
**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 21 June 2016
Subject: Post Ofsted Improvement Plan Update - Signs of Safety
Report of: Strategic Lead Children's Social Care

Summary

Manchester City Council's Children and Families Directorate is adopting Signs of Safety as its practice framework for all services.

This is being done to develop our workforce in order to deliver quality services through good practice, and thus to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

Signs of Safety is an evidence based social care practice framework and will bring together the organisation and its partners to provide a strengths based approach where there is a need for statutory social work intervention.

Signs of Safety will improve effectiveness of multi agency working in the city, with greater partnership and consistency as the common strengths based framework knits services together.

Recommendations

Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the content of the report.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental and Climate Change Impacts

Consider, and describe if applicable, how the recommendations in the report will impact on the environment, on carbon reductions goals for the city, and on the Council's climate change strategies.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for

- Equal Opportunities Policy
 - Risk Management
 - Legal Considerations
-

Financial Consequences – Revenue and Capital; In other areas where the model has been implemented there has been a reduction in the number of Looked After

Children. Implementing this model is critical in reforming children's services and achieving the overall reduction in the LAC number required.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Manchester Signs of Safety Charter (Draft)
- Signs of Safety - Comprehensive Briefing Paper. Dr Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy (3rd edition, 2014)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Signs of Safety is already being used by a number of local authorities in the UK and worldwide, and is an innovative approach to statutory children's social work. We plan to adapt it and make it our own, with our own front-line experts shaping how and when it is used.
- 1.2 We believe that this way of working can transform social work in Manchester, improving the quality of service and practice, and ultimately help us achieve the best results for children and their families to become one of the best providers of social services in the country.
- 1.3 The programme was formally launched with staff in February 2016, and most social workers have now been trained, but fully embedding the approach in Manchester will take up to five years. Early feedback from training is generally very positive, and staff are being encouraged to start using the elements of Signs of Safety as soon as possible in their work. As well as staff development, it is hoped that Signs of Safety will have an effect on staff retention as social workers benefit from this training alongside the other service improvements we are making.
- 1.4 It is expected that the resulting improved outcomes will include the right children coming into care; more children staying at home safely; building the capacity of families, with their networks of extended family, friends and community as well as professionals, to be more resilient and so less reliant on social care as children grow up.
- 1.5 The aim is for Signs of Safety to bring together the organisation and its partners, providing an evidence based model for social work intervention, and aligning organisational arrangements to work with the new practice.
- 1.6 It is envisaged that Signs of Safety will improve effectiveness of multi agency working in the city, with greater partnership and consistency as the common framework knits services together.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Signs of Safety (SoS) is a solution-focused, strengths-based approach to social work practice, which can be applied across the social care system. It has been developed by Eileen Munro, Terry Murphy and Andrew Turnell.
- 2.2 The development of Signs of Safety began in Australia in the 1990's, drawing on solution-focused therapy and the direct experience of effective practice by child protection workers and the experiences of families. It has now grown into a comprehensive approach, being used in more than 100 areas in 17 countries around the world, and increasingly being adapted to a broader range of human services including youth justice and community health.

- 2.3 Signs of Safety is still evolving within its core framework, and continues to develop through innovation by practitioners in the international Signs of Safety community, the experiences of children, young people and families and its use in different parts of the UK and the rest of the world.
- 2.4 Signs of Safety (SoS) is a key component of the workforce reform required in Manchester Children's Services following the last Ofsted inspection. SoS has been commended by Ofsted, and other local authorities have used it to improve their inspection rating and performance.

3.0 Research Evidence and Studies

- 3.1 Qualitative and quantitative evaluation and research, and data from organisations which have already implemented Signs of Safety around the world, generally indicate the following outcomes:
- Families feel more empowered and are more able to understand and address the concerns and requirements of child protection and other authorities.
 - In child protection, the number of children removed from families reduces relative to the number of families with whom authorities work more intensively to build safety around the children.
 - Practitioners report greater job satisfaction due to the clarity of the approach, the usefulness of the tools and the impact for the children and families.
- 3.2 In considering these outcomes it is important to remember that the goal of child protection practice is to improve child safety, not to keep families together as an end in itself.
- 3.3 The evidence and theory base for *Signs of Safety* has developed substantially within action research, collaborative and appreciative inquiry, or broadly "practice based evidence", and means the approach is built from what is probably the strongest single knowledge base of what works in actual child protection practice (see for example: Christianson, and Maloney, 2006; Teoh et. al., 2003; Turnell 2004; 2006; 2007; Turnell and Edwards, 1997; 1999; Turnell, Elliott and Hogg 2007; Turnell and Essex, 2006; 2013; Turnell, Lohrbach and Curran 2008; Turnell, Vesterhauge-Petersen and Vesterhauge-Petersen, 2013). The *Signs of Safety* community has also begun to publish on effective leadership and implementation (see Turnell, Munro and Murphy, 2013; Salveron, Bromfield, Kirika, Simmons, Murphy and Turnell 2015).
- 3.4 Significant quantitative practice data sets and research undertaken or underway since the 2000s include:
- Minnesota, USA outcomes - Casey Family Services and the Wilder Foundation
<http://www.wilder.org/Search/Pages/Results.aspx?k=signs%20of%20safety>

- Ontario, Canada - *The use of mapping in child welfare investigations: A strength-based hybrid intervention* (Versanov, *Child Care in Practice* in press 2014)
- England - The NSPCC studies (DSCF 2009; Gardner, 2008) summarized in Turnell 2012 and NSPCC 2013
- Netherlands – outcomes study by TNO and ZonMw – more information at <http://www.signsofsafety.net/signs-of-safety-research/>

3.5 Two major research efforts inform the development of meaningful measures, both for performance management in organisations as well as outcome research:

- Fidelity measures - Casey Family Programs through an international program - for families on practice, workers and supervisors in practice, and all staff on organisational culture and fit
<http://sofs.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/131207%20The%20Signs%20of%20Safety%20Fidelity%20%20Research%20Project%20S%20of%20S%20Website.pdf>
- Theory of change (results logic) - Australian Centre of for Child Protection (AAP), University of South Australia, research is defining the essential elements of practice leading to the outcomes for children and families
<http://www.signsofsafety.net/2920-2/>

4.0 Implementation of Signs of Safety

4.1 Effective implementation of Signs of Safety will only happen if we have a persistent and comprehensive approach, that is also agile and responsive to circumstances and progress, and involves continuous feedback and learning, is required for effective implementation. While outcomes are apparent quickly, widespread and sustainable adoption and outcomes take time. Experience implementing Signs of Safety has indicated the following four areas of focus, and the continuous learning process, that are reflected in MCC's implementation plan:

- **Learning** including basic training for staff; advanced training for practice leaders / champions; a two year formal trajectory for practice leaders development; deliberate workplace based learning; and individual and group supervision aligned to Signs of Safety.
- **Leadership** including a clear and focused organisational commitment to Signs of Safety; with strong, visible senior management engaged with practice; managing and leading the organisation in ways that model the practice approach; critically fostering a safe organisation (building confidence that workers will be supported through anxiety, crises and contention); and building shared leadership; supported by learning and development activities focusing on key implementation and practice issues.

- **Organisational Alignment** beginning with an implementation group and plan and the ‘charter’ expressing the organisational commitment; policies, procedures and forms to match practice; strong capacity at the front line; adaptation and planning for varying service areas; deliberate and formal partner engagement; and national and international engagement for resources and learning.
- **Meaningful Measures** including quality assurance which includes case audit, feedback from families and practitioners, and core data / KPIs aligned with Signs of Safety results logic and practice fidelity, together with an information management system aligned to the practice.



5.0 Progress to Date

5.1 The Signs of Safety Implementation Group is in place, with multi agency membership, Chaired by Amanda Amesbury, Strategic Lead, Children’s Services. The Group has sub groups working on

- Comms / Engagement
- Policies / - Aligning Processes with Signs of Safety/ICT
- Data / QA
- Learning / Training

5.2 Over 300 Social Care and partner staff have completed 2 day Signs of Safety Training Feb – April. Feedback from the training of the first cohort (166) of trainees shows 73% felt Signs of Safety would “greatly or somewhat increase their job satisfaction”.

5.3 Research has been carried out with staff receiving training in Signs of Safety. This has shown:

- Staff like the focus on strengths and positives
- They think the approach will be empowering for families

- They are looking forward to working more in partnership with the family
 - They like the clear structure and framework
 - They welcome a whole system and culture change, and
 - They think the tools are child friendly
- 5.4 Staff are encouraged to put the principles of SoS into practice as soon as they complete the training. Feedback from Social Work Consultants confirms that Social Work staff are already using Signs of Safety tools. In a post training survey, 77% of respondents were either very confident or confident about applying Signs of Safety to their own practice after training.
- 5.5 600 staff will have completed 2 day Signs of Safety Training by 26 May 2016. July training is diaried for new starters.
- 5.6 Over 60 Signs of Safety Practice Leads have been identified. They will receive a further 5 days Advanced Signs of Safety Training in Sept/October. Their role will be to effectively lead on the approach and support staff using it under their supervision. Practice Lead Bi Monthly workshops with the Regional Training Consultant commenced last month. Ultimately they will become our future trainers of the model once it is fully embedded.
- 5.7 Social Work Consultants are working on aligning existing paperwork and processes with Signs of Safety. This includes Single Assessment and Supervision tools. The IT elements of Signs of Safety are being delivered as part of the MiCare Upgrade Project. This project will deliver a more standard Best Practise configured system to simplify workflows and forms as well as upgrade to the Social Care System (MiCare) to the latest version (Mosaic). This work will include new workflow and redesign of forms that cater for the new practices and processes introduce to support the Signs of Safety work including the Single Assessment and Supervision requirements that are developed by the Social Work Consultants.
- 5.8 The high level release schedule for the MiCare Upgrade Project is as follows
- May 16 - Ofsted improvements and Care Act Changes
 - June 16 - Quick Wins from Best Practise Configuration Workshops
 - Autumn 16 - Upgrade to Mosaic – Phase 1
 - 1st Quarter of 17 – Upgrade to Mosaic Phase 2. New functionality from Mosaic (eg Group Working)
- 5.9 A Strategic Partner Briefing is being held on 30 June, facilitated by Terry Murphy, Signs of Safety Founder. Partners will be invited. Further briefings are being planned for July for partner staff at all levels.
- 5.10 Signs of Safety shares the same strengths based approach as the asset based approach being rolled out in our Early Help Services. The Implementation Group includes the Strategic Lead for Early Help and SoS training is also open to Early Help Staff.

- 5.11 The Signs of Safety Charter (see appendix A) is going to CMT for approval this month. It is expected that Signs of Safety will be fully piloted by autumn 2016 when systems and processes will be aligned for full implementation by autumn 2017. This will be two years from the SoS launch. From experience in other local Authorities, it is expected that the total embedding of SoS can take up to 5 years.

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL CHILDRENS SERVICES

SIGNS OF SAFETY (Draft 2, April 2016)

Manchester City Council's Children and Families Directorate is adopting Signs of Safety as its practice framework for all services.

We are doing this to develop our workforce in order to deliver quality services through good practice, and thus to achieve better outcomes for families and children. MCC believes that the resulting improved outcomes will include the right children coming into care; more children staying at home safely; and building the capacity of families, with their networks of extended family, friends and community as well as professionals, to be more resilient and so less reliant on social care as children grow up. Consequently there should be fewer re-referrals.

MCC wants Signs of Safety to bring together the organisation and its partners, providing an evidence based model for social work intervention, and aligning organisational arrangements to work with the new practice.

MCC also envisages that Signs of Safety will improve effectiveness of multi agency working in the city, with greater partnership and consistency as the common framework knits services together. We believe that a consistent case practice model and common language across agencies - along with families owning their own plans and the plans actively involving the family's network - means that it will be safe to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach.

BACKGROUND

Signs of Safety (SoS) is a solution-focused, strengths-based approach to social work practice, which can be applied across the child protection system. It has been developed by Eileen Munro, Terry Murphy and Andrew Turnell.

The development of Signs of Safety began in Australia in the 1990's, drawing on solution-focused therapy and the direct experience of effective practice by child protection workers and the experiences of families. It has now grown into a comprehensive approach, being used in more than 100 areas in 17 countries around the world, and increasingly being adapted to a broader range of human services including youth justice and community health.

Signs of Safety is still evolving within its core framework, and continues to develop through innovation by practitioners in the international Signs of Safety community, the experiences of children, young people and families and its use in different parts of the UK and the rest of the world.

Signs of Safety (SoS) is a key component of the workforce reform required in Manchester Children's Services following the last Ofsted inspection. SoS has been

commended by Ofsted, and other local authorities have used it to improve their inspection rating and performance.

DESCRIPTION OF SIGNS OF SAFETY PRACTICE

Signs of Safety is an integrated framework for how to do the work in children's services - the principles for practice; a range of tools for assessment and planning, decision making and engaging children and families; the disciplines for practitioners' application of the tools; and processes through which the work is undertaken with families, young people and children, and including partner agencies.

Signs of Safety practice enables child welfare intervention to be the catalyst and method that initiates behavior change by families and empowers them to make these changes.

Principles – underpinning the approach

Working relationships are fundamental, with families and other professionals

Relationships must be forged and maintained in the face of the authority that children's services practitioners carry, and the natural biases towards pre-judgment and different perspectives of professionals.

Using critical review – always being prepared to admit you may have it wrong

Not being prepared to admit you may have it wrong is perhaps the biggest source of error in children's services. Practitioners need to take a questioning approach and remain open minded.

Having grand aspirations in everyday practice

Families, young people and children together with front line practitioners are the arbiters of whether practice works. This "practice led evidence" has informed the development of Signs of Safety and continues to be the engine of learning for practitioners and to drive innovation and evolution of the approach.

Practice Tools

Assessment and planning tools are used for "mapping" the worries, strengths and required safety, all in plain language. The map encompasses the four domains for enquiry:

The "***three columns***":

- What are we worried about? (in child protection, the past harm, future danger, complicating factors)
- What is working well? (in child protection, the existing strengths and existing safety)
- What needs to happen? (in child protection, the family and child protection authority safety goals and next steps for future safety)

And the **scaling question** to make judgments, in child protection, about how safe the child is, from the perspective of the child protection authorities, the family, their networks and other professionals, to bring the case to judgment, develop understanding between the parties and to drive change.

Within these domains of enquiry are the categories for analyzing risk assessment, which involve defining the harm, defining the danger, identifying existing safety and developing safety goals to address the danger statements, all in succinct plain language.

The Signs of Safety map, in its original form for child protection, setting out the four domains of enquiry and the seven analysis categories is below:

When we think about the situation facing this family:		
What are we Worried About?	What's Working Well?	What Needs to Happen?
<p>(Past) Harm</p> <p><u>(Future)</u> DANGER STATEMENTS</p> <p>Complicating factors</p>	<p>Existing strengths</p> <p>Existing safety</p>	<p><u>SAFETY GOALS</u></p> <p>Next steps (for future safety)</p>
<p>On a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 means everyone knows the children are safe enough for the child protection authorities to close the case and zero means things are so bad for the children they can't live at home, where do we rate this situation? (If different judgements place different people's number on the continuum).</p> <p>0 ← → 10</p>		

Signs of Safety assessment and planning is adaptable across service areas and the full range of services, from early help through children at risk to looked after children services. The appendix, “*Signs of Something*” - *Adaptations of the Signs of Safety across the Continuum of Service*, sets out how the adjustment of the analysis categories of harm, danger, existing safety and safety goals, enable the framework and the methodology to be applied in all service settings.

Tools for **engaging children**, bring the child’s voice into the assessment, and most critically as a catalyst for change, to the family. The **three houses** (good things, worries or bad things, dreams) is a child’s version of the three columns to capture their experience.

Words and pictures explanations are used for parents to explain what has happened and what is happening to the children, and if applicable, set out the safety plan. Words and pictures serve as both the explanation that children need to understand their situation and as a catalyst for change for families.

There are variations and additions based on these core tools that have been developed by practitioners to suit specific needs and cultural settings.

Disciplines – guiding workers’ behaviour, and applying the approach

Using Signs of Safety means:

Clear distinction between past harm (the harm that has actually occurred, not what we are frightened about), **future danger** (on the basis of the past harm, what child protection authorities are worried could occur if there is no change in the families' behavior), **and complicating factors** (the circumstances of the family that lie behind the neglect or abuse, commonly such as mental health issues, and drug and alcohol abuse).

Clear distinction between strengths (positive aspects of the family such as their love for the children) **and protection** (actual behaviors that demonstrate a capacity to protect the children, such as removing dangerous adults from the household, or occasions when the parents felt as if they could but did not harm the child).

Using **plain language** that can be readily understood by families, in all verbal and written communication.

Using **statements focusing on specific observable behaviors**, avoiding meaning laden, imprecise and poorly understood labels and diagnostic descriptors.

Skillful use of authority, using the statutory authority of child protection but giving families choices about how to work with authorities and finding ways that work for them.

Assessment is always a work in progress, although this cannot preclude taking action.

Processes

As the principles and disciplines above illustrate, child protection practice doesn't involve a set process or formula – neither does any complex work with young people and families. However, the core processes of *Signs of Safety* practice involve the following elements set out in the notionally sequential order:

- Mapping the assessment and plan, doing so with the family and their network (extended family, friends and professional agencies with whom the family is engaged and who share a concern for the children or young person).
- Being as committed to identifying what is working well - and identifying the strengths demonstrated as safety, the 'signs of safety' - as being clear about the worries.
- Narrowing the key factors and conclusions into succinct and clear statements of past harm and future danger (what will happen if nothing changes).
- Scaling, with practitioners, the family, their network and partners, making a judgment, about how safe the children are, and sharing those perspectives.
- Developing safety goals that address the danger statements.
- Building a safety plan with detailed actions to achieve the safety goals, drawing on a network which includes extended family and friends and also professionals

- Engaging the children, both bringing their voice into the assessment and parents explaining to them what is happening.
- All done with a questioning approach – more asking and less telling.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE AND STUDIES

Qualitative and quantitative evaluation and research, and data from organisations which have already implemented Signs of Safety around the world, generally indicate the following outcomes:

- Families feel more empowered and are more able to understand and address the concerns and requirements of child protection and other authorities.
- In child protection, the number of children removed from families reduces relative to the number of families with whom authorities work more intensively to build safety around the children.
- Practitioners report greater job satisfaction due to the clarity of the approach, the usefulness of the tools and the impact for the children and families.

In considering these outcomes it is important to remember that the goal of child protection practice is to improve child safety, not to keep families together as an end in itself.

The evidence and theory base for *Signs of Safety* has developed substantially within action research, collaborative and appreciative inquiry, or broadly “practice based evidence”, and means the approach is built from what is probably the strongest single knowledge base of what works in actual child protection practice (see for example: Christianson, and Maloney, 2006; Teoh et. al., 2003; Turnell 2004; 2006; 2007; Turnell and Edwards, 1997; 1999; Turnell, Elliott and Hogg 2007; Turnell and Essex, 2006; 2013; Turnell, Lohrbach and Curran 2008; Turnell, Vesterhauge-Petersen and Vesterhauge-Petersen, 2013). The *Signs of Safety* community has also begun to publish on effective leadership and implementation (see Turnell, Munro and Murphy, 2013; Salveron, Bromfield, Kirika, Simmons, Murphy and Turnell 2015).

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<http://sofs.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/131207%20The%20Signs%20of%20Safety%20Fidelity%20%20Research%20Project%20S%20of%20S%20Website.pdf>
)
- Theory of change (results logic) - Australian Centre of for Child Protection (AACP), University of South Australia, research is defining the essential elements of practice leading to the outcomes for children and families
<http://www.signsofsafety.net/2920-2/>)

IMPLEMENTATION OF SIGNS OF SAFETY

“Implementing a practice framework is fitting a complex social system into a complex social system”

Effective implementation of Signs of Safety will only happen if we have a persistent and comprehensive approach, that is also agile and responsive to circumstances and progress, and involves continuous feedback and learning, is required for effective implementation. While outcomes are apparent quickly, widespread and sustainable adoption and outcomes take time. Experience implementing the Signs of Safety has indicated the following four areas of focus, and the continuous learning process, that are reflected in MCC’s implementation plan:

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- **Leadership** including a clear and focused organisational commitment to Signs of Safety; with strong, visible senior management engaged with practice; managing and leading the organisation in ways that model the practice approach; critically fostering a safe organisation (building confidence that workers will be supported through anxiety, crises and contention); and building shared leadership; supported by learning and development activities focusing on key implementation and practice issues.
- **Organisational Alignment** beginning with an implementation group and plan and the ‘charter’ expressing the organisational commitment; policies, procedures and forms to match practice; strong capacity at the front line; adaptation and planning for varying service areas; deliberate and formal partner engagement; and national and international engagement for resources and learning.
- **Meaningful Measures** including quality assurance which includes case audit, feedback from families and practitioners, and core data / KPIs aligned with Signs of Safety results logic and practice fidelity, together with an information management system aligned to the practice.



APPENDICES

Signs of Safety - Comprehensive Briefing Paper. Dr Andrew Turnell and Terry Murphy (3rd edition, 2014)

The comprehensive briefing paper provides a more detailed description of the approach and framework including its history, the supporting evidence base, the practice methodology, learning strategies and implementation.

'Signs Of Something' - Adaptations of Signs of Safety across the Continuum of Service (Resolutions Consultancy, 2015)

This brief resource paper charts the key aspects of the Signs of Safety approach that are applied unchanged and those that are adapted across service areas and the continuum of service, with examples to illustrate.