

Multi-Agency Deep Dive Audit into how agencies in the Wakefield District respond to Children and Families in Need of Help

May 2023

7 POINT BRIEFING

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SUMMARY

As part of ongoing Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) preparations in Wakefield, the Wakefield Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) undertook a deep dive multi-agency audit on the current JTAI theme of Children and Families in Need of Help to examine the effectiveness of the district's Early Help arrangements. The audit considered four cases involving children in Wakefield.

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WHAT IS MEANT BY IN NEED OF HELP OR EARLY HELP?

Early Help is support which can be provided to children and families from a number of organisations where there is an identified need, which can be at any point in a child's life. Early Help is a collaborative approach across all agencies and partners who work with children and families to prevent the need for statutory intervention.

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AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS WORKING WELL

- There was good **recognition** and prioritisation of initial risk and need for children and their families. Involvement of services was proportionate and positive at an early stage and responses were timely. The step-up process between Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care was effective.
- Multi-agency **assessment and planning** was evident via the Team Around the School (TAS) process and resulted in the correct referrals to appropriate services and the right help being offered to the child and family. The wishes of the child and family were captured within assessments.
- The audit evidenced services being adaptive in their practice to ensure the **Voice of the Child and Family** was captured effectively. For example, where there was limited verbal language and communication for one child, non-verbal approaches aided their wishes and feelings being captured. Ensuring children were seen alone and use of the Mind of My Own app were identified as positive practice. In addition, seeking to obtain the child's view in one example was beneficial in establishing that a Safety Plan which had been implemented was not being adhered to, leading to a step up in the case.
- **Interventions** were effectively tailored to the child and family's needs across all cases audited. The offer of support was multi-agency in approach with consideration of what additional educational support was needed for a child, alongside their health needs. It was identified in one example there was a likelihood that the child may have been excluded from school had there not been effective intervention via an Education Improvement Teacher and Targeted Early Help undertaking specific sessions.
- **Joint Working** was strong with examples of joint visits undertaken and regular and effective communication between agencies. In one example where progress was slow with concerns that parents were disengaging, there was a prompt response by the Health Visitor and Targeted Early Help practitioner to consider if step up was required. More broadly, it was highlighted that partners are involved in decisions to step up to ensure the right help is provided at the right time to respond to emerging risk.
- In terms of **impact and outcomes** of practice, the audit identified the support put in place via the TAS function and professional tenacity to identify the needs of the child and family, led to much improved relationships between parents and education. In examples where engagement had been limited and services were operating on a non-statutory basis and consent could not be sought, there was clear consideration of the impact and outcomes for the child if support was not provided and the potential for escalation of risk.

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AUDIT FINDINGS - AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- Ensuring that information is shared with partners at the earliest opportunity, is visible on systems to enable **recognition** and understanding of risk, and ensuring awareness of other services involvement with a child and family was an area identified for further development.
- The audit recognised the need for ongoing **assessments** to evidence escalation or improvements in circumstances and ensuring chronology and analysis is captured in records. Seeking and recording the views of parents and/or carers, or the wider family who may not be present in the household was identified as an area for improvement.

- It was recognised that in some environments, obtaining **the Voice of the Child and Family** can present limitations due to the length of time they may be engaged with a service, for example if attending a routine health appointment. Shorter contacts can mean a brief window of opportunity for practitioners to be effective when seeking and capturing the views of children and families. Documenting in records when attempts are made to do so, even if there is a limit to their success, was identified as an area for further consideration.
- The audit considered where parental non-consent within an Early Help environment can limited the progress of **interventions** which are offered when they are not taken up by children and families. Where there is a multi-agency approach in terms of interventions offered, services should consider timeliness and prioritisation, to mitigate parents and children feeling overwhelmed by numerous offers being made at the same time.
- The audit highlighted ensuring there is timely and proportionate **information sharing** when involvement of services is at the Early Help stage. In one example there was a gap in information being shared with a GP where there was no notification on systems of Early Help involvement with the child and it was stepped up, although the involvement of other health services was visible in records.
- In one case where there was increasing non-engagement with services and interventions offered, it was considered that where there is non-engagement with voluntary health services and there is evidence that a child's needs are escalating within safeguarding, how is that then captured and communicated from a systems point of view.

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WHAT WILL WE DO WITH THESE FINDINGS

The WSCP will consider the key learning points from the audit:

- Consider how individual recording systems can proportionately receive information and record children and families being in receipt of Early Help support.
- For practitioners to continue be professionally curious at an Early Help level to ensure broad understanding of the needs of the family and potentially encouraging better engagement with services when operating at a non-statutory level.
- For practitioners to be effective when seeking to capture the voice of the child and family, particularly when the intervention or contact is short: documenting where attempts have been made and the outcome.

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NEXT STEPS

- The findings of the audit have been shared with the WSCP Safeguarding Effectiveness Group (SEG) and JTAI Working Group and key multi-agency actions have been identified for services to implement.
- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service.

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RESOURCES

There are a range of resources to support practitioners in respect of the Early Help offer in Wakefield, the Continuum of Need and training on Professional Curiosity and Challenge on the WSCP website. Visit the below links for more information.

- [Final-Continuum-of-Need-Framework-A5-Leaflet-Version.pdf](https://wakefieldscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Final-Continuum-of-Need-Framework-A5-Leaflet-Version.pdf) (wakefieldscp.org.uk).
- [Professional Curiosity & Challenge page - Wakefield Safeguarding Children](https://wakefieldscp.org.uk/professional-curiosity-challenge) (wakefieldscp.org.uk).
- [Neglect - Wakefield Safeguarding Children](https://wakefieldscp.org.uk/neglect) (wakefieldscp.org.uk).
- [Wakefield Families Together – Wakefield Families Together](https://wakefieldfamilies.com/)