

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

“Authorities should have clear rules about who can get help. These rules (usually known as eligibility criteria) should mean that everyone in the area gets treated fairly”

(Modernising Social Services, chapter 1, page 2)

INTRODUCTION

The statutory definition of a “child in need” is wide. For the purposes of planning and providing services within Dundee City the following working interpretation of groups of children in need defines the basis for determining eligibility to relevant services.

Children who are unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development

Children whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired or further impaired

Children with a disability

Children adversely affected by the disability of any other person in their family

REFERRALS TO THE SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT

Referrals to Children's Social Work Services originate from a wide variety of sources, including the Children's Reporter, Health, Education, Housing, and members of the public. With the exception of referrals from the Children's Reporter, the first point of contact for most referrals is the Department's Access Team, the Child Health Team, or the Child Protection Team. Generally referrals from the Children's Reporter are dealt with by Care and Assessment Teams, who take on the majority of the longer-term allocated work with children and families.

SERVICE ELIGIBILITY

Children's Social Work Services provide, and have access to, a range of services to meet the various circumstances a child and family might experience. These include:-

Low Priority Need

Services at this level are mainly those that offer open access and self-referral.

Medium Priority Need

Children located within this group are likely to require more specialist and targeted services than the previous group.

An assessment will be required to determine whether these services are best provided by Children's Social Work Services or by another agency or department of the Council.

High Priority Need

Children within this group are generally those where there is a high risk that the child's health or development needs are not being met, and/or there has been family breakdown. All children subject to Child Protection procedures are deemed high priority.

Examples of the individual circumstances contained within each priority need category are set out in the accompanying table.

ASSESSMENT AND ALLOCATION

When a child is referred to the Social Work Department a Social Worker will undertake an initial assessment to assist in determining how best the needs of the child might be met. An assessment is a process to gather information about the child and his / her family. This may involve referral on to specialist workers or other agencies to undertake this task.

An assessment will be undertaken every time a child and family is referred to the Social Work Department as follows:-

Within 24 hours of the time of referral	A decision will be made about the level of need, if any.
Within a period of 10 working days	In cases at the medium or high priority need level, an initial assessment and accompanying work plan will be undertaken and completed with a view to transferring to the appropriate service thereafter.
Within a further 10 working days	Should it be apparent to the Senior Social Worker (of the team receiving the referral) that longer-term social work involvement is necessary, he/she should contact the appropriate Senior Social Worker (Care and Assessment Team) to discuss transfer. Transfer will be effected if this is agreed by both Seniors.
Within a period of 12 weeks from the date of transfer	A comprehensive social work assessment in relation to medium and high priority need cases will be completed.

The Child Protection Team operates its own referral and transfer protocol. All Child Protection Investigations are dealt with by the Child Protection Team, including cases already allocated to a Social Worker. If longer-term involvement is required beyond initial inquiry in cases not already allocated, these cases are transferred to the relevant Care and Assessment/Specialist Team within three months.

ROUTES TO ALLOCATION

In a variety of circumstances Managers in Children's Services will allocate a Social Worker to undertake the assessment and work arising from this assessment. Thus:-

Low Priority Need

In virtually all situations outlined, a service is likely to be directly provided by the team receiving the referral. The extent of the Department's involvement is likely to vary from merely logging the information from the referral to the provision of short-term social work input by the Duty Service. Referral on to other agencies or departments including voluntary sector organisations, is likely to be an important component of the work. Case allocation away from the Duty Social Work Service would not normally be anticipated.

Medium Priority Need

In the situations described, the most likely first point of contact will be the Duty Social Work Service. The minimum level of intervention will be the completion of an initial assessment and, in most cases, allocation away from the Duty Service would be envisaged so that a fuller assessment can be made and a care plan devised. In the majority of cases the work arising from the care plan is likely to be time limited, and the intervention is likely to be within a wider, multi-agency context.

High Priority Need

Children deemed as requiring intensive support are likely to be referred via the Duty system, although in some cases the referral may be made to an already allocated Social Worker. When referred through the Duty system, the initial assessment is likely to indicate the need for a comprehensive assessment at an early stage. When this decision is made, the work will be allocated away from the Duty service. In the majority of cases it is anticipated that long-term allocation will ensue.

When allocating social worker time and other resources the focus will be on providing a service to those whose needs have been defined as the greatest. Work in relation to medium or low priority need will only be allocated when the Senior Social Worker responsible decides that this would not jeopardise the interest of children and families defined as in high priority need.

Inevitably this will mean that, on occasion, work which may be a priority for others (agencies or within our own Department) cannot be attended to immediately. There will be support from Senior Management for the Senior Social Worker and Social Worker who have utilised the Eligibility Criteria and taken a professional and balanced decision about the allocation of resources.

The professional development and support needs of Social Workers will also be fully recognised in decision making.

THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The Eligibility Criteria provide a useful guide for social work teams in terms of managing workloads and competing demands. Whilst there will continue to be tensions between managing priorities within existing case loads on the one hand, and new referrals on the other, the criteria provide an objective basis for allocating resources according to priority needs.

HIGH PRIORITY NEED

All child protection cases will be classified as high priority.

There is a high priority need, serious concern about the care, health or development of a child or the child has suffered or is likely to suffer serious harm.

There is a serious family dysfunction, a child is beyond control, no person has or is able to exercise parental responsibility or the child is abandoned or rejected.

	HIGH PRIORITY NEED
HEALTH	<p>Children with a high level of special needs or disability requiring constant supervision, which results in a high risk of family breakdown.</p> <p>Situations where the physical care or supervision of a child is severely neglected.</p> <p>Children involved in serious substance misuse.</p> <p>Children who seriously self harm.</p>
SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIOURAL	<p>Children with severe challenging behaviour which results in serious risk to the child or others, which parents are unable to manage and which results in a high risk of family breakdown.</p> <p>Children who are experiencing acute emotional rejection by parents or carers including unrealistic expectations, 'scapegoating' and inconsistent parenting.</p>
FAMILY & SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	<p>Children needing to be looked after outside of their own family.</p> <p>Children where there has been a breakdown of the relationship with parent/carer.</p> <p>Disabled child where the parent/carer is unable to cope and where there are no alternative carers.</p>
CHILD'S ENVIRONMENT	<p>The child is living in an environment where there is the presence or risk of extreme domestic violence.</p> <p>Home environment or hygiene places the child at immediate risk of significant harm.</p>
PARENTAL FACTORS	<p>Parents/carer are suffering from severe physical or mental health problems or learning disability and are failing to adequately care for the child.</p> <p>Parents/carer are involved in severe alcohol or substance misuse which is immediately affecting the child's well-being.</p>

MEDIUM PRIORITY NEED

A reasonable standard of health and development is unlikely to be maintained without family support. The child may move into the high priority category without the provision of services.

There are identifiable factors which indicate that considerable deterioration is likely without support. This may include children who have been assessed as high priority in the recent past.

All children referred to the Children's Reporter will be viewed as medium priority unless their assessed needs place them in the high priority need category.

	MEDIUM PRIORITY NEED
HEALTH	<p>Children living in an environment which could pose a risk to their safety or well-being</p> <p>Children with a significant level of special needs, whose parents are unable to meet their needs without the provision of support.</p> <p>The physical care or supervision of the child is inadequate</p> <p>Children who occasionally self harm.</p> <p>Children who are not adequately protected or looked after.</p>
SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIOURAL	<p>Children with challenging behaviour whose parents are unable to cope without the provision of support.</p> <p>Children whose behaviour alienates or provokes rejection</p> <p>Children involved in offending behaviour leading to the involvement of the courts or Children's Hearing.</p> <p>Children with caring responsibilities which are impacting on their development.</p>
FAMILY & SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	<p>Children who may have to be looked after outside their family</p> <p>Children who have previously been Looked After and who now require throughcare/aftercare services.</p> <p>Children where there is a risk of breakdown of the relationship with parents/carers.</p> <p>Children experiencing several carers within their family network creating inconsistency and insecurity for the child.</p>
CHILD'S ENVIRONMENT	<p>The child is living in an environment where there is a history of incidents of domestic violence.</p> <p>Home environment or hygiene could place the child at risk of harm.</p>
PARENTAL FACTORS	<p>Parent/carer has physical disability or history of mental health problems or learning disability which affects their ability to care for the child.</p> <p>Parents/carer are involved in severe alcohol or substance misuse which affects their ability to care for the child.</p> <p>Parents whose criminal and/or anti-social behaviour threatens the welfare of the child.</p>

LOW PRIORITY NEED

All other children including those where the child's needs may not be consistently met. Improvements may be desirable but there are no acute risks present.

Social Work Department help is not essential to the monitoring or maintenance of the child.

The child and the carer are coping.

	LOW PRIORITY NEED
HEALTH	<p>Children with some special needs who require referral to other services eg health Visitor, Speech Therapist.</p> <p>Children who show signs of behaviour which may place them at risk.</p>
SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIOURAL	<p>Children who have little opportunity to meet and play with other children due to parents isolation. May require referral to a Family Centre, advice on play groups, after school club etc.</p>
FAMILY & SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS	<p>Children experiencing inconsistent standards of parenting but whose development is not significantly impaired</p> <p>Children whose parents request advice and guidance to manage their behaviour.</p> <p>May require referral to parenting group, Homestart etc.</p>
CHILD'S ENVIRONMENT	<p>Parent/carers have chronic relationship difficulties which may affect the child. Refer to Relate, mediation etc.</p> <p>The family require advice and support regarding racial harassment.</p>
PARENTAL FACTORS	<p>Parent/carers requires information or advice to aid their continuing care of the child.</p> <p>Parents/carers have chronic debts due to their inability to manage their finances.</p>