

Being Brilliant AT THE **BASICS**



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ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

St Helens Children and Young Peoples Services Practice Standards have been created with staff to ensure that all children and their parents/carers receive a consistently high service from staff; whatever team they are involved with

Practice Standards do not stand alone and should be viewed as part of delivering on service strategies in line with national social work standards, legislation and St Helens own policies and procedures.

Practice standards are also a useful guide to practice that can help support planning for continuous professional development

It is with great pleasure that we are happy to endorse these Practice Standards to providing a better service for all children/young people and their families as well as being a benchmark for:

- Staff to measure their own work
- Managers to authorise work
- Auditors to audit
- The complaints process

Assistant Director of Children's Social Care



Date: **August 2024**

Practice Standards

The Practice Standards guide us in;

- Being explicit about the expected behaviours families can expect from staff in St Helens who have direct contact with them.
- Creating a culture of good practice.
- Being clear about what behaviours and the standard of service a family can expect from a worker employed by Children's Services.
- Demonstrating that we put children and families at the centre of our work
- How we work in partnership with children and families.
- Being open, honest, and transparent even when delivering information that may be difficult to hear.
- Being accessible, by letting children and families know how to contact us, we do this by giving out our landline and mobile phone numbers.
- Recognising and understanding how our behaviours, what we say and how we say it may impact upon children and families, peers and partners.
- Making sure that we have the right training so that we can help children and their families/carers.
- Using a "strengths-based" approach to practice, our Signs of Safety Model, which will involve children/ young people and their families/ carers in decision making and planning.



Standard 1 - Voice of the Child

"We believe that knowing and understanding your life experiences can help you to have a strong sense of identity and self-worth".

"Your children are at the centre of our practice, and we work with you as opposed doing to you".

"We will listen to you, and we will do what we say we will do".

"We will always keep you involved in decisions made about you and we will ensure you understand why decisions are made".

- We must visit children/young people to make sure they are safe. Our visits must be purposeful, planned and linked to the assessment and plan for them.
- We should use a range of resources and direct work tools to help us better understand the lived and living experiences of each individual child.
- Children must be listened to, seen, and spoken to (age appropriately) alone, and actions taken, and decisions made about them should be explained to them.
- Each individual child's voice, and their lived and living experiences should be evidenced in their assessments and plans.
- We must accurately reflect the views, interactions and observations made during our visits. These will be used to inform the assessment, plan, meetings, and future visits.
- Where direct work tools are used/ return interviews are undertaken with a child, what is written/said/observed must be analysed / interpreted by a worker to help understand the child/ren's lived experience and ultimately contribute to the assessment and planning for them.
- All direct work tools must be uploaded to the child's electronic social care record and attached to the written case note.
- The messages from children for example via direct work or return interviews should, where appropriate and safe to do so, be shared with the parents and carers to ensure that they have a full understanding of the child's lived experience, wishes and feelings.

- We must seek children's views about their plans and invite them to meetings, where appropriate, where they will be discussed.

How the Child's Lived and Living Experiences Informs Our Work

Listening to the child's voice, observations of the child, completing direct work with the child, hearing the views of parents/ carers, and listening to the network with an embedded sense of professional curiosity are the different elements we consider when understanding the child's lived and living experiences. The comprehensive knowledge of the child's lived and living experiences underpins the cycle in which we understand, assess, plan, do and review to help us understand the impact of the plan for the child. This keeps the child at the centre of our work turning the child's voice into reality.



Standard 2 – Assessments

“Every child will have an up-to-date assessment that is completed within maximum timeframe of 45 working days, that considers the strengths and what is going well as well as what may be causing worry or concern. Early Help assessments will be completed within 30 working days.”

“Decisions about children becoming looked after by the Local Authority or returning home from care will not be made without an up-to-date assessment of a child's needs.”

“We will use the assessment to help us understand what life is like for the child and their family; both now and in the past. We will think about what life could be like for the child/young person if things don't change, or if they change for the better.”

- A child's network must always be supported to be involved in the assessment of a child's needs. The network includes all parents/carers, family members, friends, and professionals.
- The role of each network member is clear and the support they can offer will be detailed in an assessment. Where there is no network (this should be rare) this is clearly evidenced.
- The history must be considered against each aspect of the child's current needs and must be referenced in the analysis. This must include the impact this has had upon the child and the child's views, and any direct work undertaken.
- All parents/carers (this includes partners/adults living outside of the household who have access to the children) must be assessed.
- Assessments must focus on the child's views and their individual needs. They will also include the views of their family/ carers.
- All factors impacting on parenting capacity must be fully assessed.
- The assessment must link to and inform a child's safety plan and any other plan.
- An assessment must be clear, easy to understand and jargon language and abbreviations avoided.
- Assessments must always be shared with parents and carers.
- Assessments must be strength based whilst outlining the concerns/risks to the child/ren.

Standard 3 – Visits

“Our visits to children, young people and their families will be arranged and agreed with them unless there is good reason not to be. “

“We will use visits to build positive working relationships to achieve change in collaboration with the family/carers and their network.”

“When we visit people in their own homes, we will treat them with the same respect and dignity as we would want to be treated ourselves.”

- Visits to children and families must be planned and purposeful. We should know as much about the family before visiting them through reading the history and case chronology where possible. This can also keep you safe and aware of any potential risks. Families should not have to share their story time and time again.

Frequency of visits as follows;

- CiN visits should be at least every 20 working days.
- Early Help visits should be a minimum of every 28 days.
- Children with Disabilities to reflect CiN visits. After 12 months, subject to C&F assessment and with Head of Service approval, visits can be every 12 weeks.
- CP visits should be at least every 10 working days.
- Children We look After:
 - Visits within the first 5 days of placement, every week until their first LAC review, then at a minimum of every 4 weeks for children placed in children's homes out of borough.
 - All other children should be visited at a minimum of 6 weekly visits after the first LAC review. Following long-term matching being approved by IRO and panel visits can move to 12 weekly visits.
 - Placement with parents visits to take place weekly for the first 4 weeks then at least every 20 days.
- Any variance of frequency should be captured on the child's file in Management Oversight, with a rationale and whether the IRO / CP chair agree.
- At visits we must, listen, observe, and use professional curiosity.

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- At a visit we must review the child's plan by looking at what is working well and considering what needs to change.
- We will visit to assess if the child/ren is/are safe. We will always consider the safety plan and whether this is working or needs to change.
- When visits to families are made, these are then clearly documented on the child/ren case record.
- We must record visits on a visit template and complete all sections.
- We must record who was and was not present at the visit, the length of time spent at the visit, and the time it took place.
- We must discuss the progress and impact of the plan with parents/carers, as well as consequences if plan is not improving outcomes for the child/ren.
- If we are worried about a child/ren at a visit, or any other significant issues arise, these will be discussed with a manager immediately or at the earliest opportunity.
- If there is a change in social worker a joint visit to the child/ren and family must be completed by the previous and new worker.
- All social workers will have a pen picture which will be given the child/ren if they have to visit in the absence of the allocated worker so the child/ren and parents/carers know who is going to be visiting them.

Visit Template



Visiting
Template.pdf

Standard 4 – Plans

“We will work collaboratively with the children and their family/carers to decide the goals that will support/ protect the child/ren at the present time and also in the future.”

“We will work with the child/ren their families/ carers and other important people in their life to come up with a contingency plan, as a ‘Plan B’ if progress and a positive impact is not observed, does not meet the goals or the child/young person’s circumstances deteriorates”.

- We must ensure each child in a family has a plan, and that plan clearly outlines their contingency plan.
- All children where appropriate must have a safety plan that is regularly reviewed by their Network.
- We must support the children, their families / carers and other important people in their life to come up with a realistic plan that will achieve the goals we agreed on.
- Plans must be SMART, clearly understood in plain non jargonistic language.
- We must review plans every 20 working days to check if it is working and making the expected progress.
Early Help review plans every 20 / 30 working days, though this is determined by the children and family's needs.
- The person(s) responsible for an individual action will be made clear in a plan. This includes a person in the network as well as professionals. We will make sure the plan shows what needs to happen, who needs to do it, and when they need to do it by.
- All professionals involved with the family attend all child in need/child protection and care planning meetings and must send updates or an agency representative when they send apologies to a meeting they cannot attend.
- Children, (age appropriate) families and members of the child's network must contribute to plans and be part of the meetings that review the plan.
- Parents / carers must always receive copies of each individual child's plan in a format and language they understand.

Standard 5 – Management Oversight

“Management oversight is not supervision. Management oversight is there to make sure that the work we do is making a difference to Children's lives.”

“For some children, staff in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit will also offer additional challenge and oversight to make sure the decisions being made are the best for the child.”

- Management oversight clearly records critical reflection, direction, and discussions around challenge between the worker and their manager.
- It clearly records evidence of concerns or disputes with other professionals internal and external.
- Management oversight must evidence quality assurance activity including case audits and performance management.
- Management oversight must acknowledge significant events and the action that needs to be taken.
- It evidences an awareness of the child's experience reflecting on what is going well and what needs to change to improve life/outcomes for the child/ren.
- It is clear about next steps, and this is reflected accurately on the child's record being explicit about the rationale for the decision made and what we want to achieve.
- IRO / CP scrutiny will provide appropriate challenge where required to ensure that plans reflect the child's current needs, drift and delay and risk.

Standard 6 – Supervision

“Good supervision improves outcomes for children/young people. “The provision of regular, planned good quality supervision is central to the development and maintenance of high standards of social work practice.”

“Supervision must identify and contribute to continuing professional development to ensure staff have the relevant skills, knowledge, understanding and attributes to work with children and families.”

- Staff and managers must have protected time for supervision.
- Supervision must be regular, planned, collaborative and prepared for.
- Supervision must be reflective, with learning, and encourages the worker and manager to explore the impact of the support / intervention in a child's life, as well as what went well, what may need to change and what are the next steps.
- Critical reflection and challenge is encouraged and captured between the worker and manager when there are outstanding tasks.
- Supervision consists of learning circles, reflective case discussions, observations, and group supervisions.
- The welfare of the worker is discussed and explored in a safe space.
- Tasks and actions must be agreed with time scales that clearly outline when they will be completed.
- Actions from previous supervisions must always be reviewed.
- Signs of Safety principles must be adopted within one to one and group supervisions.
- If supervision is not taking place on a regular basis as per the supervision policy, staff have a responsibility to challenge, and must escalate this matter further.

Standard 7 – Pre-Proceedings

“Helping families – giving families a final opportunity to make changes to avoid care proceedings and helping them fully understand the consequence of care proceedings”.

- All review meetings should consider the progress of the plan and whether this is having a positive impact on the child or children and their family.
- The progress of plans should be considered in supervision discussions.
- Where plans are not progressing, or there are specific concerns which identify the need for escalation, case discussion to be arranged with HOS or Court and Protection Manager within 2 days of the review, supervision or incident.
- Decision to progress to Legal Gateway to seek Pre-Proceedings must be agreed by the Head of Service in a case discussion and recorded in ICS.
- SW and TM to attend case discussion and be prepared with full information and history to support decision making.
- Evidence must be available in respect of Edge of Care involvement, genogram, family group conference, Graded Care Profile 2, support and safety plans in place and what intervention has been put in place.
- If it is agreed to present to Legal Gateway Panel, an Initial Referral Form should be completed and presented within 7 days of the next available panel.
- SW and TM (ATM in exceptional circumstances) to attend Legal Gateway Panel to present the child/family.
- If panel agrees for PLO, PLO letter to be formulated and agreed with legal within 24 hours.
- Letter to be shared with parents within 2-3 working days.
- Letters to be sent out with lists of solicitors, and PLO parent brief.
- PLO Meeting to be completed within 10 working days.
- Draft plan to be shared with parents, their legal representative and Local Authority legal representative at least 3 working days before the meeting.
- Initial PLO meeting to be chaired by the TM or the PLO Coordinator
- Discussion with parents and their legal representative whether parents' solicitor is required to attend every meeting.
- Plans to be shared with parents and legal within 5 working days following the initial meetings and subsequent meetings.
- Actions agreed at meetings to be reviewed at each meeting and updated within the plan.
- PLO meetings to take place every 4 weeks as a minimum.
- Families in PLO will be reviewed at legal gateway panel initially after 6 weeks and thereafter on a case-by-case basis based on progress up until the 16 weeks deadline.
- Any decisions to extend the PLO beyond the 16-week timescale will require

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endorsement from Panel, advice from legal, and agreement from the AD, with very compelling reasons provided.

Standard 8 - Court Work

“When attending court, we will always be professional, prepared and will adhere to the Court's standards.”

- Following agreement to issue care proceedings, the SW should liaise with the allocated Local Authority solicitor to discuss initial SWET and what needs to be included.
- Initial SWETs must be reviewed and approved by the Head of Service
- Placement with Parent's Regulations must be ratified by the Agency Decision Maker before a child's care plan for placement with parents is presented to a court hearing.
- Court hearings must be attended on time and the Court must be advised at the time if directions cannot be met due to annual leave or any other reason.
- Assistant Team Manager or Team Managers must attend initial court hearings to support social workers.
- TM/ATM to attend hearings with SW were needed, especially if contested, complex and final hearings.
- If required, and where possible, placements for children must be identified prior court hearings.
- All Court reports must be succinct and clearly evidence the impact on the child/ren. They must follow the Practice Directions from HHJ Parker and ensure that Court reports do not exceed the directed number of pages.
- All required timescales for court work must be met, this includes all actions set via Court directions. In exceptional circumstances where timescales cannot be met, a team manager and the legal department must be informed, and all parties informed immediately.
- Notes must be taken during each court hearing / advocates meeting, including dates of any evidence and future hearings, and record in a case note to provide an update on the child's case file using the court hearing case note type.
- All relevant court documents must be uploaded to the child's file within three working days. This includes any orders, assessment, statements and third-party information (e.g. CAF/CASS report, drug and alcohol testing).
- All relevant paperwork must be filed with legal three days prior to the agreed submission date.
- The Local Authority Solicitor must be kept up to date with any developments and changes to placement and family time arrangements for children, as should the child's IRO and, or CP Chair.

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- IRO and, or CP Chair must be kept up to date with the progress, they should be provided with all reports / assessments and their views sought and noted on the child/ren's files.
- Final care planning meetings need to be arranged at least 10 days before the final care plan is due.
- All involved professionals should be invited to the final care planning meeting including legal, HOS, TM, SW, IRO/CP Chair and Court and Protection Manager
- All final Care Plans for the Local Authority must be discussed and agreed with the Head of Service, IRO and if required, the Assistant Director / Director for Children's Services (PWP) before final evidence or plan is filed.
- Court directions for section 7 and 37 to be complied with by the date stated.
- Once a section 7 or 37 report has been submitted, consideration to be given in supervision as to whether involvement can close.
- The Local Authority cannot commit to ongoing support re family time in private proceedings.



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