**Children’s Services Specification**

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# Introduction

At the heart of our practice framework are six practice drivers:

* Work restoratively with families on the networks to harness strengths and find solutions at last.
* Offer help and support to the right children in the right way at the right time.
* Intervene to prevent harm and support children to remain within their families whenever possible.
* Focus on practise that is curious tenacious and leads to good outcomes for children and their families.
* Support children and care experienced young people so healthy safe ambitious and supported to recover from trauma and harm.
* Ensure lived experiences understood and champion the voice and influence of children and young people.

We know that not one organisation has all the solutions for children and families, so, every day, we work collaboratively with partner agencies, in particular schools, health services and the police. We also work alongside each other as different specialist teams within children’s social care. This document will introduce these teams, including what they do and how they work.

# Children’s Social Care Directorate

## Early Help and Partnerships

**Early Help**, practitioners, from a range of agencies, work with families who need additional support to improve their situation. While Early Help itself is not a specific team, there are dedicated practitioners who help co-ordinate the provision of Early Help to children and families. There are Early Help practitioners based within the Front Door who offer advice, guidance and support to partner agencies, and support lead professionals who are experiencing difficulties with early help plans and interventions. Working closely with voluntary organisations, locality teams undertake targeted early help assessments and family plans through dedicated lead workers, co-ordinate services around the family and deliver targeted help to them.

**Bridges** is an innovative, award winning, multi-disciplinary service with a clear aim: to safely prevent and reduce the number of children and young people entering care by working to keep family’s safely together as a unit by strengthening and improving relationships. Bridges is made up of a team of specialists including:

* Adolescent Workers
* Family Workers
* Speech and Language Therapists
* Clinical Psychologists
* Education Psychologist
* Education Inclusion Workers
* Adult Workers
* Systemic Family Therapists

The service is available to young people aged 11-17 who are open to social care because of relationship breakdown in the home. By delivering tailored, structured and evidence-based interventions, Bridges aim to support families to develop their own problem-solving skills, build resilience and achieve sustainable change. Families tell us they do not want to be in ‘services’ – they wish to be supported by their own friends, families and communities to manage the day-to-day challenges.

Our aim is to therefore provide a rapid response to address multiple complex issues across our families and support them to overcome difficulties which are contributing to the risk of relational breakdown.

Bridges work to a maximum of 6 months and the initial stages are focused upon the development of a support agreement with the whole family. This is then reviewed every 6 weeks to identify areas of progress and to look at potential ongoing support at the point of closure.

**Links** is a level 3 targeted prevention service which works to increase safety and reduce risk and harm for children, young people and some young adults who:

* Have gone missing from home (any form of home)
* Are at risk of being exploited
* Are involved in increasing anti-social behaviour (ASB) and offending which may increase vulnerability to exploitation and/or exposure to youth violence

Links takes a trauma informed approach to providing holistic intervention and support to children, young people and some young adults at risk of harm outside the home, to prevent risk and harm escalating. The service takes a strengths-based approach and works in a non-judgemental and optimistic way, believing that children, young people and some young adults will have positive futures.

Links’ work is:

* Rights based – rooted in children’s and human rights
* Strengths based – building on the strengths of individuals and communities to achieve change
* Evidence informed – grounded in the realities of children and young adult’s lived experiences
* Caring – our relationships with children, young adults, their parents/carers and with other professionals who support them will be characterised by care
* Collaborative – we will collaborate with professionals, children and young adults to inform decisions about safety
* Ecological – we will consider the links between the space’s children and young adults experience harm and how these are shaped by inequalities

*(Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2024)*

**Family Intervention Team** (FIT) are part of our targeted Early Help offer for 0–19-year-olds and developed from the Targeted/Troubled Family national agenda. The FIT support families ‘at the edge’ of more intensive and/or statutory services. FIT works in partnership with services such as Locality Funding; Job Centre Advisors; YSMART; Links; Family Group Conference (FGC) Plus. FIT have similar working links with other targeted Early Help services commissioned separately, such as SPACE, Children Centre and Young Carers. FIT works with families at setting own goals that make big impact changes in practical and supportive ways. They support families to develop tools and strategies to build stronger relationships to reduce conflict and tension. FIT will support families to access support for situations such as debts, health issues and unemployment and further specialist support such as housing help, advice and support. FIT will support parents to encourage children to return to school. FIT will help create and support families to access a safe, encouraging space to meet with other parents in a similar situation and discuss tools, tips and strategies.

### Family Group Conferencing Service

Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are at the heart of our restorative approach to supporting families. FGC aim to help families develop their own solutions to difficulties they are facing through the provision of a supportive and structured space. FGCs are family-led meetings where families can come together to discuss and agree what needs to happen to support positive change in a child’s life.

Situations where a request to the Family Group Conference Service can be made include:

* preventing entry into care
* at the point of a pre-birth assessment starting
* where families are already involved in court processes
* prior to consideration of court involvement as promoted in the pre-proceeding’s checklist
* where there are child protection concerns, and it is felt the family would benefit from using our services to help support the required changes
* at the point of child in need to prevent further escalation or support a step-down to early help
* exploring the wider family and friend’s network to ensure all the potential strengths of the family are known
* improving communication between family members for the benefit of their children
* sharing accountability for the care and safety needs of children with the wider family group
* issues of conflict between the adults where the child/ren are significantly affected

FGCs are optional for and therefore early engagement with them is important to ensure FGCs are appropriate and effective. FGC teams undertake visits to families to explain what they can offer and explore if they would want to participate.

**Y-SMART** provide support and advice for young people, parents, families and professionals and deliver multi-agency training across the county. YSMART provide targeted education in schools for those who are vulnerable to substance misuse; this may include children out of mainstream education, those receiving alternative education provision and other education centres such as secure units. We also provide support for young people whose lives have been impacted by parental, carer or sibling substance use.

YSmart work with young people who experiment with drugs and alcohol; with those who have more complex needs and whose drug and alcohol use are beginning to affect other parts of their lives; also, with young people whose lives may be severely impacted and may need pharmacological interventions and support.

**Youth Justice Service (YJS)** is a multi-agency service that aims to prevent offending and re-offending by children. The YJS provides a range of services, including Appropriate Adults to children in police custody where another adult in their system is either unable or unwilling to fulfil this responsibility. The Service provides support and intervention to children diverted away from the formal youth justice system, reducing the number of children becoming a first-time entrant. For those who do go to court, the service works closely with the Courts, providing pre-sentence reports to inform sentencing options, and works with children and their families where a statutory court order is made. Where children are remanded or sentenced to Youth Detention Accommodation (custody) the Service works collaboratively with the Youth Custody Service and other professionals involved to safeguard children. Support around education, training, and employment (ETE) is a key focus within the service and children working with the YJS have access to commissioned ETE re-engagement provision, The Skill Mill employment scheme and specialist ETE mentors.

## Children’s Social Care

TheMulti-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)is called the **Front Door**. It is a confidential environment within Children’s Social Care where key partner agencies have access to their own information systems, and where information is shared to support decision making. Whenever a child is believed to be suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, Front Door will ensure the information is triaged and processed accordingly through their close working relationships with Assessment and Intervention team, supporting a consistent response to strategy meetings, safety planning and thresholds.

**Assessment and Intervention Teams** will undertake section 47, child protection enquiries and child and family assessments alongside brief interventions with families and clarify the type of plan a child requires before transfer. They must organise an appropriate meeting so that handover can take place with an identified plan in place. These plans include, an Early Help Plan, a Child in Need Plan, a Child Protection Plan or a Child in Care Plan.

**Emergency Duty Team (EDT)** provides an out-of-hour service (evenings, weekends, and bank holidays) for when a child or young person is referred to or already open to Children’s Services with urgent matters that cannot wait until the next working day. EDT’s remit is to respond to crises that cannot safely wait until the next working day. The work undertaken with families by this team is handed over to either the worker who is already allocated to the family or is sent through to the Front Door to progress to a social work team, who will continue the work with the family. Specific tasks needed to be undertaken by EDT on Area’s behalf are considered on a case-by-case basis. EDT liaises with partner agencies to ensure the most appropriate response, and a Head of Service or Deputy Director is always available to support complex decision making.

**Children and Families Teams** provide longer-term and more intensive intervention to children in need and their families. Typically, these are children subject to Child in Need, Child Protection or Care Plans. The teams also undertake child welfare reports for the Court including preparing statements and evidence and initiating pre-proceedings and care proceedings. The service is responsible for children who are looked after under section 20 until permanent decisions about their care have been made.

**Court Progression Managers** work under one leadership structure to track the progress of plans for children throughout their journey with our services. This includes those children and young people in pre-proceedings and care proceedings. The Court Progression Managers aim toimprove consistency in the timeliness and quality of planning for children throughout their journey by improving the overall Public Law Outline (PLO) process, including pre-proceedings, the timeliness of court proceedings. This to help ensure that children receive the right help at the right time.

**Disabled Children Service** is a locality-based specialist service which offers social care assessment and support for children and young people with a complex and substantial disability aged 0-18 and their families where the primary need is related to their disability. Disabled Children’s teams work with the multi-disciplinary team around the child to provide timely and focused assessment and planning to help disabled children and young people be safe, healthy, engage in education, achieve their aspirations and have as independent a life as possible with a view to moving into adulthood.

### **Multi-Sensory Impairment Service (MSI)**

MSI supports children who have dual sensory loss and are registered as Deafblind, up to the age of 25 in education and/or in the community to the age of 18. Supporting them to access their learning and achieve positive outcomes. The support is carried out by our Multi-Sensory Workers (MSWs). This is under the guidance of Team Leaders experienced in multi-sensory impairment and the Service Manager. Our support covers three main areas:

• Orientation and mobility

• Communication

• Learning and development

**Permanence and Transition Teams** work with our children in care and care experienced young people across the localities. They support the children and young people to work towards achieving positive outcomes and ambitions developed as part of their care or pathway plan.

**Family Time Service** provides opportunity for children who are in the care of the Local Authority to spend time with their parents, family members and other important people in their lives. It is essential that children and young people are supported to maintain relationships with their families and other people who are important to them during the court decision making process.

**Young Person Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking team** work with young people coming through the National Transfer Scheme but also those entering the UK through other supported organisations.

**Staying Close** provides accommodation and support options for care experienced young people, helping them to be ready and equipped to live independently. It is designed to be a comparable offer to Staying Put and offers move-on accommodation alongside support with practical, emotional, health and wellbeing.

**Childrens Homes** provide a home or a permanent home and/or short break for children with complex emotional, behavioural, sensory and health needs. We currently have 7 childrens homes across Devon with a total of 12 bedrooms that provide a residential home for children. Provided in 4 different homes across Devon we also have 16 bedrooms that provide short breaks. The short breaks can include, day care and overnight stays.

**Virtual School** works as any school to provide support and interventions to help each child achieve their best and thrive on their educational journey. Virtual School work with our young people, designated teachers in schools, social workers, carers, families and other professionals to ensure high aspirations and targeted support is the shared goal of everyone involved with the young person.

Virtual School provide:

* training for school staff, carers and social workers
* support for children and young people in care to Devon to achieve their best in school
* additional tuition where gaps are identified
* support for children, schools and carers at transition points in the education journey e.g. moving from year 6 to 7
* advice and guidance for schools and families/carers of previously looked after and adopted children and those under Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)
* each child with a high-quality Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is a central record of their educational achievement and progress, including clear targets for improvement while capturing the young person’s voice
* summer holiday activities for our children in care
* an area learning advocate for every child in care to get the best education offer possible
* a smooth, supported transition and admission to school

**Participation Team** work with children and young people to amplify their voice and experience and help them hold decision-makers to account. The team runs regular groups and activities, as well as one-off thematic events with decision-makers. The team supports care-experienced children and young people, children and young people with SEND, and members of the Youth Parliament.

**Mind of My Own** is an app for young people to feed back on the services they receive. Their professionals can see what young people think and feel about the support they receive and what could be different for them.

# Children’s Health and Wellbeing Directorate

### Quality Assurance Review and Safeguarding Services (QARSS)

QARSS includes the Social Work Academy, Quality Assurance, Principal Social Worker, LADO, Participation Team, Safeguarding Partnership and Child Protection and Independent Reviewing services. The service works to lead and implement the quality assurance framework and ensure that the impact and learning are communicated to bring about improved practice that achieves positives outcomes for children and families. QARSS address changes in legislation and ensure best practice is followed across the service. They monitor progress through activities such as audits, thematic reviews, feedback dip sampling, feedback from children and young people, and evaluations from training courses. Information gathered through these activities inform wider service development and improvement.

**Social Work Academy** is the center for practice development. Led by the Head of Service for QARSS and Service Manager for the Academy and Quality Assurance, the Academy provides all our services with learning and development opportunities.

The Academy’s work includes:

* Developing and promoting Restorative Practice
* Provision of a suite of learning and development opportunities.
* Growing and supporting our workforce by putting our learning into practice
* Supporting and nurturing our students and newly qualified social workers
* Teaching and supporting our Practice Educators

**Child Protection & Independent Reviewing Service**

**Child Protection Chairs** organise and chair restorative Child Protection Conferences when we are concerned a child or young person may be suffering significant harm. The service keeps children’s individual experiences of family life at the heart of its work, ensuring children’s views are represented in conference and that children are kept informed of how things are going and next steps. The Child Protection Chairs meet with parents beforehand to explain the process and answering any queries. After the conference, they undertake checks and measures to ensure the plan is progressing and chase up any delays and helping to resolve things where possible.

**Independent Reviewing Service** provides an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)to have independent oversight of planning for children in care, to ensure the child’s interests and needs are central and effectively addressed in the care planning and review process. The service is committed to ensuring children’s involvement and participation in the process and their care planning, so they are involved with the formulation of their plan and influence decision- making. Wherever possible the IRO remains allocated to the child/ young person throughout their time in care, and changes are kept to a minimum. They chair all their Child in Care (CIC) reviews which endorse and confirm their care plan. Between reviews the IRO monitors the progress of the plans and decisions by communicating closely with the Social Worker, including where needed meeting with the child/young person to plan their next review.

**Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)** service is responsible for managing concerns and allegations against people who work with children who are paid, unpaid volunteers, casual agency staff or anyone who works in a self-employed capacity. The function of the LADO Service is co-ordinating information sharing between agencies and providing management and overview of cases where there are allegations against staff who work with children. The LADO will liaise with other Local Authorities where there is cross–boundary issues.

**Fostering and Kinship Care**

**Fostering Devon** provides in-house fostering placements that offer a stable and consistent experience of family life to Devon’s children and young people in care. The service aims to train and develop foster carers to deliver therapeutic parenting to heal traumatised children and young people. The fostering service supports and contributes to this mission by providing an effective, efficiently managed, high quality foster care service within available resources. It meets the needs of children identified through the stages of assessment planning and review and aims to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care.

**Mockingbird** is an evidence-based innovative approach to fostering which seeks to imitate an extended family. At the centre of the ‘constellation’ are Home Hub carers, who are experienced and skilled foster carers. Around them are several ‘satellite’ foster carers nearby who provide homes to children and young people in care. The hub carers provide respite, peer support, joint planning and activities for the satellite homes. This model supports relationship-building between children and young people, carers and professionals in a mutually supportive community. As a result, the stability of home life for children and young people is improved and foster carer resilience.

**Private Fostering** is when a child or young person under 16 years old (or 18 if they have a disability) is looked after for a period of 28 days or more by someone who is not a close relative, guardian or person with parental responsibility. People involved in private fostering arrangements must, by law, inform Devon County Council as any child separated from their parents is potentially vulnerable and we have a responsibility to make sure the alternative care they receive is suitable.

**CPAT: The Child & Parent Placement and Assessment Service** is a provision that undertakes evidence-based parenting assessments. Assessments are undertaken either within child and parent arrangements in a fostering household or in the community.

The aims of the service are:

* To keep children and parents together during assessment and provide the opportunity for parents to experience caring for their child in a family-based environment
* To support families to develop the skills, experience, and knowledge to safely parent their children. To enable and encourage parents to develop a better understanding of their child’s needs and meet these independently
* To support families in building a network of support and maintain parents and their children close to their local community.
* To work with families in a trauma informed way, which includes the use of a strengths-based framework, and includes trauma awareness, providing safety through positive working relationships and clear boundaries, encouraging self-efficacy and service user involvement, with a focus on developing skills required for future living
* To provide evidence-based parenting assessments which will inform care planning decisions for children and families and reduce delay in the achievement of permanency.

**Kinship Assessment and Support Teams** undertake viability and full kinship/connected carer assessments, special guardianship assessments. Support is provided to Kinship Carers and offered to special guardians once the special guardianship order is made.

**Adopt South West** is the Regional Adoption Agency whichrecruits, trains, assesses and supports prospective adopters, seeks matches for children with adoptive parents and supports adoptive families on their lifelong journey across the South West peninsula. Family Finders in Adopt South West prepare profiles for children with a plan of adoption, and work with their social workers to seek permanent carers for them. The Post Adoption Order Support Team (which includes a psychologist and educational psychologist) work with adoptive families any time from approval until the young person is 18, and beyond that age if they wish to access their birth records.

**Finding a Home Team** searches and secures all external placements for young people and works closely with other services to find suitable placements for children entering care or who need an external placement change that matches their needs. This includes external foster care, residential care, and supported accommodation. The team will try to find the best match for the child/ young person, based on an assessment of their needs.

**Commissioning Team** develops and shapes our approach to how services are procured and delivered, how we work with partners and which services we purchase externally to meet the needs of children. This includes:

* A commissioning strategy about how we will work with partners to develop the right mix of services to meet children’s needs
* Sufficiency Plan to ensure we have the right range of services to meet the needs of children in our care and care leavers.
* Placement sufficiency strategy

Commissioning also provides a contract monitoring function to ensure the service offer meets the expected quality and the terms of the contract.

**Atkinson Secure Children’s Home** is the only secure children’s home in the South West. It is a welfare-only home accommodating up to 10 young people aged 10 – 17. The home has over 30 years’ experience of specialising in the welfare of young people. Children and young people are placed at Atkinson by their local authority and the courts because they are a risk to themselves and others and abscond from their care placements – foster care, children’s home, or sometimes from their biological or adopted family. Some could be victims of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), or, at serious risk of abuse, or be victims of actual abuse. Children come from all over the country and stay for a minimum of 72 hours, although most young people stay for longer. Each child has a key worker who works one to one with them, gaining trust and giving intensive support. They also have a personal tutor and a case manager. Each member of staff is trained in Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) this is a therapeutic parenting approach/model and is used across the home looking at what young people can do for themselves.

**Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services** (CAMHS) staff are based on site, they help young people reduce their risk behaviour and return to a positive lifestyle in the community. They support staff in looking after the very complex and often challenging everyday care needs of each young person.

**Devon Public Health Nursing** provides health visiting and school nursing services across Devon. They lead and deliver the Healthy Child Programme providing universal child and family health services and ongoing additional services for vulnerable children and families. The team is made up of health visitors, school nurses, staff nurses and community health workers. Health visitors and school nurses are qualified nurses or midwives with post-registration experience with additional experience and training and education in child health, health promotion, public health and education.

## **Legal Services Directorate**

Sitting under the Legal Services Directorate of Devon County Council, the **Children’s Legal Team** is a specialist team which provides legal advice and representation to Devon County Council. For Children’s Social Care, the team’s main area of work is providing advice and representation in safeguarding work under the Public Law Outline (PLO) in pre proceedings and court work in the Family Court, Care Proceedings and Adoption and other Public Law applications.