

# Brighton & Hove: Helping Children and Families, Threshold Document.

March 2021



## • Welcome and Introduction:

Welcome to our Brighton & Hove Helping Children and Families Threshold Document 2021-2023. The document and associated guidance are required to be in place under statutory guidance, [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#). 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 and young people live a life free from fear, harm, abuse, and exploitation, enabling every child in every part of the city to achieve their potential.

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 2018](#) (WT 2018), places a statutory responsibility on all partner agencies to focus on children, young Ppeople and families disadvantage as the very centre of what we do and 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 local organisations and agencies working together to:
  - Identify children and families who would benefit from early help
  - Undertake an assessment of the need for early help
  - Provide targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family which focuses on activity to improve the outcomes for the child
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. Whole family working means:
  - A single assessment and family outcomes plan that takes account of the experiences, needs and voices of every family member
  - Have one lead worker for the family, recognised as such by the family and other professionals. The lead worker coordinates the family outcomes plan and the work of other involved professionals
  - Objectives in the family outcomes plan are aligned to six key themes and reflect local strategic priorities

The six key themes are:



Safe communities (community safety, policing, youth offending)



Education and learning (schools, attendance, SEND, disadvantaged groups)



Safeguarding and resilience



Living standards (employment, housing and finances)



Safe relationships (parental relationships, domestic abuse)



Health and wellbeing (physical and mental health)

4. The safeguarding partners should publish a threshold document, which sets out the local criteria for action in a way that is transparent, accessible and easily understood. This should include:
  - 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 a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm)
    - Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 (care and supervision orders)
    - Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (duty to accommodate a child)
  - clear procedures and processes for cases relating to:
    - The abuse, neglect and exploitation of children
    - Children managed within the youth secure estate
    - Disabled children
5. Feedback should be given by local authority children's social care to the referrer on the decisions taken. Where appropriate, this feedback should include the reasons why a case may not meet the statutory threshold and offer suggestions for other sources of more suitable support. Practitioners should always follow up their concerns if they are not satisfied with the local authority children's social care response and should escalate their concerns if they remain dissatisfied.
6. The Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Children Partnership (BHSCP) listen to what children have told us and we incorporate this into the development of our services and aspirations for our children.

Children told us:

- **It is important for children to get help early so things don't get worse** - *With most things in life when they are confronted earlier on it is much easier to tackle. I think it's so important to address issues early on rather than letting them fester and grow into something more serious.*
- **It is important for adults to notice when children are worried by something** - *It's very easy to not be aware of how children are feeling, but it is so crucial that adults and even friends pay more attention to the children around them. Being open with children and genuinely looking out for how they are generally feeling will help a child get through something they are worried about.*
- **It could change someone's life for the better if they got help** - *A lot of societal problems can be traced back to childhood. If people can be there for those children*

*that are struggling for one reason or another, then reaching out can help that child realise they have someone looking out for them. This can then have long standing effects and that child's life can be improved significantly.*

- **Children need to be helped to keep safe and to make good choices and decisions** - *It is truly imperative that children are involved in decision making, this allows them to shape their futures. In addition to this, it can be difficult for a child to determine whether something is safe or unsafe and this is why adults are key, acting as a guiding voice to keep that child from danger.*
  - **Children should be informed of the outcomes of assessments, decisions and reasons when their views have not been acted upon** - *Unfortunately most decisions are taken without a youth perspective and it's important that children understand what those decisions mean for them. This should at least educate them on those decisions and hopefully will also instill a sense of duty to have their voice heard.*
  - **To be able to develop stable and supportive relationships to build trust with adults supporting them** - *At the end of the day we're still children. Inexperienced in certain aspects of life and it's important to have a good relationship with an adult who can support them. Building these stable and supportive relationships empowers them to flourish into a well rounded individual.*
7. All agencies need to consider how their offer of support to children and families builds upon their resilience and capacity to improve outcomes.

## Purpose

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

### **BHSCP vision:**

Children and young people in Brighton & Hove live a life free from fear, harm, abuse and exploitation, enabling every child in every part of the City to achieve their potential.

### **BHSCP values:**

- A child centred approach: for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children.
- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: for services to be effective each citizen, practitioner and organisation should play their part.

9. 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.
10. 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](#).
11. The BHSCP ask that all services and agencies sign up to the principles and common purpose outlined in this document. 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.
12. 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.

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## Threshold – Levels of Need

13. 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

14. The BHSCP 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.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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?
20. 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 the on-line form and 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** or email [FrontDoorforFamilies@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:FrontDoorforFamilies@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or via the [Front Door For Families Online Form](#)

21. If you need assistance in an emergency outside office hours, at the weekend or on a Bank Holiday, contact the Out of Hours Service on 01273 295555. Textphone users should call Freetext 18000 - to contact the emergency relay service using Typetalk.
22. Out of Hours Service Working hours:
  - Bank holidays - 24 hours a day
  - Monday - Thursday 5pm to 8.30am
  - Friday 4.30pm to Monday 8.30am inclusive

## Guide to the Levels and Response

### Level 1: Universal Services

**Description and 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.

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### 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.

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### 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 Strengthening Families 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](#).

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## **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. This can include Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation. All professionals working with children have a role to play in addressing significant harm through cumulative action and contextual safeguarding 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 (WT 2018). 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):** Police protection is an emergency power which enables any police officer to protect a child who is reasonably believed to be at risk of significant harm. The Children Act 1989 section 46 empowers a police officer to remove a child to suitable accommodation or prevent the removal of a child from a hospital or other place in which that child is being accommodated. When these powers are exercised, the child is

considered to be in police protection. Police protection does not give the police parental responsibility and does not, for example, give the police the ability to consent on behalf of the child to a forensic medical examination. No child may be kept in police protection for more than 72 hours.

Decisions relating to police protection are the responsibility of the police but, where possible, should include discussions with children's social care or any other agencies as appropriate (e.g. medical staff). A referral to children's social care must be made when a child has been taken into police protection.

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## Risk and Strengths

23. It is common for different professionals from different disciplines or agencies to have different concepts of the notion of risk and strengths. This means that risk assessments and strength-based plans to address risks are stronger if we work together to complete them.
24. It is impossible to remove all risk from a child's life. However, through the use of a consistent framework to inform the process of assessing, understanding and mitigating risk is essential to balancing the needs of children and their families within the wider context of their communities.
25. [The interactive thresholds framework](#) is a web based document to guide you through understanding and mitigating risk.. You will see that the same issues occur for children across the levels of need. It is often the cumulative and worsening situation that will increase a child's chances of escalating through the levels of need. This framework has been developed in consultation with safeguarding partners. It seeks 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.
26. 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.
27. Assessment should highlight both the risk factors and the strengths and the interplay between them, to make a judgement on balance, as to the impact upon the child. Within social work 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).
28. 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?
29. Increasingly we are seeing that risks posed to children outside of the family unit, referred to as extra-familial harm, can require a different, contextual approach to safeguarding. Parents, carers or guardians can often be doing all they can to safeguard their child however risks posed by peers, social media, organised criminal networks, etc. can continue to increase risk despite the best efforts of those responsible for the child. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge these different risks and to work with parents as partners in a safeguarding context. The [Contextual Safeguarding Network](#), based in the University of Bedfordshire, has developed tools to support this approach including assessments for peer groups, neighbourhood/hot spot locations. This information can be found on the Network's website and is underpinned by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

30. The Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnerships developed local principles to support contextual safeguarding practice and information about this together with resources can be found on the Brighton & Hove Safeguarding Children Partnership [website](#).

## 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](#)
- [Mental Health Threshold Document](#)
- [Brighton & Hove Local Safeguarding Children Partnership \(BHSCP\)](#)