

Integrated Working Processes

Lead Professional Guidance for Practitioners

The Lead Professional role has been in use in Bolton to support families, since 2006.

This guidance intends to support practitioners undertaking the Lead Professional role and can be used by line managers when supporting their staff in supervision. It should not, however, replace training and practitioners who are likely to undertake the Lead Professional role as part of their work should access training as early as possible. Lead Professional training is delivered by the Safeguarding Board Multi-Agency Training Programme. Details of training courses can be accessed by contacting the Training Shared Service Centre on 01204 337600 or by accessing the training programme from the website: www.boltonsafeguardingchild.org.uk

Why do we need Lead Professionals?

Children, young people and parents have told us that they often feel 'flooded' by the number of professionals involved in their lives and that they often have to attend a lot of long meetings where they receive conflicting advice. They often undergo multiple assessments and have to repeat the same information many times. They tell us that they do not know who to speak to and don't feel that they get the right support at the right time.

Practitioners tell us that they get frustrated because they don't have essential information needed to do their job properly and often find that they are doing the same work as other services. They are not always clear what is being asked of them and what their work is intended to achieve.

What are the benefits of having a Lead Professional?

The Lead Professional can make sure that clear communication with children, young people and families is agreed. They help to put one clear plan in place where families' views are central and they check to make sure progress is being made. This means that families are kept involved and informed, which means that they are more likely to agree to the plan and stick to the changes that they want to make. Others involved in the plan will be clear about their responsibilities and know that they will not be wasting their time doing the same as someone else.

What does the Lead Professional do?

The Lead Professional works with the young person and their family by using an assessment to identify their strengths and needs as well as the problems that may be causing concern. Together they work out what needs to change, how this will happen and what it would be like if the problems were sorted out. By doing this a plan is formed so that everyone is clear what they are doing and what is expected from the outcome of everyone's actions.

This is not a new job title or role, but part of the work that everyone working with children, young people and families may do as part of their work.

When a meeting is needed with the family and other services, the Lead Professional will make sure this happens. This meeting will be a Child Action Meeting as outlined in the Framework for Action, whether it is an informal meeting with the parents, child and another agency or a more formal meeting called to bring a range of professionals together. The Lead Professional will make sure that everybody involved shares relevant and up to date information and agrees the priorities for actions. By the end of the meeting, it is important that the family agree to the action plan and that each service are clear what they will be delivering and that it doesn't duplicate with others. This will be recorded on the Early Help Assessment and Action Plan.

However, it is impossible to expect the Lead Professional to support the family at a meeting, chair and take notes of the meeting. All other workers at the meeting are expected to provide support to the Lead Professional to ensure that the meeting is effective.

The Lead Professional should then continue to deliver their part of the action plan. They should also meet with the family and/or young person to discuss progress and identify any new changes or difficulties. They will agree with the young person or their family when a new service needs to get involved or another meeting is needed. By doing this they will be co-ordinating the plan.

Who is the best person to be the Lead Professional?

There is no clear answer to this question, other than that it should be someone who is already working with the child, young person or their parents and knows them well or is about to get involved and play a major role in supporting them. Often, the worker who works with a child or young person to complete an Early Help Assessment starts off by taking the Lead Professional role, but this can change when other practitioners get involved. The best person to take this role is usually agreed at Action Meetings. Young people and families should be asked who they would like the Lead Professional to be.

What is a deputy Lead Professional?

Experience has shown that agreeing a deputy Lead Professional is helpful; this person doesn't share the role, but will pick it up if the Lead Professional was on long-term leave or absent for any reason. Again, it is someone who is already involved with the family and delivering actions on the plan. Agreeing a deputy would also be useful when a Lead Professional from a statutory service finishes their involvement with a child or family but the action plan is on-going. The deputy would then take on the role of Lead Professional or cover it until someone new was agreed.

Who takes the role of Lead Professional in the statutory arena?

Looked-after children	Social worker
Children subject to child protection plan	Social worker
Child in Need	Social worker during assessment phase. Once decision has been made regarding provision of services, this could be a social worker; however other workers may be more appropriate depending on what services are being delivered.
Looked after child	Named social worker
Care Leaver	Social worker
Adoption Cases	Social worker
Child or young person with Special Educational Needs	SENCO may be most appropriate. However, it may be appropriate for someone else to take the lead role when the action plan identifies that a range of services from outside the school setting are needed. During Year 9, for pupils with statements, the personal adviser may take on responsibility for overseeing the delivery of the transition plan and is likely to be the lead professional.
Child or young person with complex disabilities or health needs	Where a 'keyworker' has been identified, they will take the role of Lead Professional
Child or young person with mental health needs.	Where a Care Programme Approach (CPA) is being followed, the care co-ordinator is the lead professional.
Young people on community orders or sentences	YOT supervising officer, unless the young person is Looked After or subject to a child protection plan. However, it should be noted that some orders are short-term (e.g. 12 weeks). A deputy LP should be identified who will be likely to continue the role when the YOT's work finishes as it is likely that these young people will need an action plan to be on-going beyond this time.

How many cases should a practitioner manage as the Lead Professional?

This will vary from job to job and workers will need to discuss this with their managers. For some workers, the Lead Professional role and coordinating action plans is a clear part of the

everyday role. For others, it will be less so but they may still be the best person to be the Lead Professional due to the relationship they have with the family, or the frequency of how often they see the child or their family.

Many people report that they are concerned about how much time will be needed to undertake the Lead Professional role. However evidence suggests that if Integrated Working is properly embedded across all services, workers should have some time freed up. If the Early Help Framework has been used, workers will not have to gather information that already exists and where good action plans are in place everyone will know what is expected of them they will not be duplicating what another worker is doing. Lead Professionals should discuss caseloads regularly during supervision with their line manager.

What if the Lead Professional is going to be on extended leave and will not be available for a few weeks?

Where possible, this should be planned for as much as possible. A deputy Lead Professional should be appointed from those who are already involved with the family to ensure that the plan continues without drift or delay. Responsibility for coordinating the plan and being the key contact with the family will move to the deputy Lead Professional. All others involved should continue to deliver their part of the action plan and report to and support the deputy.

What support can Lead Professionals expect?

Workers taking on the Lead Professional role should expect support from their line managers. This could be provided informally on a day to day basis or more formally through supervision, where cases could be reviewed, training and development needs identified and courses booked. Where Lead Professionals are finding difficulties in getting workers from other services to undertake their part of the action plan, or are not keeping them informed, line managers should support by trying to resolve difficulties with the managers of other services. Clear escalation routes should be used.

The Lead Professional should expect to be supported by other workers involved with the child, as part of the Early Help group. This should include attendance and support with meetings as described earlier and keeping the Lead Professional informed of how their part of the action plan is going. Others involved with the family should take responsibility for agreeing a deputy Lead Professional who will take over if the Lead Professional is not able to continue the role for any reason.

The Lead Professional is the key contact with the family and so should be kept informed about any new problems that may have arisen and what has been done about them.

Sometimes families have specific or complex problems that need the involvement of a range of specialist services. The Lead Professional needs to feel that they can support the child, young person and their family without feeling that the issues are too serious or outside of their particular expertise. The Lead Professional should be able to call on specialist workers to provide support with advice and information.

Resources for the Lead Professional role

Lead Professional training is provided from the Safeguarding Multi-Agency Training Programme. Other courses also compliment this training,

www.localdirectory.bolton.gov.uk can provide information and contact details about other available services and support for children, young people and families.

There is lots of guidance available about Information Sharing, Early Help Framework, and The Lead Professional role, Framework for Action and Safeguarding procedures on Bolton's Safeguarding website: www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk