East London
Local Family
Justice Board

Protocol

For use by East London Local Authorities (ELLAs) in all cases where the birth parents need services post care proceedings, and no longer have children in their care.

1 Letters of instruction to experts in care proceedings should request identification of locally available services for the birth parents, to meet their identified and stated needs. (If not included in the report, follow up with questions to the expert). This information can be used by the parents' lawyers to introduce the parents to their need for services, and which ones.

N.B. The provision of this information does not mean that the services identified by the experts will be provided or funded by the LA. This information should be used to inform the final care plan and a parent support plan. This is the first signpost for parents to be discussed with them by their advocates during proceedings.

2 ELLAs agree to include in final care plans all the services identified as necessary and available in its LA area for the birth parents. In addition, this should be set out in an individual Parent's Support Plan. These documents should be written in plain English (with a translation where needed), and with a clear explanation that the parents can understand.

N.B. These are included in the child's care plan because it is important for children to understand what their birth parents' needs were and what was made available for them. Available means services that the parents could be eligible for even if they do not have any children in their care. The parents each need to know what is the plan for their support.

The information should include the name of the service, what need it addresses, a contact name, an email address, any website, telephone number and address of any office or clinic, and any eligibility criteria.

This will be another signpost for the parents which can be discussed with them by their advocates and other professionals.

If the LA is not able to identify one or more of the necessary services for the parents within its area it must do its best to find such a service or services elsewhere within other ELLA areas, or be ready to explain why this cannot be done. In particular the LA will be expected to extend eligibility for relevant services notwithstanding that the parents do not currently have the care of a child. This is in line with the Government's response to the national safeguarding review and new initiatives.

3 As best practice, ELLAs agree that in their final evidence and care plan, they will if possible name a person within the LA (not being the child/ren's social worker), and/or within an outside agency identified by the LA, who the parents may contact with questions about their needs (including housing, benefits, health), and their contact with their children (if ongoing). The information should include the

contact's name, professional address, contact number and email address. If the named person moves away from the LA (or agency) or changes role, every effort must be made to tell the birth parents who will replace them or another person in the same office.

N.B. If this best practice cannot be followed by the LA, it must instead identify a department or office for the parents to contact with full details as set out above, which will provide the same service as a named person. All and any contact made by a birth parents must be responded to as soon as possible, within 7 days if possible, even if only to say that a full response will be provided by a specified date. Communication, sustained and maintained, is key.

4 ELLAs agree to produce a brochure of all services and support for birth parents within its area. Given that this may change and a written document become outdated, this may be a digital document. This document shall be emailed to the parents at the end of proceedings and emailed to them again each time it is revised.

N.B. Parents may be likely to lose a document, whether in hard copy or digital: this demonstrates the need for them to have a contact name to seek advice.

This document should be a general document including all services as the parents' needs may change over time. The document should itself include information about where current information can be found (websites etc).

5 ELLAs agree to coordinate in order to develop, implement and resource a best practice approach to linking up support for birth parents working on a Think Family/ Families First Partnership (Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams)/ Family Hub multi-agency model, using a trauma-informed and grief-informed approach, together with Housing, Education, Employment Services, substance abuse, mental health and domestic abuse services, criminal justice system, benefits and debt, Care Leaving and Disability teams. The model used or developed clearly must admit as eligible parents currently without the care of their children. The Family Group Decision-Making process may be used to inform the support available for these parents.
When parents leave a LA area it is vital that they do not lose services; there needs to be a robust system which retains one set of services or transfers services between LAs, with clear information as to which LA will provide the services to the birth parents, all fully documented and communicated to the birth parents.

N.B. (follows on next page)

N.B. This will be an ongoing initiative and will be followed up and reviewed as part of the ELFJB projects, and amended or supplemented as it progresses.

Such an approach must include sharing information when parents move boroughs within the EL area (and any other LA area if known): a Notification Protocol should be created.

Can a link be created to be used with the NHS? This needs to be thought-through and a department within local NHS hospitals so that parents can be traced and contacted.

6 Data Collection: this is data from ELLAs of repeat removals of children from the same birth parents. It is necessary so as to assess the effectiveness of this Protocol and whether changes are needed. It will be supplied to the EL Designated Family Judge and fed in to the ELFJB. This will need to be updated no less than once a year; it may use the FFP programme for data collections if available.

7 ELLAs agree to write letters for the birth parents explaining in clear, simple, language what findings the court made about harm/risk of harm - as per the court's findings of threshold, and what recommendations were made of services the parents need, and why. These should reflect what is in the child's care plan and the parents' support plans but be specifically addressed to each parent and not necessarily be documents filed within the care proceedings. They may not be part of the evidence, or part of the court proceedings, they are not for the court. They will be tailored documents for these parents, delivered in hard copy or by email or both. They need to be kept on the LA file, for future reference. The parents may use their letters to inform agencies of the information and why they need the services.

N.B. It needs to be decided who will write these documents. The options are the child's social worker/team leader, someone outside the LA, the Children's Guardian, someone in the Adoption or other LA team, or someone identified during proceedings to be the birth parents' (together or separately) support after proceedings end.

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