



Tim Loughton MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Sheena Ramsay
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Dear Sheena,

Direction to extend the scope of the trial testing a more flexible assessment processes

As you are aware, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council has been working with officials at the Department for Education to consider how to test a more flexible assessment process with the aim of delivering improved outcomes and focused interventions for children and young people. Knowsley has now agreed to act under a trial scheme that suspends temporarily certain elements of statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.

In addition to the directions given to Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council on 1 March 2011, 13 July 2011 and 30 November 2011, I am directing Knowsley, on behalf of the Secretary of State, under section 7A of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 to operate the scheme set out in the Annex to this letter. This direction will last until 31 March 2012, after which Knowsley will revert to acting under the guidance set out in *Working Together to Safeguard Children* in its entirety. While participating in the trial, Knowsley will continue to act under that guidance as normal except where the requirements of the scheme add to or override it. Evidence from the trial will feed into ongoing consideration of the assessment process.

This direction is given on the basis that Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council continues to meet the conditions set out in Dr Jeanette Pugh's letter of 27 January 2011. This includes the requirement to provide information and evaluation reports and has confirmed local political sign-off for the scheme including the additional flexibilities included in this direction in relation to conflating initial and core assessment processes. This direction is being given to allow Knowsley to test a more flexible assessment process.

You will appreciate that non-compliance with the scheme or with the conditions to which Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council has agreed may result in the directions being revoked. Similarly, if any concerns arise about the safety of vulnerable children in this trial area then the directions may be revoked.

I look forward with interest to reading your evaluation report, and to learning the outcome of your trial. I would be grateful if you would continue to work closely with officials throughout the period of this trial.

Yours ever,
L. Loughton

TIM LOUGHTON

Annex A

Scheme for undertaking assessments for the purpose of Chapter 5 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children*

1. This scheme applies to the structure and timing of assessments of children in need for the purposes of Chapter 5 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children* ("Working Together").

Assessments of children referred to children's social care

2. Where a decision is taken under paragraph 5.34 of *Working Together* to undertake an assessment, the assessment should be carried out according to the guidance provided in *Working Together*, with the exception that a single assessment process should combine and replace the separate and distinct initial and core assessments. The lead social worker should determine the depth and timescale to which the assessment should be carried out.
3. Then lead social worker will keep the progress of the assessment under review, and expedite the assessment or move straight to action if it becomes apparent that the child may be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Decision-making

4. The lead social worker should make the decisions set out above on the basis of their professional judgement, and with a view to ensuring the safety and welfare of the child, minimising delays and providing timely interventions and services that can best meet the child's needs.
5. All decisions relating to timescales and dates should be recorded, with a note made of who made the decision, and the reasons for the decision. These decisions should be reviewed weekly and revised as appropriate; immediate action should be taken if necessary. All decisions will be supported by sufficient supervision and oversight as is necessary to ensure the safety and welfare of the child.
6. All decisions will be taken with a view to ensuring the safety and welfare of the child, minimising delays and providing timely interventions and services that can best meet the child's needs.