

## **Review of disruption meeting process**

### **Flintshire County Council**

Over the past few months I have undertaken a review of the current disruption meeting service which is part of the Flintshire Meeting Service.

During this process I have met with the Senior Practitioner from the Flintshire Meeting Service, two managers from the Fostering Team, Fostering Panel Chairperson, two Social Workers from the Family Placement Team, two disruption meeting Chairpersons, one Foster Carer and an Independent Reviewing Officer.

I have also read 10 files in relation to disruption meetings and two annual reports regarding the service as well as guidance regarding the use of disruption meetings in Flintshire.

For the purpose of this exercise I have used BAAF Good Practice Guide "Dealing with disruption" Hedi Argent and Jeffrey Coleman 2006 as a bench mark of best practice in the field.

#### **Overall summary**

The meetings appear to be well organised and well executed. The process is well resourced and valued by most people. However, the general feeling was that this investment and excellent opportunity is not put to best use because the meetings do not cover the areas required to make best use of the learning experience and what lessons are learnt are not shared with others in a systematic way which drives change and improvement.

#### **Findings from reading documents**

There were 9 referrals in 2009 – 2010 (and 9 in the previous year). Of the 9 referrals 6 meetings were held. Of the 9 referrals 4 were "out of county" foster placements, 4 "in county" foster placement, and one kinship care placement.

The cost on average of a disruption meeting was £615.37 (not including management or admin costs)

Time scales – of the 13 cases considered average time from referral to meeting was just over two months. From a closer look at a few of the dates, the three referrals considered were made within a week of the placement disruption. However the time from disruption meeting to Panel was on average just over 4 months.

Who attended – of the 10 cases considered the following were present

Foster carers	Yes - 8
Social worker	Yes - 9
Young person	Yes - 4
FP SW	Yes – 7
Family member	Yes - 3
Current Foster carer	Yes – 3

Matters covered - of the 10 cases considered there were elements covered as reflected in the minutes.

Introductions	Yes - none
Matching	Yes – 1
Dates of placement	Yes – 6
Placement history	Yes – 5
Planning of placement	Yes – none
LAC forms, statutory visits, reviews	Yes -3
Reflection	Yes – 1
Conclusions	Yes – 9
Recommendations	Yes - 7

#### Issues raised

#### Criteria for disruption meetings.

Only two of the people interviewed were able to say what the referral criteria were in Flintshire. It is understood that the criteria is that a disruption meeting is held after a long term placement breaks down unexpectedly, and if a child's second placement breaks down regardless of how long the placement has been going. I have not been able to clarify whether this happens. The general feeling people gave was that there were more disruptions than disruption meetings.

There was uncertainty about how disruptions were used, some thought they were only for fostering, others knew they could be for adoption, however there was uncertainty regarding whether disruption meetings were held when residential placements broke down. There were also some issues regarding disruptions when children were placed with Independent fostering providers.

#### Referring for Disruption meeting

It appears that the manager of the fostering service has the responsibility for referring for a disruption meeting. However she does not always hear about independent fostering placements or residential placement disruption and therefore would not refer for disruption meeting. It was felt that the system should be reviewed and a system put in place where by the Family Placement Manager, Family Meeting Service Senior Practitioner and the IRO could be informed via e mail when a placement disrupted. In other areas this e mail is triggered by the staff member who pays fostering allowances and or manages the placement register.

## **Timescales**

The best practice guidelines note that disruption meetings should happen between 5 and 10 weeks after the placement ended. The general feeling from everybody was that the meetings were held too late in Flintshire and the whole process took too long. However from looking at the files it appears that the meetings are held on average just over two months after the referral. The referrals looked at were mainly referred within a week of the disruption and minutes were presented within two weeks of the meeting. There had been historic concerns regarding the critical reading process taking far too long. It is uncertain why this process is needed in light of there being an independent chair, however things has improved recently with a change in the critical reader post.

The information presented did suggest that although the minutes were completed, it took some time for reports to be circulated and for reports to go to fostering panel.

## **Preparation before the meeting**

The practice in Flintshire is different from general practice. This has been considered by those interviewed and there are mixed feelings.

In other areas and within the guidelines, the chair will be provided with reports and will generally not meet people before the meeting, unless specifically to discuss sensitive issues or to meet with the child/young person.

In Flintshire the chair does not get any reports, but may visit the office to views any files as necessary. The chair will then visit all the parties before hand to gain their views.

The positives were, the chair person visiting everyone helps them prepare for the meeting and identify issues before hand. The foster carer interviewed was very thankful that the Chair visited them before hand. They were terrified about the meeting, suspicious of the process and felt very much reassured after meeting the Chair.

The negatives were – meeting everyone makes the process more expensive. Some felt the meetings were too cosy and that issues had been raised beforehand but skirted around at the meeting. Not having reports beforehand means, people do not get to see what people are thinking before the meeting, people can chose not to raise contentious issues. Not having reports also makes the task of drawing conclusions and minutes difficult. The chairs noted that previously they could work in pairs at the meeting with one person chairing and another person taking the notes, this practice was stopped due to cost.

## **The meeting**

People were happy with the meeting; felt the venues were appropriate; the chairs were efficient and approachable. People were happy with the contents of the reports.

The meetings generally took 2 to 3 hours, people were happy with this. BAAF guidelines states meeting are generally whole day events, however a number of local authorities are saying that they do not have the resources to fund whole day events and the general feeling is that two hours is enough for a focused discussion. Some people did however note that they were not happy with discussing more than one placement breakdown in one meeting. This seemed to have developed into practice when a child had a succession of placements in a short period of time. This does not appear to be general practice.

### **Who attends**

One benefit of visiting everyone before hand in a way affects the need for everyone to attend. It was felt that having met the chair beforehand makes it easier for young people and family members to attend. However in the majority of cases the young people and family members do not attend. There was a feeling from the family placement team that they were not always invited to attend the meetings, however from the files it appeared that Family Placement social workers were present at the majority of meetings.

There was a discussion regarding who chooses who attend and does not attend, it appears that this is left to the Chair person to decide, this was felt to be a big responsibility for one person. The role of the chairperson was noted as a crucial role by many people, however as this person was felt to have the power to make decisions about who attends, what information to look for and what was the agenda for the meeting . This role appeared to be isolated with little if no supervision. In recent months the Flintshire Meeting Service Senior Practitioner has taken a much more active role in managing disruption meetings and will be in contact with the chairs regularly by phone.

### **The agenda**

Best practice suggests that a disruption meeting should look back at the whole story to make best use of the learning opportunity disruption meetings offer. This means looking at the carers registration, experience, matching, planning, introductions, support and supervision, LAC processes the children's history and progression through placement. The disruption is seen as the end of the story. There needs to be reflection on what has happened and for people to say what they have learnt, what would they have done differently, to draw conclusions and to make recommendations, to the fostering agency, the child care teams, and anyone else. The guidelines suggest that the Chairperson should be a person knowledgeable about family placement and child care regulations.

The position in Flintshire is different, and it appears that the focus of the meeting is around the time just before and during the breakdown. There does not appear to be any reflection about the early issues, this is a missed opportunity as important factor can be found during the early stages, often related to important building blocks of successful placements.

### **Reflection**

People generally feel that the meetings are safe and people feel secure, however there is a feeling that key issues are not challenged and often things get skirted around. The Chairs felt their role was

to facilitate a discussion. One chairperson felt she could follow up issues of SW practice, but another felt they did not have any mandate or power to pry beyond what people were saying. Both Chairs felt they could benefit from training on family placement issues and regulations.

It was generally felt that people did not reflect on their own practice during the meeting. Some participants went as far as to say that the social workers in particular did not reflect at all and would contribute very little. A foster carer said that the meeting gave her no recognition for the hard work they had done for the previous 5 years; no one thanked them or acknowledged their feelings.

### **Lessons learnt / conclusions/ recommendations**

There did not appear to be many examples of lessons learnt as part of the minutes. There were some conclusions but without consideration of the whole picture and reflection, the conclusions were very general. When there were recommendations they were generally related to the child. There were very little lessons learnt or recommendations for the fostering agency, the carers, the child care teams, other agencies e.g. like education or CAMHS.

### **What happens to the reports.**

Everyone has unanimously expressed that they do not feel that the investment provided to carry out disruption meetings is not being to best use as they do not feel the lessons are being shared and acknowledged.

Until recently there was no link between the disruption meetings and the role of the IRO. The disruption meeting reports were not sent to the IRO nor was she informed of the meeting. The IRO now asks for update on the progress of the disruption meeting at the child first review (following change of placement) the IRO also incorporates any disruption meeting report into the next available LAC review.

There does not appear to be any link between the disruption meeting and the Foster carers review. A disruption meeting of the placement does not trigger a review of the foster carers review. It was felt that Annual foster carer's reviews do not incorporate any disruption meetings which have been held during the year.

The fostering panel are aware that disruption meetings have been held and will monitor the progress of the review, however the reports are not discussed at the panel, or recommendations made.

It was not clear how lessons learnt were being fed back to the practitioners and who monitored change.

### **Recommendations**

1. Review the guidance for facilitating Disruption meetings to ensure the whole picture is considered from the beginning of the placement to the end.

2. Consider the best way for disruption meetings to be triggered, incorporating adoption, fostering and residential placements.
3. Ensure disruption meetings note recommendations for all agencies working with the child and placement as appropriate.
4. Training for chairs on family placement issues and regulations.
5. Review what happens after disruption reports are produced including strengthening the link between the report and the child's review and plan, and the foster carers review.

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