful for a joint visit to take place with an Early Help Practitioner to discuss Early Help and the support available through a step-down plan then this can be arranged with our duty Family Support Worker.
- If the assessment concludes that additional support is required and Stepdown to Early Help or partner agencies is agreed by the family and professional network, Social Worker to request a step-down via the Early Help Practitioners:
EarlyHelpAdvancedPractitioners@herefordshire.gov.uk
- Early Help Advanced Practitioner reviews file and develops Step-down plan (if appropriate threshold) using the recommendations from the Child and Family Assessment, to be agreed with the family and Social Worker. Consultation will only be required if there are no clear recommendations within Child and Family Assessment. **Step-down plan should be developed by the Advanced Practitioner and shared with the Social Worker within 4 working days of the request for step-down.**
- Social Worker to share step-down plan with family, ideally this would be shared in person by the Social Worker during a home visit and Early Help will be working towards being able to offer a joint visit with the new allocated worker when this is the internal service (not Vennture or Homestart) to work with the family (currently this is not possible due to

Early Help's waiting list). **The step-down plan should be shared with the family within 6 working days of the request for step-down.**

- Lead Professional should be identified prior to or at the final home visit. The Early Help Advanced Practitioner can be consulted with and/or invited to the final home visit to facilitate the identification of a Lead Practitioner and offer support with the step down plan if this is required and there is capacity to do so.
- **If agreed appropriate for Early Help support, the child and family will be added to the Early Help allocations list within 24 hours of the step-down plan being shared with the family and consent being confirmed. Early Help aim to allocate all step-down families within 5 working days from the point of being added to the allocations list.**
- Where there is a disagreement on threshold Case Manager/Early Help Service Manager to refer to the weekly transfer meeting for threshold to be discussed. If the transfer meeting concludes that the threshold remains at Level 4, step-down will not be accepted.

❖ **2.3 Step Down from CiN intervention, CP planning, Children Looked After;**

- All decisions to stepdown are reached in the multi-agency Child in Need meeting / Review Child Protection Conference / CLA review.
- Social work manager confirms decision to step down and records clear management oversight with a clear outline of 'what needs to happen', within the Early Help Service.
- Social Worker to request a step-down via the Early Help Advanced Practitioner:
- EarlyHelpAdvancedPractitioners@herefordshire.gov.uk
- Early Help Advanced Practitioner will review file and develop Step-down plan (if appropriate threshold). **Step-down plan should be developed by the Advanced Practitioner and shared with the Social Worker within 4 working days of the request for step-down.**
- The Early Help Advanced Practitioner to be invited to the final CIN review or family meeting/visit to discuss step-down plan. **This should take place within 6 working days of the request to step-down to Early Help.**
- In the event that the Early Help Advanced Practitioner is not able to attend a meeting, social worker to have a discussion with the Early Help Advanced Practitioner in advance (via consultation) and social worker to share proposed plan at the meeting with the family.
- Lead Practitioner should be identified prior to or at the final meeting, from the professionals already involved in the current Plan. The Social Worker is expected to have discussions with the family network and involved professionals regarding the Lead Practitioner's role. If targeted support is offered from the internal team then the Early Help Practitioner can be the Lead Practitioner if agreed by the family.
- **If agreed appropriate for Early Help support and Early Help are not presently working with the family (during CIN intervention) the child and family will be added to the Early**

Help allocations list within 24 hours of the step-down plan being shared with the family and consent being confirmed. Early Help aim to allocate all step-down families within 5 working days from the point of being added to the allocations list. If Early Help are already involved there will be no delay as a worker is already allocated and will continue to support the family through the step-down plan and 6 weekly TAF meetings.

- Where there is a disagreement on threshold Case Manager/Early Help Service Manager to refer to the weekly transfer meeting for threshold to be discussed. If the transfer meeting concludes that the threshold remains at Level 4, step-down will not be accepted.
- ***Child Protection: It is important to note that the use of stepdown from CP to Early Help is not regular practice. This leads to the stepping down process being very steep and consideration of threshold for Child in Need intervention is recommended.***

❖ 2.4 Consent to discuss family at Multi Agency Group (MAG) meetings and share step-down plan with involved professionals

- The Early Help Service hold locality MAG meetings (virtually) where families who have been stepped-down from social care are discussed at the initial locality meeting and subsequent meetings thereafter (if deemed appropriate).
- The purpose of these MAG meetings is to discuss the step-down plan within the multi-agency group, seek updates from professionals who may be involved, to ensure that the Lead Practitioner is aware of actions to be progressed whilst also considering any further actions that may be applicable, and to ensure that the Lead Practitioner is progressing regular 6 weekly TAF meetings
- It will be the responsibility of the Advanced Practitioner to contact parents at the point of the step-down to Early Help to gain their consent for discussion at the MAG meeting.
- The Advanced Practitioner will also be responsible for seeking parental consent to share the step-down plan with any relevant partner agency who will be part of the Team around Family process (including when they may be the Lead Practitioner)

3. Stepping up from Early Help to Social Care:

Where a family is supported by Early Help and there are immediate safeguarding concerns, the Early Help practitioner should alert the team manager immediately. The Early Help Team Manager will provide management oversight around threshold application and if Level 4 concern is agreed, the Early Help practitioner will contact the MASH team to inform them of the safeguarding concern and this should be followed up with an immediate MARF.

Where the Early Help Teams are the Lead Practitioner and the concerns are enough to step up to statutory services but are not immediate child protection, the Early Help worker should raise their concerns with their immediate team manager in the first instance. Team Manager will

provide management oversight around threshold application, ensure that the views of the multi-agency network are captured and recommend the completion of a MARF if threshold is met at Level 4.

If partners are considering a Step Up they can discuss with their Safeguarding Lead, and if Level 4 concerns agreed, a MARF to be completed and submitted to MASH. Important to note that Advice and guidance can be sought from MASH.

❖ **When step up from Early Help to Children Services is agreed**

Early Help practitioner will remain involved with the family through any Section 47 enquiry, Child and Family Assessment and if appropriate CIN intervention (there needs to be a SMART Child in Need plan which is clear in terms of outcomes for the family and FSW intervention). This agreed process will ensure a more streamlined process for families and provide consistency of workers and intervention avoiding a 'stop/ start' approach should the family require 'stepping back down' to Early Help, following the completion of the Child and Family Assessment.

In the event, the child and family assessment concludes with a Child Protection Plan, the Early Help Practitioner involvement **must** come to an end (with the exception of the Early Years Support Worker). The Early Help practitioner may attend the Initial Child Protection Conference.

❖ **Any disputes**

If there is any dispute between the Early Help and Prevention Service Manager and Children's Social Work Manager, or concern about course of action, then this will be reviewed by the HOS's of the relevant service areas, who will escalate via the Professional Differences Policy as required.

4. Early Help Assessment's received within 3 months of closure to Social Care:

There will be some circumstances whereby a child and family is closed to Children's Social Care following Child and Family assessment/section 47 investigation or CIN/CP/LAC intervention and the family have not been stepped down to Early Help. Another professional has then completed an Early Help Assessment which has been forwarded to Early Help for support. This suggests that the family were not correctly stepped down to Early Help by the Social Worker and were in need of continuing support.

In this instance, if the family have been closed to Social Care within a 3 month period then the Early Help Advanced Practitioner will bring this to attention of the recently allocated Social Worker and Case Manager so that they can review their decision making around closure. This will not require any further action from the recently allocated social work team and the Early Help Assessment will continue to be progressed by the Early Help service.

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