

Brighton & Hove – Helping Children and Families, Threshold Document.

March 2018



● **Welcome and Introduction:**

Welcome to our Brighton & Hove Helping Children and Families Threshold Document 2018-2020. The Threshold Document is part of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Business Plan. The document and associated guidance is required to be in place by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015. This guidance covers expectations and statutory duties upon all agencies to work together to safeguard and protect children and to take measures to ensure that all agencies are working to offer Early Help to prevent matters from getting worse for a child or their family.

Our vision for Brighton & Hove is that children should have the best possible start in life, growing up happy, healthy and safe with the opportunity to reach their potential, with no one left behind.

Most children, young people and families in Brighton & Hove have a good quality of life. However there are some who find life more difficult for a variety of reasons. At different times in their life children, young people and families may need additional help.

In Brighton & Hove the Whole Family Approach to offers of help and support relies upon staff from across all agencies sharing in the core values, knowledge, skills and abilities to engage well with children and families by building relationships which are based upon the strengths within a family. Support needs to be focussed on solutions and needs to be able to motivate to achieve positive change by being aware of risk and protective factors.

This document should be read together with the Brighton & Hove Whole Family Working Strategy, which includes guidance of levels of need and information about our priorities and early help offer.

● Context and Drivers:

1. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 places a statutory responsibility on all partner agencies to work together to identify children who need early help to; reach their developmental milestones, experience emotional well-being and to be safe in their home, school and community.
2. There is national evidence that helping families as early as possible and providing the right support at the right time can stop problems getting worse and help families lead happier and healthier lives. Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years. Effective early help relies upon partners working together to:
 - identify children and families who would benefit from early help;
 - undertake an assessment of the need for early help; and
 - provide services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to significantly improve the outcomes for the child and family.
3. For families with multiple problems an integrated “whole family” approach that recognises and deals with their interconnected problems is most effective. Whole family working means transforming services from a number of unconnected professionals with their own assessments, thresholds and measures to integrated, family-focussed, outcome based working. Whole family working improves outcomes for families and means that the right support is delivered to children & their families to keep them safe and well at the right time. In order that;



Families understand how to get help and feel valued



Families trust the professional they are working with and are able to access a range of support through them.



Families become confident to access services independently including community and voluntary services that meet their needs.



Professionals working with families are able to work across services to deliver support that is needed for the family - the service the family receives is no longer dependent on which agency provides it.



The family's needs and circumstances are captured in one assessment and one family plan, with the family keyworker having access to all of the information that is relevant to provide support to the family.



The family are able to make lasting changes to their lives to improve the outcomes for their children and are more resilient in the future.

4. The LSCB is required to publish threshold document which includes:
 - The process for the Early Help Assessment and the type and level of early help services to be provided.
 - The criteria, including the level of need, for when a case should be referred to local authority children's social care for assessment and for statutory services under:

- Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (Children in Need)
- Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (Reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found in their area is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm).
- Section 31 (Care Orders).
- Section 20 (Duty to accommodate a child), Children Act 1989.

5. The LSCB listens to what children have told us and we incorporate this into the development of our service and aspiration for our children.

Children have told us:

- **it is important for children to get help early so things don't get worse. *'Don't delay in giving me the support I need'*.**
- **it is important for adults to notice when children are worried by something. *'Listen to me'*.**
- **it could change someone's life for the better if they got help.**
- ***'mega important. People need to know what help there is to support them.'***
- **children need to be helped to keep safe and to make good choices and decisions. *'Help me to understand'* & *'Involve me in the decisions that are made about me'*.**
- **Children should be informed of the outcomes of assessments, decisions and reasons when their views have not been acted upon. *'Give me straight answers'*.**
- **To be able to develop stable and supportive relationships to build trust with adults supporting them. *'Be there for me'*.**

6. All agencies need to consider how their offer of support to children and families builds upon their resilience and capacity to improve outcomes.

● Purpose

1. All partners in Brighton & Hove will work together to achieve a shared common purpose:

"We all want all our children and families to do well. We support families through the challenging times and work alongside them to build their capacity to cope with life's difficulties in order to thrive."

'Safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility; everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play

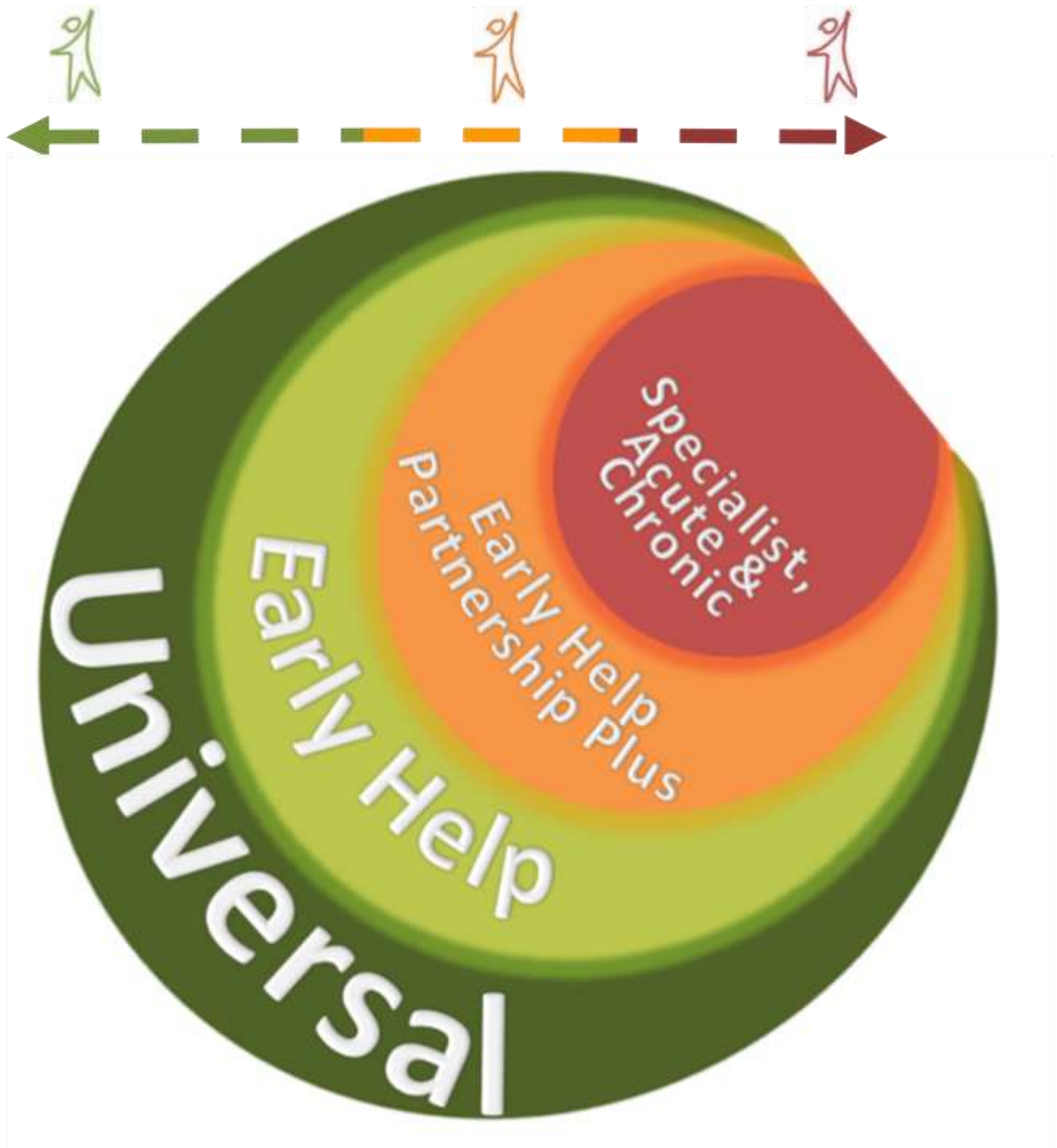
2. The purpose of this document is to provide clear guidance to professionals as to how help should be offered in the first instance, with a focus on families and children being encouraged to find their own solutions, within the context of our work.

3. Professionals should make every contact count and they should know when and how to formally assess and plan for children, when they should access further help and support from other partners and when to refer for specialist services, where the child meets the specialist need as outlined in the threshold framework level of need table.

4. The LSCB ask that all services and agencies sign up to the principles and common purpose outlined in this document.
5. We will know we are making a difference if children and families are enabled to build upon their strengths, find solutions to their needs and access the universal support available to all children and their families.
6. Agencies and services need to be alert to certain additional vulnerabilities that may increase the need for a whole family approach to early help. See our [interactive thresholds guide](#) and our [Whole Family Working Strategy](#) for more information.

- **Threshold – Levels of Need.**

1. The 4 levels of need are summarised below. The organisational model of Universal, Early Help / Early Help & Partnership Plus and Specialist has been developed to illustrate how all children and families will continue to access Universal and Early Help services, even when in need of Specialist support to address acute and chronic needs.



The levels of need are aligned to Threshold Indicators described later in this document.

● Making a Threshold Decision.

1. Brighton & Hove LSCB understand that the needs of children and their families do not always easily fit into a category or a tick box. A child's circumstances can change quickly and over time and a child may move across the levels of need dependent on a number of different variables that are present at any one time.
2. Making a judgement about level of need is not an exact science. This document seeks to provide a degree of clarity and guidance to support a consistent understanding and application of thresholds by professionals from across services and serves to let parents, carers and children know what to expect. The key to identifying a child and family's level of need must always be an evidence based judgment.
3. An assessment provides the evidence that the level of need or threshold has been met. Brighton & Hove uses a 'One' Story' model of assessment and planning across early help and specialist safeguarding services. You can find a copy of the assessment and plan to download on the Threshold Framework. Effective and timely assessment enables professionals and families alike, to understand the type and level of support that each child and their family will require. Working with common tools promotes better joined up services and reduces duplication of information for children and their families.
4. Our aim is to provide support and to develop resilience amongst our families and children at the level proportionate to the assessed needs of the child and their family. An assessment that is updated when needs change is key to ensuring an appropriate and timely response as circumstances change.
5. The combination of needs will need to be considered. Some children may appear to have needs at one level but there is a specific risk factor identified that means that a specialist assessment of risk is required (Level 4). For e.g. a specific incident and a referral to children's social work is needed. Equally there may be circumstances where an indicator for specialist assessment is present but due to the presence of protective factors, such as a willingness to engage in support, it may be most appropriate for the child to receive services at a lower level from adults where relationships are already established.
6. In making a professional judgment about level of need there are a number of key questions that need to be asked. These questions are relevant, regardless of the level you are working at:
 - What are the individual needs and views of each child in the family?
 - What is the evidence of impact on the child, in relation to their health and development or harm/likely harm?
 - What are the risks to the child if things don't change?
 - What is the likelihood of this happening and what would be the level of severity?
 - What have you and/or others done to try to help?
7. When making judgments about level of need and determining whether contact should be made with the Front Door For Families, professionals should seek guidance and support from their supervisor or agency lead for safeguarding. Contact with the Front Door For Families should be supported by a written statement which articulates the concerns and provides information to support a referral being made. Where there is evidence of harm identified and likely significant harm the Front Door For Families should be contacted immediately on **01273 290400**. www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/frontdoorforfamilies

- **Guide to the Levels and Response:**

Level 1: Universal Services.

Description & Response: The majority of children in Brighton & Hove have their needs met by their parents and family members, where they are protected and growing up healthy. Children and families can access services and early support through universal services; a Midwife, health Visitor, School Nurse, Children's Centre, GP and schools are all available within the local community and support is available on-line.

All children and families may need extra support and guidance at some point in their lives. Services are aimed at supporting children and families to find their own solutions and services are likely to signpost them to help within their local community.

Assessment: At this level services may use their own processes to help tailor the services they provide.

Level 2: Early Help.

Description & Response: Children and families can sometimes need more structured and focused help, most likely through one professional or agency in order to prevent needs from escalating. The professional or agency may be able to provide the help that is needed or support the family to identify where they can access the right help and access this. For example welfare rights, debt advice or health issues or parenting strategies etc.

Assessment: This level of support may not require a formal assessment and planning process but services should use the Early Help guidance and assessment to help them understand if support is working to reduce need.

Level 3: Early Help Partnership Plus.

Description & Response: Children and families, at this level, require a more structured plan of support in order to co-ordinate help needed, in order that agreed outcomes can be reached. It might be that support at the Early Help level has not been sufficient to prevent needs from escalating or that needs are reducing from a period of specialist intervention and support. The type and the number of problems faced by a child might be preventing them from achieving and maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development but the concern about the risk factors has not met the threshold for statutory social work intervention.

Assessment: In these circumstances an early help assessment should be undertaken to understand need and to co-ordinate work across agencies in order to best address. The assessment should trigger an early help plan that is co-ordinated by a lead professional who takes responsibility in getting the professional group together to review with the family. With the family's consent the assessment should be logged with the Front Door For Families to be stored confidentially. If accessing support, to reduce need is difficult or challenging the lead professional should make contact with the **Front Door For Families**, and again, with consent request a referral to the Weekly Allocation Meeting. This meeting is a multi-agency forum that reviews need, below the threshold for children's social work,

but requires a targeted early help plan of support and allocates the role of lead professional to partner agencies to take forward delivering support to the child and the family

Level 4: Specialist Services to address Acute & Chronic Need.

Description: A small minority of children and families will need specialist help and support that is led by children's social work or another specialist service (e.g. Tier 3 CAMHS) for those who are most vulnerable, where early help plans have been tried but not able to make sufficient, tangible difference and children are at risk of long term impairment to their health and development and where they are at risk of significant harm or have suffered significant harm.

Definition: Children in Need are defined '...under the CA 1989 as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, without provision of services; or a disabled child'. In these cases a social worker would complete a Strengthening Families Assessment under s.17 of the Children Act 1989. Assessments are consent based.

Definition: Significant Harm is the threshold that justifies intervention into family life and forces all agencies to consider what is in the best interests of the children. Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Emotional Abuse and Neglect are categories of significant harm. Sometimes significant harm is a single traumatic event but more often it is an accumulation of significant events both acute and longstanding over time, for e.g. neglect. All professionals working with children have a role to play in addressing significant harm through cumulative action as often action taken to prevent needs arising in the first place can have a significant impact upon a child's overall outcomes in the long term.

Definition: Harm is the ill treatment or impairment of health and development and as defined in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 it includes witnessing either through sight or sound, the ill treatment of another.

Response: In cases where a child's health and development are being impaired a social worker would complete a Strengthening Families Assessment under **s.17 of the Children Act 1989**. Assessments are multi-agency and consent based.

Where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm the local authority shall make enquiries as considered necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take action to safeguard or promote a child's welfare (Working Together 2015). Agencies are required in both circumstances to contact the Front Door For Families to discuss their concerns and for the Front Door for Families to decide upon the right pathway to support for the child and their family.

Assessment: If a decision is made that confirms suspicion of, or actual significant harm a social work Strengthening Families Assessment will be initiated. A strategy meeting with Police, Health and Education and any other agency required may also be held to consider what needs to happen next to address risk and harm and will consider the need for **s.47**

(CA 1989) enquiries to be made. The s.47 enquiry must consider the need for an **Initial Child Protection Conference** to be convened.

Concerns about maltreatment of a child may be the precipitating reasons for contact to be made to the Front Door For Families or may also arise during the course of completing a social work Strengthening Families Assessment/Child In Need Plan/Child Protection Plan/Child in Care plan. In all circumstances local authority children's social care must initiate enquiries to ascertain what is happening to the child and whether protection is required. On the basis of those enquiries a dynamic risk assessment must be maintained to consider the need for immediate protection, whilst assessments are undertaken, giving regard to children's wishes and feelings.

Public Law Outline (PLO): The Public Law Outline sets out clear procedures for the management of cases that may require the intervention of the Courts in dealing with children's cases. The aim of the PLO is to identify and focus on the key issues and seek to prevent delay in addressing issues for the child and to avoid the need for unnecessary evidence or hearings. Under the PLO those with Parental Responsibility are entitled to limited free legal advice, upon receipt of a letter from the children's social work service.

Section.20 (CA, 1989): Some children who are in need may require accommodation because there is no one with parental responsibility for them or because they have been left on their own or who have been abandoned. The Children Act 1989 places a duty to accommodate such children in need in their area. In these cases a social work assessment will determine whether accommodating the child is with the child's best interests in mind. S.20 accommodation agreements are made with the consent of those who hold Parental Responsibility for the child.

Section 31A (CA, 1989): It may be necessary, if harm is assessed to be sufficient, or a parents capacity is called into question, to take legal action to ensure a child's safety, for e.g. an Emergency Protection Order (EPO – lasts for 7 days) or for an Interim Care Order (CO) or Supervision Order (SO – which last until the Court decides). A social worker may only remove a child from the care of someone with Parental Responsibility through a Court Order or by prior agreement (see s.20 above).

Police Protection (PP): If there are concerns for the immediate safety of a child, to the extent that a child's life is assessed to be in danger the Police may take Police Protection to safeguard the child with immediate effect. PP lasts for 72 hours and in that time children's social work must assess to facilitate a safe exit strategy for the child following the end of PP.

● Risk & Strengths:

1. It is not uncommon for different disciplines and sometimes those within the same a professional agency to have different concepts of the notion of risk and strengths. Our background and professional expertise, in different areas, means that our risk assessments and strength based plans to address them are stronger if we work together to complete them.
2. It is never possible to remove all risk from a child's life but through the process of assessing, understanding and mitigating risk through working with a consistent framework is essential to balancing the needs of children and their families within the wider context of their communities.
3. Our framework to guide you through understanding risk and the impact this has, is a web based document accessed through [this guidance](#). You will see that the same issues occur for children across the levels of need, it is often the cumulative and a worsening situation that will increase a child's chances of escalating through the levels of need. The framework has been completed in consultation with agency partners to help develop a consistent understanding across the partnership to recognise the different risks that exist in a child's life, what level may pose a threat to a child's wellbeing and how these can be managed so that the level of risk can be reduced.
4. The framework is for use by all professionals to provide a consistent model for the assessment, analysis and management of risk reduction. At all levels professionals undertaking assessment, need to consider the child's developmental needs, their parent or carers ability/capacity to meet those needs and the environmental factors that are supporting or preventing progress from being made.
5. Assessment should highlight both the risk factors and the strengths and the and interplay between them, to make a judgement on balance, as to the impact upon the child. It is useful to scale risk on a continuum of 1-10 (1 = risk is severe and 10 = no significant risk). This can be revisited when reviewing plans to help ascertain, as to whether the plan to deliver change is having an impact and to help judge whether the level of risk is increasing (step-up required) or decreasing (step-down required).
6. At all times professionals must use the framework and set it in the context of their knowledge of the family and the child and consider: What are the factors that might increase risk of future harm? What are the factors that may diminish risk of harm? Which of these factors is likely to be most significant for the child? What are the likely outcomes for the child? What needs to change to reduce the level of risk to increase protection?

- **Our Shared Common Purpose:**

Through working together we can make a real difference to the children of Brighton & Hove. We all want all our children and families to do well. We support families through the challenging times and work alongside them to build their capacity to cope with life's difficulties in order to thrive.

Our joined up Whole Family Working will result in:

- Families being supported in a way which feels less risky or stressful to the professional (single agency)
- Professionals having a clear sense of where their role fits and who else is involved and why (multi-agency).
- Families finding their way to better outcomes for themselves and more families are stepping down out of active ongoing support as life stabilises and their capacity to cope strengthens.

- **Further Information:**

- [Threshold Framework: interactive guide](#)
- [Resolution of Professional Disagreements](#)
- [Information Sharing](#)
- [Whole Family Working Strategy](#)
- **Allegations about a member of staff: [Local Authority Designated Officer \(LADO\)](#)**
- [Making a referral to children's social care](#)
- [Brighton & Hove Local Safeguarding Children Board \(LSCB\)](#)