

Transforming culture and practice in children's social care assessment: Phases 3 & 4

Promising practice from phases 3 & 4 of the Council for Disabled Children learning and innovation programme

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This publication is aimed at strategic and operational leads in local authorities as well as frontline professionals across education, health and social care. It is designed to offer a starting point for local authorities to review their current models and approaches to assessment of disabled children and their families.

**For more information on resources, tools and support please contact
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Foreword

Nationally, social work is on an accelerated journey. The Department for Education (DfE) are committing resources to support service redesign and innovation and an intensive social work reform programme is underway with a focus on getting the right professionals into practice. There has been little evidence of the implications and need for change within social work for disabled children, despite calls from parents and practitioners highlighting a system that is:

- frequently being restructured by local authorities;
- resource intensive;
- often disproportionate to the needs of the family;
- in need of a rethink as it aims to meet the needs of some of our most vulnerable children and young people with an increasingly limited resource.



With the support of DfE's Social Care Innovation Programme, we at CDC, working alongside five local authorities, have been given an opportunity to learn and innovate in relation to social work practice with disabled children and their families, starting with the initial contact with the system, the assessment.

In the first report on our programme, we scoped out relevant research and shared learning and emerging practice from the 'discover' and 'define' phases. The five local authorities have now moved through 'co-design' and are embarking on the 'test' phase with their potential solutions. This was often not a linear journey and required consistent reflection, further discovery and redesign, all underpinned by meaningful co-production with parent carers, disabled children and young people, and a wide network of professionals. We are delighted to be able to share the experience and activity from this phase of the programme.

Throughout this journey, we have focused our facilitated learning programme on supporting the five local authorities to create a shared learning and innovation space to: think, question their current practice and learn from one another as well as learn from and further develop their approaches in response to an external evaluation and CDC coaching support.

This has supported the individual local authorities to develop shared principles, ways of working and create or further develop their own culture of co-production. At the heart of this programme has been an opportunity to build and strengthen existing relationships with parent carers, disabled children and young people, social workers and other professionals. This is very much in line with *the Government's Vision for Change* as the approach "*designs practice around an uncompromising focus on what children and families need*".

The local authorities we are working with have found it to be transformative because by enabling children, young people and families who use services to shape those services and processes, it has supported improved and appropriate relationships between social workers and families, with disabled children, young people and parent carers being more engaged in the assessment process, having a greater understanding of the context in which social workers operate and greater satisfaction with the assessment process.

In order for each local authority to realise their aspiration of embedding their learning and creating real, lasting change, we must call on senior decision makers from all parts of the system at both local and national levels to be engaged in this programme of change and give permission, support and resources to make it happen.

Next steps

Whilst this report shares examples of the potential solutions the local authorities are testing, the learning from this programme is still developing. We will have a report from Coram, who have been undertaking an independent evaluation, at the end of the programme and we will continue to support the Local Authorities through to the end of September 2016 to further test, evaluate, embed and demonstrate the positive outcomes they create for disabled children, young people and their families.

Our longer term aim is to further spread and scale up the learning by supporting new areas to build on the practice of the initial five Local Authorities through dissemination of the outputs from this programme and support to undergo the learning journey.

What has struck us is that although the approaches have focused on improving the system for disabled children and their families, there is great potential for learning from this programme to be used to drive whole system change across children's social care. Our key message is that getting our system, services and practice right for every child does not mean treating every child the same. We need to do more to consider how best to adapt practice, assessment and intervention for children with a range of needs at an individual, local and national level.

Amanda Harvey
Assistant Director, Council for Disabled Children

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Jane Creasy, our coach from Spring Consortium as well as Phil Snell and members of our project reference group for their support, challenge and eye on the national perspective. Thank you to the five local authorities, their partners, parent carers and children and young people for joining us on this journey as well as appreciation to the other local authorities who have been in touch to learn from the programme and consider how they can apply this learning locally. We look forward to seeing what comes next.

Introduction

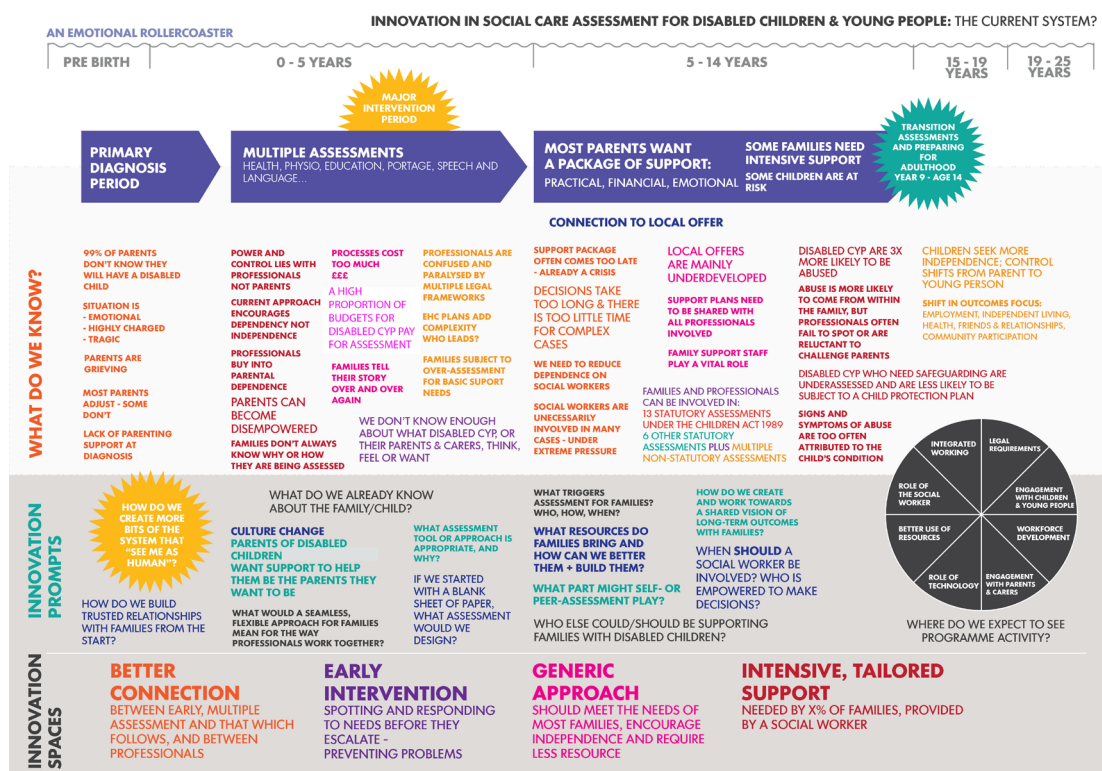
This publication is the second report from CDC's work on Transforming Culture and Practice in Children's Social Care Assessment. It is part of a suite of resources developed through CDC's work with five local authorities as part of the Department for Education (DfE) Social Care Innovation Programme. It should be read in conjunction with the [first report](#) which you can find at www.councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/transforming-culture-practice.

References to 'social care' in this report include the statutory assessment processes under the Children Act 1989 as well as the Early Help framework and the Local Offer. The programme is considering how all of these frameworks are linked together to ensure that children, young people and their families have their social care needs met. The programme also looks at the Education, Health and Care needs assessment and planning processes under Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and explores emerging practice in adults' social care which could inform thinking about different models and approaches in assessment for disabled children and families.

The programme has used a facilitated learning model to support the local authorities to fully understand the challenges in the current social care assessment system from the perspective of all of those who interact with it including disabled children and young people, parent carers, families, and professionals across education, health, social care and the voluntary and community sector.

The learning model consists of a four phase approach: 'discover', 'define', 'co-design' and 'test'. The first report focuses on the activity and learning from the 'discover' and 'define' phases, this publication focuses on the activity from the 'co-design' and 'test' phases. You can hear more about West Sussex experience of being involved in the learning programme here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ef1DvR8cTD8>

What did we learn from the discover and define phases?



Current system map – source: CDC 2015

The 'discover' and 'define' phases focused on gathering evidence of the experience of children and young people, parent carers and families, and professionals in relation to different stages of the assessment process. The process was broken down as follows:

- Pre-referral – families reported a lack of information about where to find help and, where information was available, it was inaccessible and complicated to follow.
- Referral – Professionals reported that it was not always clear who would be eligible for services and which was the appropriate pathway. There was concern that it was difficult to help families access the right support at the right time. Often those referring families into services did not receive feedback or were not clear on the information they needed to provide which led to delays.
- Initial meeting – children and young people reported that they often were not aware that they were being assessed or what the purpose of assessment was. Parent carers reported that they did not know what to expect and felt anxious and unprepared. Approaches to visits varied greatly between social workers and this led to confusion and uncertainty. Social workers reported this as a more positive part of the process as they felt it was their opportunity to finally meet the family and get to know them.
- Reports – Children and young people wanted to be involved in their assessments but found it difficult to understand how their views were reflected in the written versions of formal reports and plans. Families often did not understand the formal paperwork or felt it did not reflect their views and often felt like a tick box exercise. Families also reported that where they had recently undergone other assessments such as EHC needs assessments or completed DLA forms they couldn't understand why this information was not being used effectively to inform decision making for other services.
- Decision making – Processes for decision making varied across the local authorities. Families reflected that they often did not know what was happening and that waiting for a decision led to increased levels of stress and anxiety and decisions were not always explained. Professionals, including social workers, also reported frustration at having to wait for decisions to be made or at receiving requests for additional information before decisions could be made.

All of these elements contributed to a number of questions that we started to explore together in the 'co-design' and 'test' phases of the programme.

- How should each part of the process feel for children and young people, parent carers and professionals?
- What would make it simpler, fairer and more transparent for parents?
- How do we ensure professionals are well informed and confident in delivering information to parent carers and children and young people?
- How can we ensure consistency in messaging and approaches?
- How are young people's voices being heard?
- How can we improve children and young people's understanding, experience and approaches to ensure they are meaningfully involved in their own assessments?

1. Co-design

Co-production is one of the guiding principles that has underpinned the programme from the beginning. In the [first report](#) you can see a range of examples of how the local authorities worked with disabled children and young people, parent carers and a wide range of professionals, including the voluntary and community sector, throughout the 'discover' and 'define' phases.

The 'co-design' phase of the programme was about how we work with all of those groups in order to develop a range of ideas and then prioritise those ideas into a key selection that we will test.

The five local authorities took a range of approaches to the 'co-design' phase based on learning and feedback from the co-production work in the 'discover' and 'define' phases. The result was a transparent process where the views of all those involved were listened to and valued.

Getting started

- The first step was to organise a range of solution-focused ideas generation sessions with children and young people, Parent carers and families, and social workers, wider professionals and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).
- CDC worked with the [Spring Consortium](#) to develop a session plan (Appendix 1) for these workshops which was shared with the local authorities and formed the framework for the ideas generation and the prioritisation of those ideas to move into 'co-design' and 'test'.
- It was agreed that it made sense for those families, children and young people involved in the earlier phases of the programme to be invited to continue into the 'co-design' phase and be part of integrating and developing the ideas.



CDC Young People's event - March 2016

2. Test

In each local authority a number of potential solutions have been selected to progress through to the 'co-design' and 'test' phases.

Initially each output is being tested with a minimum of 10 families who have not been directly involved in the co-design of the specific idea. This means each local authority will have clear feedback from families who are new to the approaches.

The approaches to testing will continue to use the range of engagement techniques developed in the earlier phases of the programme in order to ensure the views and feedback from parents and carers, children and young people and professionals are fully represented. You can see a detailed plan for a young people's test event developed by West Sussex (Appendix 2).

Getting started

- The first step was to identify and engage with the people that need to be involved in the 'test' phase for each of the solutions developed as part of the 'co-design' phase.
- Think 'test not pilot'. The 'test' phase is still part of developing and refining the solution and it is okay if things don't turn out as expected!
- Where possible look to test in a 'real life' scenario however it will be possible to test some solutions through role play or focus groups.
- Remember, learning about what doesn't work and why is just as important as learning about what does work.

The 'test' phase is an iterative process that began in January 2016 and has now been extended to the end of September 2016. Each local authority have developed different potential solutions that will contribute to the learning across a number of emerging themes:

- The benefits of co-production
- Information, preparation and eligibility
- Links to the SEND reforms
- Training and workforce development

3. The benefits of co-production

All of the local authorities in the programme were involving parent carers and children and young people in elements of their work; they had relationships with their parent carer forums and other parent organisations and in some areas they had existing relationships with children and young people's groups. The approaches to co-production that have evolved as part of the programme have built on and strengthened these pre-existing relationships.

All of the local authorities reported a number of benefits that have resulted from working together in this way in the early phases of the programme:

- Problem solving together with parent carers, professionals and children and young people has led to more creative and innovative solutions.
- The process of co-production has developed a range of approaches to engaging with stakeholders and has led to the professionals involved developing a number of key transferable skills and approaches that can be used to ensure meaningful involvement at an individual level in assessment as well as strategic level involvement in process development and service design.
- Having parent carers and professionals (including SENCOs, inclusion managers, health visitors, health professionals, social workers and local authority education teams, and voluntary and community sector organisations) in the same room discussing the same challenges and sharing their views in a solution focused way has led to a much greater understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- Parent carers have developed a better understanding of the challenges and constraints that professionals are working with but also feel that they are being listened to and that their views are informing the solutions that are being tested.
- The approach has given more credibility to the outputs developed for the test phase as it is clear that all of the stakeholders' views have been taken into account.
- Trusting relationships between parent carers and professionals have developed which have enabled open conversations about difficult topics leading to unexpected learning which has supported innovation.

The local authorities worked with parent carers and families through a range of solution focused sessions on particular themes identified in the programme and also through email groups, surveys and smaller working groups.

These groups also included professionals across social care, education, health, commissioning and the voluntary and community sector.

The work with children and young people in the earlier phases of the programme in all of the local authorities highlighted that children and young people want to be more involved in the assessment process. However, they were often unaware that it was happening or were very anxious about the process and the potential impact it might have on their family. We also learned that young people wanted more opportunities to share their views and spend time with their peers in an informal environment where they have the confidence to express themselves.



These suggestions resulted in varying approaches to co-production with children and young people at all phases of the programme, such as:

- Events and filming;
- Interactive drama workshops and roleplay;
- Focus groups at special schools;
- 1:1 interviews;
- Peer interviews/support;
- Ideal journey mapping;

There was a large amount of transferrable learning that came out of the children and young people's work across all of the local authorities. The Council for Disabled Children have developed the following resource to share some of the learning from young people on how to involve them in their own assessments. It is designed as a prompt for social workers, or other professionals involved in assessments, on how children and young people would like to be involved in their own assessments (Appendix 3).



Top tips from disabled children and young people about how to involve them in their social care assessment*:



- **Help us to prepare**
Send us information about:
 - What to expect
 - The types of questions we might be asked
 - Who is coming to visit and why
 This gives us a chance to think about any questions we might have too
- **Get to know us**
Find out if we have a favourite band or hobby that you can talk to us about
Find out how we communicate and be prepared
Use the Local Offer and be aware of local opportunities so you can signpost us
- **Help us feel relaxed**
We're much happier communicating when we're doing an activity
Be creative about how you get our views so that we feel listened to no matter how we communicate
- **We think that our social worker should be:**
Organised, approachable, funny, knowledgeable and non-judgmental
- **Last but not least... we love biscuits at our meetings!**

*With thanks to all the children and young people involved in CDC's Social Care Innovation Programme

It was noted by several of the local authorities that it was crucial for all professionals to be engaged in the co-production from the outset and not to view co-production as simply being about work with parent carers and children and young people. One of the biggest benefits for the local authorities in working in this way has been an increased awareness of roles and responsibilities across the local authority as well as an increased understanding of the role of the social worker for parent carers, children and young people and the wider workforce.

What are the challenges?

Genuine co-production takes time in order to make sure everyone has a clear understanding of the task at hand and to ensure that all those who are affected by decisions and changes are an equal part of developing the solution. It is important to create opportunities for professionals, parent carers and children and young people to develop trusting relationships which enable them to share their views.

For many children and young people there was not a clear understanding of what an assessment was which meant there was the need to develop different approaches, such as drama workshops, role play and events to support young people to understand the topic before they could be fully involved in the co-production.

For more information on how the local authorities approached co-production and the benefits and challenges along the way you can find a range of films here

West Sussex: [Listening event video](#)

Enfield: [Children and Young People co-production video](#)
[Parent carers and professionals co-production video](#)

York: [Co-production with Young people](#)
[Co-production with parents and professionals](#)



4. Information, preparation and eligibility

Some of the key learning from the 'discover' phase of the programme was that there was a clear lack of accessible information for parent carers and children and young people which led to a range of negative experiences as families started to go through the process of assessment.

It also became clear that for those families who were aware of the assessment process, there was also a stigma attached to the idea of having a social worker involved and an anxiety for children and young people around what the outcomes of these assessments might mean for them and their families.

This led to the co-design of a range of different potential solutions to be tested across the local authorities:

BROMLEY

Bromley are planning to raise awareness of the importance of finding ways to meet the social care needs of everyone in the family; parent carers, siblings or young carers, and disabled children and young people themselves. This has resulted in the testing of their new brand "time for me".

time for me

DAD
I like to do things with my family and make use of local community activities together such as swimming, bowling and taking my son to the park.

MUM - Click me
I work part time in a school and I use Yoga as a way of relaxing. I feel it's important to do things that allow me to be 'me'.

ME - Click me
I go swimming and my carer takes me to the farm which is fun!

US - Click me
We enjoy time together and meeting up with family and friends.

SISTER - Click me
I have a break with 'Young Carers' and help with the media crew when I'm there.

Are you a family with a child or young person with additional needs or disability living in Bromley?

Time for Me...

Do you need a break from caring or would you like your child to access more activities in the borough?

Do you want to know more about the services and activities that are out there for you and your family?

www.timeforme.bromley.co.uk

Bromley THE LONDON BOROUGH NHS Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group Bromley Parent Voice

It is suggested that the poster will be located in a variety of places commonly visited by all families, such as libraries, GP surgeries, pharmacies and children centres but will also be available as an interactive online version which will form part of their Local Offer. This is being tested out with children and young people, families and professionals in order to refine the solution.

The interactive version links to a number of film clips which share the story of each individual in a family and the importance to them of finding "time for me".

You can see some of the film clips here:

- Us <https://vimeo.com/canvasfilmsuk/review/155546545/3f07bd758c>
- Mum <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYV-Hsg-BH4&feature=youtu.be>
- Sister <https://vimeo.com/canvasfilmsuk/review/155546661/0b2ef5250e>

WEST SUSSEX

West Sussex have worked with young people to co-design a preparation film for young people that explains the role of the social worker and what will happen in an assessment in order to support young people to prepare and feel less anxious. This approach came out of the young people's listening event that they held in January. You can find out more here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZGw5Rn7LaM>.

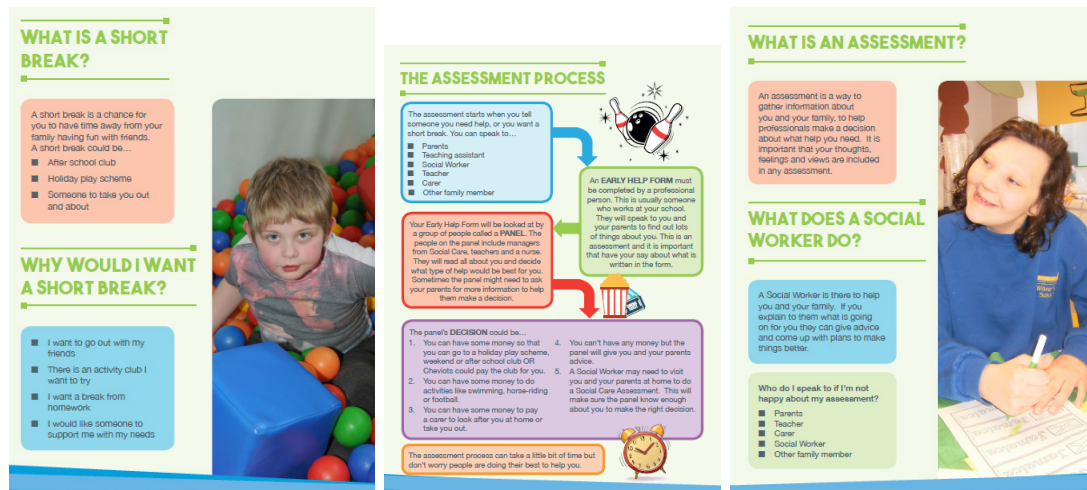
They have started to develop an easy read leaflet to support children and young people to prepare for their assessment (Appendix 4).



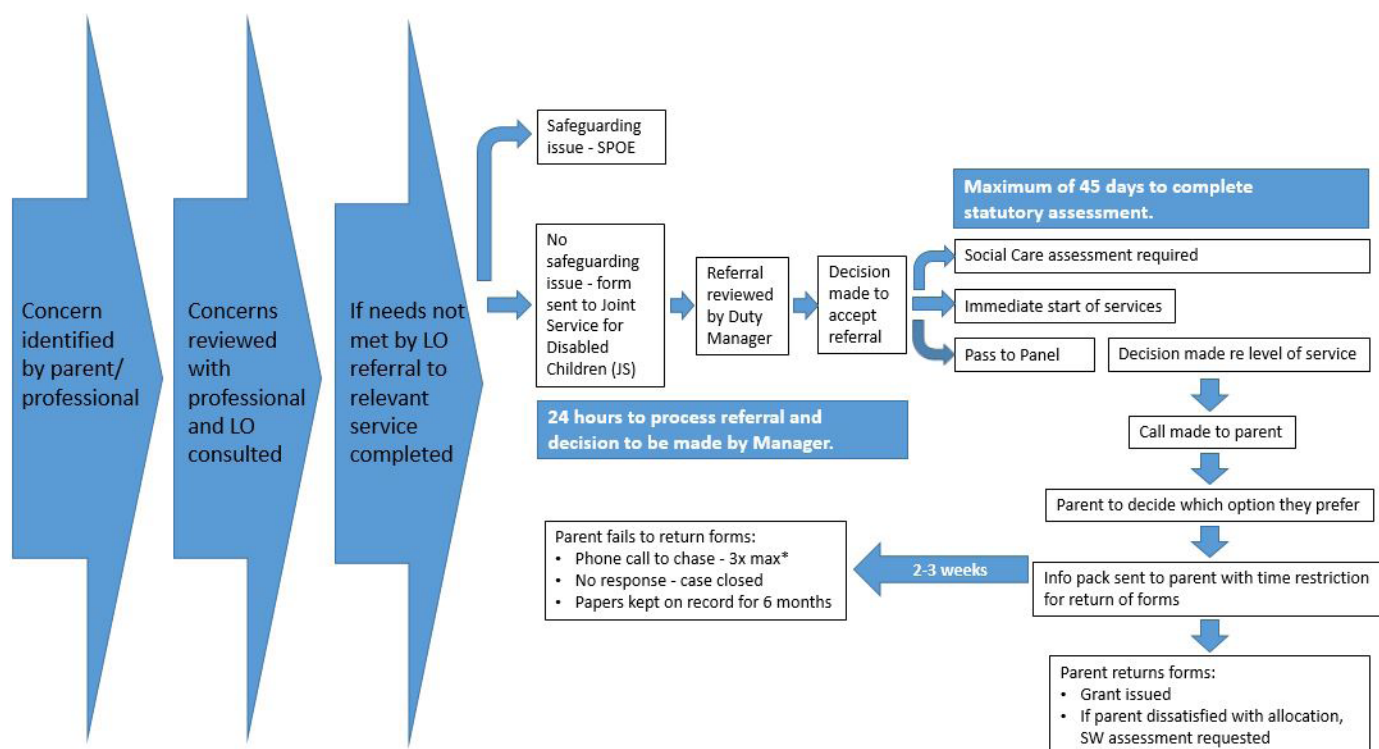
For parent carers they are developing an information and preparation pack that includes a flow chart for the assessment process and what families can expect at each stage.

ENFIELD

Enfield have co-designed a range of information leaflets to test with parent carers and children and young people. The leaflets are intended to support them to understand the purpose of assessment (Appendix 5).



They have also reviewed their assessment pathway and are carrying out their testing phase to get feedback on the following:



CORNWALL

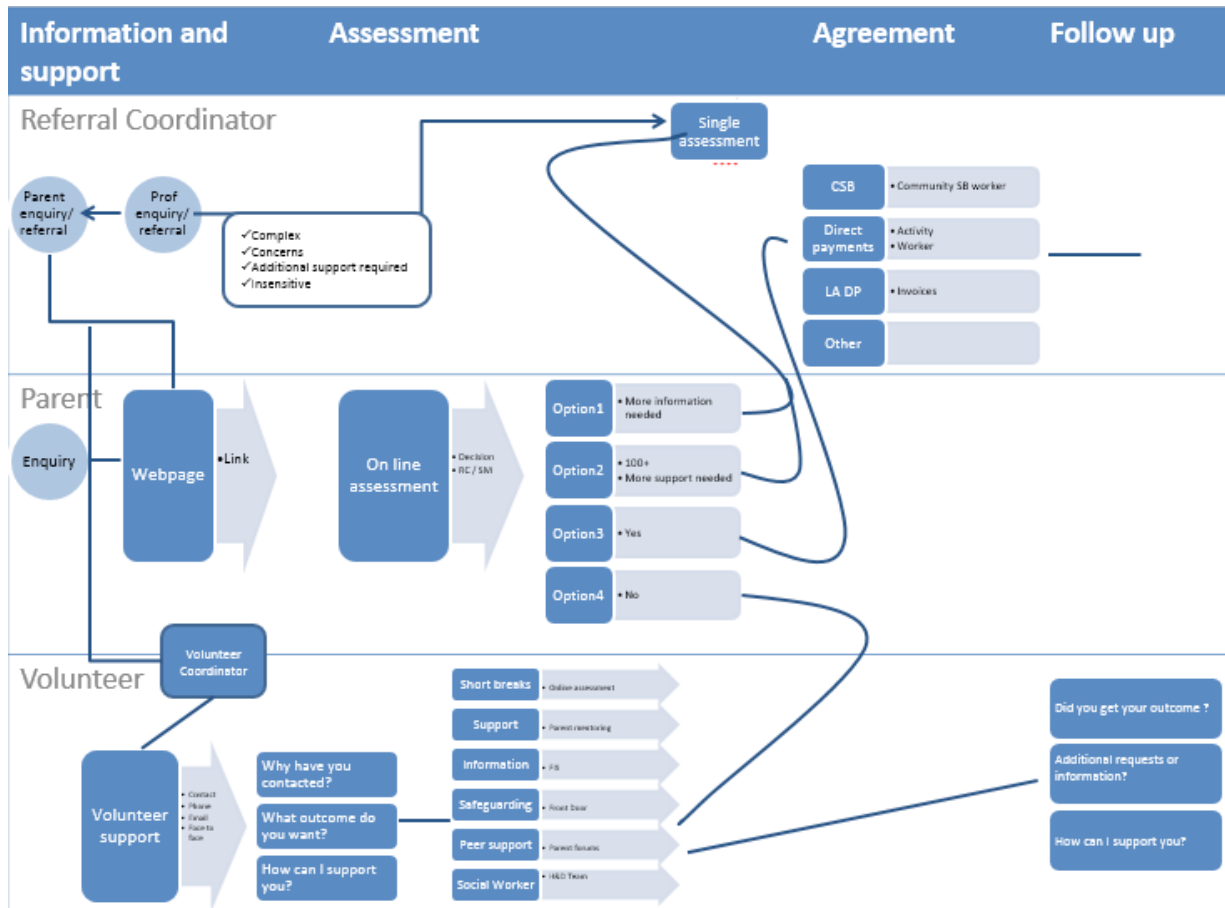
Cornwall have worked with young people to develop a film about what young people think a social worker should be based on their own experiences.

You can watch the film here: <https://youtu.be/bgdwZUWGK5o>

YORK

York have developed a small team of trained volunteers made up of parent carers, local authority staff and community library staff. The team will test this approach to support families navigating the community support available via the Local Offer, as well as supporting families as they go through the early help and statutory assessment processes, if required.

This is the revised service pathway that York are testing to incorporate the volunteer support pathway:

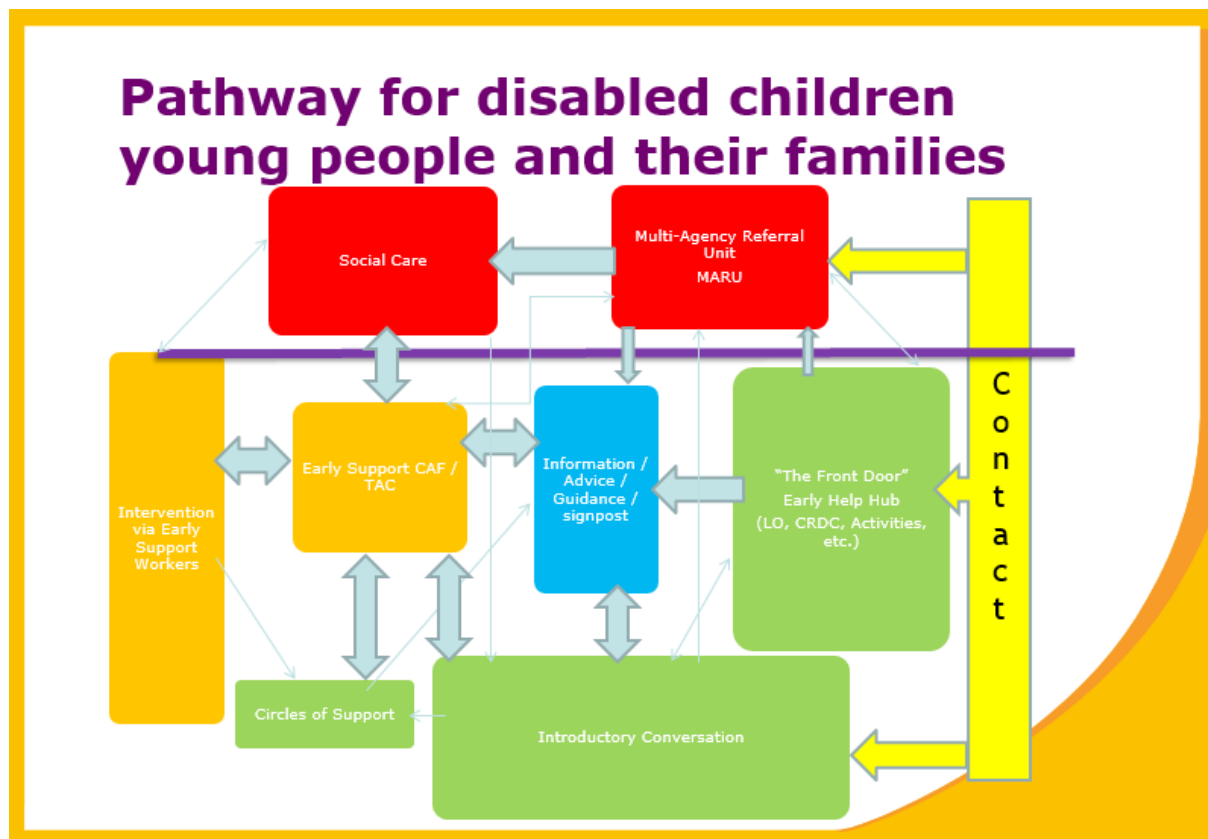


Young people and professionals involved in 'co-design' from York



CORNWALL

Cornwall have developed a 'Let's Talk' introductory conversation as a preventative intervention to support families early and reduce the need for statutory assessment. This is their updated pathway:



Let's talk is a solution-focused intervention, not an assessment or co-ordination of services. It involves working in partnership with disabled children, young people and parents and aims to prevent the need for families of disabled children to have a statutory social work assessment and/or intervention.

The approach seeks to build resilience in families by:

- Focusing on setting a maximum of three specific and achievable goals that will improve outcomes for disabled children and young people.
- Celebrating success when goals are achieved, thereby improving families' capacity for problem solving and reducing dependency.
- Sign-posting, sharing information, and linking to community resources through the Local Offer.

The key features are:

- It offers families a proportionate response.
- It is part of a systemic approach to working with disabled children, young people and their families, consequently it promotes the safeguarding and welfare of disabled children and young people.
- A time-limited intervention with a clear focus on improving outcomes.

For several of the local authorities the transparency and accessibility of eligibility criteria for statutory assessment and support was identified as a big challenge for both families and professionals referring into the system.

In the areas where this was identified and prioritised as part of the 'co-design' phase the focus was on ensuring that the existing criteria was made more accessible to parent carers, families and professionals.

In **Bromley** this meant creating a simplified visual representation of the criteria and embedding it into the initial referral processes to support families to see where their circumstances fitted into the bigger picture.

This should enable families and professionals to more effectively judge which pathway into the system is the most appropriate to their circumstances and to understand what the likely outcomes might be thus removing some of the uncertainty and anxiety that families have reported in the 'discover' phase of the programme.

5. Links to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reforms

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced Education, Health and Care plans to be a holistic, integrated support plan for children and young people with SEN. The Act also places a duty on Local Authorities to develop a Local Offer of services for children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND.

Section 19 of the Act states that Local Authorities must pay particular attention to:

- the views, wishes and feelings of children and their parents, and young people;
- the importance of them participating as fully as possible in decision-making and providing the information and support to enable them to do so; and
- Supporting children and young people's development and helping them to achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes.

The ongoing implementation of the SEND reforms in Part 3 of the Act create an opportunity to align processes and develop a more integrated approach to assessment and planning. This is an important part of the work in several of the local authorities based on the feedback from families who reported feeling over assessed and under supported.

Enfield have reflected on feedback from families in relation to the 'About me' section of the EHC plan and are testing an adapted version of their early help assessment forms to use the same model. This approach should enable more effective information sharing across assessments and plans and mean that families do not need to keep retelling their story.

As part of the EHC needs assessment process there is a requirement to request social care advice, **Bromley** have worked with their EHC co-ordinators, parent carers, social workers and wider professionals to co-design a set of questions to support a conversation about social care needs to happen earlier in this process. The questions are designed to support EHC co-ordinators to have the confidence to gather the information that is needed in order to get accurate social care advice, particularly where a young person is not known to a social work team.

Bromley have explored how social care needs can be met through the Local Offer and the early help framework and are considering how this can be integrated and recorded in an EHC plan.

The purpose of this initial conversation is to be the first step in developing a set of social care outcomes.

After this conversation, as part of the 'test' phase, families are signposted to Bromley's test online system of trigger questions.

The key features are:

- A set of 5 online questions;
- Signpost families, and professionals who may be supporting them, to the facility in the borough that will help meet their needs;
- Reduce confusion over who is eligible for social work assessment or services by publishing the eligibility criteria for parents to review with the questions;
- Depending on which answer a parent carer selects, they will either be directed to the Local Offer for information on Universal and Targeted Provision or an online social care assessment for Specialist Provision.

The online assessment option is being tested alongside a new panel process with the intention that decisions on low level short breaks will be able to be agreed based on the online assessment tool only, without the need for a full social work assessment.

In the test approach, the online assessments are verified by an approved professional who knows the family well and has the opportunity to input their own views and concerns as appropriate.

6. Training and workforce development

Some of the potential solutions developed by the local authorities have identified the need for new training models and different approaches to workforce development. In some areas this has included the possibility of creating new roles and responsibilities in order to support the effectiveness of the co-designed approaches as they progress through the 'test' phase.










BROMLEY

Bromley are looking to develop a programme of training across schools, the voluntary sector, Local Authority and Health to raise awareness of the importance of thinking about social care needs and how this links to the EHC needs assessment and Local Offer, promoting the underlying principles of co-production with children, young people and their parent carers in line with Section 19, Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Bromley's 'shared ways of working' approaches for Social Workers should help to ensure that there is consistency in the approaches used at visits to families. This is in response to the feedback that families in the same circumstances reported having a completely different experience of a home visit depending on the Social Worker who attends. For example, some families reported an informal meeting where they sat on the sofa and had a cup of tea, whereas others reported a more formal inspection of the home environment and insistence on seeing the child's bedroom. These discrepancies were leading to confusion and anxiety amongst parents about the purpose of the assessment and what the possible outcomes were. It was also creating a situation where some families felt too anxious to ask for help when they needed it.

The 'shared ways of working' approaches have been co-designed with parent carers, children and young people, and social workers. They co-produced four documents to be tested as part of a home visit toolkit for use at the early stages of a Social Work assessment.

- Letter of introduction for the parent carer
- Easy read letter for children and young people
- New form/table to record the conversation during the initial visit
- Information to leave behind for families to refer too

  	<p>My name is _____ I am a social worker. I am going to visit you and your family on _____</p> <p>The visit is to talk about your needs and hopes for social activities and short breaks.</p> <p>After we have talked to you and your family we will work out what sort of short break you can have.</p> <p>We want to get to know you a bit before the meeting. Please send us anything you have from this list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• letters from doctors or health workers about your condition• a copy of your Education Health and Care Plan. This is a plan about you and the type of support you need• a video about what you do each day• anything else we should know about you
  	<p>Before the meeting please talk to your family about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• what is going well• what is not going well• what are your hopes and goals for the future• how would short breaks help your family• what do you like doing• what type of short break would work best for you and your family <p>There is a website where you can see all the short breaks Bromley has to offer. bromley.mylifeportal.co.uk/lbb-local-offer.aspx</p> <p>You can talk to me about the visit or send me information before I come to see you. My contact details are _____</p> <p>  </p>

Assessment and Planning Form		What Needs to Happen?
Explore? <small>How are things going? How is she getting on? What would you like to talk about first? What would short breaks mean for you as a family?</small>	Focus? <small>What would you like to be able to do? What are your hopes for (a) in the future? What do you think we should work on first?</small>	Agency Goals (What will the agency need to do to support this family?)
WHAT IS WORKING WELL?		Family Goals (What does the family want generally and regarding short breaks?)
ANY COMPLICATING FACTORS		Next Steps (Who needs to be involved to take the identified goals forward?)
PLAN – What would be the best type of short break for (a) and the family? Is there anything we can do to help you support (a)?		Parent Signature _____ Social Worker Signature _____
Context Scale – Rate the situation on a scale of 0 – 10, where 0 means the family requires short term break support to maintain stability, and 10 means that there is no immediate need for short term break support.		

Although these approaches are in the early stages of testing initial feedback from professionals has been positive:

"I think providing families with a 'summary of next steps' is really useful and the form is very clear. Likewise the easy read letter."

Social worker involved in initial test

Bromley have also considered a range of other workforce development needs across the local authority. They are exploring the potential benefits of a *Social Needs Co-ordinator* as part of the Disabled Children's Team. This role could:

- support Families who do not meet the threshold for specialist provision
- develop inclusive opportunities within LB Bromley (Market Development)
- provide administration support around short breaks to the Disabled Children's Team
- manage specialist provision placements for families who only require a short break.

They are also looking at links to the SEND reforms work by influencing the role of *EHC Keyworkers* across the borough to ensure that the 'C' in EHC counts, including how existing education and health staff can be supported to develop their knowledge in relation to social care needs.

Part of this work also includes a possible *Local Offer Officer* role to ensure information on the Local Offer is constantly up to date and relevant to make the Local Offer 'fit for purpose' and sustainable over time.

YORK

York are testing a new volunteer role in order to support families in the early stages of assessment. They identified five key things, as part of the co-design phase, that needed to be developed in order to set up the volunteer role:

1. Role description – what it is and what it is not.
2. Simple, accessible training – focused on the role, communication skills, safeguarding, and services and support available (Appendix 6).
3. Simple steps to follow in the role.
4. Signposting guidance – the boundary of the role and the importance of balancing the need to support and empower rather than creating dependence.
5. Support and supervision.

The role of the volunteer is to listen to parents and support and signpost them to the different people and places that can provide help, support, services and information. Volunteers can also assist families to complete the on-line form. They are recruited, trained and supervised by the City of York Council Volunteer Coordinator who works closely and communicates regularly with the social work Referral Coordinators in the Child Health and Disability team.

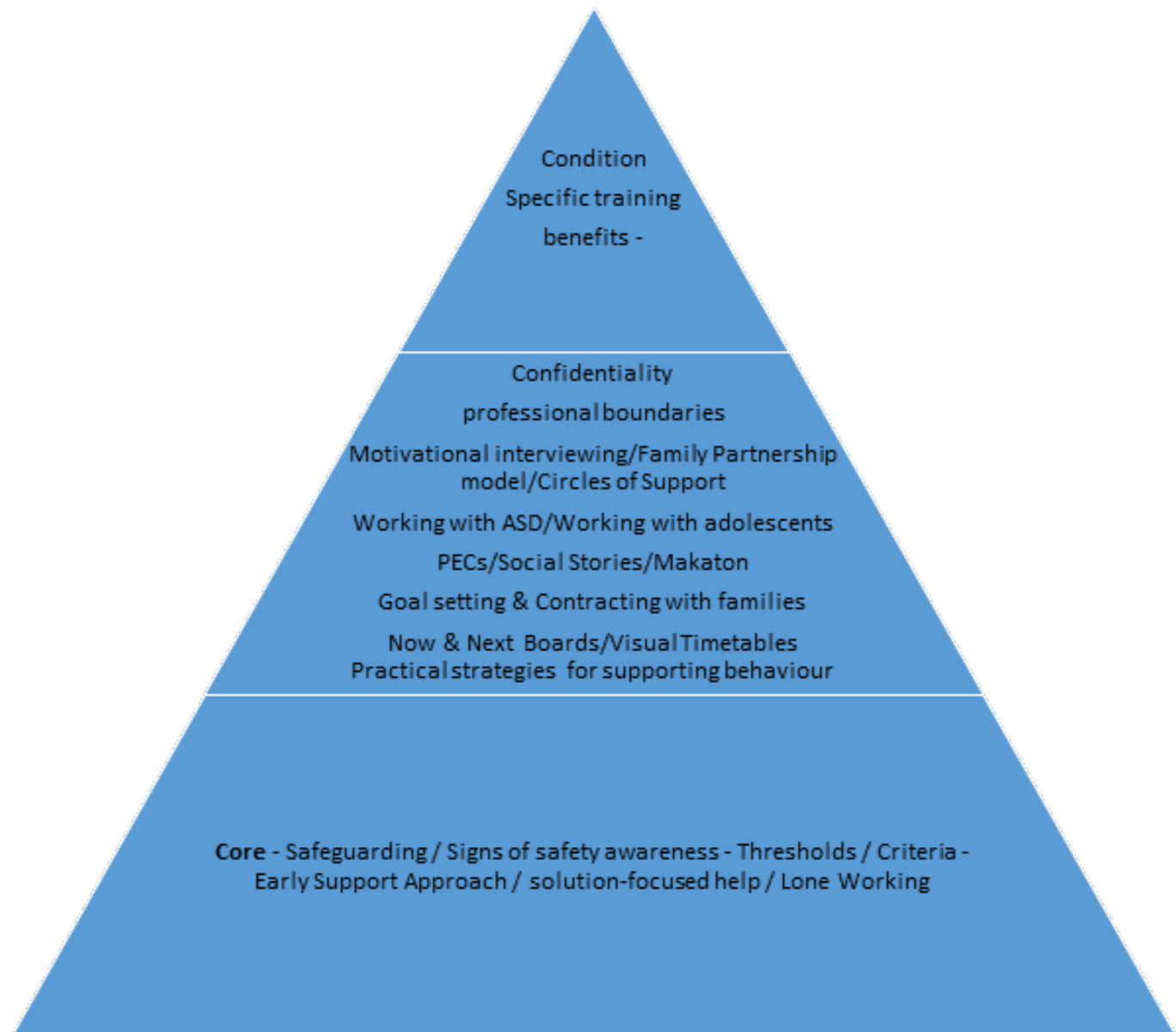
ENFIELD

Enfield's co-designed training model (Appendix 7) is being tested with professionals and parent carers and focuses on the following objectives:

- To enable professionals to link statutory duties in relation to EHC needs assessment and recognise individual responsibilities, ensuring practice is Ofsted and CQC compliant.
- To improve understanding of the Local Offer and the referral and assessment process.
- To improve understanding of the role of the social worker and social care assessment.
- To enable professionals to identify the correct level of assessment so that it is proportionate, relevant and reasonable.
- To ensure professionals understand their responsibility to take the Child and Young Persons' view and perspective into account within the assessment.
- To know how to support parent carers through the assessment process, listening and empathising with the parent carer's experience.
- To acknowledge that parent carers may be at different stages in terms of understanding and acceptance, and therefore require different approaches at different times.

CORNWALL

Cornwall's training model (Appendix 8) focuses on developing the skills of parent carer volunteers and early support workers and takes a tiered approach:



7. Conclusion and next steps

The Government's vision for children's social care reform highlights three key themes that need to be the focus of development in order to effect real change and to deliver positive outcomes for children and young people:

- **People and Leadership** - bringing the best people into the profession, and giving them the right knowledge and skills for the incredibly challenging but hugely rewarding work we expect them to do, and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence.
- **Practice and systems** – creating the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish.
- **Governance and accountability** – making sure that what we are doing is working, using data to show us strengths and weaknesses in the system, and developing innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services.

All of the potential solutions being tested across the five local authorities are linked to these themes and have the potential to support the transformation of culture and practice in children's social care assessment.

At the beginning of this report we highlighted a number of questions that related to the issues that were identified in the discover and define phases by disabled children, young people and their families. The test phase creates opportunities to assess the impact on issues such as:

- Improved information, preparation and transparency leads to a better understanding of the role of the social worker and reduces the stigma in asking for help;
- Links to the SEND reforms lead to more streamlined processes and a better experience for both families and professionals;
- Training and workforce development approaches lead to well informed and confident professionals who understand where to sign post families in need of social care support;
- Transferrable skills developed by professionals involved in the co-production model leads to meaningful involvement of disabled children, young people and their families in both assessment processes and service design;
- Better value for money.

The new approaches being tested seek to align assessment pathways and processes across social care, including the Local offer and early help framework as well as statutory assessments under the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Families Act 2014. They create clear links in both directions through the pathway and acknowledge that families circumstances may fluctuate.

Ultimately the approaches have been co-designed in order to support disabled children, young people and their families to:

- Experience a proportionate response to assessing and meeting their needs;
- Enable them to access the right service at the right time;
- Have their views, wishes and feelings reflected in the assessment and planning process.

For social workers this should mean:

- Less duplication of paperwork;
- Improved information sharing across teams and agencies;
- More time to meaningfully involve those disabled children and young people who require a statutory assessment, thus supporting improved outcomes;
- More time to spend working with complex families who are in need of social work intervention.

Research and inspection indicate that disabled children face an increased risk of abuse or neglect yet they are underrepresented in safeguarding systems. Disabled children can be abused and neglected in ways that other children cannot and the early indicators suggestive of abuse or neglect can be more complicated than with non-disabled children.

Source: Safeguarding disabled children: practice guidance 2009

There are a number of clear recommendations in the 'Safeguarding disabled children: practice guidance' that are supported by the outputs being tested:

- Awareness raising of the particular safeguarding needs of disabled children.
- Good communication and effective working relationships between and within agencies working with disabled children and young people.
- Appropriate training concerning the safeguarding of disabled children.
- Access to specialist advice and resources for all practitioners when an assessment of a disabled child is required.
- A strong culture of consulting with, listening to and encouraging the participation of disabled children amongst all services.
- Families and carers are supported to provide the best care possible for disabled children and young people.

The five local authorities are creating opportunities, through workforce development and training, to promote safeguarding as everyone's responsibility. They are raising awareness of the signs of abuse in a range of professional and community settings, while better links to the early help framework should support early intervention in families where concerns are identified.

For many families of disabled children and young people one of the risks to the wellbeing of the child or young person is the parent carer's capacity becoming diminished because they are unaware of how to access support, for them and their children, either through the Local Offer or through statutory services as appropriate.

By improving information, preparation and eligibility, the new approaches should support families to access the right support at the right time building resilience and enabling them to maintain their caring role and support their children to achieve their potential.

Appendices

- 1. Ideas Generation session template - CDC**
- 2. Children and Young People's session plan - West Sussex**
- 3. Top Tips for involving disabled children and young people in assessments - CDC**
- 4. Children and Young People's preparation leaflet - West Sussex**
- 5. Information leaflets - Enfield**
- 6. Training framework - York**
- 7. Training framework - Enfield**
- 8. Training framework - Cornwall**



About the Council for Disabled Children

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) is the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England, with links to the other UK nations. CDC works to influence national policy that impacts upon disabled children and children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their families. The CDC Council is made up of a variety of professional, voluntary and statutory organisations, including disabled young people and parent representatives. CDC's broad based membership and extensive networks of contacts provides a unique overview of current issues. It also enables us to promote collaborative and partnership working among organisations.

CDC hosts the following networks and projects:

- IASS Network
- Independent Support
- Making Ourselves Heard
- Special Educational Consortium
- Transition Information Network

If you would like to share good practice on any of the issues set out in this publication please contact Amanda Harvey at aharvey@ncb.org.uk



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