

Children and Families Moving Across Local Authority Borders

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The purpose of this guidance is to support safe, timely and coordinated practice when a child, young person, unborn baby or family moves between Local Authority areas, whether the move is planned, unplanned, temporary or permanent. It sets out the key expectations for information sharing, safeguarding responses, transfer arrangements, management oversight and recording.

The guidance applies to practitioners and managers across children's services and partner agencies who are involved in identifying, assessing, supporting or safeguarding children and families who move into, out of, or across Cardiff and other Local Authority areas. It should be used alongside relevant statutory duties, the Wales Safeguarding Procedures, local safeguarding arrangements and any specific cross-border or legal requirements that apply to the child's circumstances.

The guidance is intended to promote consistency and reduce drift, but it does not replace professional judgement. Where there are immediate concerns about a child's safety or welfare, practitioners must take appropriate safeguarding action without delay and seek management advice where required.

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 children's 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. This includes where concerns are of a complex or contextual nature, including risks associated with exploitation (e.g. child sexual or criminal exploitation, trafficking, or county lines activity).

For the purposes of this guidance, the 'originating Authority' is where the child has previously lived, and the 'receiving Authority' is the Local Authority to which the child has moved to.

Throughout the guidance, the use of 'child' will also refer to babies, children and young people.

Case responsibility and safeguarding responsibility

It is important to distinguish between case responsibility and safeguarding responsibility. Case responsibility refers to the Local Authority that holds formal responsibility for the child's plan, legal status, assessment or ongoing service provision. This may remain with the originating Authority, for example where a child is subject to a statutory order, accommodated by a Local Authority, or where responsibility has not yet been formally transferred.

Safeguarding responsibility refers to the duty to respond to immediate concerns about a child's safety and welfare. Where a child is physically present in another Authority area and there are concerns that they may be suffering, or at risk of suffering, harm or neglect, the Authority where the child is located may need to take urgent safeguarding action, even if another Authority retains formal case responsibility.

Discussions about which Authority holds ongoing case responsibility must not delay any action required to safeguard the child. Where responsibility is unclear or disputed, both Authorities should share information, agree interim arrangements, and escalate promptly through management routes so that the child remains visible and protected while formal responsibility is resolved.

The Guidance applies to both children originating from Cardiff and have moved to another area, as well as children moving into Cardiff.

This also includes children who move out of the UK whilst subject to a Care and Support Protection Plan. Where this is the case please refer to the Welsh Government Protocol: [Handling cross-border child protection cases | GOV.WALES](#)

Key Principles

The following principles should guide practice whenever a child or family moves between Local Authority areas, whether the move is planned, unplanned, temporary or permanent:

- **Safeguarding takes priority.** Concerns about responsibility, consent, ordinary residence or transfer arrangements must not delay action to protect a child or unborn baby from harm.
- **Information must follow the child without delay.** Relevant information should be shared promptly with the receiving Authority and partner agencies,

including current risks, strengths, protective factors, plans, legal status and key contacts.

- **The child's lived experience must remain central.** Decisions should consider the child's day-to-day circumstances, relationships, education, health, identity, wishes and feelings, and any impact of the move on their safety and well-being.
- **There should be no gap in professional oversight.** Until responsibility is formally agreed or transferred, the originating and receiving Authorities should work together to ensure the child remains visible, supported and safeguarded.
- **Roles and responsibilities must be clear.** Practitioners and managers should agree who is leading, what actions are required, by when, and how progress will be reviewed and recorded.
- **Professional disagreement must be escalated promptly.** Any dispute between Local Authorities or agencies should be escalated through management routes, but this must not prevent immediate safeguarding activity from taking place.
- **Recording must be clear and defensible.** All contacts, information shared, decisions, rationale, agreements, disputes and actions should be recorded on the child's record.

1. 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 well-being or 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 agreement to share information with agencies in the area the family have moved or are planning to move. 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.
- ✓ Agreement is required from the parent or guardian to share information, unless there are safeguarding concerns about an unborn child or children where safeguarding would take priority. Agreement should be sought where possible, but it is not essential. Safeguarding takes priority.

- ✓ Provide all relevant records to colleagues in equivalent agencies in the area the family have moved or planning to move to. These can include the following:
 - the temporary address and likely duration of stay;
 - up to date chronology;
 - most recent well-being assessment;
 - relevant child protection conference records/minutes;
 - most recent care and support protection plan;
 - any Public Law Outline (PLO) plan, if not included in the above
 - any existing Court Orders (Care Orders, Special Guardianship Orders, Child Arrangement Orders etc).

If the child has a social worker in the originating Authority, the social worker should be informed and given the name and details of relevant staff/agencies to contact in the area the child is moving to. This should be done before the move wherever possible. Copies of all relevant documents should be forwarded to the relevant professional **within five working days** of being notified of the move.

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 moves and to share relevant information including asylum claims in other countries.

Management oversight and escalation

Effective transfer arrangements require clear management oversight. Where a child or family has moved, or is planning to move, the allocated practitioner should ensure that their line manager is informed at the earliest opportunity. Management oversight should confirm the level of risk, whether the move is temporary or permanent, what information has been shared, which Authority is leading, and what immediate actions are required to safeguard the child.

Managers should ensure there is no gap in professional oversight while transfer arrangements are being agreed. This includes checking that the receiving Authority has been notified, that relevant records have been shared within the required timescale, that any urgent safeguarding action has been progressed, and that the child remains visible to services during the transfer period.

Escalation should take place without delay where there is uncertainty, disagreement or drift. This includes situations where the receiving Authority does not respond, there is disagreement about case responsibility, there are barriers to sharing information, agreed actions are not completed, or there are concerns that the child's safety and welfare may be compromised while arrangements are being resolved.

Where escalation is required, practitioners should discuss the matter with their line manager in the first instance. If the issue remains unresolved, it should be escalated to the relevant service manager or equivalent manager in both Local Authorities. Where there is an immediate safeguarding concern, escalation must not delay protective action, and the Authority where the child is physically present should take any necessary urgent steps to safeguard the child.

Where there is a dispute between Local Authorities about case responsibility, transfer arrangements or the lead role, the matter should be progressed through the relevant management escalation routes in each Authority. Disputes should be addressed promptly and professionally, with a clear record of the issue, the interim safeguarding arrangements, who is responsible for each action, and the timeframe for resolution. Disagreement about responsibility must not delay information sharing, assessment activity, strategy discussions, protective action or any other steps required to safeguard the child.

All management decisions, escalation actions, agreements, disagreements, rationale and next steps must be clearly recorded on the child's record. This should include who was contacted, when contact was made, what was agreed, any outstanding issues, and the date by which arrangements will be reviewed.

2. 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. Agencies must note if there has been previous children's services involvement and its nature.

Facilitating access to universal services

Children and families who move most frequently between Local Authorities including homeless families, asylum seekers and refugees, families experiencing domestic abuse, gypsy and traveller families and looked after children, may require support to access universal services. 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 coordinated, 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.
- Exploitation and/or trafficking concerns.
- Children accommodated in another Local Authority area.

It is essential that all information that is pertinent to the safety of the child/ren or expectant mother is shared by Local Authorities. For example; if there are safeguarding concerns in respect of half- siblings, previous children or concerns of a parent who resides in a different Authority to the child and may see the child.

In this instance all professionals have a responsibility to make a safeguarding referral to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in the Authority area where the child/family are relocating. Where exploitation is identified or suspected, this must be clearly flagged within the referral and include notification to relevant specialist services (e.g. SAFE where the child is in Cardiff). This is to be completed within one working day.

Local Authorities may provide access to exploitation toolkits to support practitioners. In Cardiff, the SAFE team can be contacted to request a copy of the exploitation toolkit (SAFE.Exploitation@cardiff.gov.uk). Practitioners should note that individual Local Authorities may hold their own locally developed toolkits.

If a Strategy Discussion is held, it is good practice for relevant Local Authorities to attend to share information and keep a record of information and actions, so that if a family returns the information is available to inform any future decision making.

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.

For Transfers In please refer to 'Temporary Child Protection Registration Procedure'

Children and young people on the Child Protection register who move frequently

Any agency/practitioner who become aware that a family with a child who is subject to child protection registration moves into or out of an area, must notify all agencies involved as well as the custodian of the register – see the Wales Safeguarding Procedures [Safeguarding Wales](#).

The Care and Support Protection Plan will 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 may provide assistance to implement the Care and Support Protection Plan to be agreed on an individual basis in line with the Care and Support Protection Plan. If Cardiff agree to complete tasks under the plan, we must 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.

Inter-Authority arrangements for child protection enquiries (S47 Enquiries)

When a report of possible abuse or neglect is received from/about a child not residing in their originating Authority the initial strategy meeting/discussion must be convened by the Authority where the child is found (Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2019; S3.1).

For example: a report is made whilst a child is on holiday or staying with a relative in the area. The Local Authority for that area is responsible for convening a strategy discussion/meeting.

The relevant social services managers should be informed about the report without delay, and the strategy meeting (or discussion where there are constraints such as distance) must be organised to allow for the participation of a representative of the originating Authority, and the Authority where the incident is alleged to have happened.

The strategy meeting will decide:

- the Authority that will have responsibility for carrying out the enquiries. this will normally be the Authority in whose area the incident occurred;
- what part should be played in the investigation by the other relevant Authorities.
- The decision and reason for making it must be clearly recorded and made in the best interest of protecting the child.

Where more than one Authority is involved, immediate and full consultation should take place between both areas to agree how enquiries will be undertaken through a strategy discussion.

Where exploitation is a feature of the case, consideration **should** be given to multi-agency safeguarding meetings (including exploitation-focused meetings), ensuring appropriate cross-border representation and specialist service input.

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

If there are practical barriers to a Local Authority achieving tasks, discussion must take place between the responsible Local Authority and the Local Authority where the child is present.

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.

This includes where concerns relate to exploitation. Where exploitation is occurring in a different Local Authority area to where the child ordinarily resides, the Authority in which the exploitation is taking place will be responsible for convening the strategy discussion/meeting and leading the enquiry, with appropriate involvement from the originating Authority. For example, where a child resides in one Local Authority area but is subject to exploitation in another (e.g. through county lines activity), the Authority where the exploitation is occurring should take the lead in convening the strategy meeting.

The Authority which placed the child (placing Authority) 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.

Examples are;

- a child found in one Authority but subject to a child protection plan in another Authority
- a Child Looked After 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 has moved into the area, but where another Authority retains case responsibility
- a child suspected of being abused in another local Authority area to the area the child lives.

Children who move during Section 47 enquiries

The Authority who initiated the Section 47 Enquiry should convene a strategy meeting/discussion **within 24/72 hours**. This must include Children's Services and other relevant professionals from the area the child/pregnant woman has moved to.

The Authority who initiated the enquiry retains responsibility until the completion of the enquiry, unless an alternative arrangement is agreed. This ensures that services are working together to limit the times that children and families are exposed to having to repeat their stories and minimise the risk of crucial information may be lost.

The transfer process will depend on the outcome of the S47 Enquiry (see rest of document). An Outcome Strategy Meeting involving both Local Authorities will agree next steps. If a child protection conference is required it should be take place in the area the child has moved to.

Children and young people 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.

The Local Authority's legal responsibility can only be transferred by direction of the Court. This includes:

- Care order
- Interim Care Order
- Child Arrangement Order (Residence order)
- Emergency Protection Order.
- Child Assessment Order
- Police Protection Powers
- Section 37 assessment; Section 7 (of the Children Act 1989)

However, the receiving Authority to which the family have moved should be made aware of the move and may agree to provide services on behalf of the originating local Authority where the family previously lived. This must be confirmed in writing.

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 and young people who are accommodated by the Local Authority:

A care-experienced child remains the responsibility of the originating Authority until:

- The child is discharged from Local Authority care or reaches an age of 18 years old.
- In the case of the child who is voluntarily accommodated, when the parent does not give consent for their child to be accommodated, or the child is of an age where he can consent not to be in foster care.

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 support (potentially up to 25 years), the responsibility for these services remains with the originating 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 in respect of 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 must be followed (see above).

Children supported under a Part 4 Care and Support Plan (Wales) or are a 'Child in Need' (England, Scotland, Ireland; CA 1989).

When a child who is receiving services under a 'Care and Support' or 'Child in Need' plan moves, it is normally advisable that assessments, enquiries or particular pieces of work 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 reduced child protection concerns having to be repeated.

Wales – Portability of care and support

When a Local Authority (the "sending Authority") learns that an individual under its duty (Section 35 or 37) plans to move to another Authority's area, it must:

1. Notify the receiving Authority.
2. Provide the individual's care and support plan and any other requested information.

When the receiving Authority is informed of the move, it must:

1. Notify the sending Authority.
2. Provide the individual and their carer with appropriate information.
3. If the individual is a child, provide information to those with parental responsibility.

4. Assess the individual under Section 19 (if an adult) or Section 21 (if a child), considering any changes in care and support needs due to the move.

If the receiving Authority hasn't completed the required assessment or other steps by the move date, it must meet the individual's care and support needs according to the plan prepared by the sending Authority, as far as reasonably practicable.

England - Following formal notification, the receiving 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).

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.

In Child Protection cases, the facts of the individual case should determine which Authority will have lead responsibility for a 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 a family have moved Local Authorities and have made a homeless application, in situations where there is yet to be established the local Authority holds responsibility for housing, the Authority where the homeless application has been made will continue to have a responsibility for the welfare of the child until there is clarity on the Local Authority which will provide ongoing accommodation.

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.

Negotiated alternatives

In exceptional cases, in response to the circumstances of an individual child, a Local Authority children's services 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

Moving Abroad

Local agencies and professionals should consider 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, missed appointments may indicate that the family have moved out of the area or overseas. Children's Services 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 Social Work Team and Conference Chair should consider reconvening a Review Conference or Core Group to determine what action to take.

The Welsh Central Authority can provide consultation and support for cooperation with Authorities abroad under the 1996 Hague Convention. At the time of writing, The Welsh Central Authority has engaged Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB) to discharge its functions under Chapter V of the Convention concerning co-operation. Further Advice prepared by the Welsh Assembly Government can be found here- [Handling cross-border child protection cases: A "Key Steps" guide for Local Authorities health boards and NHS trusts in Wales](#)

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.

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 agencies.

This also applies when a child, who is subject to a Care Order, has been removed from the UK. Children's Services, the Police and the International Child Abduction and Contact Unit should be informed immediately.

Coordination with Overseas Authorities:

Local agencies should take appropriate steps to inform the relevant Overseas Authorities and ensure that safeguarding measures are in place

The originating Authority should maintain communication with the receiving authority to monitor the child's welfare and address any ongoing concerns until such a time until the transfer process is complete.

Document Control

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