

Children and families moving across local authority boundaries

It is best practice for children to receive services from agencies who are local to where they live. This particularly applies to health, education and social care services.

At any stage in the process of working with a child and their family, the parents/carers and/or the child may move from one household to another. This may include a planned or unplanned move to a different local authority area.

It is important that professionals from all agencies know what to do when this happens. The effective co-ordination and robust transfer of information to local agencies is critical to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

More detailed guidance on regional cross borders working is available from the [Transfer Protocol: Notification of Children Placed Within or Transferred Between Local Authorities in the East Midlands](#)

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Sharing information of a planned or unplanned move

When a family is planning to move or has moved to another area and there are concerns about the welfare of a child, professionals in all agencies should:

- ensure that other agencies who have been working with the child and family are aware of the move
- seek appropriate consent to share information with agencies in the area the family have moved, or are planning to move, to (if consent is not obtained consideration should be given as to whether grounds exist to share information without consent: the rest of this section assumes consent has been given or refusal set aside)
- provide all relevant records to colleagues in equivalent agencies in the area the family have moved, or are planning to move, to.

If the child has a known social worker (for example, a child on a child protection plan or CIN plan) the social worker should be informed and given the name and details of staff in the area the child is moving to.

This should be done before the move wherever possible, otherwise as soon as possible afterwards (with copies of all documents forwarded to the relevant professional **within five working days** of being notified of the move).

Where a young person who is receiving services as a care leaver moves into another local authority area there is no duty to notify professionals in the new area. However, in agreement with the young person, this may be appropriate in some circumstances.

Where the immigration status of the child and their family is not confirmed or where there are safeguarding concerns, the UK Border Agency should be notified of any movements.

Responding to children and families moving into a new area

All agencies in contact with families who have moved, must establish basic information (i.e. full names, dates of birth, previous address, registration with doctor and enrolment in school etc.). The relevant agency must be notified if a child is not appropriately registered/enrolled.

Facilitating access to universal services

Children and families who move most frequently between local authorities include homeless families, asylum seekers and refugees, families experiencing domestic abuse, gypsy and traveller families and looked after children. For those already socially excluded, moving can worsen the effects of their exclusion and increase the vulnerability of children.

Professionals in all agencies should be aware that a child or family who has moved may not be in receipt of universal services. Professionals should pro-actively engage with the family in order to link them into local universal services, for example:

- providing information about relevant services
- following up to ensure that the family has managed to make contact and register with a local GP, school and other relevant services to which the child is entitled
- engaging appropriately with relevant agencies regarding any concerns which emerge.

Identifying children at risk of harm

Some families will move between authorities to avoid or divert professional contact where safeguarding or child protection concerns have been identified.

Professionals in all agencies should be alert to this possibility. Along with the indicators of abuse and neglect, the following circumstances associated with children and families moving across authority boundaries may indicate a particular cause for concern:

- A child and family or pregnant woman not being registered with a GP.
- A child not having a school place or whose attendance is irregular.
- A child or family having no fixed abode (for example, being homeless or living temporarily with friends and relatives) in so far as it impacts on the welfare of the child;
- Several agencies holding information about the child and family, which is not co-ordinated, and/or which has not followed the child or family (i.e. information which is missing or has gaps).
- Attendance of children at accident and emergency departments: these should be communicated to the child's GP by the hospital's paediatric discharge system or paediatric liaison arrangements.
- Domestic abuse and violence, substance misuse and/or adult mental health problems.

Requesting information if circumstances suggest cause for concern

If agencies become aware of a family moving into their area in circumstances that suggest there may be cause for concern about the welfare of one or more children, they should contact their equivalent agencies in the area the family have left to request information. This information should be provided **within one working day**.

Transfer of responsibilities

Children's social care services are normally provided by the local authority for **the area where the child is living or is found**. For these purposes, 'found' means the physical location where the child suffers, or is identified to be at risk of, harm or neglect.

However, where a child is currently receiving services, or is subject to a section 47 enquiry, formal transfer processes should be followed. Responsibility for safeguarding the child will remain with the local authority where the child was living (even though the child will have moved) until these transfer processes have been fully completed.

In some cases the local authority where the family previously lived will retain responsibility for the child.

Children subject to a statutory order

Responsibility for a child will remain with the local authority where the family previously lived if the child is subject to a statutory order. This includes:

- a care order
- an interim care order
- any form of supervision or family assistance order
- an emergency protection order
- a child assessment order
- any child who is subject to police protection powers
- a Section 37 assessment.

This legal responsibility cannot be transferred. However, the local authority to which the family have moved should be made aware of the move and may agree to provide services on behalf of the local authority where the family previously lived. This must be confirmed in writing by a local authority children's social care manager.

Any child protection concerns which subsequently arise are the responsibility of the local authority in whose area the child is found (i.e. the physical location where the child suffers, or is identified to be at risk of, harm or neglect).

Children who are accommodated

An accommodated child remains the responsibility of the local authority where the family previously lived until:

- the child is discharged from accommodation
- the local authority to which the family have moved agrees they will accommodate the child. This agreement must be confirmed in writing by children's care managers for both authorities.

Any child protection concerns which subsequently arise are the responsibility of the local authority in whose area the child is found (i.e. the physical location where the child suffers, or is identified to be at risk of, harm or neglect).

Where a parent is accommodated or a care leaver

Where a child is a mother/expectant mother and is accommodated or subject to leaving care arrangements (potentially up to 25 years), the responsibility for these services remains with the local authority where they previously lived unless formally transferred.

However, the local authority where the child/baby is living or found will be responsible for responding to any concerns about the child/baby.

If the unborn baby is already the subject of a pre-birth child protection plan the arrangements for transferring the child protection plan (below) must be followed.

Children subject to a child protection plan

All reasonable efforts should be made to house children who are subject of a child protection plan or to a child protection enquiry within the authority (unless a move is part of the child protection plan). This applies to both temporary and permanent housing provision.

The responsibility for a child subject of a protection plan remains with the local authority where the family previously lived until a 'Transfer-In' Conference has taken place and the area where the child has moved to makes a formal decision about the continuing need for a protection plan and this is confirmed in writing. For more information see the section on transfer in conferences. (add link to LLR procedures)

The Lead Social Worker will:

- Immediately make a referral to Children's Social Care in the new area to request a temporary child protection plan in their area and request a transfer in conference to be convened.
- Send the child's relevant personal details and forward any relevant documentation to the new area including a copy of the most recent Child Protection Plan, record of Child Protection Conferences and the most recent Review Conference;
- Inform the 'original' Child Protection list/plan holder (Children subject to a Child Protection Plan) of the new /temporary address.
- Inform the Core Group members of the change in circumstances.
- Attend any Initial Child Protection Conference in the new area

If a family moves to an area that is too far away for the existing social worker to effectively carry out home visits and other tasks required by the child protection plan, the local authority in the area the child has moved to should assist by implementing the plan prior to the formal Transfer-in conference. The agreement to do this must be confirmed in writing **within one week** of the family moving (where the date of the move is known).

Any child protection concerns which subsequently arise are the responsibility of the local authority in whose area the child is found (i.e. the physical location where the child suffers, or is identified to be at risk of, harm or neglect)

Time-limited moves

There may be circumstances where the child protection plan specifies a move out of an authority for a time-limited period. For example:

- the child temporarily stays with friends/family in another authority
- there is a time-limited placement in a residential or mother and baby unit in another local authority area
- a parent, together with children, is supported for a time-limited period to live with a specified person (for example, a relative or friend in another authority)
- the child is admitted to hospital in another authority.

In these cases the responsibility for the child protection plan will remain with the area who initiated the plan, although they may require assistance from the area where the child is temporarily living.

Children who move frequently

The child protection plan will also remain with the area who initiated the plan if the family moves so frequently that the child's welfare cannot be adequately monitored. The local authority holding the case responsibility should share information with each successive authority that the family moves to.

Professionals in the area where the family are temporarily living should provide assistance to implement the child protection plan and should share information with the authority retaining the formal responsibility. The child should be added, in a temporary category, to the list of children on a child protection plan in each area they live.

Children in receipt of services as a 'child in need'

Where a child who is receiving services as a 'child in need' (but is not looked after or subject to a child protection plan) moves it is normally advisable that assessments, enquiries or particular pieces of work or treatment are concluded before any transfer of case responsibility takes place. This will limit the extent to which children and families are exposed to having to repeat their stories and prevent work to overcome child protection concerns having to be repeated.

Following formal notification, the authority in the area the child has moved to should undertake an assessment of need and make a decision on the child and family's eligibility for service provision **within one calendar month** of the notification of the move (or later if agreed).

The authority in the area the child has left should retain case responsibility while this assessment takes place and may retain responsibility for a limited period after if they wish to challenge the outcome of the assessment.

Any child protection concerns which subsequently arise are the responsibility of the local authority in whose area the child is found (i.e. the physical location where the child suffers, or is identified to be at risk of, harm or neglect).

Children who move during section 47 enquiries

In the event that a family moves while a section 47 enquiry is being undertaken, the authority who initiated the section 47 enquiry should convene a strategy meeting/discussion **within 72 hours**. This must include children's social care and other relevant professionals from the area the child has moved to.

The authority who initiated the enquiry retains responsibility until the completion of the enquiry, unless an alternative arrangement is agreed.

If a child protection conference is required it should be take place in the area the child has moved to.

Other circumstances requiring cooperation across local authority boundaries

Co-parenting arrangements

Where there is a co-parenting arrangement (however imbalanced) across two different local authority areas, the professionals in the two areas should jointly plan for the child's safety. This

will include an assessment of the child's needs in both locations and an assessment of both parents.

The facts of the individual case should determine which authority will have lead responsibility for the child protection plan, and the second authority will need to hold the child on a temporary plan. Reviews should be managed by the lead authority but will involve professionals from both areas.

Housing

Where housing and any subsistence costs are being provided by the area the child has left, these costs should continue to be borne by the local authority the child has left until the child and family's housing needs are resolved. Other local authority children's social care, or other services, should be provided by the area the child has moved to.

Negotiated alternatives

In exceptional cases, in response to the circumstances of an individual child, a local authority children's social care manager may negotiate different arrangements to those set out here, with their equivalent in another local authority.

Such negotiated departure from this procedure should be confirmed in writing by both the local authorities within 48 hours of the agreement being made.

Inter-authority arrangements for child protection enquiries

Responsibility for section 47 enquiries rests with the local authority children's social care for **the area where the child is living or is found**. For these purposes, 'found' means the physical location where the child suffers, or is identified to be at risk of, harm or neglect.

Usually, the area where the child is living is the same as the physical location where the child suffers, or is identified to be at risk, of harm and neglect. However, these may be different. For example

- a child found in one authority but subject to a child protection plan in another authority
- a looked after child placed in another local authority
- a child attending a boarding school in another area
- a child receiving in-patient treatment in another area
- a family currently receiving services from another local authority
- a child staying temporarily in the area but whose family continues to live in another authority
- a family who have moved into the area, but where another authority retains case responsibility temporarily
- a child suspected of being abused by a paedophile operating in another local authority are to the area the child lives.

Where more than one authority is involved, immediate and full consultation should take place between both areas to agree how enquiries will be planned and undertaken.

However, **negotiations about responsibility must not cause delay in urgent situations**.

Any emergency action should be taken by the area where the child is suffering, or at risk of suffering, harm or neglect (unless agreement is reached the authority where the child normally lives will assume this responsibility).

The area where the child lives will be responsible if concerns relate to the child's home circumstances or if the concerns are in relation to the child's parenting.

Where the concerns arise in relation to the child's circumstances where they do not normally live (for example, abuse in a school or placement) the authority where the neglect, harm or abuse takes place should lead the enquiry, liaising closely with the authority where the child lives.

The authority where the child lives will be responsible for the provision of any form of foster or residential care or other services to ensure the protection of a child found in another authority.

Moving Abroad

Local agencies and professionals should bear in mind when working with children and families where there are outstanding concerns about the children's safety and welfare, including where the concerns are about an unborn child who may be likely to suffer Significant Harm, that a series of missed appointments may indicate that the family has moved out of the area or overseas. Children's Social Care and the police should be informed immediately when such concerns arise.

Where a child subject of a Child Protection Plan moves abroad whether planned or unplanned the Lead Social Worker and Conference Chair should consider whether to reconvene a Review Conference or Core Group to determine what action to take. Appropriate steps should be taken to inform the relevant local and overseas authorities in the country to which the child has moved of any concerns.

Dependant on circumstances consideration should be given to following the children missing procedures [Children and Young People go Missing from Home or Care \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

Consideration needs to be given to appropriate legal interventions, where it appears that a child, who has outstanding child protection concerns about their safety and welfare, may be removed from the UK by their family in order to avoid the involvement of agencies with safeguarding responsibilities. This also applies when a child, who is subject to a Care Order, has been removed from the UK. Children's Social Care, the Police Child Abuse Investigation Team and the International Child Abduction and Contact Unit should be informed immediately.

In the case of children taken overseas it may be appropriate to contact the Consular Directorate at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which offers assistance to British nationals in distress overseas (020 7008 1500). They may be able to follow up a case through their consular post(s) in the country concerned.