



Local Safeguarding Children Board Good Practice Briefing

Supporting Children in Need who have moved out of the local authority area

The Issue

One of the findings of a Serious Case Review (SCR)¹ carried out in this LSCB area in 2014 was that there is a potential for families with vulnerable children becoming 'lost to the system' and therefore becoming at risk of possible harm when they move from one local authority area to another. This is a particular risk where parents appear to be deliberately avoidant of services that are offered.

The SCR was in response to the death of a one year old child who had been seen by a range of medical staff and whose family had been supported by social workers, housing professionals and the police. Seven local authorities including two of the authorities covered by the LSCB had records of involvement with the family but no professional deemed the child to be at continuing risk of significant harm and no evidence of physical injury or neglect was confirmed. However, concerns were expressed about the family's housing arrangements and finances. When the child was three months old, her mother moved without notice and she was not seen again by any professional until her death.

Practice implications

There are clear processes and procedures that are followed by all agencies when children who are subject to child protection plans move to other local authority areas, regardless of whether the agencies delivering the child protection plan have prior notification of the move or not. Such cases are not closed on the basis that a family has moved or gone missing.

All local authorities are required to publish details of their thresholds for providing services for children who are deemed as being "in need". The thresholds applied in Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster are published on [the LSCB website here](#).

¹ "Sofia" Serious Case Review, Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster LSCB 2015

While children who receive services as Children in Need are not subject to the same risks as those who have Child Protection Plans, they still have high levels of vulnerability which can increase or become more complex over time. Moving to other areas can put many families under additional stresses as they may lose access to existing social networks and professional support. While some families may move for what they perceive to be positive reasons, many with vulnerable children are subject to frequent moves which they may have little control over as well as having insufficient time to make adequate plans in advance.

[London Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Procedures](#) suggest that “in order to provide mobile families with responsive, consistent, high quality services, London local authorities and agencies must develop and support a culture of joint-responsibility and provision for all London children”²

For children and families who move frequently, it is important that key identifying information is accurate including full names of all family members with clarification of relationships between these individuals, dates and places of birth, and details of previous addresses. Agencies in both the originating and destination authority should ensure notifications are made and received as soon as they become aware a vulnerable family has moved.

LSCB Good Practice

When **a Child in Need** appears to have moved to another local authority area or have disappeared, agencies who are assessing or providing services to their family must **make all reasonable efforts to locate the family**. This includes families that are in the middle of an assessment.

This should include:

- At least two home visits to the last known address, one by appointment, one speculative
- A letter to the last known address, including a stamped addressed envelope for parents, carers or others who may know family members to inform the agency of any child’s whereabouts
- Liaison with the relevant Housing Department(s)
- Contact with the Metropolitan Police Missing Persons Unit
- Follow up of any leads resulting from the above measures
- Child Benefit checks
- Use of inter-agency networks
- Issue of missing alerts to other local authorities

Cases should only be closed by Children’s Social Care or Early Help services following such reasonable efforts not being successful. Such case closures must be signed off by the Head of Service and this decision should be recorded on the child’s case record.

² London Child Protection Procedures - Children and Families moving across Local Authority boundaries