
**RECORDING PRACTICES FOR STATUTORY VISITS FOR
CHILD PROTECTION CASES**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the current performance in undertaking statutory visits to children subject to a child protection plan.

Summary

2. Children subject to child protection plans have been identified as being at risk of continuing significant harm, therefore, it is essential that they are seen regularly to ensure that they are both safe and well and that there is progress on reducing the risks which have been identified by the professionals through the child protection conferencing process.
3. The expectation is that all children subject to child protection plans are seen in their home at least every ten working days.
4. Good practice indicates that this should be a mixture of announced and unannounced visits to ensure that the social worker gains a real insight into the care of the child. This in practical terms means more than one visit to the home as when undertaking unannounced visits the family may not be at home, or with older children they may be out. The additional challenge is all children of school age should be at school during the day and so all visits need to be carried out, out of school hours.
5. The national statistical return measures the percentage of children who are subject to child protection plans who have had all of their visits in time i.e. have been seen within a ten day timescale throughout the reporting period. The variation across Local Authorities (from 6 to 100%) demonstrates that there is wide variance in performance and on how this data is measured.
6. Children's Social Care is developing a weekly reporting dataset which will enable all managers to be confident of the most up to date level of performance and any areas where remedial action is required. Visiting to Children is part of the dataset and reports on how many children subject to child protection plans have an up to date visit or are out of time. This enables first line managers to plan their team's priorities for the week and take proactive action to ensure that children are seen.

Recommendation

7. Members are asked to note current performance and the system for improved reporting and monitoring that is now in place.

Suzanne Joyner
Director of Children and Adult Services

Background Papers

Appendix

Description of the Child Protection Framework

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S17 Crime and Disorder	Reduction of risk of continuing harm will increase likelihood of achieving social, educational and health potential which could have a positive impact on crime and disorder.
Health and Well Being	Reduction of risk of continuing harm will increase likelihood of achieving social, educational and health potential which could have a positive impact on crime and disorder.
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impact implications in this report.
Diversity	There are no issues around diversity this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	This reports impacts on the whole of Darlington.
Groups Affected	Children and young people
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework. But supports targets in the Children and Young People's Plan.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Increases potential for positive outcomes for the children of Darlington

Efficiency	There are no recommended efficiency savings in this report.
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MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background

8. When the Local Authority receives information to suggest that a child is suffering or likely to suffer continuing significant harm, there is a duty under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to carry out enquiries as to whether the Local Authority should intervene.
9. In a small number of circumstances those enquiries result in the Local Authority taking emergency legal action to safeguard the child. However in a larger number of situations the enquiries result in a decision to hold an initial child protection conference. In 2014/15 there were 105 initial child protection conferences held, which discussed 200 children in Darlington.
10. The Initial Child Protection Conference is a multi-agency meeting chaired by an independent chair and attended by parents and professionals involved with the child and family . Where appropriate the child is encouraged to attend. The conference is required to make a decision as to whether the child is likely to suffer significant harm or not. Where it is concluded a child is suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, a plan is developed. Last year 169 children were made subject to a child protection plan.
11. Every child subject to a child protection plan is required to have as their lead professional a suitably experienced and qualified social worker. The allocated worker is expected to meet with the child on a regular basis (maximum of ten working days between visits) in their home to understand their experience. They also are expected to monitor the living arrangements including where the child sleeps.
12. The child protection plan is a multi-professional plan identifying task and responsibilities for parents and all professionals involved to affect change to reduce the identified risks to the child. The plan is developed further and monitored through a series of regular meetings of the professionals involved with the family called core groups. It is required that there is at least two core groups between child protection conferences. They are led by the allocated social worker although the responsibility for the progression of the child protection plan rests with each and every member of the core group.
13. After the initial child protection conference there is a review child protection conference held within 3 months and then every six months subsequent to that. These are always chaired by an independent Chair, call an Independent Review officer or IRO.
14. Currently we have 134 children subject to a child protection plan. A child cannot cease being subject to a child protection plan unless that decision is made in a review child protection conference.

15. Nationally the number of children subject to child protection plans for more than two years is monitored as children should not live in a situation where professionals believe that they are at risk of continuing significant harm for any significant length of time. At this point in time there are no children in Darlington who have been on a child protection plan for more than two years. If the risk does not decrease or the family situation change then the Local Authority will consider alternative care arrangements.

Current Situation

16. The Ofsted report (September 2015) described a situation where ‘too many children’ were not seen within timescales. It highlighted this as a risk that ‘they do not have the opportunity to build a meaningful relationship with social workers, their views are not always known and social workers cannot be sure that risks are reducing’.

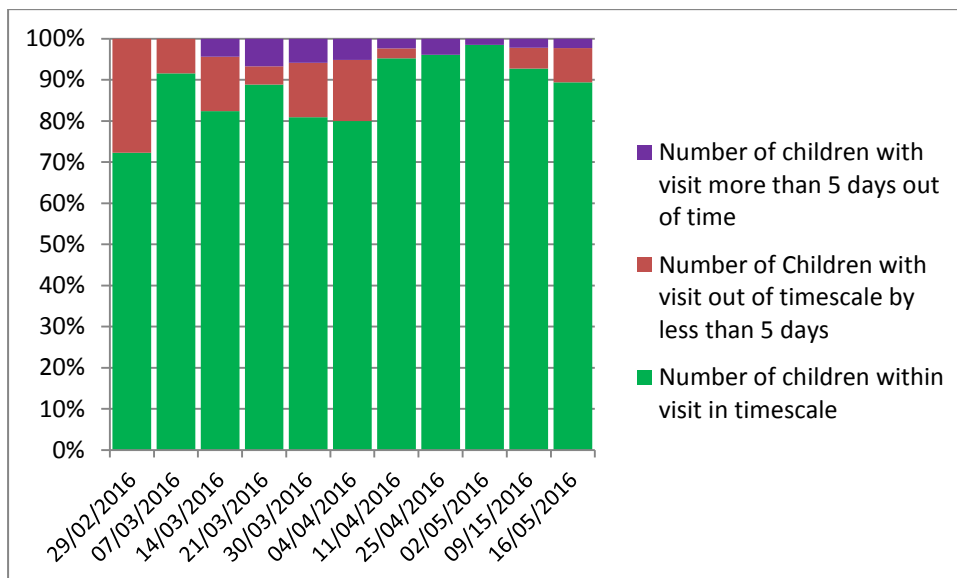
17. The social work teams have made available to them management information that capture the following:

- (a) Children who have a recorded visit that took place in the last 6 days
- (b) Children with a visit due in the next 7-10 days
- (c) Children whose last recorded visit was over 10 but less than 15 working days
- (d) Children whose last recorded visit was over 15 working days ago

18. The expectation on managers is that for all children:

- (a) In cohort (b) they ensure that there is a visit planned for the next three days,
- (b) In cohort (c) team managers are expected to check to see if the visit has been carried out but not recorded yet or if a visit is required. Team manager collate actions completed and report to the Service Manager on the Thursday of each week on progress.
- (c) Who have not had a recorded visit in the last 15 days (cohort (d)) the Service Manager is expected to interrogate the reasons why the visit has not been recorded and ensure that remedial actions are carried out to resolve this.

19. Current performance is as follows



Next Steps

20. Having established a consistent management reporting mechanism the focus is to improve the quality of the visits. By that we mean ensure that visits concentrate both undertaking direct work with the child and progressing the child protection plan.
21. A baseline audit was carried out in March 2016 of 49 visits and the learning fed back to all first line managers. The audit identified areas for improvement in the recording of visits such as :
 - (a) Ensuring children are seen alone if age appropriate
 - (b) Where a child is non-verbal that observations of the child are recorded
 - (c) Linking the visits to the progress of the plan
22. Further work is being undertaken through:
 - (a) Managers direct observation of practice on visits
 - (b) Repeat audits of recording in June 2016
23. These will provide evidence of both compliance with visiting timeliness and the quality of practice.