Vulnerable Children & Young People at Risk of Significant Harm

Multi Agency Procedure & Practitioner Guidance
FOREWORD

The Outer Hebrides Child Protection Committee (CPC) is committed to ensuring that children in the Outer Hebrides are protected and their needs are properly assessed. The CPC takes the view that

*The protection of children and young people is everyone’s job and everyone’s responsibility.* Outer Hebrides Inter Agency Guidelines 2018, p3

The purpose of this document is to provide multi-agency guidance for professional staff working with children and young people who are considered to be at significant risk, either through their own actions or at the hands of others. It sets out how agencies should work together to protect children from harm and the procedure sits alongside single and multi-agency child protection procedures.

INTER AGENCY PROCEDURE

SECTION 1

Background

The Scottish Government wants Scotland’s children and young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens and want them to be fully supported as they grow and develop to be –

- Healthy
- Achieving
- Nurtured
- Active
- Respected
- Responsible
- Included
- and above all to be Safe

“Every child and young person in Scotland is on a journey through life: experiencing rapid development and change as they make the transition from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood….some may have temporary difficulties, some may live with challenges …and some may experience more complex issues”. (Getting it Right for Every Child, 2008)

It is recognised that children and young people may require a range of supports and services as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood and many different professionals in statutory and other organisations have contact with children who are in need / at risk of harm. While Social Services have a legal duty to “safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need” all agencies and local authority departments have a significant responsibility for the protection of children/young people.

Status of Document

The procedures and guidance notes apply to all staff of agencies / services represented on the Outer Hebrides Child Protection Committee. Staff from these agencies / services should comply with the procedures, unless there are exceptional reasons which should be fully recorded.
Inter-Agency & Practice Principles

These procedures are underpinned by the Getting It Right for Every Child common values and principles which apply across all aspects of working with children and young people. In responding to the needs of children and young people who are deemed to be vulnerable help should be appropriate, proportionate and timely.

Agencies and practitioners should –

- Aim to work in partnership with young people, and where appropriate those with parental responsibilities
- Work to find common ground and practice
- Understand and respect the roles, responsibilities and boundaries of others
- Be regularly involved in reviewing and improving practice

Practice –

Agencies and practitioners should –

- Provide additional help that is appropriate, proportionate and timely
- All children and young people should be safe and able to develop to their full potential
- The needs of children and young people are paramount and should underpin all work to safeguard children – the child should be put at the centre of all agency intervention
- All children and young people deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential and workers should build on the child’s strengths and promote resilience
- All children and young people have the right to be safeguarded from harm and exploitation
- Responsibility for the protection of children and young people must be shared because they are safeguarded only when all relevant agencies and individuals accept responsibility and co-operate with one another
- Statements or allegations about abuse or neglect, made by young people, must always be taken seriously
- The wishes and feelings of children and young people, which are vital elements in assessing risk and formulating protection plans, must always be sought and given weight, according to the level of understanding of the child or young person
- No child or young person should be allowed to feel responsible for the actions taken by professionals, nor for the outcomes
INTER AGENCY PROCEDURE

SECTION 2

Background

These procedures were drawn up in response to the recognition that there are a number of children and young people who through their own behaviour, or as a consequence of others behaviour towards them, are at considerable risk of significant harm. The procedures are intended to give guidance in the assessment, decision making and co-ordination of a multi-agency response to the complex needs of this group of children/young people. It is recognised that often young people may be involved in a number of high risk activities, and that managing and supporting children/young people will often be demanding and progress very difficult to measure or achieve.

Work with children / young people involved in high risk activity / behaviours should be co-ordinated as part of the multi-disciplinary child protection procedures. A common procedure is necessary to ensure

- key support staff are alerted to vulnerable and dangerous situations for young people
- care, support and protection for young people and others
- monitoring of a young person's progress and the effectiveness of support plans

This procedure will support the work of staff and will assist agencies and professionals plan and work together to make best use of their experience and expertise in protecting children aged under 16 years and those young people who are aged between 16 – 18 years who are looked after children. Complementary sets of practitioner guidance have been developed to support staff through these procedures. The management of this procedure will be the responsibility of the Child Protection Co-ordinator and Development Officer.

Many of these young people may not come within the scope of the Child Protection Procedures, but may be looked after or accommodated and be known to several workers and services. These procedures are intended to mirror and complement existing child protection procedures.

If the circumstances meet the criteria of Child Protection Procedures they require to be followed. This particular policy is intended for those young people not protected by Child Protection Procedures or processes. E.g. those children over 16 years of age who are not looked after or accommodated.

Scope of Procedure

These procedures are not intended to be used where children/young people become involved for the first time in risk behaviours, (ie. using drugs/alcohol, absconding etc), but rather when workers and those with a knowledge of the child, identify an escalation/pattern in behaviour resulting in increased risk either to the individual child or to others.

It is likely, that children/young people being reviewed under this inter-agency procedure, will be known to social work services and often other agencies. However, there may be occasions, when a young person comes to the attention of agencies/organisations for the first time, and because of the assessed risk to the young person, a meeting will immediately be convened.
These procedures should be implemented when agencies consider a young person’s behaviour to be of a level of concern which could lead to serious physical and emotional difficulties: in some instances the level of risk may be life threatening. These procedures **must** be applied in relation to children under 16 yrs, and/or children/young people who are looked after by the local authority.

These procedures **will** also be applied in relation to children/young people aged 16 - 18 yrs who have not been looked after and children/ young people 16 - 25 yrs who have previously been looked after. These children/young people do not have the added safety net of compulsory supervision order, and can be equally or more vulnerable. Team Leaders (Social Work) should give careful consideration to applying the procedures in such cases, and should respond positively from requests from social work staff or other agencies to do so.

Social work have the responsibility for co-ordinating vulnerable young person’s case conferences. However, it will be necessary that all agencies/organisations coming in to contact with vulnerable young people acknowledge their responsibilities for sharing information through direct representation or by providing a written report. All agencies/organisations have a key role in identifying and supporting vulnerable children/young people.
Initial Wellbeing Assessment

Many children and children/young people who become involved in high risk activity have been known to social work and other agencies for some time. Their high risk behaviour may have developed over a period of time, and it is critical that significant changes in behaviour are recognised, and that appropriate action is considered. Workers from other agencies/organisations may have significant information regarding a young person which may reflect a different set of risk behaviours.

Any worker from any agency/organisation who is concerned about the vulnerability of a young person should liaise with the young person’s Named Person/Lead Professional. This referral should be followed up in writing within three days. It is likely that most children/young people will be known to social work services and considerable dialogue will have taken place around the vulnerability issues.

An initial wellbeing assessment or existing Child Assessment and Plan to be updated to take cognisance of existing and current risk will be necessary by those in contact with the young person to identify issues of concern. All agencies should recognise that children/young people are often unable to accept or comprehend the level of risk they are exposed to, and are unable to accept they are vulnerable.

The Team Leader will consider the assessed needs of each case and will advise of any immediate action to be taken or inter-agency consultation required in terms of protecting the young person. A referral will be made to the Children’s Services Manager through his admin support. **Necessary urgent action must not be delayed while a vulnerable young person’s (VYP) Case Conference is being arranged.**

In reviewing the information the Team Leader will make a decision about the need to convene a VYP Case Conference. A decision on whether such a meeting should be convened should be conveyed to the referrer within 5 working days.

In those situations where social work services, Named Person and the referrer disagree over the need for a vulnerable young person’s Case Conference, the Service Manager in discussion with the referring agency will discuss and agree an appropriate course of action.

**Vulnerable Young Person (vyp) Case Conference**

Case Conferences will be chaired by the Children’s Services Manager

Where an agency is concerned about the vulnerability of a young person (16-18 yrs) who is unknown to Social Work Services, initial discussion should take place with the duty Team Leader to agree what action is necessary.

The referrer will detail in writing (email communication is acceptable) the high risk behaviour(s) which is causing concern, and this will be available at the case discussion.

When it is agreed that a VYP Case Conference should be convened social work services, the Named Person or where there is a Lead Professional, the Lead Professional and the referrer will agree –
- who will inform the young person of the date of meeting
- purpose of meeting
• prepare/support the young person for attending
• to discuss the young person’s views if they do not wish to attend
• inform the young person of their right to have a support person

The Case Conference should be needs led and the agenda should include -

a) **Assessment of need**
(has or should a Child’s Assessment and Plan be undertaken, in what areas of the YP’s life is he/she experiencing difficulty, past history of abuse, current abuse history, natural support systems involvement with other agencies eg. police)

b) **Assessment and analysis of risk**
(description of risk behaviour(s), how/when behaviour commenced, pattern of behaviour, frequency of risk taking episodes, escalation of behaviour with subsequent rise in level of personal risk or risk to others, current areas of concern, what changed for this procedure to be considered necessary)

c) **Options for supporting and protecting the child/YP**
(these may include the use of child protection procedures, secure accommodation, accommodation by social work department, referral for emergency medical assessment, intensive community support package)

d) **Relevance of the Children’s Panel to the child/YP’s situation**
(If there is a current compulsory supervision order the Reporter must be kept informed)

Agencies should be included in Case Conferences on the basis of their existing involvement with the young person, or the potential for them to contribute advice or services which will benefit the young person.

All agencies participating in the Case Conference should be prepared to share appropriate information and be flexible in their approach to providing direct or indirect support to the child/young person. All agencies must agree the level of risk the young person may be exposed to, and should collectively agree a Child’s Plan which reflects the young person’s unique situation. All agencies must be able to clearly define what they can offer the young person, and be prepared to participate in the core group if this is the decision of the Case Conference.

**Child’s Plan**

In most cases a Child’s Plan will be agreed, allocating specific roles and tasks to individuals and agencies/organisations. Where a child or young person has not been previously known to the Social Work Services a decision will be taken about the need for the allocation of a Lead Professional.

The child’s plan from the Case Conference will be circulated within five working days, setting out tasks and areas of responsibility to be undertaken by individual workers and agencies. The Child’s Plan will be written up immediately following the discussion and circulated to case conference participants. During the Case Conference a decision will be made about the need for the establishment of a core group of workers who will work together on the young person’s behalf.
Consideration needs to be given as to whether a referral to SCRA is necessary. Where it is agreed a referral should be made a copy of the minute along with a letter or email correspondence advising the Reporter of the referral should be forwarded to the Reporter. Where the young person is subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order a copy of the minute should always be forwarded to the Reporter for information.

Where a young person does not attend the vulnerable young person’s Case Conference, the participants will agree who should meet with the young person and provide them with feedback in relation to the Child’s Plan. In those circumstances where the young person is missing, the Child’s Plan will proceed and discussion will take place with the young person upon their return.

The minutes of all VYP Case Conferences will be signed by the Named Person & Lead Professional.

**Core Group**

Where a core group has been agreed, the following will apply -

The core group will be made up from the key agencies involved with the young person. Not all agencies need to be represented.

The co-ordination of the Child’s Plan will normally be the responsibility of the Lead Professional, however, there may be circumstances when this may be the responsibility of the after care worker or someone else as agreed at the VYP Case Conference. Communication between members of the core group must be open and prompt.

Frequency of core group meetings will be agreed at the first core group meeting. This will often be determined by the level of the young person’s risk and whether or not the young person is participating and engaging in the process.

These procedures and subsequent reviews should be linked to existing review frameworks (eg LAC review under the Vulnerability Procedures).

All core group meetings will be formally recorded with minutes distributed to all participating agencies within 5 working days.

The core group can, at any time, request a Case Conference convened if circumstances change and there is a need for urgent review.

**Review**

The action plan will be reviewed at regular intervals and at each core group meeting and any subsequent VYP Case Conference.

An initial review should take place within 3 months and can be earlier if specified by the VYP Case Conference. The core group will update the review VYP Case Conference with regard to work undertaken and current concerns. Core Group normally meet on a 4 week assess but this more regular depending on risk and need. The Case Conference will be reviewed after 3 months and thereafter every 6 months as per Case Conference guidelines.
Appendix A
Procedural Flowchart

Child deemed to be vulnerable and / or at risk of harm - agency / organisation discusses concerns

Are proactive measures sufficient without referral to Social Work?

Referral to Social Work requesting VYP Case Conference

Social Work do not agree to VYP Case Conference but agree with referrer what action is necessary

Social Work agree to convene VYP Case Conference

VYP Case Conference takes place

No further action under VYP procedures – Agreed care plan

VYP Case Conference takes place

VYP Case Conference takes place