

Getting it Right for Children & Families

Somerset Multi-Agency
Step-Up, Step-Down Protocol



CONTENTS:

IF YOU ARE
CONCERNED THAT
A CHILD MAY BE
AT RISK OF, OR
MAY BE SUFFERING
SIGNIFICANT HARM
CALL US ON

0300 123 2224

Key Principles	2
Summary	3
Introduction	3
Definitions	
Step-In	4
Step-Up	4
Step Down	5
Completing an Early Help Assessment (EHA)	6
Requesting involvement from Children's Social Care	7
Consent	8
Evidencing Concerns	8
Resolving Professional Differences	9
Examples Of Transition Between Services:	
1: Step-In	10
2: Leading to Step-Up	10
3: Step-Up	10
4: Step-Down	11

USEFUL RESOURCES:

[Resolving Professional Differences form](#)

[Early Help Assessment \(EHA\)](#)

[Effective Support for Children and Families](#)

[Strategy Discussions - practice guidance](#)

[South West Child Protection Procedures](#)

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Partnership working and good communication between agencies provides consistency of support, clarity on expectations and effective safeguarding for children.
- Children's needs are met by the most proportionate (i.e. least intrusive) type of support.
- Services and families respond to children's needs in a timely, proportionate and co-ordinated way.
- Having gained family consent, information and assessment findings are transferable across services - see consent guidance in the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) [Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset](#).
- The child and family's story is not unnecessarily repeated, and should be captured in an [Early Help Assessment \(EHA\)](#), or other service specific assessment.
- Assessment and planning is not duplicated by different agencies.
- The **Step-Up** and **Step-Down** process is acted upon in a timely manner and there is no gap in service provision to families. This protocol ensures that families do not 'bounce' between services.
- Practitioners are open, explicit and transparent when there is need to resolve disagreement or professional differences (see [Resolving Professional Differences Protocol](#)).
- Early Help should happen as soon as possible when additional needs emerge to prevent problems from becoming entrenched or escalating. This means at any stage of a child's life, not just in the early years.
- Early Help is underpinned by universal services to identify the need for support at the earliest stage for those families who may need it.
- The development of an effective Early Help offer is the responsibility of all strategic partners, and this responsibility is shared with families and their communities.
- All families will have access to co-ordinated Early Help corresponding with need as soon as additional support is identified. This support should be personalised, multi-agency, evidence-based and embedded within a whole family approach. Children and young people in those families will be supported to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.
- Lack of engagement by a family or failure to keep appointments is not a reason to **Step-Out** of, or to end, a Team Around the Family (TAF) process, and does not automatically equate to requiring a **Step-Up**. Where there is a lack of engagement there should be a review of the Early Help Assessment (EHA), referring to the Effective Support for Children and Families document to assess whether the needs of the family have escalated, or if an alternative approach is required.
- Families will become more resilient and develop capabilities to prevent and resolve problems themselves.

SUMMARY

This protocol describes the application of **Step-Up** and **Step-Down** mechanisms across Somerset to ensure a seamless journey for children, young people and their families across all services. It also describes processes where services may **Step-In** to families' lives as their needs change.

Good practice requires all practitioners working with children, young people and their families to be familiar with these approaches so that children do not fall between services when there is a reduced or increased need. Instead, children are held safely in the transition from one service to another. Those agencies involved should maintain and promote a strengths-based approach to working with families to help them identify solutions to the challenges they face.

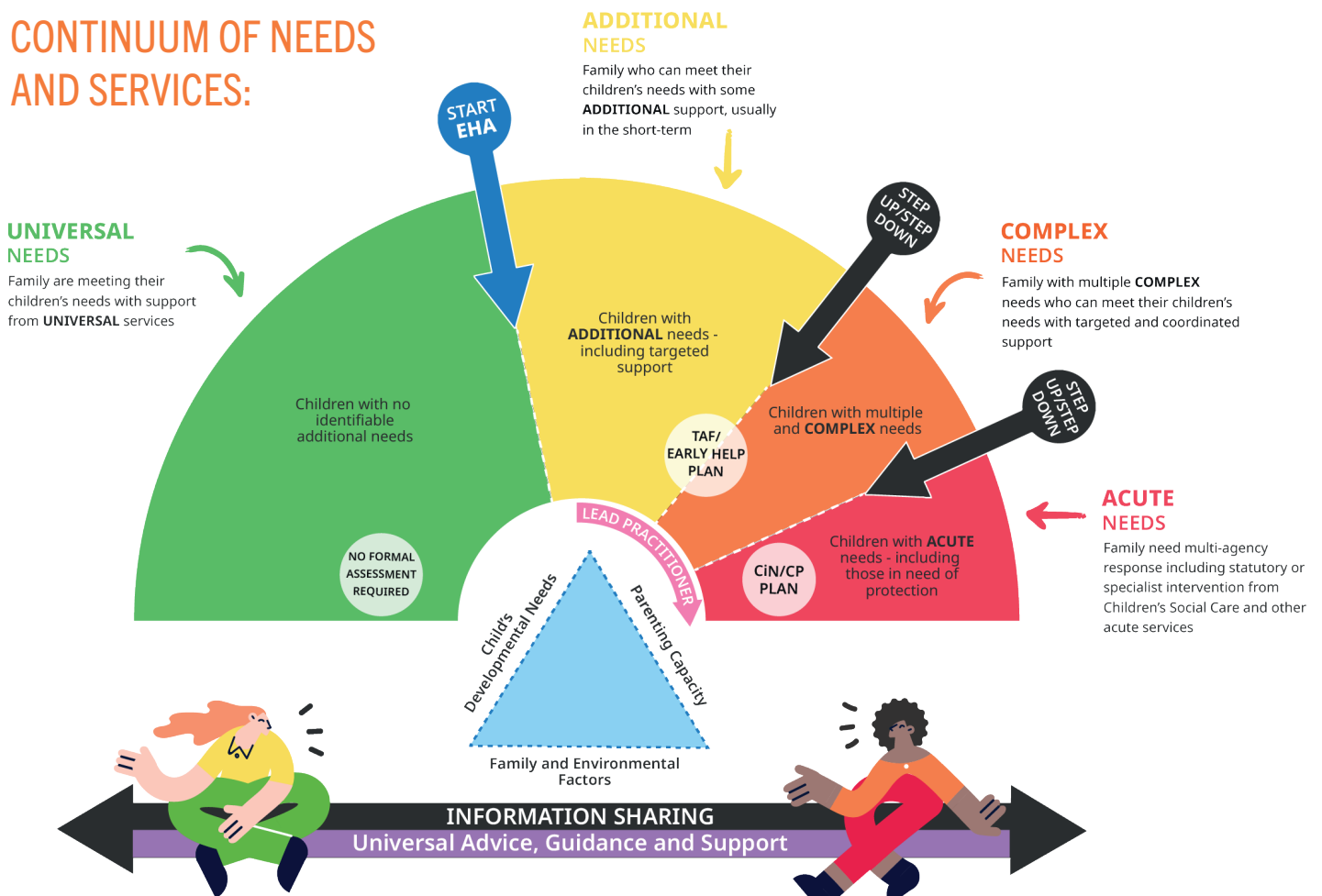
This protocol should be read in conjunction with the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) [Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset](#).

Whilst this guidance provides an outline of standard practice, the protocol does not apply to emergency situations, or where alternative internal processes have been agreed.

INTRODUCTION

A child's journey through universal, additional, complex and acute needs is one that all partners and families wish to ensure is as smooth and time limited as possible. The **Step-Up** and **Step-Down** process is intended to support children via universal and additional services as far as possible by ensuring early intervention is provided in a timely manner, and any **Step-Up** to more complex/specialist provision is only agreed when a child's needs cannot be met at their current position on the continuum of need.

CONTINUUM OF NEEDS AND SERVICES:



DEFINITIONS

STEP-IN

Step-In is when an additional service is consulted to meet an identified need in a **Team Around the Family** (TAF) action plan, and the service is asked to join the existing process. This could be any service across the children's partnership which may be able to provide advice or support.

The **Lead Practitioner** will ensure that the service **Stepping-In** is provided with all relevant information to make an informed decision on the best course of action, with all agencies referring to the SSCP [Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset](#). It is important to remember that an agency Stepping-In does not necessarily mean the child and family's needs have changed.

STEP-UP

Step-Up can occur at various points across the child's life. **Step-Up** describes the process of supporting children and families when additional, escalating need occur and outcomes are not being met, despite planned intervention from Universal, Additional and/or Complex Needs services (Early Help).

It is important that when professionals have concerns about children that they speak to parents/carers and the children about those concerns and that these concerns are shared and visible to any relevant agencies.

Occasionally, some children can require support for a single need (for example housing or debt), this issue in isolation may not require an Early Help Assessment (EHA) to be completed. If however, you consider that a child/family needs are growing and amount to more than one single need and require additional support, it is appropriate to discuss this and complete an [Early Help Assessment \(EHA\)](#) to identify the needs and appropriate support.

If requesting involvement of another service listed on the Early Help Assessment (EHA), the assessment, including current plan of support should be completed and submitted using the contact email address for that service (generated automatically on the EHA) to ensure that children and families get help at the earliest possible opportunity to prevent current needs for escalating.

STEP-UP TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE DUE TO CONCERNS THAT A CHILD IS AT RISK OF SIGNIFICANT HARM:

If there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and immediate action is required to safeguard them practitioners should call Somerset Direct on **0300 123 2224**, or **999** if there is immediate risk to the child.

Following this an Early Help Assessment must be completed and submitted to SDInputters@somerset.gov.uk

If you are unsure of the best action to take, or need assistance completing an Early Help Assessment (EHA), please contact the Consultation Line on **0300 123 3078**.

STEP-DOWN

Step-Down describes the process that occurs when challenges experienced by a child, young person and their family have been addressed, the objectives within the plan for the family have been met and the identified and needs have reduced such that they can be managed by targeted or universal services.

Step-Down is a crucial facet of practice to prevent re-escalation and re-referral. It is important that practitioners work together to develop a plan that will sustain positive progress to improve outcomes for children.

When families are **Stepped-Down** from a service, it is good practice to ensure that the continuing plan is agreed through a **Team Around the Family**. This will ensure that everyone is clear about the plan to support the family in the future.

Best practice indicates that a plan devised through the **Team Around the Family** should have the following components:

- **Positive recognition of the progress achieved by the family.**
- **Clear actions and accountabilities, with timescales.**
- **Clear descriptors of circumstances where a Step-Up may again be required.**
- **A review date/date of next Team Around the Family.**
- **Be devised with family and all agencies currently or proposed to be involved.**



COMPLETING AN EARLY HELP ASSESSMENT (EHA):

Discuss the EHA and process with the family unless you are making a child protection referral where you feel obtaining consent places the child at greater risk



Establish which other agencies are working with the family from speaking with them to triangulate information to complete your assessment



Universal Needs

No need for an EHA unless additional needs are emerging and EHA required as preventative assessment.

Store on own agency file.



Additional Needs

If joint agency response, share EHA with consent with that agency and update the EHA together with the family.

*Consider TAF



Complex Needs

Lead Practitioner to be identified, TAF to be arranged and completion of joint EHA with the family. Shared ownership of actions agreed.



Acute Needs

Please refer to diagram: Requesting Involvement from Children's Social Care



The EHA is both an ongoing assessment tool and a request for involvement for other services.

During discussions with partner agencies and in the Team Around the Family (TAF), responsibility needs to be agreed as to who will make the request to another service for ongoing support and intervention.

The EHA should also be used when requesting a Step-In from a listed service (EHA section 9). When requesting a Step-In the date, time and location of the meeting must be included.*

All agencies have a responsibility to store the EHA in line with their own agency procedures.

* Services not listed on the EHA (section 9) should be contacted directly to discuss the Step-In request.

REQUESTING INVOLVEMENT FROM CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE:

**IF YOU ARE UNSURE CONSULT WITH YOUR AGENCY
SAFEGUARDING LEAD OR CALL THE CONSULTATION LINE ON:**

0300 123 3078

CHILD PROTECTION ENQUIRY

Is there reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm?

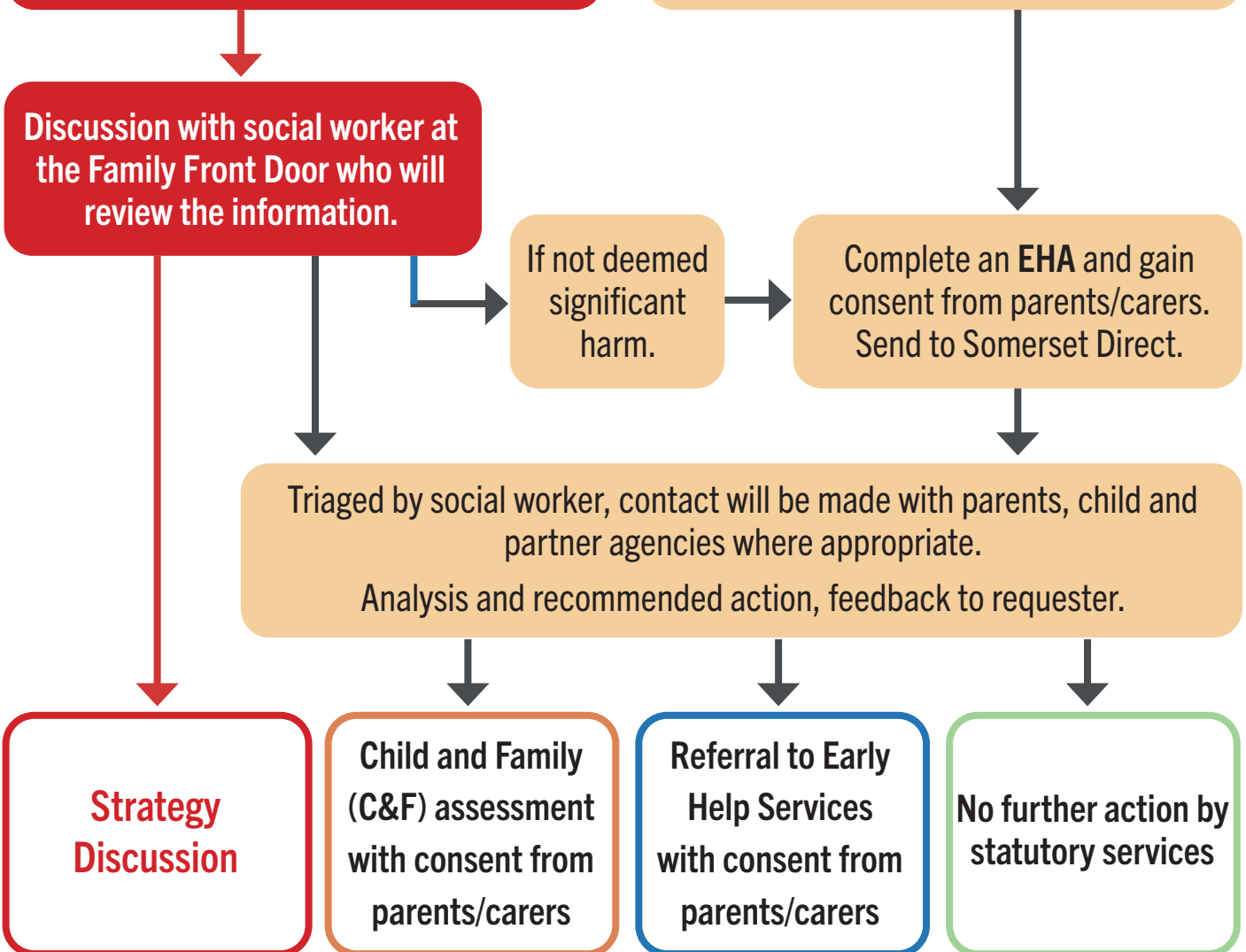
CALL Somerset Direct on 0300 123 2224 or 999 if there is immediate risk to the child.

* Follow up EHA within one working day.

CHILD IN NEED

Is the child unlikely to achieve, maintain or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining a reasonable standard of health or development?

Is their health or development likely to be significantly impaired without the provision of such service?



CONSENT

All practitioners should obtain informed parental consent when they wish to seek information or share information with other agencies, or request the involvement of another agency, unless if doing so would:

- place a person (the individual, family member, worker or a third party) at increased risk of significant harm (if a child) or serious harm (if an adult);
- prejudice the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime - this is likely to cover most criminal offences relating to children;
- lead to an unjustified delay in making enquiries about allegations of significant harm (to a child) or serious harm (to an adult).

Failing to seek consent in order to preserve a professional relationship with a family is not a valid reason to demonstrate open and transparent practice when seeking to share information.

Where consent is not sought the decision and rationale should be clearly recorded on the child's file, both of the agencies records and the Early Help Assessment (EHA).

For further guidance on consent please refer to the SSCP [Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset](#).

EVIDENCING CONCERNS

When completing an Early Help Assessment (EHA), and considering requesting the involvement of another service, it is important to remember that decisions are made on the information provided. Due to this it is vital to be clear and explicit about what your concerns are, why you have those concerns, what has already been put in place to support the child/family, and what the outcome of this has been.

In order to evidence concerns be clear about what is opinion and what is fact, and avoid using vague terms in isolation, such as 'worried', 'unsuitable' or 'inappropriate' without explaining exactly why. For example, stating that you are worried because the home is unsuitable for a young child could mean that there is not a garden, it is overcrowded, or it may mean that the condition of the home poses an immediate and direct risk to the child, so be clear by stating the reasons behind the concerns.

The SSCP [Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset](#) guidance must always be used when assessing the needs of a child/family and when you have identified that areas require a **Universal, Additional, Complex** or **Acute** response utilities the descriptors and be clear about why you feel this is the most accurate descriptor based on your knowledge and involvement.

If you have concerns relating to specific needs, such as neglect, child exploitation or domestic abuse then tools and resources are available to you to explore these concerns further and use these alongside the Early Help Assessment (EHA) in order to evidence the exact areas of need, as well as the existing strengths.

Early Help Plans are also essential in evidencing not only what support has already been put in place to support a child/families need, but to clearly inform others of how long these needs have been present, what the outcomes of the actions put in place have or haven't been and the reasons for this. This is critical in informing and targeting further intervention as well as demonstrating the journey already taken with a family and the reason a family may need to **Step-Up** or **Step-Down** at this time.

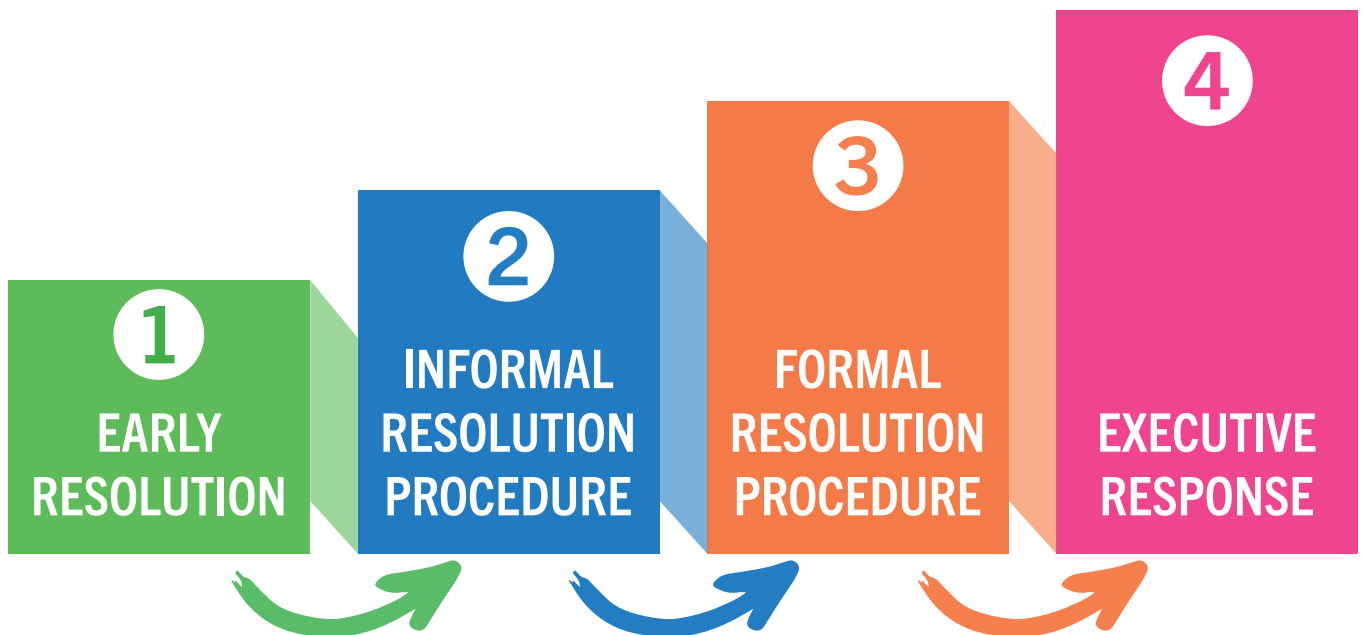
RESOLVING PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCES (RPD)

There will be times when there are differences of opinions about how best to support a child and family, and the intervention required by different agencies.

In the first instance, attempts should be made to resolve differences using the [Resolving Professional Differences Protocol](#) (Steps 1 & 2 - informal) within agencies to seek the best outcome.

If agreement is not reached and resolution of differences become 'stuck' then the [Resolving Professional Differences Form](#) (Step3 – formal) should be completed in line with the Resolving Professional Differences Protocol guidance.

RPD 4 STAGE PROCESS:



EXAMPLES OF TRANSITION BETWEEN SERVICES:

EXAMPLE 1: STEP-IN

A **Parent and Family Support Advisor (PFSA)** for a school has been working with a family for six months. They are concerned that advice and support being offered is difficult for the family to sustain, and is concerned about the impact this is having on the child.

Initially the **Parent and Family Support Advisor (PFSA)** seeks consent from the family and discusses their involvement at a **Team Around the School (TAS)** meeting, where some additional suggestions on how best to support the family are provided.

Two months after the **Team Around the School (TAS)** the PFSA remains involved with the family but feels that the intervention is still not progressing, and so sends a request for a **Step-In** to the **Early Help Hub** and a **Family Intervention Service (FIS)** representative attends the next **Team Around the Family (TAF)** meeting. At the meeting the practitioners consider the **SSCP Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset** document and agree that the family's needs are still being met.

The **Family Intervention Service (FIS)** worker offers advice but the conclusion is that there is no current role for the service. It is identified however that some specific support from **Citizen Advice** to help review and manage debts would help resolve some of the difficulties the family are facing. The plan for the family is reviewed and updated and a date set for the next **Team Around the Family (TAF)** meeting.

EXAMPLE 2: STEP-IN LEADING TO STEP-UP

A **Team Around the Family (TAF)** meeting is ongoing for a family where there has been domestic abuse.

The practitioners working with the family are concerned that the incidents of domestic abuse are increasing even with intensive support. The team of practitioners agree that the family would benefit from a **Step-In** from Children's Social Care to offer advice and consider whether social work input is required.

A social worker is booked to **Step-In** to the next **Team Around the Family (TAF)** meeting. The attending social worker agrees that there is additional support required from social care for the family, and the families needs are **Stepped-Up** to Children's Social Care to complete a **Child and Family (C&F) Assessment**.

EXAMPLE 3: STEP-UP

Consent is gained for a 14-year-old child to be discussed at a **Team Around the School (TAS)** meeting due to concerns about attendance, emotional health and wellbeing and parental mental health.

All practitioners at the meeting agree that concerns are continuing to increase even though

targeted support is in place. The practitioners consider the **Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset** guidance and agree that need within the family have escalated and **Family Intervention Service (FIS)** is identified as the appropriate service to work with the family.

The **Lead Practitioner** for the family discusses with the parents the identified needs before holding a **Team Around the Family (TAF)** meeting with the family and current involved practitioners and gains consent to submit an **Early Help Assessment (EHA)** to the **Early Help Hub** requesting **Family Intervention Service (FIS)** support.

EXAMPLE 4: STEP-DOWN

A social worker has recently completed a **Child & Family (C&F) Assessment** due to concerns relating to domestic abuse perpetrated by a mothers partner.

During the **Child & Family (C&F) Assessment** period the mother ends the relationship and her now ex-partner has moved out of the family home, resulting in the original risks to the 7-year old children being significantly reduced.

It is identified and agreed with the mother that there would be some benefit to some ongoing support to the family from a **Parent Family Support Adviser (PFSA)** to help both the child with their behaviour at school, and the mother to help sort out some of the financial difficulties and the parenting challenges that she is currently facing.

The social worker contacts the PFSA prior to completion of the **Child & Family (C&F) Assessment** where the assessment and proposed ongoing action plan is discussed and they agree on the **Step-Down**. Following this discussion the social worker finalised the **Child & Family (C&F) Assessment**, including the agreed actions.

Following this the social worker convenes a **Team Around the Family (TAF)** meeting with the mother, the father, PFSA and Head of Year of the school where there is a clear handover of information which includes the contents of the **Child & Family (C&F) Assessment** and sharing of the **C&F Action Plan** to support the families ongoing additional needs.

At the **Team Around the Family (TAF)** the Head of Year suggests some additional support from the school **Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)** would be helpful and this is included alongside the C&F Action Plan to form the **Early Help Action Plan**.

Due to the previous concerns relating to the mothers ex-partner, the **Early Help Action Plan** also includes **contingency planning** which states that should the relationship with the ex-partner begin again and there is a further domestic abuse incident then the PFSA should submit an **Early Help Assessment (EHA)** to Somerset Direct to **Step-Up** again to Children's Social Care.

The PFSA takes their own minutes at the meeting, which forms the first **Team Around the Family (TAF)** review and ongoing **Early Help Action Plan**.



Somerset Safeguarding
Children Partnership

This publication has been produced by the
Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership

www.somersetsafeguardingchildren.org.uk

Published: March 2023