



**CORNWALL
COUNCIL**
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Together 
for Families

Briefing note – January 2024

Working Together 2023- Lead practitioners for Children in Need

There is no change to most aspects of our work with Children in Need

Most aspects of our work with Children in Need are remaining the same. There aren't any changes, for example, to statutory definitions, thresholds, referral processes, MARU/Early Help, Early Help arrangements, step up and step down between Early Help and Child in Need work, or to our current team structures and approach.

What is changing about Child in Need work

The updated statutory guidance enables a broader range of practitioners to act as lead practitioner for children in need and their families under the supervision of a social work qualified manager.

This gives us in Children and Family Services more choice and flexibility about how we manage and deliver our work with Children in Need, which will help us improve experiences and outcomes for children.

We are not asking other professionals to be lead practitioners

This is an internal change for Children and Family Services and there is no additional ask of other agencies. Schools, health visitors, GPs, midwives, police officers and the wide range of other professionals who help and protect children in Cornwall will continue to make a crucial contribution to multi-agency work with our most vulnerable families. We are not asking other professionals from other agencies to be lead practitioners for Children in Need.

So, what will be different, and why will this be better for children?

The change in statutory guidance enables a broader range of practitioners to act as lead practitioners for Children in Need. We see this as a really positive change, because it recognises the significant skills, expertise and contribution of our Family Workers and Youth Workers, and it will enable more choice and flexibility about how we work with children, with better matching of Child in Need work based on the child's needs, expressed wishes, and practitioner experience, expertise and interests- rather than based on job title alone.

We already have skilled professionals in Children and Family Services who are not registered social workers, but who have substantial experience and expertise in direct work with children and families, and who already make an important contribution to assessments and plans for Children in Need.

Family Workers and Youth Workers already do a brilliant job as lead practitioners for children subject of assessments and plans in our Early Help teams.

This adjustment will be most relevant in teams which complete most of our Child in Need work, particularly our Family Assessment and Support teams, and also Gweres Teyluyow, Gweres Tus Yownyk, and our Disabled Children and Therapy Services. So, you may notice when you are working in these teams, some children may have Family Workers or Youth Workers as lead practitioners, working alongside social workers and under the supervision of the social work Team Manager, instead of allocated social workers.

Type of assessment/plan	Lead practitioner
Early Help	Family Workers, Youth Workers
Child in Need (s17)	Family Workers, Youth Workers, Social Workers <i>(under guidance of a social work qualified manager)</i>
Child Protection (s47 and Child Protection Plans)	Social Workers
Child in Care	Social Workers

What other changes might you notice?

Previously, people have tended to say 'social work assessment' to cover all types of Child in Need and Child Protection assessments. As the statutory guidance has changed, we now need to be more specific whether we are talking about a 'Child in Need assessment' (which can be completed by a social worker, or other practitioners under the supervision of a social work manager) or a 'Child Protection assessment' which has to be completed by a social worker.

Reflecting the change in language in Working Together 2023, you will hear the term 'lead practitioner' more instead of 'allocated worker'.

What if I have any feedback or questions?

We want to make sure that the updated lead practitioner arrangements work in the best possible way for Children and Family Services staff, multi-agency working, and most importantly for our children. So, we are taking an action learning approach, making adjustments carefully over the next 3 months, to learn what works best, evaluate how this works in practice, and inform our future planning.

If you have any concerns for the safety and welfare of an individual child we are working with, please talk about this with the child's lead practitioner, or ask to speak with their Team Manager. If you are not satisfied by the response of the lead professional and Team Manager, please get in touch with the responsible Service Manager or Head of Service. If people have worries, we welcome people letting us know so that we can understand your concerns, explain what we are doing and why. We take well-founded criticism as an opportunity to learn and improve, and if things have gone wrong, we are committed to doing everything we can to put things right and correct this for the child.

If you have any suggestions and feedback about the changes to lead practitioner arrangements for Children in Need, please contact Julie Saville, Head of Children and Family Services (West Cornwall) who is coordinating the learning and feedback for this, on julie.saville@cornwall.gov.uk. We would welcome hearing from you about how things are working in practice, so that we can consider any learning and further adjustments we need to make in the longer term.