



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

Regulation of
Health and Social
Care Services

Child Protection and Welfare Thematic Programme

Guidance and assessment- judgment framework

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Safer Better Care

About the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) is an independent statutory authority established to promote safety and quality in the provision of health and social care services for the benefit of the health and welfare of the public.

HIQA's mandate to date extends across a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector services. Reporting to the Minister for Health and engaging with the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, HIQA has responsibility for the following:

- **Setting standards for health and social care services** — Developing person-centred standards and guidance, based on evidence and international best practice, for health and social care services in Ireland.
- **Regulating social care services** — The Office of the Chief Inspector within HIQA is responsible for registering and inspecting residential services for older people and people with a disability, and children's special care units.
- **Regulating health services** — Regulating medical exposure to ionising radiation.
- **Monitoring services** — Monitoring the safety and quality of health services and children's social services, and investigating as necessary serious concerns about the health and welfare of people who use these services.
- **Health technology assessment** — Evaluating the clinical and cost-effectiveness of health programmes, policies, medicines, medical equipment, diagnostic and surgical techniques, health promotion and protection activities, and providing advice to enable the best use of resources and the best outcomes for people who use our health service.
- **Health information** — Advising on the efficient and secure collection and sharing of health information, setting standards, evaluating information resources and publishing information on the delivery and performance of Ireland's health and social care services.
- **National Care Experience Programme** — Carrying out national service-user experience surveys across a range of health services, in conjunction with the Department of Health and the HSE.

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Section 1 — Overview

Section 1 – Overview

Introduction

The Director of Regulation within the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has produced this combined guidance and assessment-judgment framework as part of the roll-out of a thematic inspection programme on how the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) manages child protection and welfare referrals.

Thematic inspection programmes aim to promote quality improvement in a specific area of a service and to improve the quality of life of people receiving services. They assess compliance against the relevant national standards, in this case the *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2012).

This document aims to provide extra supporting information to inspectors and providers on assessing compliance with national standards and offers guidance on reviewing individual standards.

An assessment-judgment framework and its lines of enquiry (questions to be addressed) assist with checking compliance and do not replace the professional judgment of the inspector or the requirements of the standards. This can also be used by providers to self-assess their own services.

Tusla has 17 service areas across the country which provide child protection and welfare services to children and families. This thematic inspection programme is primarily focused on defined points along a pathway in child protection and welfare services provided by Tusla: from the point of initial contact or reporting of a concern to Tusla through to the completion of an initial assessment.

This programme arose out of a commitment made by HIQA in its *Report of the investigation into the management of allegations of child sexual abuse against adults of concern by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) upon the direction of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs*.⁽¹⁾ This investigation was carried out at the request of the Minister under section 9(2) of the Health Act 2007 (as amended) and looked at the management by Tusla of child sexual abuse allegations, including allegations made by adults who allege they were abused when they were children (these are termed retrospective allegations).

The investigation specifically reviewed how Tusla managed child sexual abuse allegations. This thematic inspection programme is broader in scope because it will look at the management of all child protection and welfare referrals and reports rather than sexual abuse referrals only.

The thematic programme incorporates reviewing two out of three of the systematic risks identified by the Investigation Team, namely:

- screening and preliminary enquiry of referrals
- safety planning.

Retrospective allegations will not be reviewed as part of this thematic inspection process as Tusla is developing and implementing new processes in this area of child protection and welfare practice. Therefore, HIQA believes the service requires a period of time to embed these changes.

Programme aim

The purpose of the child protection and welfare thematic inspection programme is to promote improvement in the management of referrals from screening and preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessments. This thematic programme is expected to run over the course of 18 months.

Scope of thematic programme

Thematic inspections carried out by the Director of Regulation (and the Chief Inspector of Social Services within HIQA in relation to designated centres) aim to promote quality improvement in specific aspects of service provision — in this instance, the management of child protection and welfare referrals to Tusla.

The service will be assessed against the *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. The programme focuses on the management of referrals to Tusla from the point of receipt of a report through to the screening and preliminary stage, safety planning and the completion of the initial assessment.

Where it becomes evident that the findings on inspection fieldwork (such as conducting an on-site inspection in a Tusla office) indicate risk, the lead inspector will decide the direction of the inspection. For example, the inspection may change from a thematic inspection to a risk-based inspection.

The purpose of this thematic programme

The thematic programme focuses on those national standards related to key aspects of quality and safety in the management of referrals to Tusla's child protection and welfare service, with the aim of supporting quality improvement in these and other areas of the service.

When children and their families are first referred (or re-referred) to Tusla, they should experience a service that ensures the safety of the child or children, consults with them and includes them in assessing their needs. The service should involve

them in planning and implementing actions that will ensure their children's needs are met and that they are kept safe.

Child welfare and protection policies are based on a legal framework mainly provided by the Child Care Act, 1991 and the Children First Act 2015. However, when reading this guidance and assessment-judgment framework, Tusla and its staff should also be aware of other legislation relevant to the services they provide, such as data protection legislation and the Child and Family Agency Act 2013.

National policy

Parents and guardians have the primary responsibility for the care and protection of their children. However, at times, they may need support and assistance from the State in carrying out their responsibilities as a parent.⁽²⁾ Where help is required by families, Tusla is required to ensure that parents have the necessary parenting supports in place.⁽²⁾ In exceptional circumstances when a child's welfare is at risk — despite supports being provided by Tusla to the child and their family — Tusla may take further steps to protect the child and keep the child safe from harm and or neglect, such as taking a child into care.

On 11 December 2017, the Children First Act 2015 was enacted. This law places a mandatory responsibility on people like teachers, psychologists, youth workers, doctors and foster parents to make a report to Tusla where they have reasonable grounds for concern about the welfare of children.

Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children, published in 2017, sets out the steps that should be taken in order to keep children safe.

Methodology

The findings of HIQA's investigation into the management by Tusla of allegations of child sexual abuse against adults of concern helped to inform the lines of enquiry for assessing and judging a service's compliance with the national standards.

This investigation — carried out by HIQA, upon the direction of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, between 2017 and 2018 — identified three defective points in Tusla's management of child sexual abuse referrals. These were:

- screening and preliminary enquiry
- safety planning
- management of retrospective referrals.

For the purpose of this thematic inspection programme, the inspection team has decided to focus on inspecting Tusla services from the receipt of referrals. This will

include the screening and preliminary enquiry (gathering further information) stages of the referrals, safety planning for children and the completion of initial assessments. These processes are explained here:

Screening (also called intake) is the initial activity undertaken by social workers or social care workers on receipt of a referral or report of possible child abuse, neglect or child welfare concerns. The main objective of this process is to check if the matter comes within the remit of child protection and welfare services. Those that do not are “screened out”. Screening is usually carried out by a social worker often in dedicated intake (duty) teams.

Preliminary enquiry is made following receipt of a referral or report. This stage includes gathering information from the person who made the referral and checking Tusla’s own records to determine whether the family are currently known to the service or have been referred previously. These enquiries may also include the social worker contacting other professionals and agencies to see if they have concerns about the child referred.

Safety planning can occur or be relevant at any stage of the child or family’s involvement with child protection and welfare services. Safety planning involves putting a plan in place in consultation with children and families to ensure all reasonable measures are taken to ensure that the risk of harm to a child’s welfare is managed. It is based on the strengths of the individual family members and their ability to monitor their own behaviour. Monitoring of this plan is a key part of the social worker’s contact with the family. This allows the child to remain at home if this is in his or her best interests.

Initial assessment is the process by which social workers gather further information about a family in order to decide on the appropriate supports or interventions needed to ensure the safety and welfare of the child. Social workers meet with the child and their family, analyse the information gathered and produce an initial assessment report. This report contains recommendations on any actions required to ensure the child’s needs are met and they are safe.

Following this approach, and in reviewing the *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2012), the thematic inspection team developed lines of enquiry to guide them in assessing and judging the service’s compliance with the national standards. The lines of enquiry for this thematic inspection reflect:

- *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2012)

- *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (referred to from here on as Children First) (2017)
- HIQA's programme of inspections carried out against the national standards
- relevant legislation, which includes the Child Care Act, 1991 (as amended) and the Children First Act 2015
- Tusla performance data about unallocated cases
- Tusla performance data in relation to screening and preliminary enquiry
- a literature review of national and international best practice
- feedback from an external advisory group.

The purpose of the lines of enquiry is to guide service providers in their preparation for inspection and to support inspectors in gathering evidence when monitoring or assessing a service and to make judgments on compliance. The lines of enquiry form the basis of what is explored by inspectors in order to assess compliance with the national standards.

Once inspectors have gathered and reviewed evidence from a child protection and welfare service, they will make a judgment on how the service performed. The following judgment descriptors will be used:

Compliant	Substantially compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant
The service is meeting or exceeding the standard and is delivering a high-quality service which is responsive to the needs of children.	The service is mostly compliant with the standard but some additional action is required to be fully compliant. However, the service is one that protects children.	Some of the requirements of the standard have been met while others have not. There is a low risk to children but this has the potential to increase if not addressed in a timely manner.	The service is not meeting the standard and this is placing children at significant risk of actual or potential harm.

Review of literature

In preparation for this thematic programme, a literature review was conducted to better understand current trends and best practice in relation to the management of referrals of child protection and welfare concerns to social work departments.

Self-assessment questionnaire

Prior to the start of the inspection programme, a self-assessment questionnaire will be sent to all 12 out of 17 Tusla service areas who deliver child protection and welfare services to children and families (5 service areas that were identified by Tusla as requiring a service improvement plan will not be required to complete a self-assessment initially). The questionnaire will be used by managers of services in conjunction with this guidance document, which describes what a good service looks like.

Each service area will complete an assessment of its own performance against this description of what a good service looks like, which in turn helps the service area to identify where improvements are required. Each area will have 12 working days from receipt of the self-assessment questionnaire to complete and return it to HIQA.

Each service area will also be provided with a soft copy of this combined guidance and assessment-judgment framework document for the programme, which will assist with the completion of the questionnaire. Inspectors will analyse returned self-assessment questionnaires and this will further inform the focus of HIQA inspections under the programme.

Based on the completion of the self-assessment questionnaire, each Tusla service area must develop their own improvement plan for their use. HIQA will provide an improvement plan template, which the service can choose to use, or services can devise their own improvement plan templates. While service areas do not have to include this plan when returning their questionnaires, inspectors may ask to view this plan during an inspection.

Scope of on-site inspection

Because these inspections are focused on quality assurance, those service areas that have been identified by Tusla's National Office as requiring a service improvement plan will not be inspected under this thematic programme at this stage, as these services will continue to be subject to ongoing risk-based inspections.

The inspection team will schedule inspections based on data from self-assessment questionnaires, information known to HIQA about the service or held by HIQA and performance data published by Tusla. Thematic inspections will be announced in advance, and services will receive 10 working days' notice of such inspections.

Request for documentation and data

The inspection team will issue a standard request for documentation and data to each service area in relation to each theme of the inspection as outlined in the sources of evidence listed under the guidance of each theme. The service area will be required to return data to the inspection team seven working days after the announcement of the inspection. The service areas will be requested to have copies of relevant documentation available for inspectors to review during the inspection.

Experience of people using services

In designing the thematic programme of inspection, HIQA consulted with young people and parents who have experienced Tusla services to get their views on how children and their families should be consulted by inspectors during inspection (such as an on-site inspection in a social work office). This feedback was incorporated into our approach to this programme and helped inform the lines of enquiry.

The inspection team will meet with children who already meet as an established group in a service area, such as the groups formed for the Tusla Children and Youth Participation Strategy 2019 – 2023⁽³⁾, and will ask them about their experience of the service. Inspectors will also review a sample of children's records in order to establish children's and their families' experiences of the service. The case-record approach enables inspectors to examine the management of a sample number of cases to assess their compliance with the national standards, Children First and Tusla's own policies and procedures. Inspectors will choose a sample of parents with whom they will complete a telephone questionnaire as part of the inspection in order to establish their views of the service as related to the theme of the inspection.

Risk management and escalation

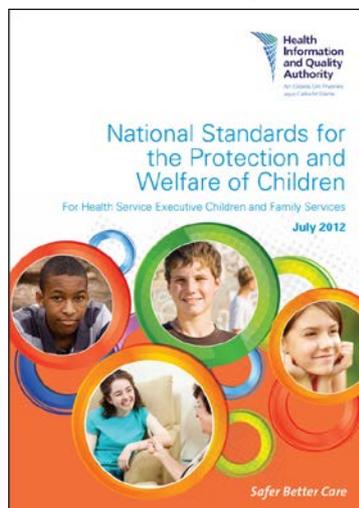
During the fieldwork part of the thematic inspection (on-site inspection in a social work office), inspectors may form the view that there is significant risk in the service. In such circumstances, the lead inspector, in consultation with the inspector's regional manager, may decide to cease the thematic inspection against the national standards and proceed to a risk-based inspection of that service area.

If an inspector identifies a specific issue that may present an immediate and or potential serious risk to the health or welfare of children, then, in line with HIQA policy, these risks will be assessed by the lead inspector and his or her regional manager. These risks will be escalated to the relevant Tusla manager during the inspection fieldwork and or following completion of the inspection fieldwork to the Tusla area manager, regional service director and or the Chief Operations Officer.

Section 2 — The national standards

Section 2 – The national standards

This section of the guidance document will outline the key *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children* selected for review as part of this thematic programme. The full standards are available to download on the HIQA website, www.hiqa.ie.



The national standards are grouped into six areas called 'themes' as illustrated below in Figure 1. Under each theme, the 'standard statement' describes what a good service looks like and what this means for the child. Underneath these are 'features' which give examples of how the standard may be met. See Figure 2. However, providers are free to achieve the national standards in other ways.

Figure 1. Themes in the *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2012)

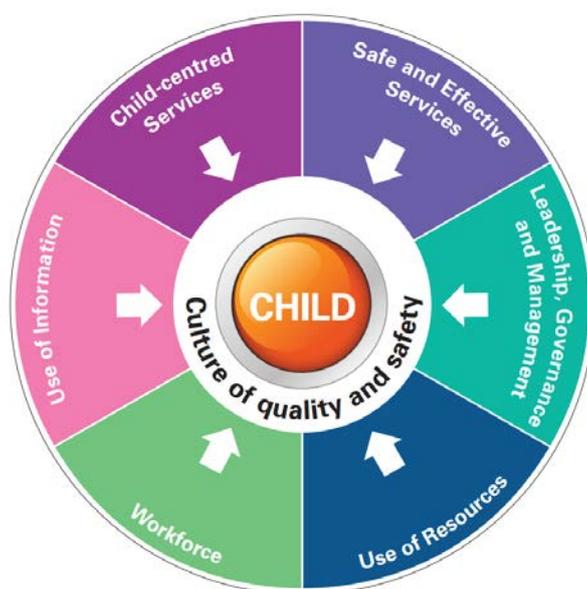
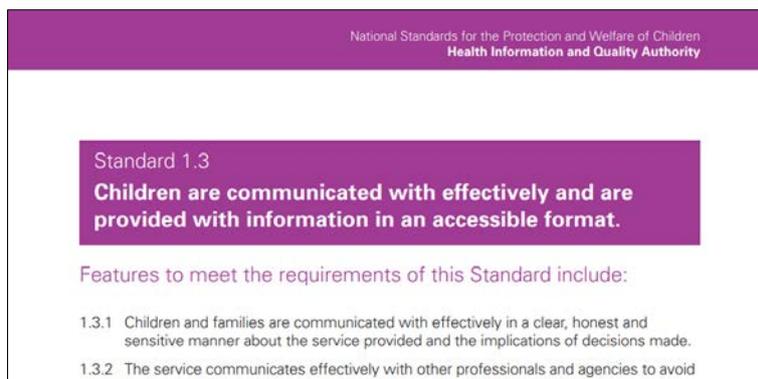


Figure 2. A 'standard statement' and extract of 'features' from the national standards



The themes fall into two further areas or groupings, called 'dimensions'. These are: **Capacity and capability**; and **Quality and safety**.

The **capacity and capability** dimension includes the following four elements:

- **Leadership, Governance and Management** — the arrangements put in place by a child protection and welfare service for accountability, decision-making, risk management as well as meeting its strategic, statutory and financial obligations.
- **Workforce** — planning, recruiting, managing and organising staff with the necessary numbers, skills and competencies to respond to the needs of children and families that are referred to the service.
- **Use of Resources** — using resources effectively and efficiently to deliver best achievable outcomes for children and families.
- **Use of Information** — actively using information as a resource for planning, delivering, monitoring, managing and improving care.

The **Quality and safety** dimension includes two elements:

- **Child-centred Services** — children's rights are recognised, including their right to be listened to and to participate in decisions about their lives. Children and families are communicated with in an open, honest and effective manner. Children's safety and welfare is promoted, and supports are identified and provided early in their involvement with the service. The service is responsive to the changing needs of the child and their family.
- **Safe and Effective Services** — how services protect children from the risk of harm and promote their welfare. Safe services also avoid, prevent and minimise harm and learn from things when they go wrong.

Standards for review under the thematic programme

The lines of enquiry for the thematic inspection programme of child protection and welfare services will focus on **seven specific national standards** within four of the six themes of the standards, spanning both the **quality and safety** and **capacity and capability** dimensions.

These particular standards reflect the essential components of a safe, high-quality child protection and welfare service. Outside of the thematic programme, Tusla should always aim to comply with all standards.

Quality and safety dimension

The quality and safety dimension relates to standards that govern how services should interact with children and ensure their safety. The standards include consideration of communication, safeguarding and responsiveness and look to ensure that children are safe and supported throughout their engagement with the service.

The associated national standards which will be focus of the thematic inspections are:

- Theme 1. Child-centred services
 - Standard 1.3
- Theme 2. Safe and Effective services
 - Standard 2.1.

Capacity and capability dimension

This dimension describes standards related to the leadership and management of the service and how effective they are in ensuring that a good quality and safe service is being provided to children and families. It considers how people who work in the service are recruited and trained and whether there are appropriate systems and processes in place to underpin the safe delivery and oversight of the service.

The associated national standards for the programme are:

- Theme 3. Leadership, Governance and Management
 - Standards 3.1 and 3.3
- Theme 5. Workforce
 - Standards 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

These are set out in more detail in the following sections of this document.

Section 3 — Guidance and assessment- judgment framework

Guidance and assessment-judgment framework

Theme 1: Child-centred Services

Standard 1.3

Children are communicated with effectively and are provided with information in an accessible format.

What a service meeting this standard and striving for quality improvement looks like

Services working with children promote a child-centred approach through the use of clear, open and honest communication to build relationships with children and families and to encourage them to seek advice and engage with services. A good service considers children's ages and their developmental needs when it is communicating with them. The service ensures that it accesses specialised supports to communicate with children, if required, such as engaging a signer[†] in order to effectively communicate with children. Translators are employed by the service to ensure that children and their families are communicated with appropriately.

Children and families receiving the service are kept informed at the following stages of the process: the referral, the initial assessment, the outcome of the initial assessment and the need for a safety plan, as appropriate to their situation. The child protection and welfare service is responsive and consults with children and families throughout their involvement with the service. All decisions about children are made in consultation with them and their families, where possible and in line with their developmental stage. The implications of all decisions made and actions taken as a result are explained to the child and the family, as appropriate.

Children are facilitated to exercise their right to be listened to and to participate in decision-making about their lives, where it is in their best interests and in a manner which takes account of their age and stage of development.

Consideration is given to the fact that children are capable of understanding complex situations. The service ensures that the information and communication needs of the child, first and foremost, are paramount.

In situations where there are conflicts between the rights of parents and the

[†] A person who communicates information to a deaf or hard of hearing person using sign language.

rights of the child, the service puts the child's rights first.

The extent to which services have the above elements in place will inform a judgment on their level of compliance with National Standard 1.3.

What this means for the child

Children using the services know they have rights and if they have a concern they know who to report it to and that they will be heard. Children are appropriately facilitated to communicate openly with staff in the service and they are confident that professionals will listen and take action to address their concerns. Children and families engage with services and are kept fully informed of developments during their involvement with the service. Good working relationships are built between children, families and the staff providing the service. Children are assured that their information is kept private and is only shared with others, including their family, if necessary and appropriate for their welfare or protection. Children and their families receive this information from one — rather than several — professionals. Children are helped to understand what is happening throughout their involvement with the service and the social worker checks in with them regularly in a way that makes them feel safe and ensures them that their voice is being heard.

Lines of enquiry

Are children and families communicated with in a clear and sensitive manner, as appropriate to their age and understanding, about the:

- referral
- purpose of the initial assessment
- need for a safety plan
- outcome of assessments?

Does the service communicate with children and families at regular intervals throughout their involvement with the service?

Is information provided to children in an age-appropriate manner which takes account of their communication and literacy abilities?

Sources of evidence

- service's self-assessment
- information received from the service
- review of documents relevant to consultation and communication with

children and their families

- case records up to completion of initial assessment, including closed cases
- focus group with children (attending established groups)
- telephone interview with parents (A sample of parents will be chosen by inspectors and they will be contacted by Tusla staff in advance to seek their consent to be interviewed)
- focus groups with:
 - social workers and child care leaders involved in providing services to children
 - social work team leaders
- interviews with:
 - principal social workers
 - area managers.

Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services

Standard 2.1

Children are protected and their welfare is promoted through the consistent implementation of *Children First*.

What a service meeting this standard looks like

The screening system in place ensures that all referrals are reviewed and screened in a timely manner. Children at risk are kept safe. A good child protection and welfare service reflects the practice outlined by the standard and is responsive to the changing circumstances of children and families.

The service has policies, procedures, processes and evidence-based frameworks in place in relation to thresholds, screening and preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessment. These policies reflect the Children First Act 2015 and *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017). These clearly guide staff to appropriately manage referrals from the point of referral through screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning through to the completion of the initial assessment. This means that children are seen quickly and provided with the right support services or social work intervention.

Staff can demonstrate knowledge of Tusla's policies, procedures and guidance documents with respect to responding to screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessment, and these are implemented in practice.

Screening and preliminary enquiry

Referrals made to the service are consistently acknowledged in a timely manner. A good service screens all referrals within 24 hours to establish their appropriateness and to identify children that require a service in a timely manner including those at immediate risk.

A good child protection and welfare service has standardised criteria for screening that are routinely implemented without delays. Tusla's Standard Business Process outlines that the screening process involves deciding if the report:

- concerns a child and
- whether the concern that can be categorised as physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional abuse or a welfare concern.

Staff conduct internal checks to see if children and their families are known to the service or have been referred previously. This ensures that those children that

need a service get it in a timely manner.

The information about the child and their family gathered during these initial checks is clearly recorded by the staff member. If the referral is not appropriate for acceptance to the child protection and welfare service, then information and advice is provided on the most appropriate ways of addressing the needs of the child and their family. Referrals are closed (no longer have involvement with the service) or the family is referred on to another service that is more appropriate to the needs of the child and their family. As a result, the children and their families that need services in the community are directed to the right service for them.

A good child protection and welfare service accepts appropriate referrals by conducting a thorough screening process and quickly conducts preliminary enquiry to clarify the reason for the concern about the child. These preliminary enquiries include:

- contacting the person who made the report to clarify the details of their concern about the child
- contacting other professionals and or agencies to see if they have any concerns or worries about this child (referred to as 'network checks').

The social worker records the checks conducted and the information being sought and received. When consent has not been sought from a parent for network checks, the reason for this decision will be recorded in the child's file by the social worker and approved by their manager. The information gathered provides the staff member with an understanding of the child's history and circumstances and the strengths and challenges within the family. It assists the professional in making a decision about whether the child needs to be visited by a social worker and the appropriate actions to be taken in response to the referral. These actions include deciding whether a safety plan is required in order to keep the child safe. The staff member, in consultation with his or her manager, identifies what the appropriate next steps are and this is clearly recorded.

Categorisation

As part of the screening and preliminary enquiry process, the staff member records the concern about the child according to whether it relates to their welfare or to suspected abuse, in line with Children First (2017). In a good child protection and welfare service, all concerns about children are appropriately categorised in line with Children First.

Prioritisation

Children with the highest level of need are prioritised for allocation to a social worker, and they receive a timely child protection and welfare service. There is a system for doing this, and it is applied equally to all children.⁽⁴⁾ All the children that require a service get it. In a good child protection and welfare service, there are no waiting lists for children and families to receive a service, but where waiting lists occur, these are limited and are well managed to ensure that waiting times are as short as possible.

Threshold of need

A good child protection and welfare service identifies the level of the child's needs according to an agreed continuum of need (this ensures that staff identify the child's correct level of need in order to provide children with the correct level of service at the right time).⁽⁵⁾ The appropriate services are provided to ensure the child's needs are met. A child's need can vary from having no additional needs to having highly complex needs, including being at immediate risk of harm.⁽⁵⁾

In a good child protection and welfare service, staff members are knowledgeable about the categories of abuse, the thresholds of need and the prioritisation levels. They consistently apply these correctly to the circumstances of the referral of children and their families. All decisions taken are made in the best interests of the child and the reasons for decisions are recorded in the child's file. Feedback is provided to the person making the report, as appropriate, within the confines of confidentiality and in line with Children First (2017).

Where it is determined that there is a welfare concern for a child, then the steps that can be taken include:

- the case is closed and the child and or family is referred to a service more appropriate to their needs
- the family is referred to the Partnership, Prevention and Family Support (PPFS) Programme or Meitheal* or appropriate community services
- a social work service is provided to the child and his or her family which focuses on the child's welfare. This may include an initial assessment of

* PPFS is a programme provided by Tusla which completes preventative and early intervention work with children and families. Meitheal refers to a programme of work whereby a lead worker builds a team of supports around the child and their family in order to meet the needs of the child. Meitheal comes under the PPFS programme.

the child and family's circumstances to determine what support the family needs.

If there is a risk of harm to a child, then this is a child protection concern and the child needs a child protection and welfare service from a social worker. The staff member decides on the most appropriate response that is proportionate to the risk identified.

This can include:

- taking immediate action to ensure the child's safety
- safety planning to identify the risk of harm and to take action to reduce or remove the risk of harm to the child so that they can remain at home
- an initial assessment of the child and the child's family.

Where there are child protection or welfare concerns in a family, there is a legal requirement on Tusla to provide a child protection and welfare service to the child and the child's family. A good child protection and welfare service acts in a timely manner to ensure that children are not left in situations of potential or actual harm. The service aims to work together with children and their families to ensure the child's needs are met and that any risk of harm or potential harm is well managed. Where this is not possible the service reviews each individual case and takes whatever steps are necessary to ensure the safety of children. This may include gathering further information from parents and other sources with the parents consent or taking the appropriate legal action such as a Supervision order[†].

A good child protection and welfare service processes all referrals in line with Tusla's policies and procedures and its standard business processes. The screening and preliminary enquiry process is recorded and the record is easily accessible. Decisions are based on evidence of what is likely to bring about the best outcomes for the child. Decision-making is clear and the reasons why some decisions are taken over others is clearly written in the child's file.

A good child protection and welfare service ensures that immediate action is taken where required to ensure the safety of children and where risk and or

[†] A supervision order is a court order than can be made under the 1991 Child care act. The order gives Tusla the authority to visit and monitor the health and welfare of the child and may be made prior to deciding on the merits of a full care order.

potential of harm to a child becomes apparent at any stage of the process. The service responds in a proportionate way to the level of risk or harm or potential harm identified. The actions taken may include accessing the child's existing support networks, immediate visits to the their home by a social worker and putting a safety plan in place if required.

Where children are at immediate risk of serious harm, Tusla may request the assistance of An Garda Síochána (Ireland's National Police Service) in making an emergency intervention (for example, section 12 of the Child Care Act, 1991 which authorises An Garda Síochána to remove a child to safety in certain circumstances or if assistance is required under section 35 of the Child Care Act, 1991. Alternatively, all child protection and welfare services will — when a child is at serious and immediate risk — apply to the district court for an emergency care order under Section 13 of the Child Care Act, 1991.

Initial assessment

A good child protection and welfare service ensures that initial assessments are of good quality, completed in a timely manner and in line with Children First (2017), Tusla's own assessment framework and best practice.

Staff meet with children and their families without delay in order to determine whether:

- the child has an unmet need and if the family requires support services or
- there is risk of significant harm to the child and therefore a child protection intervention is required.

The initial assessment includes staff meeting with children on their own to listen to what they have to say about their experiences of family life. These views are taken into account when decisions are made about the services the family needs. In a good child protection and welfare service, staff are aware of the need to communicate with children in a way that is sensitive to their communication skills, and staff use various methods of communication to obtain the views of children.

The assessment of children's needs includes observation of them in their own homes, where possible, as this provides information about how their family life impacts on them. The social worker explains to children what the social worker is worried about and the reason the social worker is calling to the family, and does so in a way the children can understand. The concerns about the child are discussed with the family, including the changes that are required to ensure the child's needs are met and the child is safe. This information is clearly recorded in

the child's file.

As part of the initial assessment, professionals and agencies that are involved with the child and their family, other than Tusla, work well together and talk to each other, and with Tusla, about their concerns so that all relevant information is shared and considered. This means the best plan is put in place for the child and their family. For example, if a child has mental health needs or a disability, then the mental health or disability services work together with the child protection and welfare service to ensure that services do what they can to ensure the child's needs are met and the child is safe at home. The social worker completes a good quality analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the child's situation, the family circumstances and the impact it has on each child in a family.

The initial assessment report is factual and objective and clearly describes the needs of the child and any potential risk of harm to the child. The report clearly outlines the outcome of the assessment in line with Children First (2017) and makes recommendations about next steps, which may include the following:

- The child does not need a child protection and welfare service or that no unmet need or risk in relation to a child was found. The family may be referred to another service such as mental healthcare or disability services.
- The assessment indicates that the child has some unmet needs but is not at risk of harm. A family support service may be provided to the family.
- The assessment finds the child has welfare needs. These needs require a child protection and welfare service that involves an allocated social worker to work with the family to make sure the child gets what they need and is safe in their family.
- The assessment concludes that there is a child abuse concern and the child is at ongoing significant risk of harm that requires a child protection social worker to work with the family. This is very serious and involves the family attending a multidisciplinary meeting, called a 'child protection case conference'.

In a good child protection and welfare service, the outcome of the initial assessment is shared with the child and their family and is done in a way that is sensitive to the child's age and stage of development and understanding. The plan of action that is required to improve the situation for the child is discussed with the child, where appropriate, and their family to ensure the child's needs are met and that an appropriate safety plan is put in place where required.

In a safe and effective child protection and welfare service, managers have continuing oversight of all stages of the process from receipt of referral through to preliminary enquiries, safety planning and completion of initial assessments, including oversight of waiting lists. This means they know how many families the service is concerned about and what the social workers are doing to help these families. They also know if there are families that are waiting to be allocated a social worker, and they make sure that children are seen by a social worker and or social care worker as soon as possible.

Safety planning

A safety plan is “a plan that is developed by the worker and the family to assure that the child will be conditionally safe. It is based on the strengths of the individual family members and their ability to monitor their own behaviour”.⁽⁶⁾

The safety of children is an integral part of the culture of a good child protection and welfare service and is embedded in the daily work practices of its staff. Staff consider whether a safety plan is required at every stage of the process from the receipt of the first report right through to the completion of the initial assessment. Where it is deemed that a child is at potential risk of harm, then safety planning is put in place to ensure that all known risks are addressed so that the child is safe and can remain at home. A good child protection and welfare service works with children and their families to ensure that the actions taken promote the safety and welfare of the child. Good safety plans include:

- an assessment of both parent or adult’s capacity to safeguard the child
- involvement of the child’s father, mother or partner of a parent in the development of the safety plan
- meaningful involvement of the child in the development of the safety plan
- identification of all risks
- management of all risks
- identification of the child’s support network as part of the safety planning process and
- active involvement of the support network in keeping the child safe.

Safety plans are monitored, reviewed and updated by the social worker and their manager regularly and in response to changing circumstances in a family to ensure that children continue to be kept safe. Where the level of risk to the child changes or there is a lack of progress, arrangements are reviewed and appropriate actions taken.

A good child protection and welfare service recognises that timely and regular

sharing of information and planning are essential to keeping children safe. Strategy meetings are convened between professionals such as members of An Garda Síochána, general practitioners (GPs), public health nurses, disability service managers and others at any stage of the process. These meetings are held so that all professionals share relevant information they have about the child, thus ensuring that children get the right service they need and are safe and well cared for. These meetings take place as often as needed and at any stage of the family's contact with social work services.

Garda notifications

In all child protection and welfare services, when staff suspect that a crime has been committed, they should formally notify An Garda Síochána in writing without delay. The Gardaí and the social workers work well together and always follow the Joint Working Protocol for An Garda Síochána and Tusla Child and Family Agency Liaison. This is an agreement that is in place to support social workers and members of An Garda Síochána to share appropriate information and work well together.

Re-referrals

When referrals of concern are received about the same child and their family more than once, then all the information about the other referrals is held together. This ensures that all available information is used to determine the current and most up-to-date picture of the child's needs or what harm might occur to them and what is needed to ensure the child's welfare and safety. Children get the services they need when they need them, and they do not have to wait to have their needs met or to be safe inside their own families.

Closed cases

A good child protection and welfare service ensures that children and their families benefit from the service for as long as they need it. Cases remain open and are not closed until there are appropriate and sustainable arrangements in place to keep children safe. Children and parents are told by the service when their case is closed. Closed cases are reviewed by the social work manager prior to closure to make sure they are not being closed too soon. They are signed off by both the social worker and the social work manager. The reasons why the family does not require the child protection and welfare service are written down in the child's file.

The extent to which the services have the above elements in place will inform a judgment on their level of compliance with National Standard 2.1.

What this means for the child

The child receives a timely and proportionate response from the service based on his or hers identified needs. Children who are at immediate risk receive an immediate response to ensure their safety. The service is responsive to the changing needs of children and takes the right action at the right time to make sure children are safe and well cared for. Children and families are seen, observed and consulted with in order to complete an assessment of their needs. Children are seen on their own and observed with their families.

Children know the reasons for the actions taken and or services provided, and this is explained to them in a way they can understand. Where a child is at risk, safety plans are put in place and these plans adapt to the changing circumstances of the family. Children are asked to identify the people who keep them safe. Children are asked for their ideas about what could be done to keep them safe and who should be included in making sure the safety plan happens. Children are never left in a situation where they feel unsafe. Children are confident in the service and know that everyone is working together in their best interests.

Lines of enquiry

Does the service have policies and processes in place to direct practice in relation to:

- thresholds
- screening and preliminary enquiries
- safety planning and
- initial assessment

which reflect the requirements of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017) and provide clear guidance to staff in the management of referrals?

Can staff demonstrate knowledge of relevant laws, standards, policies, procedures and guidance documents with respect to responding to screening, preliminary enquiries, safety planning and assessment, and are these implemented in practice?

Are all reports of concerns acknowledged?

Are all new referrals checked to see if there is a record of previous contact with the service?

Is the referrer contacted to clarify the information provided?
As part of the preliminary enquiry process, are other professionals contacted to see if they have concerns about the child who is the subject of the referral?
Does the practitioner seek parental consent to conduct checks with other professionals as appropriate?
Are new referrals that are screened out appropriately recorded and closed?
Are thresholds for accepting a report consistently and properly applied?
Are such thresholds in line with Tusla’s own policies and standard business processes following screening of a new referral and following preliminary enquiry?
Are children at immediate risk of abuse identified, and are proportionate actions taken to keep them safe?
Are referrals correctly categorised as welfare or in line with the descriptions of abuse as set out in Children First (2017)?
Is the level of need identified and recorded in line with the ‘Tusla Threshold of Referral to Tusla Social Work Services’ guidance document?
Are all referrals correctly prioritised as high, medium or low?
Where a referral has been assessed as a welfare concern, is a referral made to appropriate services, that is to say, Tusla’s Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme, or other community or family support services?
When there is a re-referral, is all previously held information considered to ensure that the child receives an appropriate response from the service?
Is decision-making clear and transparent, and does the service clearly document the rationale for decisions made at every stage of the process?
Is safety planning of good quality and does it include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ an assessment of the capacity of each parent or adult to safeguard the child ▪ an identification of all risks ▪ the actions to address all risks ▪ an identification of the child’s support network and its involvement in the safety planning process

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ collaboration with the child and their family, and other professionals to develop an appropriate safety plan?
<p>Are safety plans overseen by management and monitored, evaluated and updated regularly and in response to changing circumstances in the family?</p>
<p>Are strategy meetings convened between professionals to facilitate the sharing and evaluation of information between professionals and to prepare a plan of action for the protection of the child?</p>
<p>Are good quality initial assessments completed in a timely manner and in line with Children First (2017) and Tusla’s own processes? Do initial assessments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ consultation with children and observation of the child in the home ▪ consultation with parents or guardians ▪ consultation with the child’s support networks where appropriate ▪ good consultation with other agencies and professionals to ensure that all information is shared and considered as part of the initial assessment?
<p>Is the initial assessment report factual and objective, and does it clearly describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the needs of the child and any risk of harm to the child ▪ personal and family strengths ▪ support networks that can be accessed to mitigate risks and meet unmet need ▪ existing protective factors?
<p>Does the report include a comprehensive analysis of the child’s needs and outline the clear actions needed to address the identified needs and or significant risk of harm?</p>
<p>Do managers have continuing oversight of all stages of the process from screening and preliminary enquiries, to safety planning and completion of initial assessments?</p>
<p>Is the outcome of the initial assessment shared with the family and actions discussed to ensure the child’s needs are met and or that safety planning is in place as appropriate?</p>
<p>Do children and families have timely access to the right service at the right time?</p>
<p>Do managers have continuing oversight of waiting lists and are they subject to continual review and prioritisation?</p>

Does the service formally notify An Garda Síochána of suspected abuse in a timely manner in line with Children First (2017)?

Are cases closed appropriately?

Sources of evidence

Inspectors will gather evidence from a number of sources before and during an on-site inspection. The evidence determines the findings made against the lines of enquiry. The sources of evidence are outlined below.

- data set and information provided by the service area
- case files
- waiting lists (if relevant)
- observation of duty intake system
- review of closed files
- focus groups with children, staff and team leaders
- telephone interviews with parents
- interviews with principal social workers
- interview with area manager
- management oversight systems of the screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessment processes
- review of frameworks to determine thresholds of harm, levels of risk and prioritisation of cases and observation of them being applied
- management oversight of waiting list policies,
- procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals from receipt of report to completion of initial assessment.

Theme 3: Leadership, Governance and Management

Standard 3.1

The service performs its functions in accordance with relevant legislation, regulations, national policies and standards to protect children and promote their welfare.

Standard 3.3

The service has a system to review and assess the effectiveness and safety of child protection and welfare service provision and delivery.

What a service meeting this standard looks like

In a well-governed service, overall accountability for the service is clearly defined and the governance arrangements ensure a safe, sustainable service is delivered within a child-centred culture. The culture of the service is informed by the lived experience and voice of the child receiving the service. Therefore, children are kept safe and protected from harm and their welfare is promoted.

The best interests of the child are served at every level of the organisation. Clear lines of communication are in place so that ongoing risk which cannot be resolved locally is escalated up through regional and national channels within Tusla. There is a system to record and learn from mistakes, and excellent data and records are maintained.

The service has clear arrangements in place to meet its legal obligations under the Child Care Act, 1991, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 and Children First Act 2015. The strategic objectives of the service are in line with these laws, and they reflect that the focus of the service is on the wellbeing and safety of children. The service is well-led and there are governance structures in place at local, regional and national level which support the delivery of good quality screening, preliminary enquiries, safety planning and initial assessments to children in line with the legislation and the standards.

Qualified and experienced managers provide strong leadership to staff. Staff are supported and confident in the delivery of safe, consistent and accountable services to children and families from the receipt of the initial concern through to the completion of initial assessment.

The service is planned to ensure it is safe and effective in managing all referrals of concern about a child from the point of receipt of a report through to the completion of initial assessment. The service has policies, procedures and guidelines, including on the management of caseloads, which guide and support staff and managers in doing so. Staff are confident in their knowledge of, and consistently adhere to, the service's policies and procedures.

The governance, management and leadership arrangements in place help to assure management at local, regional and national level that the service is protecting children and promoting their welfare at all stages from the receipt of the referral through to screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessment.

Management systems include oversight of decision-making, risk management, quality assurance and information governance.

There are monitoring and oversight systems in place at local, regional and national levels to ensure that the service is child-centred and that the child's needs are at the centre of all processes. These systems help to assure management that:

- thresholds for the service are appropriately implemented, resulting in children receiving the appropriate service in a timely way
- screening and preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessments are of good quality and adhere to the service's own standard processes, including time frames.

Effective quality assurance mechanisms identify areas for child-centred practice improvement. Management systems effectively track how improvement plans are implemented from local to regional to national level.

In a good service, the risk management system effectively:

- identifies and assesses risk
- decides on appropriate responses and
- provides assurances that the chosen responses are effective in managing, mitigating or eliminating the identified risks to children and families and the service.

In this service, staff at all grades are aware of their responsibility to manage risk. If they are unable to manage a specific risk, there is a system in place to escalate risk to management at local, regional and national level. These escalations are

reviewed and monitored, and steps are taken to address these risks.

A good child protection and welfare service has a risk register in place which is regularly reviewed, monitored and updated to ensure that no child is left in a situation of potential risk that has not been addressed. Control measures are also put in place to manage potential risks.

A good child protection and welfare service is well run and has strong systems in place for the notification and review of serious incidents. The learning from the review of serious incidents and the findings of any investigations or reviews are shared with front-line managers and staff within appropriate timescales. This informs the development of good practice and leads to improved services for children and families.

The data gathered in a good service supports service planning and service delivery to ensure the service area protects children and promotes their welfare. Systems of recording and storing information support the service to fulfil the requirements of Children First (2017), the service's policies and its legal obligations.

In a good service, staff and managers are accountable for the provision of services for children, and excellent records are maintained. Each child's record clearly reflects all referrals, interventions and related decisions. Records of management meetings and decision-making forums are well recorded, with identified actions and identified persons responsible for implementing actions.

Conversely, in a service that is non-compliant, management systems do not adequately nor appropriately ensure that services provided to children and their families are safe, effective and timely.

The extent to which the services have the above elements in place will inform a judgment on their level of compliance with National Standards 3.1 and 3.3.

What this means for the child

Children and families receive an appropriate good quality service to meet their needs in a timely way. Children's welfare is promoted and they experience a well-managed and child-centred service. They are safer as a result of engaging with the service.

Children experience a consistent approach from staff providing the service and benefit from a service that learns from its successes and mistakes and uses these as opportunities to continually develop and improve.

Lines of enquiry
Does the service perform its functions in relation to screening, preliminary enquiry and assessment in line with <i>Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)</i> , the <i>National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children</i> and its own policies and procedures?
Does the service have policies, procedures and guidelines which guide and support staff through the management of referrals from receipt of a report, through screening, preliminary enquiry, initial assessment and safety planning?
Are the above policies, procedures and guidelines consistently implemented in practice?
Is the delivery of child protection and welfare services appropriately planned to respond to the needs of the service area?
Is the service well led, and do the governance arrangements in place ensure a service that is responsive to local challenges in a manner that maintains a safe service?
Can staff demonstrate knowledge of and adherence to the legislation, standards, policies and procedures that guide them in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the application of thresholds to accept a report as appropriate to the service ▪ in the completion of screening and preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessments?
Does the service have monitoring and oversight systems at local, regional and national levels that report regularly on the compliance of the service with Children First, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017, national standards, and policies on the application of thresholds, screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and assessment?

Sources of evidence

- data and information provided by the service area
- relevant national policies, strategies, procedures, guidance and documentation produced by Tusla and relating to:
 - child protection and welfare
 - thresholds
 - child-centred practice
 - governance and oversight
 - risk management
 - service improvement (if relevant)
 - caseload management
 - information management
 - quality assurance
 - improvement plans arising from quality assurance monitoring and or audit
 - supervision
 - implementation of lessons learnt and or recommendations made arising from serious incidences or investigations or reviews
 - an organogram showing the governance structure
- observation by inspectors of the service area's duty system
- interviews with area managers
- focus groups with children
- telephone interviews with parents
- focus groups with social workers and other relevant staff
- focus groups with team leaders
- meetings with principal social workers.

Theme 5: Workforce[‡]

Standard 5.1

Safe recruitment practices are in place to recruit staff with the required competencies to protect children and promote their welfare.

Standard 5.2

Staff have the required skills and experience to manage and deliver effective services to children.

What a service with good recruitment practices looks like

A service with good recruitment practices hires qualified staff who have the competencies to conduct the screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessments required. All staff have the qualifications required for the position they hold and their CVs and references have been checked. All staff have been vetted by An Garda Síochána and or other police services and this vetting is held on their personnel files. Staff that should be registered with a professional body have provided evidence of their current registration and this is held on their personnel files.

The service maintains contemporaneous, accurate and secure personnel files for all staff. These personnel files include all the personal and professional information outlined in the *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children*, including:

- name, date of birth and evidence of identity
- CV, including record of previous employment
- references
- satisfactory vetting from An Garda Síochána and or other police services
- qualifications
- training undertaken and completed

[‡] The section on Workforce is separated into two parts: the first takes Standards 5.1 and 5.2 together and the second deals with Standard 5.3 only.

- registration status with professional bodies as appropriate.

Services with good recruitment practices provide induction training to new staff on screening, including information on the threshold for referral to the service, preliminary enquiry, initial assessment and safety planning processes and procedures. Staff receive the training before they start work in the child protection and welfare service.

Staffing

A good service has sufficient staff in place with the appropriate skill-mix, qualifications, competencies and experience to ensure that good quality screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and assessments are conducted. Where there are staff vacancies, a good service has appropriate contingency plans in place to ensure that it can operate safely. The service has effective staff retention initiatives in place to support continuity of staffing, such as:

- phased introduction of caseloads for new staff
- incremental and supported introduction to complex cases
- systems for mentoring and supporting new staff
- continual professional development initiatives
- performance management and development schemes
- a career path that acknowledges the experience and skills of staff
- channels for existing staff to communicate personal challenges
- management of staff wellbeing
- the implementation of feedback from exit interviews to improve staff retention and future recruitment strategies.

Staff have a clear understanding of thresholds and apply them consistently so that children and their families are appropriately screened and accepted to the service. Where referrals are not accepted, staff then provide information and advice to the person making the referral on the most appropriate ways of addressing the needs of the child and his or her family.

Staff conduct thorough preliminary enquiries that include checking Tusla records for previous contact with the family. Staff may also contact other professionals and other agencies known to the child to see if they have any concerns. The information gathered assists the social worker and or social care worker to understand the child's history and circumstances, and to make a decision as to whether the child is at immediate risk of harm. The social worker has the skill to decide on the most appropriate response, and receives support and advice from his or her team leader

as necessary.

If an initial assessment is needed, the social worker works in consultation with the family to determine the needs of the child and their family. Staff have the necessary competencies to determine the appropriate supports and interventions, including safety planning to ensure the safety and welfare of children. Managers have appropriate qualifications, skills, practice and management experience to meet the service's objectives and to ensure that staff provide effective services to children and their families.

The extent to which the services have the above elements in place will inform a judgment on their level of compliance with National Standards 5.1 and 5.2.

What this means for the child

The child experiences a timely response and continuity of service, that is to say, the child meets the same social worker and social care worker if relevant from their first contact with the service until the completion of an initial assessment. The child meets qualified, vetted, registered (if appropriate) staff who are experienced and competent in conducting screening and making preliminary enquiries so that a child is seen when someone reports a concern about them.

Children find social workers and social care workers and their managers easy to talk to. Staff are skilled at gathering the relevant information and making a decision about what a child needs in order to be kept safe at home and to ensure they are well cared for. The needs of staff and children are supported by qualified and experienced managers in order to provide safe effective services to children.

Lines of enquiry

Are staff with the required qualifications and competencies recruited?

Are contemporaneous, accurate and secure personnel files maintained for all staff, which include the information outlined in the *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children*?

Does the service have sufficient staff with an appropriate skill-mix, qualifications, competencies and experience to ensure that the screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessments are completed effectively?

Does the service have appropriate contingency plans in place in the event of a shortfall in staffing levels?
Does the service have effective staff retention initiatives in place?
Do managers have appropriate qualifications, skills, practice and management experience to meet the service's objectives?
Does the service have strategies in place to support newly qualified and recruited staff?
Does the service have systems in place to support staff members' wellbeing?
Sources of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ completed self-assessment ▪ data and information provided by the area ▪ national workforce strategy and related policies ▪ local and or regional and or national workforce plans ▪ organogram ▪ documentation on staff retention initiatives ▪ initiatives for supporting new and existing staff ▪ information on wellbeing initiatives and support for staff ▪ staff files ▪ performance management records ▪ case files ▪ local business plan ▪ management meetings ▪ focus groups with staff, team leaders and children

- interviews with principal social workers
- interviews with area managers
- training records relevant to the theme of this inspection to include:
 - induction of new staff
 - management training for managers
 - training for all staff in supervision
 - training for staff in caseload management
- staff supervision and support records
- telephone interviews with parents.

Theme 5: Workforce

Standard 5.3

All staff are supported and receive supervision in their work to protect children and promote their welfare.

What a service looks like when it is supporting staff to protect children and promote their welfare

Staff are supported by the service through the identification of their training needs in relation to the management of referrals. The appropriate training is provided to ensure safe, effective and consistent management of referrals. Training and development opportunities are provided to staff to equip them with the skills required to consistently apply the criteria for:

- acceptance of a new referral
- relevant thresholds of need and
- to ensure the correct categorisation and prioritisation of cases.

A good child protection and welfare service is proactive in supporting staff to continually update and maintain their knowledge and skills in relation to screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessment. In addition, staff receive training in supervision and caseload management.

Managers receive accredited management training in order to assist them to achieve the service's objectives and to ensure that staff provide effective services to children and their families.

Staff are clear about the lines of accountability and their responsibility in relation to the management of cases. Staff receive regular supervision and support from experienced and appropriately qualified managers in line with the service's supervision policy. A good service provides good support to newly qualified staff — this includes receiving more regular supervision and staff having a caseload that incrementally grows in both numbers and complexity.

The supervision process holds staff to account and ensures that all the information gathered is used in decision-making. Records of supervision and support are maintained, and clearly outline discussion and decision-making. Supervision records show that the decisions made at previous sessions are reviewed to ensure that progress is being made or that other actions are being taken in response to the

changing needs of the child and their family. These records are signed by both the staff member and their manager.

There are effective performance management systems in place that include an annual appraisal of each staff member's performance. The service has arrangements in place to inform CORU, the regulator for health and social care professionals, where managers have evidence to suggest that performance or conduct of a staff member may not meet the requirements of the regulatory body.

The service has arrangements in place to enable staff to make protected disclosures about the effectiveness and safety of the service. Staff are aware of these arrangements.

The extent to which the services have the above elements in place will inform a judgment on their level of compliance with National Standard 5.3.

What this means for the child

Children are supported by competent and confident staff who clearly reassure children that their needs and safety are the main concern of staff. Staff have time to spend with children and their families, and children feel the main priority of staff is their welfare and safety.

Lines of enquiry

(The lines of enquiry below are to be considered in the specific context of this thematic programme i.e. screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessment.)

Are the training needs of the workforce identified?

Are training and development opportunities (including induction training) provided to staff to equip them with the skills required to meet the needs of children who are reported to the service?

Is regular supervision and support provided by managers to all staff in line with Tusla's own policy?

Are records of supervision and support maintained and do they clearly outline

discussion, decision-making and accountability?
Are supervision records signed by both the staff member and their manager?
Are there effective performance management systems in place that include an annual appraisal of each staff member's performance by their line manager?
Has the service put arrangements in place to inform CORU where managers have evidence to suggest that performance or conduct of a staff member may not meet the requirements of the regulatory body?
Are staff aware of how to make a protected disclosure if they had concerns about the effectiveness and safety of the service?
Do staff engage in continual professional development, and are they up to date with training in applying thresholds and the completion of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ screening ▪ preliminary enquiry ▪ safety planning ▪ initial assessment of children ▪ supervision ▪ caseload management?
Sources of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ completed self-assessment ▪ information and data set provided by the area ▪ implementation of national workforce strategy and related policies ▪ local and or regional and or national workforce plans ▪ staff files, including performance management systems or annual appraisals ▪ case files

- local business plan
- management meetings
- focus groups with staff, team leaders and children
- interviews with principal social workers
- interviews with area managers
- training records relevant to the theme of this inspection to include:
 - training needs analysis
 - induction of new staff
 - management training for managers
 - training for all staff in supervision
 - training for staff in caseload management.
- staff supervision and support records
- telephone interviews with parents.

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