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The role of the Lead Professional is key in the success of the multi-agency working. The aim of the role is not to undertake all the work, but to co-ordinate the multi-agency approach alongside their own responsibilities and interventions within the group, and ensure that all agencies are working together to best support the child or young person and their family.

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An audit was conducted in February 2017 examining 'how well do practitioners engage in Early Help and the Role of the Lead Professional?'. The audit in September 2018 re-examined the role of the Lead Professional, and looked at the multi-agency response to working with Targeted Services. The aim of this audit was to evaluate if there had been an improvement in the understanding of the role of the Lead Professional, and to seek assurance that there is effective multi-agency working in Sandwell.

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#### Key assurance questions included:

1. How does case file supervision give direction and drive the plan for the family?
2. How well does the multi-agency partnership recognise and work together to deliver a provision around families?
3. How well do staff in universal and targeted services understand and undertake the Lead Professional role where that is appropriate?
4. How effective are local systems to assess a range of intelligence about concerns for a child?

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#### Key Strengths included:

- Agencies had a much better knowledge/understanding of the Lead Professional role and where this role was being correctly used, it was working well.
- A high quality of work from many agencies, both individually and in multi-agency working, with significant improvements for some families.
- Agencies had a better knowledge/understanding of the ECAF system.

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#### Key areas of development highlighted were:

- Management oversight of cases needs to be more vigilant, looking at family history/dynamics, and using professional curiosity. As well as ensuring a rigorous accuracy of recording.
- More involvement from adult services involved with parents, especially if this is a factor in the lived experience of the child (e.g. mental health concerns, Adult Social Care, drug/alcohol services).
- If there are chronic concerns for children, or low-level neglect, plans need to be tried and tested before closure to ensure sustained change for the children.
- Practitioners need to be able to have difficult conversations with parents, when their behaviour is impacting on the child. Recognising when the conduct of older children/teenagers is a direct result of the behaviour of the parent (e.g. learnt behaviour, reaction to controlling behaviour).

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#### What must we do now:

- Complete regular chronologies and family histories, to ensure that we are getting the 'big picture' and not just focusing on the presenting problems.
- Evidence that you are actively seeking to gain consent to work with the whole family, and exercising professional curiosity if families are only consenting for work with certain child/ren.
- Ensure that the right agencies/individuals are invited to multi-agency meetings, and when agencies fail to attend that this is escalated to seniors within their organisation by other members of the group.
- Resolve professional disagreements outside of the meetings. If they cannot be resolved, they should be escalated.
- Show evidence of persistence, professional curiosity, and creative methods of engaging with families, through accurate and timely record keeping. Practitioners should attend "Core Working Together" training at least once every three years.

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#### Next Steps:

- Practitioners to ensure that they are attending 'Core Working Together'.
- Importance of accurate and timely record keeping to be integrated into existing SSCB Training.
- Guidance for Lead Professionals role when cases are stepped down to be developed and circulated.
- Recommendations to be circulated and an evaluation to be completed by SSCB within next two years to determine progress of recommendations.