



Achieving the best outcomes for children & young people...

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Introduction

- ▶ These workshops are intended to open debate about how we as a system can best support improved outcomes for children and young people;
- ▶ This presentation includes summaries of:
 - ▶ The legislative framework;
 - ▶ Some research information around securing best outcomes for children and young people;
 - ▶ Some information about the way in which the local system operates;
 - ▶ Some consideration about information for practice;
- ▶ This is a complex area and solutions are not available 'off the peg'...

Background

- ▶ The Local Safeguarding Board requested that a multi-agency task & finish group be established to examine the impact of 'Effective Support for Children & Families';
- ▶ This request was made in the context of concern by all agencies about how best to continue to deliver improved outcomes for children in a context of continuing pressures on resources;
- ▶ The Board and leaders of all the main agencies are also concerned by practitioners feeling overwhelmed by the volume of work as well as anxious that they may miss indications of children at risk of harm;
- ▶ In unpicking these issues, it is clear that a broader dialogue with key agencies supporting children and young people was needed;
- ▶ This presentation is intended to be thought provoking: there are complex issues at play here....

Effective Support for Children & Families...

Introduction

‘Children and young people almost always do best when they grow up within their own families. Even where risks of significant harm have been identified, it will usually be better for the child or young person to remain with their families and for their parents or carers to be supported to make the changes that they need to make in order that they are able to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of their children.’

- ▶ Expectations in relation to securing consent prior to referral are clearly set out;
- ▶ Positively frames expectations about supporting parents and doing at the earliest level of intervention positive;
- ▶ As such it is well-aligned with Children Act 1989 principles;
- ▶ But perceptions of concepts such as impairment, harm and significant harm varies widely across the country as well as between groups of practitioners.

Legislation and guidance....

- ▶ The key elements of legislation and guidance covering support and statutory intervention for families are:
 - ▶ The Children Act 1989;
 - ▶ The Children Act 2004;
 - ▶ Working Together: 2018.
- ▶ 'Early Help' was introduced by the 2004 Act, which placed a duty on local authorities to coordinate [note – not provide] activities by the partnership in order to improve outcomes for children and young people;
- ▶ In Cambridgeshire, the council has directly provided a range of services to compliment provision by schools, health colleagues and so on;
- ▶ In Peterborough, the council has commissioned a variety of support services.

Legislation and guidance....

- ▶ Under the 2004 Act, local arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the well-being of children in the local area so far as relating to:
 - (a) physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
 - (b) protection from harm and neglect;
 - (c) education, training and recreation;
 - (d) the contribution made by them to society;
 - (e) social and economic well-being.
- ▶ Partners may provide support and services to address support needs or contribute to a general fund in order to do so.

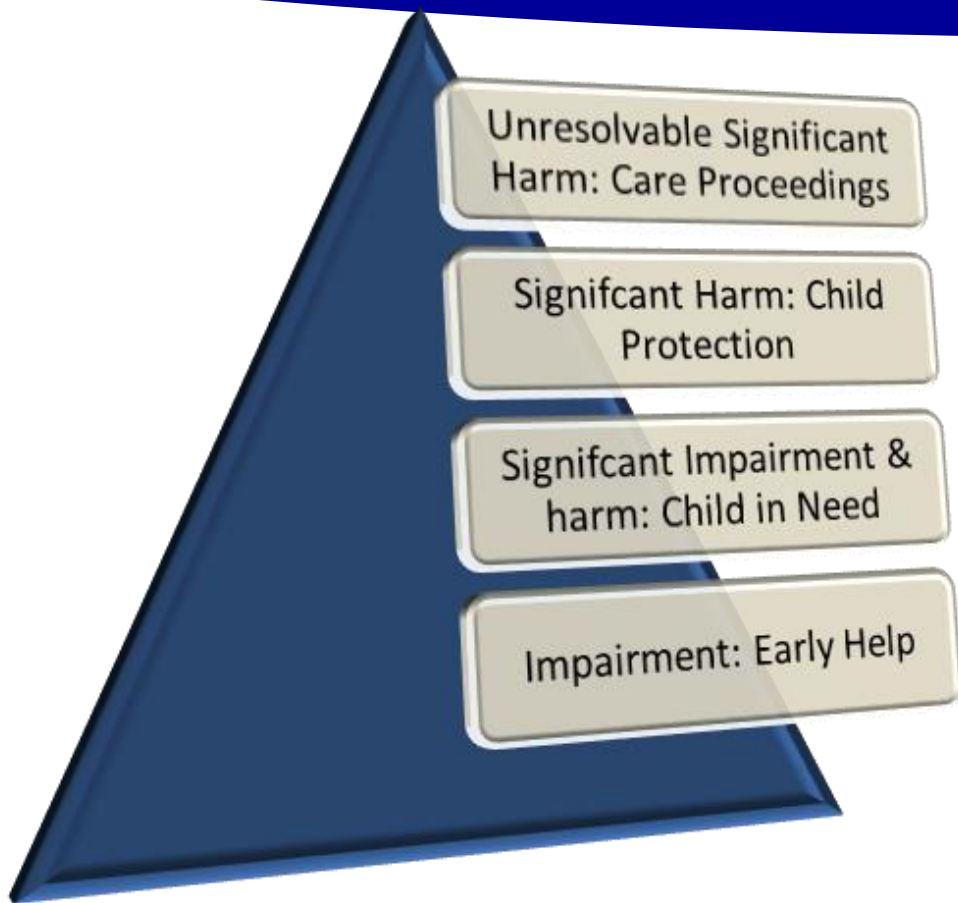
Working Together 2018 further defines the children and young people who may need early help support:

- ▶ is disabled and has specific additional needs;
- ▶ has special educational needs (whether or not they have a statutory Education, Health and Care Plan);
- ▶ is a young carer;
- ▶ is showing signs of being drawn into anti-social or criminal behaviour, including gang involvement and association with organised crime groups;
- ▶ is frequently missing/goes missing from care or from home;
- ▶ is at risk of modern slavery, trafficking or exploitation;
- ▶ is at risk of being radicalised or exploited;
- ▶ is in a family circumstance presenting challenges for the child, such as drug and alcohol misuse, adult mental health issues and domestic abuse;
- ▶ is misusing drugs or alcohol themselves;
- ▶ has returned home to their family from care;
- ▶ is a privately fostered child.

The Children Act 1989.... S.17 – Children in Need...

- ▶ **Provision of services for children in need, their families and others.**
- ▶ (1) It shall be the general duty of every local authority (in addition to the other duties imposed on them by this Part)—
 - ▶ (a) to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and
 - ▶ (b) so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families,
- ▶ **(10) For the purposes of this Part a child shall be taken to be in need if—**
 - ▶ (a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part;
 - ▶ (b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or
 - ▶ (c) he is disabled,

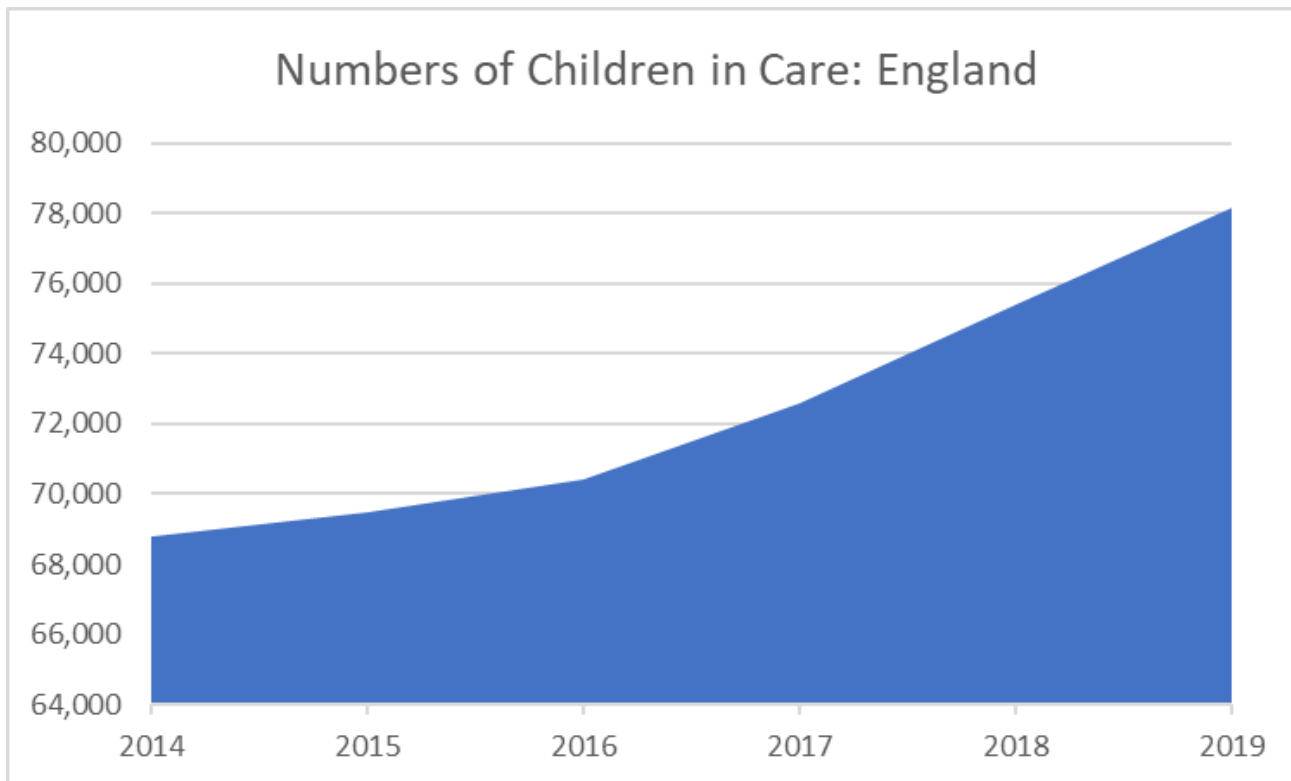
Impairment, significant impairment and harm...



Consent....

- ▶ Consent needed for all interventions and assessment up to s.47 significant harm;
- ▶ But in most cases, best practice is to secure consent even at s.47;
- ▶ Refusal of a service at S.17 does not mean escalation to s.47 unless significant harm test is met;
- ▶ Children's social care has no more power than any other service to require engagement except through care proceedings.

Steadily increasing numbers of children in care....



- ▶ Growing numbers locally and nationally has had a significant impact on placement availability;
- ▶ Not enough in-house foster carers in either authority;
- ▶ Independent Fostering Agencies are increasingly able to cherry pick referrals;
- ▶ Increasing numbers of children being placed far from home, disrupting family and friendship groups as well as education:
- ▶ Children who 3-4 years ago would be in settled foster placements are increasingly likely to be placed in residential placements;
- ▶ These factors all make achieving positive outcomes for children in care all the more challenging.

National context and other research

- ▶ Around 24% of children involved in care proceedings return home at the end of those proceedings;
- ▶ A further 26% are placed within the extended family;
- ▶ No research is available on the impact for children of involvement in care proceedings;
- ▶ ‘Care Proceedings in England: The Case for Clear Blue Water’ argues strongly that cases that could go either way should not go into proceedings;
- ▶ The ‘thin red line’ approach is resulting in too many children being taken into care proceedings and there should be ‘clear blue water’ between those in proceedings and those who are supported to remain with families;
- ▶ Their research also identifies a reduction in levels of tolerance of diversity of parenting and the adoption of a more punitive stance towards families.

Family Safeguarding in Peterborough & Cambridgeshire....

- ▶ Family Safeguarding is a model of practice where children's social work teams include a number of adult-facing practitioners expert in:
 - ▶ Substance misuse and or problematic alcohol misuse;
 - ▶ Domestic abuse;
 - ▶ Mental and emotional ill-health;
- ▶ Funding received in Cambridgeshire to meet initial additional costs of the approach;
- ▶ The approach has been operated in Peterborough for two years;
- ▶ Focused at working at Child in Need and Child Protection;
- ▶ Has been associated with securing sustained change in parenting across the 5 pilot sites, having been developed in Hertfordshire.

National context and other research

- ▶ Bywater's law of inverse intervention finds that when controlling for deprivation at a local authority level, deprived families living in areas of deprivation in affluent authorities are:
 - ▶ Two times more likely to have one of their children subject to a child protection plan, and;
 - ▶ 40% more likely to have a child in care than a similar family living in the more deprived LA.
- ▶ Possible reasons for such variation include:
 - ▶ It being more stressful to be disadvantaged in an otherwise affluent area, leading to increased child harm to which authorities respond;
 - ▶ Vulnerable families are more visible in affluent areas & there may be more services to identify them;
 - ▶ Attitudes towards struggling families may differ between areas of higher and lower deprivation.

Local Context

- ▶ The vast majority of information about children that comes into the Contact Centre progresses no further;
- ▶ 60% of all contacts are Domestic Abuse notifications from the police;
- ▶ Only 6% of contacts from police, 16% from health and 22% from schools result in an assessment by Children's Social Care;
- ▶ 60% of Peterborough City Council and 50% of Cambridgeshire County Council assessments resulted in recommendation for early help or NFA;
- ▶ But we must recognise anxieties in the system of what might happen if they fail to alert 'social care' to worries about a child and something terrible happens at a later date.

What this means....

- ▶ An ever increasing demand for staff in the contact centre to sift through the information;
- ▶ At a time when Peterborough City Council is cutting valuable youth services now and Cambridgeshire County Council will need to make savings in next 12-24 months;
- ▶ Contacts have to be processed in strict timeframes. This:
 - ▶ Increases risk aversion as easier to put doubtful cases through 'in case';
 - ▶ Increases likelihood that a very vulnerable child is missed among the large number of contacts;
 - ▶ Reduces the likely quality of decision making and, if we are also doing too many assessments, the quality of assessments as well.
- ▶ The evidence is that families less likely to engage in prevention services after CSC intervention, particularly if the outcome is repeated No Further Action.

Achieving the best long term outcomes for children and families....

- ▶ Children and young people who are suffering or are at imminent risk of significant harm need a fast response from relevant statutory services;
- ▶ The majority of families respond better to support provided within the context of universal services;
- ▶ This approach can provide a gateway to more specialist targeted early help services, which in turn are more likely to be accepted if accessed in this way;
- ▶ Children's social care assessment and intervention should be a last resort;
- ▶ There is a considerable amount of research that shows that assessments by children's social care that result in a recommendation for early help or no further action result in families being more likely to disengage with support services.

Implications for practice...

- ▶ Compulsory statutory intervention is set at a very high threshold;
- ▶ Particularly with the most excluded/vulnerable families, initial engagement and subsequent progress can be slow;
- ▶ Work with families can be frustrating, particularly where progress is slow;
- ▶ And particularly in context of talk of 'compulsory reporting', this can reinforce a pressure to refer to children's social care;
- ▶ But referring where outcome is NFA or assessment leading to NFA, the family will be less likely to engage in future, leading to poorer long term outcomes;
- ▶ In most circumstances, continuing to work positively with compassion and patience is the most likely way we will secure best long term outcomes for children.

Have thresholds been raised?

- ▶ Thresholds to Children's Social Care are defined by law, further tested through legal precedent;
- ▶ There are always occasions when thresholds are not applied correctly;
 - ▶ Individual children who should proceed to an assessment but who do not;
 - ▶ Accepting more children into the system who have not met threshold;
- ▶ Both have potentially serious consequences;
- ▶ Children's social care services in both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire have received additional investment over recent years;
- ▶ But both services become stretched when they work with children below threshold;
- ▶ Individual children at risk must receive an urgent response.

Looking to the future....

- ▶ A whole-system review of support services to older children [KS2/around 8 years and above] has been jointly commissioned by the local authority, CCG and Police and Crime Commissioner;
- ▶ This is focusing on how we can pool our collective resources to ensure that they are focused on preventing older children with significant needs becoming teenagers at risk of self-harm, criminal or sexual exploitation;
- ▶ This work will conclude by the summer, consists of focus groups and input from families, children and young people;
- ▶ There is an increasing focus on place and strengths-based approaches nationally and locally.
- ▶ Think Communities work is seeking to join district, county, city, police and crime commissioner, voluntary sector activities closer together.

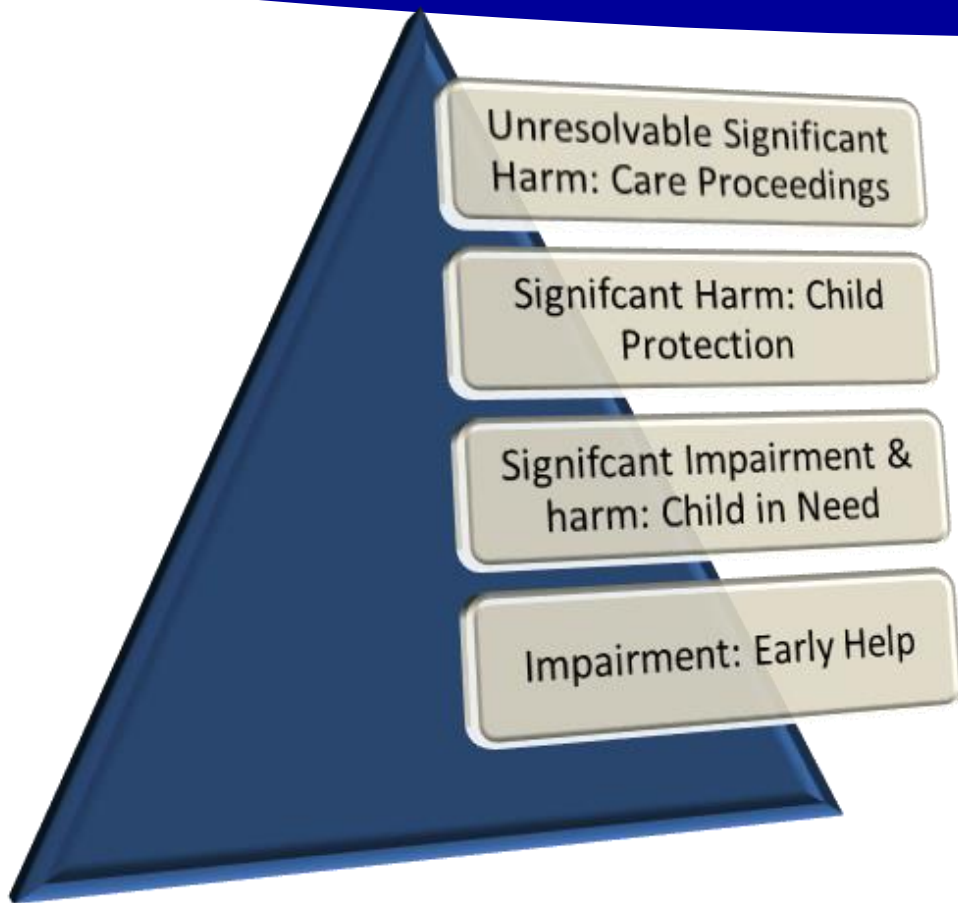
Think Communities and Best Start in Life....

- ▶ Think Communities work is seeking to join district, county, city, police and crime commissioner, voluntary sector activities closer together;
- ▶ There are a lot of activities where by working better together, we can achieve more;
- ▶ The approach is predicated on the needs of local communities varying and on helping to build capacity within communities;
- ▶ Best Start in Life is bringing together a range of services and budgets to improve outcomes for children aged under 5;
- ▶ The approach is about to be piloted in a number of areas across the two authorities;
- ▶ It has been designed in partnership with service users and a key aim is to ensure that children arrive in school ready to learn.

Concluding remarks....

- ▶ This presentation has focused on children's social care and early help;
- ▶ There are other parts of the system where similar observations about too much information concerning too many children circulating can be made;
- ▶ By far and away the majority of children achieve excellent outcomes through the support of our excellent universal services;
- ▶ Much of how we discuss children is in terms of risks although what we are actually trying to assess the likelihood or probability of something happening;
- ▶ It is possible that this language of risk leads to a focus on deficits, rather than on strengths and building resilience.

Concluding Remarks...



Making A Referral....

- ▶ A good referral helps to improve response and outcomes;
- ▶ Describe the harm or impairment and/or likelihood;
- ▶ Use tools such as those available for neglect to help identify the issues;
- ▶ Ensure consent [except where prejudicial] is clearly recorded;
- ▶ Consider what else might support the family in the local area and whether this should be tried first.

Concluding remarks....

- ▶ We are never going to achieve the best possible outcomes for all particularly given that within a pretty wide range of standards and risks, families and young people can refuse all support;
- ▶ That said, children and young people at risk of significant harm need to be identified and need the proactive support of specialist services;
- ▶ In some circumstances, including high risk child criminal exploitation, a children's social care response will not be the best approach;
- ▶ We are looking at how we can improve information about local support services;
- ▶ We will also review the current referral form in order to support practitioners in providing the information needed to help us to provide the best response;
- ▶ We will also keep relative funding levels under review: if we can spend less in children's social care we can spend more in Early Help.

Questions and Comments....

- ▶ Thank you.....!

- ▶ Key Contacts:

 - ▶ Jenny Goodes: Head of Service, Integrated Front Door and Peterborough Assessment Teams;
 - ▶ Lisa Riddle and Sarah Tabbitt: Heads of Service, Early Help Cambridgeshire South & North respectively;
 - ▶ Karen Moody: Head of Service, Early Help, Peterborough;
 - ▶ Nicola Curley, Assistant Director, Early Help, Assessment and Family Safeguarding Peterborough and Cambridgeshire