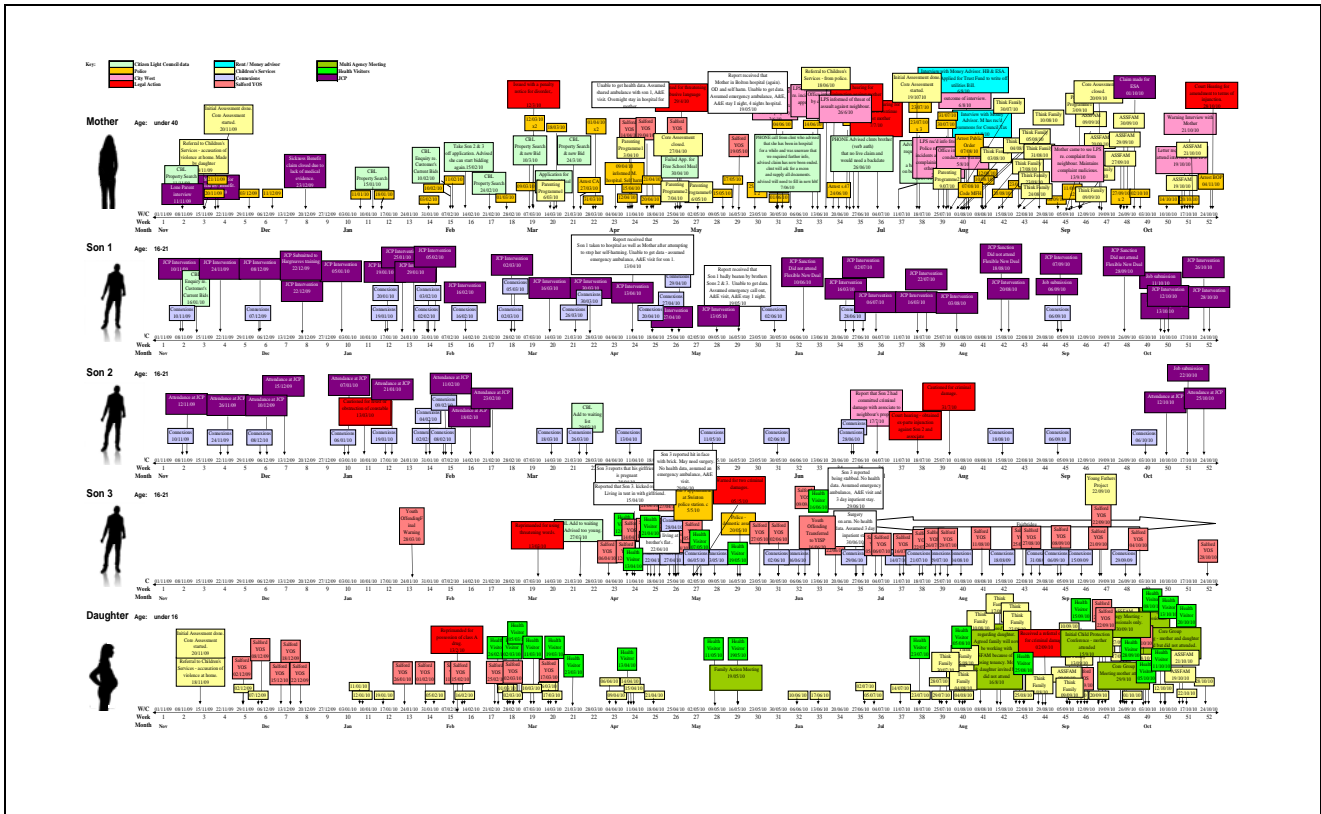


# Community Budgets Political Leadership Group Simplified Assessment Work Strand Scope and initial findings

## Family-led assessment: simpler and leading to more appropriate response

Families with multiple problems have interaction with many different elements of the public, private and voluntary sector. An example of the complexity of their involvement with multiple agencies is illustrated by the picture below which was kindly provided by Salford City Council. The different colours show the engagement of different agencies with a single family. Work in Salford has identified multiple assessments of the families needs, often with no acknowledgement of the family unit. .



Previous initiatives to develop simplified and shared assessments have stumbled because individual agencies start from their own requirements rather than the needs of the family. Each organisation will have its own detailed requirement regarding the information to be collected. Often these requirements will duplicate the information collected by other partners frustrating the families, equally often they will collect information that they regard as essential but that other partners do not require. This is also a major driver of fragmented and duplicated service delivery and costs, including significant amounts of qualified staff time in completing assessments which could be better deployed supporting the delivery of outcomes.

We want all families to live increasingly independent of the State, able to weather the ups and downs of life with resilience. We therefore want all parts of our systems affecting families to build family capability, helping them take ownership and responsibility for improving outcomes, with the support of expert practitioners as necessary.

Being assessed is one of the things which is often done 'to' families, a process they rarely feel in control of and at which they are rarely feel at the centre. We want to see assessment in which families have a key stake, which supports their sense of efficacy and control, and which tells their story, preferably once. We want families with expert support

to contribute to a 'family-led' assessment of need, supporting coordinated and appropriately-sequenced responses from other practitioners and agencies. This work strand will focus primarily on the possibility of making progress on simplified and shared assessment by examining assessment from the perspective of the family rather than the assessing organisations.

### **Suggested Scope**

The work strand will:

- First and foremost involve families in thinking about what simplified assessment might look like, and seek best practice regarding the engagement of families in the assessment of their needs. Learning from Total Place customer insight amongst other examples.
- Identify the different types of assessment that a family may be subject to in order to access the support they need and consider the opportunities for a family centred approach to simplify and share assessment procedures .
- Identify the obstacles to achieving simplified and shared assessment and evaluate whether a family centred approach can overcome these obstacles.
- Gather evidence from families and partner organisations that simplified and shared assessment can realise their assumed benefits .
- Build on the findings and further refine the recommendations of the Munro Report and work closely with the cross Whitehall group that will be responding to the report.
- Work with the four authorities piloting greater flexibility in child protection assessment to share their experience and findings.
- Explore the learning regarding simplified assessment from local authorities' adult services, in particular the engagement of service users and families in their own assessment.
- Open discussions with the Department of Health (community services) and the Home Office (YOT, Police, Probation) on the possibility of establishing common family assessments with social care. To consider other opportunities for similar dialogue.

### **Support from government departments and the Local Government Group.**

Assistance from central government will be required to co-ordinate the work of this strand with that of the four pilot authorities, develop a clear role for the Political Leadership Group in relation to the recommendations of the Munro Report and the Government's response, and to broker conversations regarding the possibilities for simplified and common assessments.

### **Links with finance and data sharing work strands**

The work strands of finance and data sharing of course cut across the simplified assessment strand. Shared assessment arrangements are sometimes thwarted because partners are often not clear regarding information sharing protocols and partner's ICT systems do not facilitate sharing of captured assessment information.

### **Simplified and shared assessment**

It is important to distinguish between simplified assessment and shared assessment.

Simplified assessment is a reduction in the detailed specification of the information to be collected, and an increased reliance on the professional judgement of officers completing the assessment to determine what information is captured. This can be carried by a single organisation reviewing its own procedures. Shared assessment is where different assessment processes share common procedures for collecting information.

Simplified assessment is an important step towards achieving common shared assessment because it can remove the differences between assessment regimes.

The Group may wish to examine the impact of both simplified and shared assessment arrangements.

### **The positive and negative impacts of shared assessment arrangements**

It is hypothesised that having a many different assessment arrangements for a family is:

- makes it difficult to identify those with greatest need.
- frustrates families and increases likelihood of disengagement from services
- A major driver of duplication and cost
- A constraint to integrated service delivery.

It is similarly hypothesised that shared assessment arrangements will:

- deliver better outcomes for families and communities, by providing better informed delivery of support and moving away from reactive to proactive service delivery.
- improve client engagement with services.
- reduce costs.
- release capacity.
- improve shared public sector trust, awareness, and joint-working.

Bradford's Total Place offender management identified the fact that offenders are subjected to between 5-10 assessments during their time within the offender management pathway. Moving to a single assessment for offenders, carried out early in the pathway and then shared between agencies, was estimated to make savings of c£130K per annum solely on offenders from Bradford in a one year period.

The work strand will take a view on the evidence that these and other benefits can be realised.

### **Simplified assessment – Child Protection – the Munro Report**

Professor Munro recommends revising the statutory guidance “Working Together to Safeguard Children” and “The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families”, in particular removing the requirement to complete both an initial and core assessment and allowing more discretion regarding the information to be collected during assessment. Her Report suggests that assessment arrangements which are overly prescriptive in regard to the information they require to be collected have the following impacts:

- force frontline officers to focus on completing the assessment rather than family outcomes.
- create illusion of certainty in circumstances where outcomes cannot be definitely determined.
- emphasise collecting information and describing the client, their family and circumstances rather than analysis of the situation.
- create a passive culture that follows the rules.
- assist inexperienced staff giving simple rules to follow.
- are unable to cope with unusual situations.
- stifle innovation.

### **Existing Local Authority experience of simplified assessment**

The Government have been working with five authorities to explore greater flexibility in regard to child protection assessments and this work strand should look to build on their experience. The authorities are: Cumbria, Knowsley, Hackney, and Westminster. These new arrangements have only been in place for a short time and learning is tentative at present.

Hackney are developing family focused recording systems, and in particular use multi skilled teams – which facilitate a single assessment of each case made in discussion with professionals from a range of specialisms. Child protection conferences fully engage the families and draw on Strengthening Families and Signs of Safety models to clearly identify risks and family strengths,

Authorities in Greater Manchester are rolling out a single joint assessment approach.

Tower Hamlets are also developing a new approach to assessment. This includes the need for the framework to articulate and understand a child's story; enhance the social worker's understanding of the family; and support social work analytical thinking,

judgement and decision making. It explores the interplay between historical factors and the present situation and help families understand the concerns that have been raised. Tower Hamlets is now running a "live pilot" involving about 25 social workers to inform development of the framework.

Bradford are developing a "passported" rather than a common assessment. This involves agreeing shared elements of assessment while leaving partners to add customised elements that meet their individual needs, and agreeing between partners what can be shared. This may require some re-working of definitions in gathering information or data capture, which national agencies will need to agree to.

### **Currently identified difficulties**

There are multiple assessment frameworks in use by local partners with different emphasis and purposes. A particular difficulty is that some approaches aim to collect the information required to determine whether an individual or family meets a predetermined threshold for support. This is an area that might be included within the scope of the work strand.

We are aware of the following different assessment processes. This is almost certainly an underestimate.

#### Childrens' services

- Statement of special educational need.
- The statutory initial assessment for children at risk.
- The statutory core assessment for children at risk.

#### NHS

- Health Visitors.
- Midwives.
- School nurses.
- Community Psychiatric Nurses.

#### Other nationally funded organisations

- Police Domestic Violence – DV1 Form.
- Youth Offending Team.
- Probation Service.
- Work Programme Providers.

#### Schools

- Each School has its own assessment processes.

#### Third Sector

- Voluntary sector partners would each have their own assessment arrangements.
- Benefits advice

### **Extending the remit to cover whole system change**

The authorities charged with taking forward this work strand would like its scope enhanced to cover overall system change. This reflects the ambition of all authorities in regard to Community Budgets. At this stage it is difficult to scope this element of the work. We suggest that the work strand be left open to collect any obstacles identified by partners that do not fit into the four defined work strands.