

SPOA GUIDANCE FOR AGENCIES

Introduction

The Single Point of Advice (SPOA) will be the first point of contact for East Sussex Children's Services and is available for both professionals and public who have concerns about the welfare of a child.

**This Service will be available from 3rd May 2016 on 01323 464222
Email: 0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk**

There are 2 components to the SPOA Service:

Web based information advice and guidance

The web based information, advice and guidance service will provide the current functions of the Information for Families Service for both public and professionals, including guidance about the Continuum of Need (CON).

Telephone screening, information, advice and guidance

The SPOA team will be a countywide team that undertakes Screening Triage for the 0 – 19 years age groups using the CON. A simple definition of the Triage role is determining the priority of information shared about a child and their family.

The Triage role identifies within one working day that the information shared is either for:

- a) Triage only – the information is logged but no further response is needed beyond checks within our own systems i.e. Children's Index, SCIS and telephone advice given (Level 1 and 2 Continuum of Need).
- b) Triage and Early Help Allocation Hub – if the initial triage undertaken by SPOA indicates Level 3 then a referral will be made directly by SPOA to the Early Help Allocation Hub.
- c) SPOA will pass cases through to the MASH team for further screening and response that will be required for Level 3 - 4 cusp on CON or for a Social Work response via MASH for immediate emergency safeguarding action; Social Care assessment required under Section 17 (Children Act 1989) or for any potential S47 strategy discussion (Level 4 of CON).
- d) Statutory Social Care information request – to be sent directly to MASH.

This guidance is intended to provide agencies with information that will help them to:

- a) better understand the role and function of the Single Point of Advice (SPOA)
- b) Understand how and when to contact SPOA to aid professionals make appropriate referrals having used the CON prior to making the call.
- c) Be aware of the need for professionals to consult with their own agency safeguarding lead to discuss the level of need using CON and only contacting SPOA if the level is agreed at level 3 or 4.
- d) Offer assurance that the thresholds have not changed but the access to the Service has.

In East Sussex the CON is intended to provide practitioners with a shared understanding and common language around needs and risks surrounding children and their families.

- The responsibilities of all agencies in providing universal awareness raising and PSHE curriculum in schools (Level 1 CON)
- Recognising when children may need additional help from universal services when parental stresses are starting to affect their ability to prioritise their child's needs, ensure child safety or parents require guidance on parenting issues to ensure child safety at Level 2 CON
- Identifying when children have multiple and complex needs at Level 3 and an Early Help Service response is needed to address dysfunctional relationships between family members to prevent a rise to Level 4.
- Recognising and responding to children with acute needs including at risk of significant harm, Level 4 CON including physical inflicted injuries; persistent domestic abuse; neglect; substance misuse; instability and risk in the home continually; lack of response to Early Help intervention leading to increased risks to the child.

When the agency safeguarding lead receives information regarding a young person potentially at risk of harm, he/she needs to reflect on the information with the staff member reporting it. Together they need to consider and record an overview of the information and situation and clarify:

- What has been said?
- When was this ?
- How often does this happen?

- Who else knows?
- Have the Police been involved? (If the Police have been involved they will have made a record - a SCARF - and this will automatically be considered by the Police Detective Sergeant in the MASH. If the incident indicates concerns at Level 3 or 4 on the CON, the MASH Senior Social Worker and the Police DS will have decided whether a social care response is needed.
- What is the agency's relationship with the child and family like?
- What else do you know about the child and family? (Including rumours and suspicions if relevant).
- Check against other vulnerability factors (consider the Continuum of Need as a prompt).
- How is the child presenting today – are they frightened to go home today?
- Which other professionals are known to be working with the family?
- Check the Children Index if necessary.
- If there is an Early Help Family Keyworker working with the family the safeguarding lead should ring and discuss this information with them and/or their manager and agree next steps.
- If there is a Social Worker working with the family the safeguarding lead should ring that worker and discuss this information with them and agree next steps.
- If there is currently no Early Help Family Keyworker or Social Worker working with the family the safeguarding lead needs to consider the information against the CON.

Identifying when children have multiple and complex needs at Level 3 and an Early Help Service response is needed to address dysfunctional relationships between family members is affecting parental ability to provide warmth, nurturing, consistent and safe parenting the agency safeguarding lead should contact SPOA, SPOA will take responsibility for triaging referrals to Early Help Services at Level 3 of CON.

Recognising and responding to children with acute needs including at risk of significant harm, Level 4 the agency safeguarding lead should contact SPOA. SPOA will take responsibility for the initial contact and will transfer it through to MASH if it is agreed that the child's needs are confirmed at Level 3 /4 cusp or Level 4 on CON.

When contacting SPOA the safeguarding lead should be prepared with the information they have discussed with the staff member and be ready to email this immediately. This will enable the SPOA worker to have the written information in front of them so that the discussion can focus on clarification and reaching a shared understanding of the situation and the level of need using CON.

In both scenarios the purpose of the discussion with the safeguarding lead is to:

- To reach a shared understanding of what is known about the family and their current situation.
- Reflect and decide on the type of case and identify where the needs appear to be on the CON.
- agree on the next course of action, including who is going to do what.

If a practitioner and safeguarding lead manager assess that the child is at immediate risk of significant harm they should telephone SPOA immediately making it clear when the phone is answered, what their concern is about and the immediate risk today and if possible they should email the SOR to SPOA. If it is not possible to email the SOR prior to the telephone call they should email it within 24 hours.

SPOA will make the decision as to whether the contact will be accepted as a referral and will be responsible for referring through to MASH or Early Help Services if appropriate.

The aim of the SPOA Service is to enable Children's Services to be able respond to the right referrals to ensure that children and their families are provided with the appropriate support and interventions in the timeliest way.