

Multi-agency audit exploring the experience of children and families who are re-referred to Isle of Wight Children's Social Care

Multi-agency audit examining the multi-agency response to children who have been re-referred to Children's Social Care since the island Children's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) was established, where the outcome was:

- no further action
- referred to early help
- referred to children's social care for a child and family assessment under section 17 or section 47

The audit was undertaken in June 2025 by members of the Performance and Quality Assurance (PQA) subgroup of the Isle of Wight Safeguarding Children Partnership (IOWSCP).

Summary of key learning for effective practice

Plans and assessments

- **Capture of children's voices.** Effective practice places children's lived experiences at the heart of assessment and planning. All assessments and plans should consider what children say, what they don't say, their body language, how they present. Consider using tools such as the [day in my life tool](#).
- **Use multi-agency chronologies** to prevent incident-based responses, supporting a holistic understanding of a child's lived experience over time, the impact and outcomes of previous interventions and to identify the impact of cumulative harm or historical patterns.
- **Multi-agency Assessments and joint visits.** Support effective information sharing, promotes a fuller understanding of the child and families circumstances and encourages greater professional curiosity and shared analysis.
- **Whole-family needs in assessments.** (i.e. child and family assessments, Early help assessments). This should include all the children in the family and seek to understand

parental factors that can increase risks and vulnerabilities and parenting capacity i.e. parents with complex needs and disabilities, such as emotional wellbeing, mental and physical health, and factors such as domestic abuse, substance misuse and parents' own adverse childhood experiences.

- **Purposeful planning and intervention.** There must be a shared understanding for professionals and the family of the change(s) to be achieved, including who is responsible, what needs to happen, and by when. Progress should be broken down into small, manageable steps, with all plans incorporating SMART goals - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. These goals and steps towards them, should be co-created with the family to ensure clarity, collaboration, and shared ownership throughout the process.
- **The Child's Experience of Education in Assessments.** Consider the child's educational experience in every assessment and plan, including their current attendance and engagement. This approach recognises school participation as a protective factor. Where relevant, consider previous educational settings, particularly if there have been multiple placements, as this can highlight patterns of transition, disruption, or stability that are important to understand the child's overall experience and needs.
- **Support During Key Transitions.** Transition points should be considered when planning the end of a period of support - i.e. carefully considering the impact of closing plans prior to or during transitions such as changing schools or setting/ school phases/year group moves, changes in service provision (e.g. mental health), house moves, and transitions to adulthood/adult services. Revise decisions to close where needed.
- **Recognise and respond to Children as Victims of Domestic Abuse in their own right.**
- **Avoid stepping down children and families to Early Help just before extended school holidays,** especially if school staff are the lead professional. Transitions to Early Help should be carefully timed to ensure continuity of support. Consider the child's and family's needs during periods when school-based professionals may not be accessible.

Multi-agency working

- **Professional Curiosity and Triangulation.** Maintain professional curiosity and triangulate information. Engage in honest, open conversations with families, maintaining "respectful uncertainty." Don't rely solely on information provided by family members, as this can lead to over-optimism. Triangulating key information through multiple sources helps ensure a fuller understanding of the child's circumstances. Professionals must

build trusting relationships with families offering both support and challenge when needed.

- **Strengths-based approach.** Work collaboratively with families to identify and build on what is working well - within the family unit, their wider network, and the community. This includes recognising and responding with families to the challenges they face.
- **Professionals' Meetings for Decision-Making.** Use professionals' meetings to support effective decision-making in addition to routine planning meetings. These can provide a space for multi-agency collaboration when it may not be appropriate to involve children or families directly. These meetings enhance quality assurance, enable effective information sharing, and foster professional curiosity. They are particularly useful in cases involving concerns around compliance, hostility, or resistance, and can help avoid unnecessary re-referrals - especially when a child and family assessment recommends a Child in Need plan but the family declines to engage.
- **Contextual Safeguarding, Child Exploitation and Extra Familial Harm.** This means recognising and responding to risk outside the home - harm that may arise within the community or peer group, including online harm and sexual and/or criminal exploitation. It is important that the multi-agency workforce is familiar with and able to complete a [CERAF](#) (Child Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework) if there are concerns around child exploitation and to ensure appropriate action is taken. [Guidelines for completing a CERAF](#)
- **Referral Outcomes and Escalation: Practitioners are reminded**
 - If you would like to find out the outcome of a child's referral to MASH, please phone MASH with your query. Do not submit a further referral.
 - If you disagree with the outcome of a referral or the closure of an assessment or plan, the [Working Together to Resolve Professional Differences](#) HIPS procedure should be used.
- **Early intervention and prevention** are essential pillars of safeguarding practice. Identifying and responding to concerns at the earliest opportunity can reduce the likelihood of issues escalating and requiring statutory involvement, preventing cumulative harm and re-referrals. When professionals work together to offer timely, coordinated help, they not only improve outcomes for children and families and can prevent the need for statutory social care intervention. It's about building protective factors around families - before challenges become crises.

Reminder: When a family are receiving Early Help support and their needs are escalating, please consult the Isle of Wight Early Help Team to ensure that all preventative actions are in place [Early Help and Prevention for professionals](#)

- **Lead Practitioner Role.** In early help for children and families consider who is the most suitable lead practitioner. [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) notes that the early help lead practitioner role could be held by a range of professionals/volunteers providing they have the skills, knowledge, competence, and experience to work effectively with the child and their family. The lead practitioner co-ordinates the partner activity around the family, ensures the assessment and the family plan responds to the needs identified, and works with the family co-produce the plan.

The Isle of Wight Council offers [fully funded face to face Early Help training](#) to any professional or volunteer working with children and families. The course aims to improve confidence in the Early Help processes and improve multi-agency working, whilst building understanding around the Isle of Wight Safeguarding Thresholds, the tiers of Early Help support, the Lead Professional role, completing assessments, Team Around the Family meetings, and the Sentinel data system.

Supporting Resources

- [Inter-Agency Referral Form \(IARF\)](#)
- The [Hampshire and IOW Threshold Chart](#) for assessing level of risk/concern.
- The IOWSCP provides a free, multi-agency, [training](#) programme for professionals who work with children and families on the Isle of Wight.
- Resources to support [working with children with additional needs \(including complex needs and disabilities\)](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)
- [Day in my life tools](#): individual documents for - Unborn baby, Baby, Preschool child, Child, Child with disabilities, Adolescents - to support gaining an overview of a child's daily lived experience
- [HSCP and IOWSCP Practice Principles for Chronology Template](#)
- [Professionals meeting guidance](#)
- [Threshold Pathway Guidance](#)

Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (HIPS) Procedures

- ➔ [Child protection Section 47 Enquiries Procedure and Strategy Discussions](#)
- ➔ [Safeguarding Children as Victims of Domestic Abuse](#)
- ➔ [Working Together to Resolve Professional Differences \(Escalation and resolution\)](#)

Hampshire and IOW Safeguarding Children Partnership Toolkits

Wide range of [IOWSCP toolkits](#) developed to aid professionals to better understand and respond to safeguarding concerns, including:

- ➔ [Safeguarding Adolescents toolkit](#)
- ➔ [Safeguarding Infants toolkit](#)
- ➔ [Adopting a family approach toolkit](#)
- ➔ [Hampshire and Isle of Wight Neglect toolkit](#)
- ➔ [Child Exploitation toolkit](#)
- ➔ [Child Sexual Abuse toolkit](#)
- ➔ [Understanding Unidentified Adults toolkit](#)
- ➔ [Learning from reviews toolkit](#)