

Lead Professional Handbook

The role of the Lead Professional¹ is to take the lead to coordinate provision and act as a single point of contact for a child or young person and their family when a range of services are involved and an integrated response is required. They will be one of the practitioners who are working with the family.

Appointing a Lead Professional at the earliest point is central to the effective frontline delivery of services for children with a range of additional needs. When the role is delivered in the context of multi-agency assessment and planning, underpinned by the Early Help Assessment or relevant specialist assessments, it ensures that professional involvement is rationalised, coordinated and achieves the intended outcomes.

This is not a definitive guide and there will be similar terms used within agencies. It is designed to complement rather than replace any statutory or specialist guidance. This Handbook is intended to clarify the role and responsibilities of the Lead Professional and supporting multi-agency professionals across the [Thresholds of Need](#).

Lead Professional - Why are they needed?

We know from practice that children and families who require support from a range of specialist professionals can potentially receive fragmented and uncoordinated services such as:

- Children and families having too many professionals involved with them
- Children and young people falling below a key agency's threshold for support and failing to get the input of that agency as part of a joined-up approach
- The voice of the child is not always used to influence assessments and decision making and the child is not always an integral part of the analysis or support from professionals
- Children and young people receiving short-term, inconsistent or un-coordinated support from different professionals.

Such fragmentation causes confusion for everyone; it can cause delay in children receiving the support they need, and lead to poorer outcomes for children and young people using services.

What is a Lead Professional?

Where a child, young person and family with multiple needs require co-ordinated support from more than one practitioner/service, the functions of the Lead Professional are to:

- Act as a single point of contact that the child or young person and their family can trust
- Be able to support them in making choices and help guide them through the process
- Ensure that they get appropriate assessment and interventions when needed, which are well planned, outcome focussed, regularly reviewed and effectively delivered with support from other professionals
- Reduce overlap and inconsistency from other professionals/services
- Notify all professionals about serious incidents following strategy discussions/meetings

¹ [Working Together 2018](#) refers to the lead professional as the lead practitioner.

The key functions of a Lead Professional can be fulfilled with support from other professionals by:

- Building a trusting relationship with the child or young person and family (or other carers) to secure their engagement and active involvement in the support process.
- Ensuring the child, young person and their family remain central to decisions made about them or their care
- Ascertaining the needs, wishes and feelings of the child/young person to ensure they are an integral part of the support process
- Providing the child, young person and family with sufficient information to empower them to make their own decisions
- Using the outcome of the assessment of the child, young person or family to:
 - agree a delivery of 'solution focused' package of support that is dynamic and responsive to the changing level of need
 - identify with the child, young person and family where additional services, other practitioners or family members may need to be involved.
- Ensuring that the child, young person and family have been informed, understand and agree to the support process.
- Acting as a key conduit and contact point between the child, young person and family, and other practitioners involved in delivering specialist, targeted and universal services
- Co-ordinating the delivery of the actions agreed by the practitioners involved, to reduce overlap and inconsistency in the services received. Ensure that progress is monitored, taking into account:
 - the changing circumstances and needs of the child, young person or family over time
 - the child, young person or family's experience of or satisfaction with services/support received
 - the views of other practitioners on the effectiveness of support
 - whether support or services should be changed and whether more specialist support may be required
 - whether the child or young person's needs have been met and they no longer require additional support
 - Ensure strategies are in place that children and families are aware of how to access universal services so that outcomes can be sustained.
- Ensuring that where children, young people and their families may require more specialist services:
 - the Lead Professional continues to support them while any more specialist assessments are carried out
 - an effective transition takes place when a new Lead Professional is required to deliver and co-ordinate the ensuing support.
- Arranging regular multi-agency meetings to review the needs of the child, young person and family.

If the Lead Professional Chairs the multi-agency meetings, it is their responsibility to ensure the multi-agency plan is reviewed, updated and copies of the multi-agency plan are shared with the child/young person and family, members of the multi-agency group and any other agreed professionals/services.

Where there is a safeguarding concern about a child or adult it is the responsibility of all professionals to ensure that they follow the [Greater Manchester Safeguarding Partnership procedures](#), [Salford Child Protection Procedures](#) and [Safeguarding Adults procedures](#)

Who can be a Lead Professional?

The person who takes on the role of Lead Professional will vary according to the specific needs of the child and family.

It is recommended that children, young people and families with additional needs have co-ordinated support from a range of practitioners across the thresholds of need. We anticipate that the person carrying out the role of the Lead Professional will be drawn from the range of practitioners who are already delivering support to the child and family.

Many practitioners in the children's workforce can take on the Lead Professional role, as the skills, competence and knowledge required to carry it out are similar regardless of professional background or role. The role has been defined by the functions and skills, rather than by particular professional or practitioner groupings.

Those in the workforce undertaking the role of Lead Professional could include but is not limited to roles such as ; Personal Advisers, Health Visitors, Midwives, GP's, Paediatricians, Family Nurses, Social Workers, Youth Justice Service Workers, Youth Workers, Family Support Workers, Substance Misuse Workers, Mental Health Workers, Early Years Workers, Educational Welfare Officers, Housing Officers, Community Children's Nurses, School Health Practitioners, Teachers and school support staff such as Learning Mentors and practitioners from voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations etc.

How is the Lead Professional identified?

The Lead Professional is identified from the multi-agency group of practitioners working with the child, young person or family. They are chosen through a process of discussion and agreement.

Decisions about who should be the lead practitioner should be taken on a case-by-case basis and should be informed by the child and their family.

In some circumstance the Lead Professional may need to be allocated in line with statutory guidance where child protection processes are in place i.e. [Working Together 2018](#). Once the referral has been accepted by local authority children's social care, the lead practitioner role falls to a social worker.

Practice suggests that it is important to have clear criteria for choosing Lead Professionals and a clear process to facilitate this. Disagreements or confusion are less likely when these are in place.

The criteria for identifying the Lead Professional will include:

- What are the predominant needs of the child or family?
- What are the wishes of the family and child/young person?
- Which agency has main responsibility for addressing the child or family's needs, including statutory responsibility?
- Does anyone have a previous or potential ongoing relationship with the child, young person or family?
- Does anyone have an ongoing responsibility to carry out an advocacy role for the child or young person or family?
- Who has the skills and knowledge to provide a leadership and coordinating role in relation to other practitioners involved with the child, young person or family?
- Who has the ability to draw in and influence universal, targeted and specialist services?
- Who has an understanding of the surrounding support systems which are available to manage and sustain the ongoing needs of the child, young person or family?

Accountability of the Lead Professional and supporting professionals

- The Lead Professional is responsible for ensuring the key functions described above are carried out
- Expectations of the Lead Professional will also be dependent on the needs of the children/young people.
- The Lead Professional is NOT responsible or accountable for services delivered by other agencies.
- Each professional involved in supporting the child or family is accountable to their own agency for delivery of the support they provide to a child, young person and family.
- Multi-agency professionals play a critical role in offering their input and the expertise of their agency to provide a holistic picture of the child and family's needs to inform assessments, reviews, interventions and support. *For example health partners agree that; where there a number of health professionals involved with a child/family, a lead health professional should be identified. This is particularly important where a child has complex medical, emotional, psychological and or mental health needs and a coordinated approach is needed to support the child/family in accessing appropriate health care and support.*
- Always follow up your concerns if you are not satisfied with the agency/practitioner response and should [escalate](#) their concerns if they remain dissatisfied.

Lead Professionals: children across the thresholds

Status	Who has the lead role?
<p>All children</p> <p>Universal services and self-help</p>	<p>All children are supported by their parents/carers in the community with access to mainstream ('universal') services but with no identified additional needs. Diverse community self-help arrangements may also support parents and carers in providing good care for their children.</p>
<p>Children receiving Targeted and Co-ordinated Help (Level 2)</p>	<p>The Lead Professional is usually the person who has written the Early Help Assessment up until the first Early Help Assessment Review. At the first review (T.A.F.) the Lead Professional can be chosen in conjunction with the family as the practitioner most relevant to the family, child or young person, with the skills needed to carry out this role.</p> <p>Remember that the Lead Professional can change over time as the needs of the family, child or young person can change.</p> <p>Where a case has stepped down from Children's Social Care to T.A.F., the Lead professional will be identified by the family in partnership with the Social Worker as part of the step down process.</p>
<p>Child with special educational needs</p>	<p>The SENCO may, where appropriate, be the Lead Professional for children with special educational needs. Where these needs require input from a range of professionals outside the school setting or a high degree of family support is required, it may be appropriate for someone else to take on the lead role. During Year 9, for young people with a Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the education setting (usually the SENCO) will be the lead of overseeing the delivery of the transition plan and is likely to be the Lead Professional.</p>
<p>Child with disabilities including complex health needs</p>	<p>Where there is an allocated Children's Social Worker involved and the child is at threshold of Child in Need, Child Protection or Looked After, the Social worker will be the Lead Professional with support from multi-agency professionals that are involved with the family.</p> <p>Where there a number of health professionals involved with a child/family; health partners agree that a lead health professional should be identified. This is particularly important where a child has complex medical needs and a coordinated approach is needed to support the child/family in accessing appropriate health care. Where there is an identified lead health professional there should be regular information sharing with the Lead Professional.</p> <p>Where the child or family have a key worker, it is recommended they are the Lead Professional with support from other professionals involved</p>

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	<p>with the family. Key worker models are increasingly in place for children with severe and complex disabilities or health needs, as recommended by the Children’s NSF (National Service Framework). Key workers tend to be deployed in one of two ways :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. as a ‘non-designated’ key worker, in which they carry out the key worker functions alongside the practitioner role for which they are employed or ii. as a ‘designated’ key worker in which they are employed and paid specifically to carry out a key worker role. Both roles deliver the functions of the Lead Professional. <p>Where a key working service is not in place, or where the level of support required is less intense or do not have an allocated Children’s Social Worker, the Early Help Assessment process is recommended and a practitioner should be appointed to take on the Lead Professional role.</p>
<p>Children in need (Children Act Section 17)</p>	<p>The Social worker is the Lead Professional during the children in need assessment phase. After completing the Child and Families Assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Worker is the Lead Professional for looked after children; • Social Worker is the Lead Professional for children that are subject to a Child Protection plan; • Any relevant practitioner can be the Lead Professional for any other child in need once decisions have been made about the provision of services. Where Children’s services remain involved in delivery or funding, it may still be appropriate for the Social Worker to be the Lead Professional. • The Social Worker is the lead professional for those cases open to Children’s Social Care at a Child in Need level
<p>Young Person’s Plan</p>	<p>The Young Person’s Plan (YPP) has been introduced in Salford as an alternative to the Child Protection Plan for 15,16 and 17 year old young people. Instead of focussing, as the CP Plan does, on the changes the parents or carers must make to ensure the safety of their children, the YPP focuses on working directly with the young person to help reduce the risk of harm created by the circumstances of their lives.</p> <p>As the YPP is at Child Protection Plan level the Lead Professional has to be the case holding Social Worker.</p> <p>A Key Professional is however allocated for each YPP and is responsible for co-ordinating the service response to the young person’s situation but does not have to chair the YPP planning meeting. The Key Professional should ideally be selected by the young person so that there is a constructive working relationship between them and so that the Key Professional can help streamline the delivery of services to the young person, avoiding duplication.</p>

Status	Who has the lead role?
	The Chairing of YPP meetings will be by the YPP coordinator who also co-ordinates the plan. This is an important distinction in the two functions of co-ordination. The Key Professional is likely to also have individual responsibility for delivering a specific service to the young person but cannot be responsible for the delivery of all specific services. This responsibility remains with each individual practitioner/agency. However it is important to note that the Key Professional is not equivalent to the Lead Professional.
Child Protection Plan	The Lead Social Worker is responsible for acting as the Lead Professional for the inter-agency work with any child that is subject to a Child Protection Plan.
Looked After Child	The Lead Social Worker is the Lead Professional. For those children in residential settings, they will have a key worker in the home/school that provides day to day support. The social worker will link with both the child and the key worker in a monitoring/coordination role
Care leaver	<p>The personal advisor or the young person's Social Worker is the Lead Professional. Where care leavers remain looked after ('eligible children'), they should usually have a social worker who, where appropriate, will assume the personal adviser role.</p> <p>Where care leavers have left care before their 18th birthday ('relevant children') the Lead Professional will usually be a Personal Adviser who may be attached to a specialist leaving care service.</p>
Adoption cases	For children for whom adoption is the plan, the child's Social Worker is the Lead Professional.
Child with mental health needs	<p>Where a Care Programme Approach (CPA) is being followed, the care co-ordinator is the Lead Professional. Where a CPA is not being followed, it is still appropriate to appoint someone as the Lead Professional to oversee the delivery of services via a multi-agency approach.</p> <p>For children and families that are open to the CAMHS service alone, CAMHS will allocate a lead professional and for children and families that are open to children's services, CAMHS will contribute to multi-agency working and allocate a lead CAMHS worker to support the Social Care Lead Professional.</p> <p><i>See also: Child with disabilities including complex health needs.</i></p>
Youth Justice Service	For young people on community orders or sentences, the Youth Justice Service (YJS) will allocate a YJS case manager. For young people in custody the case manager oversees the management of the case as a whole, linking with the key worker/personal officer in the establishment. The YJS case manager in such situations may be the Lead Professional but where the young person is looked after, is a child subject to a Child Protection or a Child in Need plan, the Lead Professional must be the Social Worker. In all other situations where YJS is involved, the decision

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	as to who should be the Lead Professional must be agreed locally. If it is agreed that the YJS supervising officer should be the Lead Professional this must be with the support of relevant mainstream agencies.
Cross border responsibility	<p>This includes but is not limited to Looked After Children, Children Missing from Home, Care or Education, Private Fostering, Asylum seeking and unaccompanied children, homeless children and children at risk of exploitation i.e. human trafficking, modern slavery, child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation etc</p> <p>Professionals should check the Local Authority that the child is normally a resident or the Local Authority that has responsibility for the child to determine who the Lead Professional should be.</p>

Supporting the Lead Professional

- In order that the Lead Professional can carry out their functions effectively, they must have access to high quality professional supervision and line management support from their agency, and where appropriate additional training to enable them to make appropriate decisions.
- It is also essential that the other professionals involved with the child/family, support the Lead Professional in the exercise of this role, by such means as agreeing to Chair, take and disseminate minutes of meetings, ensuring that they attend meetings as required and that they provide information and follow through actions as agreed.
- It is expected that in the absence of the Lead Professional i.e. annual leave, short-term sickness, exceptional circumstances etc other supporting professionals should continue to support the functions of the Lead Professional where possible to ensure children, young people and family members receive seamless support.

Regardless of their substantive professional role, it is important that the Lead Professional is given appropriate recognition and co-operation in this role by other professionals and agencies.

Changing the Lead Professional

Although it is preferable that there is continuity in the person undertaking a Lead Professional role with a child or young person, there will be circumstances where a change in Lead Professional is required. Examples of such situations are:

- Where the allocated Lead Professional is changing or leaving employment;
- Where the current Lead Professional is ceasing involvement with the family. This could be because needs have been identified as complex and a statutory agency has become involved, or because needs have become less complex and their involvement is no longer necessary including where the child is no longer a Looked After Child or meets the threshold for a Child in Need Plan or a Child

Protection Plan . It could also be because a family disengages from the service currently providing the Lead Professional role;

- Where the identified needs of the child change significantly and it would make sense for a professional from a particular agency to take on the role (for example, where initial needs were health related, but these are resolved and the major need is then identified as school related);
- Where the child, young person or parent/carer requests a change of Lead Professional.

Dispute Resolution Protocol

All agencies that are partners in Salford have committed to integrated working and supporting the implementation of the tools and processes that are being introduced to support this multi-agency approach. This is the basic premise of this dispute resolution protocol.

- The decision regarding the Lead Professional is provisionally agreed on the basis of the criteria outlined above.
- If an agreement cannot be reached during the Early Help Assessment and Team Around the Family arena, consultation should take place with an Early Help Assessment Co-ordinator, who will liaise with the managers concerned to try to find a resolution.
- In the event of a resolution still not being achieved, the matter will be referred to Heads of Services and escalated as appropriate.
- Ultimately, where it is not possible to reach a resolution and it is necessary for a Lead Professional to be appointed, it may be necessary to take the issue to Salford Safeguarding Children Board for consideration.

The Early Help Assessment team can be contacted via **Email:** EHAT@salford.gov.uk or **Telephone:** 0161 603 4239.

Other Resources

- [Escalation Procedure](#) and [Resolving Professional Disagreements/Escalation Policy](#)
- [Dealing with Persistent Non-Engagement with Services by Uncooperative Families](#)
- [Salford Policies and Procedures](#) including [Greater Manchester Safeguarding Children Procedures Manual](#)
- [SSCP Training](#) including [courses](#), [seminars](#) and links to [e-learning](#)
- [7minute briefings](#)
- [Salford Thresholds of Needs and Response](#)
- [Worried about a child](#)
- [Safe Practice and Managing Allegations \(LADO\)](#)
- [Safeguarding Adults](#) and [Salford Safeguarding Adult Board](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance](#)

If there are any comments or suggested changes required in this guidance please contact:
Salford Safeguarding Children Partnership, **Tel:** 0161 603 4322 **Email:** SSCP@salford.gov.uk
Web: <https://safeguardingchildren.salford.gov.uk/>