



Regulation of  
Health and Social  
Care Services

# Guidance for the assessment of Tusla's Child Protection and Welfare

Version 2: August 2023

## Contents

<b>Section 1 – Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Section 2 – National Standards</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Section 3 – Guidance for assessment-judgment framework</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Quality and safety</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b> .....	<b>111</b>
<b>Appendix 2 ‘Authority Monitoring Approach’</b> .....	<b>113</b>
<b>The purpose of this guide</b> .....	<b>113</b>
<b>How HIQA will inspect services</b> .....	<b>113</b>
<b>Inspection teams</b> .....	<b>113</b>
<b>Inspection</b> .....	<b>114</b>
<b>On-site fieldwork</b> .....	<b>114</b>
<b>Documentation, data and information request</b> .....	<b>114</b>
<b>Confidentiality</b> .....	<b>114</b>
<b>Communication</b> .....	<b>114</b>
<b>Risk management and escalation</b> .....	<b>115</b>

## Revision history

Revision date	Summary of changes
August 2023	<p data-bbox="469 376 624 412"><b>Version 2</b></p> <p data-bbox="469 448 1377 528">Publication of revised Child Protection and Welfare Assessment-judgment Framework</p> <ul data-bbox="520 564 1385 954" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="520 564 1385 689">• amendments to introduction including HIQA’s emphasis on a rights based approach to human rights-based approach</li><li data-bbox="520 698 1385 824">• amendments to introduction outlining updated information on HIQA’s authority’s monitoring approach to practice</li><li data-bbox="520 833 1385 913">• amendments to line of enquiry which reflect HIQA’s rights based approach</li><li data-bbox="520 922 1385 954">• various style and grammar amendments throughout</li></ul>

## Section 1 — Introduction and purpose of this guidance

Section 8(1)(c) of the Health Act 2007 (as amended) confers on the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) statutory responsibility for monitoring the quality and safety of child protection and welfare services. The Chief Inspector in HIQA is responsible for administering this function on behalf of HIQA. This guidance relates to HIQA's inspection programme against the 2012 *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children* for Tusla's children and family services, and has been produced to support the related assessment-judgment framework, which should be read in conjunction with this guidance.

The purpose of this guidance is to provide additional supporting information on assessing compliance and to offer guidance on reviewing each standard. It is also intended to be used by providers and their staff to assess their own services and continually improve the quality and safety of care and support delivered to children and young people. It outlines what an inspector might review during fieldwork planning (fieldwork is the term we use to describe all the activities associated with the pre-, on-site and post-inspection activities), gathering of relevant information and evidence on site, and the making of judgments about compliance.

Additionally, this guidance facilitates a consistent approach to assessing compliance by:

- supporting inspectors in developing an understanding of the standards
- providing direction to providers on the type of findings that may demonstrate evidence of compliance and non-compliance.

A section on what a quality rights-based service looks like is also included. This section is intended to support providers to constantly strive for ongoing improvements in the quality of their service and to promote positive outcomes for children and young people.

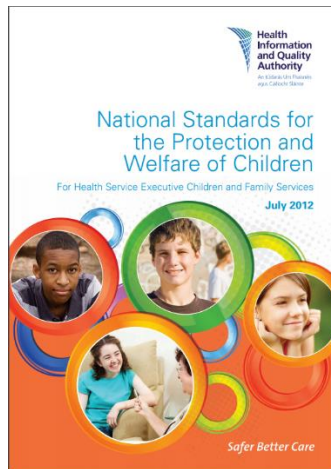
### Structure of the guidance on each Standard

Each standard is described in five sections, namely:

- the standards
- what a service implementing a quality rights-based service looks like
- what this means for the child
- examples of the information that will be reviewed to assess compliance and how this will be done
- examples of indicators which demonstrate the level of compliance with the standards.

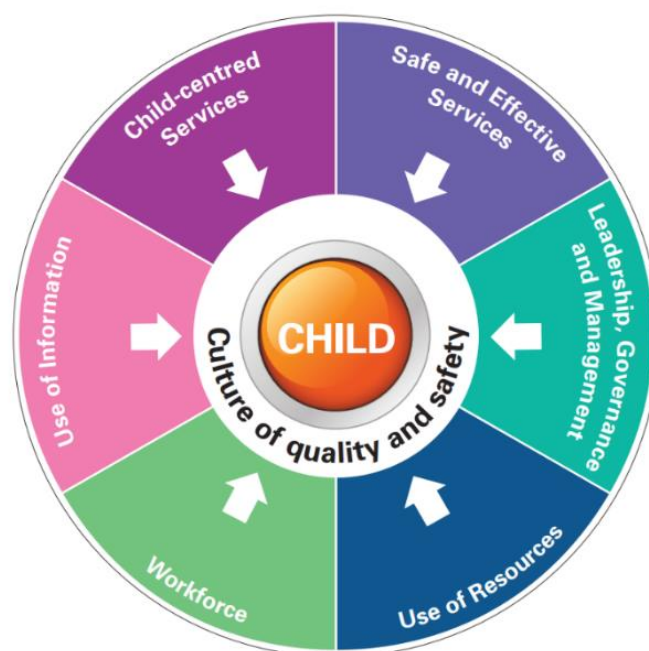
This guidance should be applied in conjunction with the *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2012).

## Section 2 — National Standards



The national standards are grouped into six 'themes' — or aspects of care — as illustrated below in Figure 1. Under each theme in the national standards, the standard number and 'standard statement' describes what a good service looks like and what this means for the child. Underneath these are 'features' which are 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**

National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children  
Health Information and Quality Authority

Standard 1.3  
**Children are communicated with effectively and are provided with information in an accessible format.**

Features to meet the requirements of this Standard include:

- 1.3.1 Children and families are communicated with effectively in a clear, honest and sensitive manner about the service provided and the implications of decisions made.
- 1.3.2 The service communicates effectively with other professionals and agencies to avoid repetition or confusion in information provided to the children and families.

The themes are categorised under two 'dimensions' called **Quality and safety** and **Capacity and capability**.

The lines of enquiry for inspections will be based on the six themes and associated standards across the dimensions. The standards are available to download on the HIQA website, [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie).

The **capacity and capability** dimension comprises:

1. **Leadership, Governance and Management** — 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.
2. **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.
3. **Use of Resources** — using resources effectively and efficiently to deliver best achievable outcomes for children and families.
4. **Use of Information** — actively using information as a resource for planning, delivering, monitoring, managing and improving care.

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

1. **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.
2. **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.

## Section 3 — Guidance for assessment-judgment framework

### Capacity and capability dimension

This section focuses on the provider’s ability to sustainably deliver the service and how the provider is assured that a quality, safe and effective service is provided to children and their families.

It includes how the service provider:

- is assured that there are effective governance structures and oversight arrangements in place for clear accountability, decision-making, risk management and performance assurance, which is underpinned by effective communication among staff and includes how responsibility and accountability for service provision is integrated at all levels of the service
- plans, manages and organises its workforce to ensure enough staff are available at the right time and with the right skills and expertise to meet the service’s needs.
- effectively manages resources to deliver the service.

The associated national standards are set out in this section. Please note that for risk-based inspections, specific standards will be inspected against.

## 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.

### What a rights-based quality service looks like

In a well-governed service, the provider ensures that 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 rights-based and 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. All staff demonstrate a knowledge of legislation, regulations, policies, standards and international best practice, such as the UN convention on the rights of the child. This means that the service has clear arrangements in place to meet its legal obligations under relevant legislation, such as 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 provider ensures that the service is well led and there are governance structures in place at local, regional and national level which support the delivery of the child protection and welfare service in line with the legislation and the standards.

The provider reviews new and existing legislation, regulations and national policies to ensure it is relevant to the service provided to children and their families. The provider assesses how it impacts on practice and addresses any gaps in compliance with what is required of it. The service provides feedback to government to inform policy when appropriate.

The provider takes appropriate actions based on the recommendations made by regulatory bodies and by investigations into the service. These actions are taken to ensure children are provided with a service that protects them and promotes their welfare. Qualified and experienced managers provide strong leadership to ensure these actions are taken. Management systems within the service are effective to ensure these actions are implemented, monitored and evaluated.



Staff are supported and confident in implementing changes to practice when required to ensure the delivery of safe, consistent and accountable services to children and families, including those at ongoing risk of significant harm.

### **What this means for the child**

Children and families receive an appropriate good quality service which promotes their rights and meets their needs in a timely way. They 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.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates:

- meetings involving or in relation to children
- staff interaction with children and families.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families to explore:

- their experience of the service and whether their rights, independence and safety are promoted
- their understanding of the service, policies and procedures and how they have reached this understanding.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- if there is a system in place to inform staff of any changes to policies and procedures, and ensure that they are implemented
- if they are aware of changes to practice and are supported to implement them
- if staff have sufficient knowledge, understanding and opportunities to discuss policies and procedures relevant to their work.

#### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- data and information provided by the service area, including a governance structure organisational chart
- relevant national policies, strategies, procedures, guidance and documentation produced by Tusla and relating to areas such as thresholds, child-centred practice and caseload management
- policies in relation to governance and oversight, risk management, information management and quality assurance
- improvement plans arising from quality assurance, monitoring and audits
- complaints and appeals
- staff supervision
- implementation of lessons learnt and or recommendations made by regulatory bodies, investigations, or reviews arising from serious incidents.

### **Compliance Indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- staff appropriately demonstrate knowledge of relevant legislation, regulations, policies and standards for the protection and welfare of children and reflect this knowledge in their practice
- learning is identified following reports by regulatory bodies and investigations into the service and this is implemented to ensure improvements in the service
- new and existing legislation, regulations and national policies have been reviewed with subsequent action taken to ensure there are no gaps in compliance

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- there are gaps in achieving compliance in the implementation of new and existing legislation, regulations and national policies
- where learning has been identified by regulatory bodies and investigations, appropriate actions are not fully and consistently implemented
- some staff are not familiar with the relevant legislation, regulations, policies and standards for the protection and welfare of children that should guide their practice

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- governance arrangements are weak, strong leadership is absent and systems are not effective in ensuring the service performs its functions in line with relevant legislation, regulations, national policies and standards
- staff are not familiar with the the relevant legislation, regulations, policies and standards for the protection and welfare of children that should guide their practice
- learning from reports or recommendations by regulatory bodies or investigations into the service are not implemented.

**Theme 3: Leadership, Governance and Management**

**Standard 3.2**

Children receive a child protection and welfare service, which has effective leadership, governance, and management arrangements with clear lines of accountability.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

In a well-governed service, there is a clearly defined vision for how high-quality child protection and welfare service will be delivered. Children and families are at the heart of this vision and it informs the service delivery along with the culture of the organisation.

The provider facilitates a positive organisational culture within the service. Professional values of being child-centred and valuing continual improvement in service delivery contribute to the culture of the organisation. It is also 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 provider ensures the service is well led by effective leaders. There is strong leadership throughout the organisation. The best interests of the child are served by those working at every level of the organisation. Management throughout the service are committed to implementing the service provider's vision and through their leadership they deliver a service that is child-centred, aligned to its statement of purpose, legal requirements and in line with its strategic plan.

Leaders in the service understand the needs of children and the right resources are directed to children who need care and protection. Staff are supported and confident in the delivery of safe, consistent and accountable services to children and families, including those at ongoing risk of significant harm.

The provider has up-to-date strategic objectives and operational plans which are regularly reviewed. These plans describe a road map or clear direction for how the service is to be planned and delivered. The strategic objectives of the provider are in line with all relevant legislation and Children First 2017, and they reflect that the focus of the service is on the wellbeing and safety of children. These objectives are informed by consultation with stakeholders, best available evidence, the resources available and the information relevant to the provision of safe services. The provider ensures that its objectives and plans take account of the welfare and protection needs of children who are not receiving adequate care and protection, the complex needs of children and families, and the particular needs of vulnerable children.

The provider has clearly defined governance arrangements and structures within the service. The governance structures in place at local, regional and national level support all aspects of child protection and welfare service delivery in line with relevant legislation and standards. This ensures overall accountability for the service is clearly defined and the governance arrangements ensure that a safe, sustainable service is delivered within the organisational culture.

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 rights and welfare at all points of service delivery.

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

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 provider ensures 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

- all aspects of child protection and welfare service delivery are of good quality and adhere to the service's own procedures, processes, and national policies
- the outcome of complaints and appeals are routinely reviewed to ensure best practice.

Effective quality assurance mechanisms identify areas for child-centred practice improvement. This ensures the service is monitored and evaluated against strategic objectives annually. The provider develops plans to improve service delivery and these plans are tracked, amended and updated regularly by the management team. The local management team are accountable. Management systems effectively track how improvement plans are implemented from local to regional to national level.

A quality child protection and welfare service is well run and has effective systems in place to monitor complaints, concerns, and adverse events, such as serious incidents. Trends are identified, shared and appropriate actions taken to implement learning. 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.

### **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.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation:**

The provider facilitates:

- meetings involving or in relation to children
- staff interaction with children and families.

### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families to explore:

- their views and experiences of the service and access to staff
- if they have given any feedback to the service
- if any written or other forms of information about the service has been made available to them.

Inspectors will speak with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- if they are familiar with the management structure, including their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the reporting structure
- their understanding of the aims and objectives of the service and how they are implemented
- their understanding of a quality service
- if there is a culture of openness and transparency and whether staff know how to raise concerns about the quality and safety of the care and if they feel supported to do so
- how effective communication is within the service
- if feedback is delivered and how it is delivered
- if there are adequate resources to drive improvement and change
- their understanding of risk management and their individual roles and responsibilities in that
- if they are empowered to raise issues and make suggestions about the service
- if they are aware of and have read the findings of inspection reports, audits and any plans put in place to address any concerns identified
- if they are knowledgeable of their responsibilities under the national standards.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- data and information provided by the service area, including governance structure
- relevant national policies, strategies, procedures, guidance and documentation produced by Tusla and relating to child protection and welfare thresholds, child-centred practice, risk management, governance and oversight, service improvement (if relevant), quality assurance, caseload and information management, and complaints and appeals.
- improvement plans arising from quality assurance, monitoring and audits
- supervision records
- evidence of implementation of lessons learnt and or recommendations made arising from serious incidents or investigations or reviews.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- the service is well led, has a statement of purpose and has strategic and operational plans which are being delivered
- clearly defined governance arrangements and structures are in place that set out the lines of authority and accountability at national, regional and local levels
- governance arrangements support delivery of a safe, sustainable service
- the service is regularly monitored and evaluated against its objectives and actions are taken to improve service delivery
- the service publicly reports on the effectiveness and safety of the service at national level.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- the provider does not always meet stated objectives in strategic and operational plans
- the statement of purpose does not include all the relevant information
- regular monitoring and evaluation of the service does not always lead to service improvement
- learning from adverse events, complaints and concerns does not lead to

changes in practice or improved delivery of the service.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- leadership is weak and managers do not have a clear vision for how the service will be delivered
- governance arrangements and structures are poorly defined; as a result, staff are not supported to deliver a safe sustainable service
- the service does not have a statement of purpose and or strategic and operational plans in place
- quality improvement initiatives do not result in improved services
- the service is not monitored and evaluated against its objectives and actions are not taken to improve service delivery
- there is no auditing of the service to assess, evaluate and improve the service provided to children and their families in a systematic way
- risks management frameworks are not used effectively
- there is no learning from adverse events, complaints or concerns.

**Theme 3: Leadership, Governance and Management**

**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 rights-based quality service looks like**

The governance, management and leadership arrangements in place assure management at local, regional and national level that the service is protecting children and promoting their welfare at all stages where a child protection social work response is required. The provider ensures there is a robust monitoring system in place which is used to report regularly to the public on compliance of the service with national child protection and welfare standards, policy, legislation and regulations. Where non-compliance is identified, actions are taken to bring the service into compliance.



All aspects of the service are monitored and evaluated regularly in order to identify risks.

In a good service, the risk management system effectively:

- identifies and assesses risk
- decides on appropriate responses
- provides assurances that the chosen responses are effective in managing, mitigating or eliminating the identified risks to children and families and the service
- escalates ongoing risk which cannot be resolved locally to regional and national management, where steps are taken to effectively manage this risk.

The provider ensures that in this service, staff at all grades are aware of their responsibility to manage risk. If staff 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.

The provider ensures there is 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.

Learning arising from the monitoring and evaluation of the quality and safety of the service is shared by management with staff and also to the public. The organisation implements this learning in order to improve services for children and families.

### **What this means for the child**

Children receive a service that ensures all of their staff are aware of their responsibility to manage risk and take action to address any risks. Children are not left in a situation of potential risk that has not been addressed because the service reviews risk on an ongoing basis and takes appropriate action when required. Children receive a service that is child-centred, and the child's needs are at the centre of all processes.

## **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates:

- meetings involving or in relation to children
- staff interaction with children and families

### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families to explore:

- their views and experiences of the service
- if they have given any feedback to the service.

Inspectors will speak with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- if they are familiar with the service's monitoring arrangements
- how risks are identified, managed and escalated, and their understanding of their role and responsibilities in relation to risk management
- if staff know how to raise concerns about the quality and safety of the care
- how children's care records are reviewed to ensure they are of good quality and maintained
- if there are adequate resources to drive improvement and change that benefit children
- if children receive an appropriate service in a timely way.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- data and information related to the service area
- policies in relation to governance and oversight, risk management, information management and quality assurance
- children's records
- complaints log

- supervision
- risk register and serious incidents
- minutes of management meetings and other decision-making forums
- audits of service provision
- audits on compliance against the standards.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- monitoring systems are robust and are used to report on compliance with national child protection and welfare standards, policy and regulations
- risks are managed locally where possible and in the event they cannot be managed locally, they are escalated to an appropriate level, where an appropriate response is received
- learning is shared with staff to ensure the quality and safety of the service is continually improving.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- there are good monitoring systems in place but some require strengthening
- risk management systems require improvement as they do not identify all risks and control measures required.

#### **Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- monitoring systems are weak, not well implemented and ineffective at providing assurance to management at local, regional and national level that the service is protecting children and promoting their welfare
- monitoring systems have not identified significant non-compliance with standards, policy, legislation and regulations
- the management of risk is poor across all levels within the service
- monitoring and evaluation of the service does not lead to improved service provision and delivery.

### Theme 3: Leadership, Governance and Management

#### Standard 3.4

Child Protection and welfare services provided on behalf of statutory service providers are monitored for compliance with legislation, regulations, national child protection and welfare policy and standards.

#### What a rights-based quality service looks like

Service-level agreements are in place with externally sourced services for commissioned child protection and welfare services. Service-level agreements are reviewed and amended on a regular basis in order to be in line with the area's service plans and or when required to improve service delivery for children and their families.

The provider ensures that these agreements include the scope of a service provided, resources required to deliver the service, and monitoring and governance arrangements, including compliance with national policy, Children First and relevant standards.

The provider ensures that the external service providers are monitored on a regular basis to assure that the service provided to children and families complies with legislation, regulations, standards and national policy.

#### What this means for the child

Children receive a good quality service provided from an external service provider, as the statutory provider regularly reviews the service-level agreement and service provision by the external service provider to ensure compliance with legislation, regulations, standards and national policy.

#### Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done

##### Through observation

The provider facilitates:

- meetings involving or in relation to children.

### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families:

- to determine their views and experiences of externally provided services.

Inspectors will communicate with external providers to explore:

- the service-level agreement in place and the service provided to children and their families.

Inspectors will speak with managers to explore:

- if they are familiar with the service-level agreements in place and what impact this has on the service provided to children and their families
- is the risk register up to date and reflective of the risks identified within the service
- business plans, annual reports, senior management meetings and stakeholder meetings for the service.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- service-level agreements
- reviews of service-level agreements, annual reports and business plans
- risk register
- senior management and stakeholder meeting minutes.

## **Compliance indicators**

### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- the provider has formal agreements in place with external agencies that provide child protection and welfare services
- external services are monitored regularly to ensure the service provided is compliant with legislation, regulations, national standards and policy.

### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while formal agreements are in place with external service providers, they do not include all the required information, such as information about the

resources required to deliver the service, but this does not impact on the service provided to the child.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- there are no agreements in place with external providers of services and there are no monitoring arrangements in place to ensure compliance with legislation, regulations, standards and policy
- external providers are not monitored to ensure quality of service provided.

**Theme 4: Use of Resources**

**Standard 4.1**

Resources are effectively planned, deployed and managed to protect children and promote their welfare.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

The effective use of financial and human resources is central to the delivery of a good quality child protection and welfare service. The provider routinely completes an assessment of needs and the demand for services within its area. This information informs the planning and allocation of resources.

A good quality service has a comprehensive up-to-date plan that incorporates the area's aims and objectives for the service and service area. Such a plan outlines how the service will be delivered within available resources and this will include definite actions with clear timescales for delivery. The provider responds effectively to unforeseen events and uses resources as required to deliver a quality service.

A good quality service effectively uses its resources. It has a range of checks and balances in place to ensure that resources are deployed in an effective and transparent way. A good service provider has contingencies in place — it responds to resource challenges such as staff vacancies, and uses its resources in an innovative way to respond to these challenges. For example, the provider may relocate staff from one team to another based on service demands and prioritised needs. Local challenges are communicated where appropriate to regional service directors and the national office where appropriate.

The provider holds regular meetings with all the agencies that provide services to vulnerable children and families. Agreements have been reached to ensure a

consistent delivery of safe and effective services, which protect children and promote their welfare. Decisions to procure services on a one-off basis for children are transparent and effectively planned. Clear agreements are in place with the support services who receive funding from Tusla.

Memoranda of understanding are in place with partner agencies such as disability services, and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The provider regularly meets these services to enable children to access partnered services in a seamless way. Records of these meetings are held and shared with all parties.

The good service is prudent in its use of resources, and the financial performance and cost effectiveness of the service is regularly monitored and evaluated on an annual basis in order to continually improve service delivery to children and families.

### **What this means for the child**

The child experiences a well-coordinated service and receives the right service at the right time.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- service plan
- agreements and or contracts with and evaluations of commissioned services
- records of monitoring and minutes of meetings with partner and or commissioned services
- memorandums of understanding with partner agencies
- needs analysis of the area
- management meeting
- funding requests.

### Compliance indicators

#### Indicators of compliance include:

- the provider monitors the levels and demand for services in order to inform planning and allocation of resources
- the provider has plans in place to use all available resources to best effect
- the provider regularly meets with all the agencies that provide services to vulnerable children and families to support delivery of safe and effective services
- the provider annually monitors and evaluates its financial performance and cost-effectiveness to improve service delivery.

#### Indicators of substantial compliance include:

- resources are not always effectively deployed to meet prioritised needs
- the provider monitors level of demand for the service but does not always use this information in service planning.

#### Indicators of non-compliance include:

- resources are not well managed or deployed to meet prioritised needs
- decision-making in relation to resource allocation is not transparent
- the service does not monitor its financial performance and cost-effectiveness
- the provider does not meet with partner agencies who provide services to vulnerable children and families to support quality of service delivery.

## 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.

### What a rights-based quality service looks like



The provider's recruitment of staff is in line with employment and equality legislation, and is informed by evidence-based human resource practices. A service with good recruitment practices employs qualified staff who have the required competencies to undertake the duties associated with their roles and responsibilities.

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
- registration status with professional bodies where required.

The provider ensures there are good recruitment practices in place to provide orientation and induction training to new staff on all the requirements of their role in protecting and promoting the welfare of children. This includes all the activities and work practices associated with processing new referrals to the service, ensuring appropriate pathways through services and that services are provided for as long as they are needed.

### **What this means for the child**

The child meets qualified, vetted and registered (if appropriate) staff who have been appropriately trained in the duties associated with their roles and responsibilities. Staff are confident and competent in conducting all the requirements of their respective roles, in order to protect children and promote their welfare. Children are confident that they will meet staff who understand their circumstances and who will work with their families and other services to ensure they are well cared for and feel safe.

## **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates a review of:

- how new staff are inducted and supported.

### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families to explore:

- their views and experiences of the service.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- the quality of induction provided
- the recruitment process and contingency plans should unexpected staff shortfalls occur
- how managers ensure that staffing is appropriate.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data and information provided by the service area
- recruitment and staff files
- orientation and induction programme and processes for each team, including evidence of staff attendance at and or completion of such programmes and processes
- children's records
- other training records relevant to the theme of this inspection, including management training for managers.

## **Compliance indicators**

### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- there are robust recruitment practices in place which ensure that staff with

the required competencies are recruited

- contemporaneous, accurate and secure records are maintained on all staff
- all staff receive orientation and induction training on commencement in child protection and welfare services.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- there are some minor gaps in records held in staff recruitment files
- not all staff have received induction training into their roles in the child protection and welfare service.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- there is neither An Garda Síochána nor other police vetting in place for some staff
- recruitment practice is not robust in ensuring that competent staff are recruited
- staff are not appropriately registered to practise
- staff do not receive orientation or induction training on commencing work in child protection and welfare services
- staff are not competent to perform the duties assigned to them.

## Theme 5: Workforce

### Standard 5.2

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

#### What a rights-based quality service looks like

The provider ensures that the service has sufficient staff in place with the appropriate skill-mix, qualifications, competencies and experience to ensure that children's needs are met through the provision of a good quality, comprehensive child protection and welfare service. Where there are staff vacancies, a rights-based quality service has appropriate contingency plans in place to ensure that it

can operate safely. A good 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 the necessary competencies to work with children using the service, are registered with the relevant professional body as appropriate to their profession, and engage in continuing professional development, keeping up-to-date with evidence-based practice in their area of work. The service maintains records of any continuing professional development courses or training undertaken by staff in the child protection and welfare service.

Managers have appropriate qualifications, practice and management experience and can demonstrate the skills necessary to meet the service's objectives and to ensure that staff provide effective services to children and their families.

### **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 staff member, if relevant, from their first contact with the service until they no longer need the service. Children do not have to wait a long time to meet a member of staff, and they find staff and their managers easy to talk to and feel they are being listened to. They trust staff with their personal information and are comfortable telling them about their lives. Children know that staff are interested in hearing about their experiences and want to understand what their lives are like. Children are confident that staff will work with their families and trust them to make good decisions that will effect positive changes in their lives. Children know that staff want them to be well cared for and feel

safe in their homes. Children know that staff will continue to be involved with their families for as long as is necessary.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates:

- how staff are supported
- how a continuity of staffing is promoted.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families to explore:

- their view on and experience of their service.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to determine:

- staffing levels are appropriate and what actions are taken to address any deficits
- staffing arrangements and how cases are allocated
- the quality of induction provided
- how managers ensure that staff being on leave do not cause a negative impact and children continue to receive an adequate service.

#### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- national workforce strategy and related policies
- local, regional and or national workforce plans
- organogram (organisational chart)
- documentation on staff retention and wellbeing initiatives, including initiatives for supporting new and existing staff
- training in supervision and caseload management

- staff supervision and support, and performance management records
- management meetings
- business plan
- review of children's records.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- there are sufficient staff with the required skills, experience, registration and competencies to meet the needs of children using the service
- the service has contingency plans in place in the event of a shortfall in staffing
- staff engage in continual professional development and are up to date with evidence-based practice
- managers are competent, hold appropriate qualifications and have sufficient practice and management experience to manage the service.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- there are some vacancies within teams but these are filled quickly and resources are well managed to limit the impact on service delivery
- while there are issues with staff retention, initiatives are in place to address this
- while managers do not have formal management qualifications, they are experienced in managing the service and provide leadership.

#### **Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- there are insufficient staff to provide a service, with high numbers of vacancies not being filled or recruited for
- there are issues with staff retention and, therefore, no continuity of service for children and their families
- continual professional development is not promoted or practised in the service
- staff are not appropriately registered with their professional body, yet

continue to work in the service

- managers have no formal management qualifications and are not experienced in managing a service.

## 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 rights-based quality service looks like

Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and are familiar with all the necessary child protection and welfare procedures to carry out their duties.

A rights-based quality child protection and welfare service is proactive in supporting staff to continually update and maintain their knowledge and skills in relation to meeting the needs of children who use the service. 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. All managers are trained in supervision theory and practice.

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 trained managers in line with the service's supervision policy. A good service has systems in place to support staff members' wellbeing.

Staff are managed effectively to exercise accountability and this is clearly evidenced in records of the formal and informal supervision sessions that managers conduct with workers. 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 provider 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.

### **What this means for the child**

Children are supported by skilled, competent and confident staff who work with children and their families to ensure that children are safe and their needs are met.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates a review of:

- how staff are provided with supervision and support.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will speak with children and families to explore:

- how staff engage with them and their experience of the service.

Inspectors will speak with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- how performance issues are managed
- the quality of supervision, mentoring and support available to them.

#### **Through a review of documents during or after onsite activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- staff supervision and support policies and records
- the performance management procedure
- information and data set provided by the area



- implementation of national workforce strategies and related policies, including local, regional or national workforce plans
- staff files, including performance management systems, annual appraisals or records of disciplinary actions
- children's records
- local business plan
- management meetings
- training records relevant to the theme of this inspection, including training needs analysis, staff induction, management training, supervision and caseload management.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- good quality formal and informal supervision and support is provided regularly to staff by appropriately trained managers ensuring clear accountability for practice
- there is a regular formal management appraisal of each staff member's individual performance
- professional regulatory bodies are informed where the performance or conduct of a staff member may be below the requirements of that body
- staff are facilitated to make protected disclosures about the effectiveness and safety of the service in line with legislative requirements
- staff are provided with training and developmental opportunities to equip them with the skills required to meet the needs of children
- managers have accredited management training and are trained in supervision of staff.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while supervision is provided regularly, it not well recorded
- training is provided but records are not up-to-date
- managers are experienced but do not have formal accredited management training.

#### **Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- the frequency and quality of supervision is poor and is not effective at ensuring oversight or accountability
- poor performance is not well managed or had been left unchecked
- regular formal management appraisal of each staff member's individual performance does not take place
- professional regulatory bodies are not informed where the performance or conduct of a staff member may be below the requirements of that body
- there are no systems in place to facilitate staff making appropriate protected disclosures about the effectiveness and safety of the service
- training opportunities are not provided to ensure staff have the required skills to work with children.

## Theme 5: Workforce

### Standard 5.4

Child protection and welfare training is provided to staff working in the service to improve outcomes for children.

### What a rights-based quality service looks like

A rights-based quality child protection and welfare service provides training as part of a continual professional development programme. The service completes regular training needs analysis. A child protection and welfare training, education and development programme is put in place and is accessible to all relevant staff. This programme has clear objectives, is reviewed annually and equips staff with the skills and knowledge — in relation to the requirements of legislation, standards, Children First guidelines, operational policies and procedures — relevant to their roles and responsibilities. The programme also takes into account feedback from children and their families about their experiences of the service. Staff are facilitated to develop specific skills to ensure the delivery of safe effective services. Staff are supported to continually develop and up-skill competencies associated with their role. Training and development programmes are delivered on a multidisciplinary and interagency basis which facilitate learning and strengthen working relationships.

A good service provider also arranges joint training between its staff and other professional groups or organisations, such as An Garda Síochána or CAMHS, which assists in services working in partnership in line with Children First.

### **What this means for the child**

The child receiving this service meets with confident, competent staff at every level of the organisation, and this gives them confidence that they will receive the right service at the right time and for as long as they need it.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates examination of:

- how training has informed staff interactions with children.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families to explore:

- how staff engage with them.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- their training and whether they feel this has enabled them to care for and support children effectively from when they started work and on an ongoing basis
- if they are informed and are knowledgeable about the national standards
- the quality of training and to determine how the provider's training policy is implemented in practice.

#### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- feedback from families
- training needs analysis
- training programme content and attendance records

- professional development and performance management plans.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- regular training needs analyses are conducted to identify staff training needs
- training has clear objectives, is reviewed annually and is tailored to the identified training needs of staff
- training is delivered on a multidisciplinary and interagency basis to facilitate learning and strengthen working relationships.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while training needs analyses are conducted, they do not inform the programme of training for the service
- records of attendance at training are not consistent across the service.

#### **Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- regular training needs analyses are not conducted to identify staff training needs
- training is not tailored to the individual training needs of staff
- training does not result in improved knowledge, skills and performance.

## **Theme 6: Use of Information**

### **Standard 6.1**

All relevant information is used to plan and deliver effective child protection and welfare services.

### **What a rights-based quality service looks like**

In a well-governed service, quality information and effective information systems are central to planning, delivering, managing and improving the quality of child protection and welfare services.

A rights-based quality child protection and welfare service has effective systems in place to ensure that information held is used ethically and in line with relevant data protection legislation. Managers ensure that the best available evidence is used to protect personal information held by the service, and to support the provision of effective child protection and welfare services.

The provider ensure that the service complies with legislation in relation to information governance arrangements. Robust systems are in place to ensure that information is managed safely while ensuring the delivery of effective services to children and families.

The provider has a system in place to collate and manage standardised information. Staff are clear about their responsibilities in collating this information. Children's services share information with other agencies in the best interests of the child. A rights-based quality service shares this information in a way that is governed by protocols and managed in a sensitive, lawful and appropriate manner, in line with GDPR, data protection and freedom of information legislation.

Effective services respect the right of children and families to access their personal information and facilitate access where appropriate.

### **What this means for the child**

Children's information is managed in line with the legislation. Children and their families can access their records if they wish to do so. Children's information is shared with relevant services where it is in the best interests of the child, and in line with legislation.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates examination of:

- children's records for information management.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families to explore:

- if they have accessed their records.

Inspectors will speak with social workers, social care staff and their managers to explore:

- their awareness about data protection, GDPR and freedom of information
- if children and their families had accessed their records.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- data and information provided by the service area
- relevant national policies, strategies, procedures, guidance and documentation produced by Tusla and relating to data protection, GDPR, freedom of information, access to records, governance and oversight, risk and information management
- quality assurance reports, audits and associated improvement plans
- complaints and appeals logs
- evidence that children and or families have requested access to their records and how this has been facilitated.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- there are robust and effective information governance systems in place
- information systems support the planning, delivery, management and quality improvement of child protection and welfare services
- information governance systems are in compliance with all relevant legislation regarding access to records, freedom of information and GDPR
- standardised information is collated, managed and shared at local, regional and national level to support effective decision-making.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- robust information governance systems are not always used effectively in

service delivery and quality improvement

- while standardised information is collated, managed and shared at local, regional and national level, it does not always support effective decision-making
- there have been minor breaches in information governance practices.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- information governance systems are not robust, effective and not in compliance with legislation
- information is not well managed or used to plan, deliver, manage or improve the quality of services
- there have been significant breaches in information governance practices, which has resulted in sensitive data being sent to inappropriate recipients
- service areas do not work together to share information and learning.

**Theme 6: Use of Information**

**Standard 6.2**

The service has a robust and secure information system to record and manage child protection and welfare concerns.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

Quality information is central to effective decision-making, as abuse and neglect rarely present with a definitive picture. It is the totality of information that gives the clearest picture of the situation. A rights-based quality service provider records all information accurately, and information is stored securely by the service provider in line with relevant legislation.

There is a robust system in place for managing information to support the delivery of the service, and to do this the service uses an integrated information management system that supports the collating, management and sharing of information to support effective decision-making.

The service has a designated person to manage all information in accordance with Children First.

Children and families can access their personal information easily and quickly when required, in line with relevant legislation, and in the best interests of the child.

### **What this means for the child**

Relevant information in relation to children is accurately recorded and updated, and stored securely. Information held on a child is used to manage child protection and welfare concerns in accordance with Children First. Children can access their personal information, if required, and if it is in their best interests.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates examination of:

- children's records.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will speak with social workers, social care staff and their managers to explore:

- how all information is recorded accurately and how information is stored securely by the service.

#### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- data and information provided by the service area
- children's records
- relevant national policies, strategies, procedures, guidance and documentation produced by Tusla and relating to data protection, GDPR, freedom of information, access to records, governance and oversight, risk and information management
- quality assurance and audits including associated improvement plans



- complaints and appeals logs
- implementation of lessons learnt and or recommendations made arising from serious incidents or investigations or reviews.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- all information is recorded accurately and securely stored in a secure integrated information management system
- information is used to support the management of child protection and welfare concerns
- all information gathered is compliant with the information requirements outlined in Children First, national standards and legislation.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- information is recorded accurately and securely stored but is not always up to date
- there are minor breaches in compliance with the information requirements outlined in Children First, standards and legislation.

#### **Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- information gathered does not support the management of child protection and welfare concerns
- information is not compliant with the information requirements as outlined in Children First, standards and legislation
- information on children about whom there is a child protection and welfare concern is not relevant, accurate and up-to-date
- information is not securely stored.

## **Theme 6: Use of Information**

### **Standard 6.3**

Secure record-keeping and file-management systems are in place to manage child protection and welfare concerns.

#### **What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A rights-based quality service has a robust system in place to ensure children's records and files are managed in a sensitive, lawful and appropriate manner.

Staff are aware of their responsibilities to ensure children's records are factually accurate, and updated in line with the relevant legislation. Children's records are legible and accessible and protected from unauthorised access.

Managers have oversight of the record-keeping system, and have audit systems in place to review practice in relation to file and record-keeping practices. There are procedures in place for the filing, archiving, transfer, secure storage and destruction of records.

The extent to which the services have the above elements in place will inform a judgment on their level of compliance with National Standard 6.3.

#### **What this means for the child**

Children's records are kept safely and securely and are protected from unauthorised access. A child's record is up to date, accurate, accessible and legible.

#### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

##### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates examination of:

- children's records

##### **Through communication**

Inspectors will speak with social workers, social care staff and their managers to explore:

- if the service has a robust system in place for information management to ensure children's records and files are managed in a sensitive, lawful and appropriate manner

- if staff are aware of their responsibilities to ensure children's records are factually accurate, and updated in line with the relevant legislation
- how the service ensures children's records are legible, accessible and protected from unauthorised access
- how managers have oversight of the record-keeping system and if there are audits in place to review record-keeping practices.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data and information provided by the service area
- relevant national policies, strategies, procedures, guidance and documentation produced by Tusla and relating to data protection, filing, archiving, transfer, secure storage and destruction of records, freedom of information, governance and oversight, risk and information management, quality assurance reports, audits and associated improvement plans
- complaints and appeals logs
- implementation of lessons learnt and or recommendations made arising from serious incidents or investigations or reviews
- children's records.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- records are handled sensitively and are accessible to appropriate persons
- every child's record is factual, accurate, legible and maintained in chronological order
- records are maintained in compliance with the requirements of Children First, national standards and legislation
- children's records are secured and protected from unauthorised access
- regular audits are undertaken to evaluate the record-keeping and file-management systems and practices.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while the majority of children’s records are factual, accurate and legible, a small number are not
- records are not always signed or dated
- records are not always easily accessible to appropriate persons
- some records are not up to date.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- procedures for filing, archiving, transfer, secure storage and destruction of records are not adhered to and record management systems are not robust
- records are inaccurate, illegible or omit relevant facts
- records are not accessible when a staff member is on leave
- record-keeping and file-management systems are not audited to evaluate practice.

## Quality and safety dimension

The quality and safety dimension relates to standards that govern how services should interact with children and ensure their safety on a day-to-day basis. 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 are set out in this section. Please note that for risk-based inspections, specific standards will be inspected against.

## Quality and safety

### Theme 1: Child-centred Services

#### Standard 1.1

Children's rights and diversity are respected and promoted.

#### What a rights-based quality service looks like

Services working with children use a child-centred approach by promoting all rights of children as set out under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. A good service upholds, respects and values these rights. Children's rights are at the forefront and underpin all aspects of service delivery.

Children and families receiving a service are made aware of their rights. Staff facilitate children and families to understand their rights and this is well integrated into their practice. Children and families are made aware of the child's right to be protected from abuse and neglect.

Children are facilitated to exercise their right to be listened to. They participate in decision-making about their lives in a manner that takes account of their age and stage of development.

The service recognises the diversity of children and families, respecting their age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, religious beliefs, geographical location, and membership of an ethnic group. The service uses appropriate networks and organisations to support children and families. Assessments and interventions involving children and families take account of their diverse needs.

A rights-based quality service actively promotes the privacy and confidentiality of children and families by having robust and well-implemented data protection practices. Personal and sensitive data relating to children and families is securely stored and is only shared appropriately with other organisations and individuals

where it is in the best interests of children in order to ensure their safety. During forums such as child protection conferences, information is shared appropriately and sensitively. This means that children and families using the service are confident that their privacy and confidentiality is respected.

In situations where there are conflicts between the rights of parents and the rights of the child, the service puts the child's rights first.

### **What this means for the child**

Children using the child protection and welfare service feel valued and respected. They are supported to understand their rights and to exercise them. They know they have a right to be safe and protected from harm and abuse and they are treated with dignity and respect. Children are confident that the service will treat them the same as everybody else and the diverse nature of their needs will be reflected in the service they receive. They are assured that the service will respect their information but that this will be 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.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates:

- meetings involving children and their families.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- if they were given information on their rights.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- their experiences of the service
- if they think children's rights and diversity were protected and promoted by the service.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- how they support children in understanding their rights and in exercising their rights
- if children's information and confidentiality is respected and promoted.

**Through a review of documents during or after onsite activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- information leaflets provided to children and families, including information on their rights
- review of documents relevant to consultation
- children's records, including closed cases.

**Compliance indicators**

**Indicators of compliance include:**

- children receiving a service are made aware of their right to be protected from abuse and neglect
- child-centred information is automatically given to children and families as appropriate at all stages of the child protection and welfare service
- children and families' diversity are recognised and respected by the service
- children's privacy and confidentiality is promoted, while personal and sensitive data relating to children and families is securely stored and is only shared when it is in the best interests of children in order to ensure their safety.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while the service has the means to ensure that child-centred information is provided to children and families, the sharing of information does not always happen
- children's records do not reflect how children receiving a service had been made aware of their right to be protected from abuse and neglect
- while the service has the means to store children's personal and sensitive

information, data was not in a secure location and information was not always securely held.

**Indicators of non- compliance include:**

- children receiving a service had not been made aware of their right to be protected from abuse and neglect
- the service does not recognise the diversity of children and families
- assessments and interventions had not taken account of children’s age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, religious beliefs, geographical location, and membership of an ethnic group
- personal information relating to children and families was not securely stored. Sensitive data had been inappropriately shared with organisations and individuals.

**Theme 1: Child-centred Services**

**Standard 1.2**

Children are listened to and their concerns and complaints are responded to openly and effectively.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A rights-based quality service ensures that children and families are listened to and it endeavours to understand their views. Those who engage with children do so in a child-centred manner, appropriate to a child’s understanding and maturity. Children may communicate in many ways; for example, verbally or through art. Staff are creative at using different methods to engage with children. Children’s views are listened to and taken seriously. The views of children and families informs decisions that directly impact their lives. Assessments and interventions clearly show and incorporate the views of children and families.

Children are facilitated to communicate their concerns and report allegations of child abuse. Staff listen to children and their concerns are acted on in an appropriate and timely way.

Services working with children recognise that some children have difficulties in communicating a concern, and they put appropriate and effective measures in



place to address communication difficulties. A good service provider considers children's ages and their developmental needs when it is communicating with them. The service provider, managers and staff ensure that they access specialised supports to communicate with children, if required, such as engaging a signer<sup>‡</sup> in order to effectively communicate with children. Translators are employed by the service provider to ensure that children and their families are listened to and their views are understood. A consistent person engages with children and families.

Staff regularly communicate directly with children and families and provide them with clear information on the focus of their work and any related developments. Parents are clearly informed of the measures that are required to be in place in order to keep children safe and what further steps will need to happen in order for their involvement with the service to end. This instils confidence in the service they are receiving.

Children have access to external advocacy and independent representation. In a good service, discussions with children and families are held explaining what independent advocacy is and how it can be of benefit. The service ensures that appropriate referrals are made to independent advocacy organisations, such as Empowering Children In Care (EPIC). Where children are subject to legal proceedings, a guardian ad litem (a court-appointed advocate for a child in specified court proceedings) is appointed to represent children in court. Service providers may also encourage parents to have an advocate or someone to support them throughout their engagement with the child protection and welfare service.

A rights-based quality service has a robust complaints procedure that is transparent open and accessible. Children are facilitated to make complaints. The service provider ensures there is an appropriate and timely response to all complaints and it addresses the issues raised. There is regular feedback to children and families at all stages of complaints, and conclusions are reached and communicated back to children and families in a timely manner. If an individual making a complaint is not satisfied with the outcome, they are given information about next possible steps, including an appeal. In this way, a fair and transparent system is in place.

The provider consults with children on a regular basis to get feedback on what the service is like and how it can be improved. This feedback is incorporated into

---

<sup>‡</sup> A person who communicates information to a deaf or hard of hearing person using sign language.

service planning and makes a real and substantial difference to how the service is delivered.

### **What this means for the child**

Children using the service know that if they raise a concern, they will be listened to. Children will see that their views are actively considered and impact on the decisions that directly affect their lives. 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. Children are assured that if they make a complaint, it will be taken seriously, the issue will be addressed and they will be given regular feedback on the issue. Children are invited to and are involved in the planning for the service. They will see that their views on how the service is delivered is used to influence how the service is delivered.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The inspector will observe:

- whether the complaints procedure is displayed in a prominent place in the service.

The provider facilitates:

- meetings with children and families.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- if they have made a complaint about the service, and their views on how the complaint was managed
- if they were satisfied that complaints were responded to appropriately and in a timely manner; and if anything changed as a result
- if they know how to access advocacy support and advice when providing feedback or making a complaint.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- if they have made a complaint and was the response timely.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- what they understand their role and responsibilities are regarding complaints, how complaints are managed and to establish if any complaints have led to service improvement.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- information received from the service prior to inspection including the complaints policy and procedure
- documents relevant to consultation and communication with children and their families
- records regarding complaints and the appeals of the outcome of complaints
- children's records, including closed cases
- children's questionnaires received before and during the inspection
- information on advocacy services
- records of any investigations or staff disciplinary actions
- audits relating to complaints
- minutes of staff meetings.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- children are listened to and their views are taken seriously
- staff are creative at using different methods to engage with children, with appropriate and effective measures put in place to address communication difficulties, including accessing specialised supports if required
- children and families are provided with clear information about how to report any concerns they may have
- children have representation through independent advocacy and representation where appropriate

- the service regularly engages in consultation with children and families, through a variety of methods, so that the service can be improved
- when children and families made a complaint, they received an appropriate and timely response where the issues they had raised had been addressed.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- where children have difficulties in communicating their views, appropriate and effective measures are not consistently put in place to address communication difficulties, such as accessing specialised supports
- children's views are not always reflected in assessments and interventions
- children and families are not always provided with information about reporting concerns they may have
- children and families do not have consistent access to advocacy services
- the service does not regularly receive feedback from children and families to improve the service
- the service provider's complaints procedure requires improvement to ensure it is fair and transparent in all cases.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- children are not listened to and their views are not taken seriously
- children's ages and their developmental needs are not considered when communicating with them
- specialised supports are not in place to address any communication difficulties that children may have
- children and their families are not involved in assessments and interventions
- the provider does not provide children and their families with information about how to report concerns
- the provider does not facilitate access to advocacy services for children and families
- the provider does not regularly seek feedback from children and families about how to improve the service
- the provider does not have a fair and transparent complaints procedure in

place.

## Theme 1: Child-centred Services

### Standard 1.3

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

#### What a rights-based quality service 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 rights-based quality service considers children's ages and their developmental needs when it is communicating with them. The provider ensures that it accesses specialised supports to communicate with children, if required, such as engaging a signer<sup>‡</sup> 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 are provided with accessible and age-appropriate information about child abuse and neglect, how to report concerns and how these reports will be dealt with.

The provider of a rights-based quality 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 in a timely manner, as appropriate.

The provider engages in regular campaigns to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect for the public to be aware of these risks to children. Campaigns inform professionals and the public on how to report any concerns about child abuse and neglect, how they will be managed and how to access services.

#### What this means for the child

<sup>‡</sup> A person who communicates information to a deaf or hard of hearing person using sign language.

Children using the services have been provided with information on child abuse and neglect in an age-appropriate and accessible manner. 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 and families have been informed, at regular intervals about the service provided and the implications of decisions taken.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

Inspectors will review:

- information made available to children on abuse and neglect.

The provider facilitates:

- observation of the duty intake system
- meetings with children and families.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- if they have been provided with information on child abuse and neglect
- if they know how to report a concern
- if they have been communicated with in an open manner
- if they have been informed about the service being provided
- if their voice is being heard.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- if they have been communicated with in an open manner
- if they have been informed about the service being provided

- if their voice is being heard.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- if they communicate openly with families, keeping them informed at all stages of their involvement
- if they have provided children and families with information about child abuse and neglect, including how to report a concern and who they can report a concern to.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- review of documents relevant to consultation and communication with children and their families
- children's records, including a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant)
- documents provided to the public to raise awareness about the service
- engagement with referral agencies such as An Garda Síochána, education services and welfare services through questionnaires issued during inspections.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- the provider promotes a child-centred approach through the use of clear, open and honest communication
- the provider provides children with accessible and age-appropriate information about child abuse and neglect and informs them about how to report any concerns they may have
- the provider prioritises the rights of the child over the rights of parents whenever conflict between these rights arises
- the provider engages in regular campaigns to raise public awareness about child abuse and neglect.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while the provider promotes a child-centred approach, there are gaps in communicating with families which may have an impact on their relationship with the service
- the provider does not adequately provide children with information about child abuse and neglect or inform them about how to report any concerns they may have
- while the provider engages with the public to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect, this is not done on a regular basis.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- children and their families are not communicated with in a clear and sensitive manner in a way that is appropriate to their age and understanding
- children and their families are not communicated with at regular intervals throughout their involvement with the service
- the provider does not provide children with information about child abuse and neglect in an age-appropriate manner
- the provider does not engage in regular campaigns to raise awareness about child abuse and neglect.
- the provider does not provide the public with information about child protection and welfare services nor advise the public about how to report a concern.

**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 rights-based quality service looks like**

A rights-based quality child protection and welfare service keeps children safe, is responsive to the changing circumstances of children and families and reflects the practice outlined in the standard. The provider has policies, procedures,



processes and evidence-based frameworks in place in relation to thresholds, screening and preliminary enquiry, safety planning and 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 to completion of assessment and implementation of all necessary interventions to support children and families. 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, initial assessment and further assessment, and these are implemented in practice.

### **What this means for the child**

The child receives a timely and proportionate response from the service based on their identified needs. Children who are at immediate risk receive an immediate response to ensure their safety. The provider 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.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates:

- meetings involving or in relation to children
- staff interaction with children and families
- observation of a duty intake system.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children:

- to talk with them about their experience of the service
- to identify what actions were taken to ensure their safety.

Inspectors will communicate with families:

- to discuss what actions the service has taken to ensure children's safety
- to determine if they felt supported by the service when this was required.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- the management oversight systems of screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning and initial assessment processes.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records, including a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant), including management oversight of waiting list policies
- case management records
- policies relating to child protection processes; for example, safety planning and case closures
- review of the child protection notification register
- review of frameworks to determine thresholds of harm, levels of risk and prioritisation of cases, and observation of them being applied
- procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- policies, procedures and guidance documents are disseminated and fully implemented in practice.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while there are policies, procedures and guidance documents with respect to all aspects of the child protection and welfare service, they are not consistently implemented in practice.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- the provider has not updated policies, procedures and guidance documents with respect to all aspects of the child protection and welfare service
- policies, procedures and guidance documents are not implemented in practice.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.2**

All concerns in relation to children are screened and directed to the appropriate service.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A good quality child protection service ensures that all referrals are screened promptly and appropriately. 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. The content of a referral is effectively analysed and where it is identified that there is a potential or actual immediate risk to children, immediate action is taken to ensure that children are kept safe.

**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 meets the threshold for a child protection and welfare service
- 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 rights-based quality 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 their manager, identifies what the appropriate next steps are and this is clearly recorded.

### **Threshold of need**

A rights-based quality 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).<sup>(5)</sup> 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.<sup>(5)</sup>

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

- the case being closed and the child and or family being referred to a service more appropriate to their needs
- the family being referred to the Partnership, Prevention and Family Support (PPFS) Programme or Meitheal<sup>1</sup> or appropriate community services
- a social work service being provided to the child and their family which focuses on the child's welfare; this may include an initial assessment of 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

### **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.<sup>(4)</sup> 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.

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. Feedback is provided to the person making the report, as appropriate, within the confines of confidentiality and in line with Children First (2017).

### **What this means for the child**

When a social worker receives information which indicates a potential or actual risks to a child, this child can be assured that the information is analysed effectively and appropriate and timely action is taken to protect them.

The social worker receiving information about a concern for the child responds quickly. Social workers ensure that they gather any other information they need to understand a child's circumstances and their family's strengths and challenges. If from gathering this information alone a social worker cannot be satisfied that a child is safe, then they will take immediate further action to make sure the child is safe.

Children are never left in a situation where they are unsafe. All decisions taken are made in the best interest of the child and the reasons for decisions are clearly

recorded in the child's file. Children and their families will be involved in decision-making about their safety wherever possible.

If a child and or their family do not need a service from the social work department but would benefit from information, guidance or supports in another form, then this information and advice is provided by the service on the most appropriate ways of addressing their needs.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The providers facilitates:

- meetings involving or in relation to children
- staff interaction with children and families.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- if they received support when required
- their contact with professionals and what they do to ensure children's safety.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- their views on the support they received.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- the processes in place to ensure children receive the right support at the right time
- any delays in ensuring children and their families receive appropriate support
- how waiting lists for the service are managed.

#### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records including a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant) and management oversight of waiting list policies, procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals
- observation of duty intake system
- 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.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- all new referrals received are screened, in line with policies and procedures and within 24 hours, to establish if they are an appropriate referral
- screening and preliminary enquiries include a consistent application of thresholds of harm, in addition to an appropriate prioritisation and categorisation, which has been recorded on the child's record
- preliminary enquiries are completed within five days
- the level of the child's needs are clearly set out and aligned with an agreed continuum of need, to inform decision-making
- the rationale for the most appropriate action is clearly recorded and the child is referred to the most appropriate service, based on their level of risk, safety and welfare
- An Garda Síochána are notified of suspected physical and sexual abuse and wilful neglect in a timely manner in line with Children First (2017)

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while all referrals have been screened, they have not been completed within 24 hours
- while the majority of preliminary are completed within five days, some



have been completed outside of this time frame

- records of screening and preliminary enquiries do not consistently include the application of thresholds of harm in addition to an appropriate prioritisation and categorization
- while An Garda Síochána are notified of suspected physical and sexual abuse and wilful neglect in a timely manner in line with Children First (2017), there have been some small delays in the notification.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- referrals received have not been screened in line with policies and procedures to establish if they are an appropriate referral
- previously held information is not considered to ensure that the child receives an appropriate response from the service
- screening and preliminary enquiries do not include a consistent application of thresholds of harm in addition to an appropriate prioritisation and categorisation
- decision-making is not transparent and is not based on set criteria; as a result, children have been placed at risk of harm or significant harm
- An Garda Síochána are not notified of suspected physical and sexual abuse and wilful neglect in a timely manner in line with Children First (2017).

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.3**

Timely and effective action is taken to protect children.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A rights-based quality 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 provider 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. The provider has detailed policies and procedures to ensure staff know how to best deal with concerns.

When it is not possible to work effectively with children and their families and when there are concerns about the safety and welfare of children, the service provider has access to specialised legal advice, if required, at the earliest opportunity. The service provider 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 or without the parents' consent or taking the appropriate legal action such as a supervision order.<sup>2</sup>

A provider of 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 potential of harm to a child becomes apparent at any stage of the process. The provider, managers and or staff respond 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 their home by a social worker and putting a safety plan in place if required.

In emergency situations where children are at immediate and serious risk of harm, a good service provider will take action to protect the child. This may include reaching agreement with the parents of child regarding the child's voluntary admission to care. Where this is not an option, the provider of a good child protection and welfare service 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.

Where the child does not meet the threshold of being at immediate and serious risk, but there remains serious concerns for the child's safety and welfare, the social worker will take action to protect the child. This includes seeking agreement with the parents regarding the child's voluntary admission to care, or alternatively an application to the district court for an interim care order may be made. The services ensures there is no undue delay in taking action simply for the purpose of gathering more information.

### **Safety planning**

---

<sup>2</sup> A supervision order is a court order than can be made under the Child Care Act, 1991. 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.

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”.<sup>(6)</sup>

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, through all stages of the children protection and welfare service, to the completion of social work intervention with families. It is important that safety planning happens throughout a family’s involvement with the service. 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. Staff in a good child protection and welfare service work 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 a parent’s 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 and 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.

The provider is aware of the impact of long-term harm and neglect on children’s wellbeing and takes active steps to promote children’s safety and welfare. A rights-based quality service considers previous referrals to the service and determines if there has been long-term harm or neglect to children. These previous referrals should be taken into consideration to ensure effective action is

taken to protect children from further harm. A good service focuses on the experiences of the child when providing child protection and welfare interventions.

### **What this means for the child**

Children are never left in situations where they feel unsafe. When a child tells someone about a situation which places them at risk, the child will get a quick response which protects them from further harm. If a child's family refuses to work with social workers, this will not mean that the child does not get the protection they need.

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 can help to 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 confident in the service and know that everyone is working together in their best interests.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates examination of:

- the duty intake system.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- what is like to have a safety plan and find out if they are aware of what this means
- their experience of the child protection service.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- what it is like to be involved in developing a safety plan
- if they know what the safety plan means
- what will happen if the safety plan is not working

- their experience of the child protection service.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care staff and their managers to explore:

- the processes in place for safety planning, including what makes a good safety plan, determine when they are reviewed and what happens when the safety plan is not working
- the procedures in place to deal with concerns and their understanding of interventions and procedures for managing concerns

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records, including a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant), and management oversight of waiting list policies, procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals
- management oversight systems of the screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning, initial assessment, child welfare and Child Protection Notification System (CPNS) processes
- review of frameworks to determine thresholds of harm, levels of risk and prioritisation of cases, and observation of them being applied.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- the service has taken action in a timely manner to ensure that children are not left in situations of potential or actual harm
- the provider has standard operating procedures to ensure staff know how to respond to children's concerns
- staff are alert to the signs that children may need help or protection
- specialised legal advice is sought, if required, at the earliest opportunity
- where children are at immediate and serious risk of harm, action is taken

to protect the child

- timely action may also include visits to their home by a social worker and putting a safety plan in place if required
- previous referrals to the service are considered so that the long-term harm or neglect for children is carefully considered and active steps are taken to promote children's safety and welfare.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while the provider has standard operating procedures in place, not all staff are familiar with them
- not all previous referrals to the service are considered so that the long-term harm or neglect of children can be carefully considered, and active steps taken to promote children's safety and welfare

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- staff are not aware of the signs that children may need help or protection
- action is not taken in a timely manner; as a result, children are left in situations of potential or actual harm
- the service does not have timely access to specialised legal advice
- where children are at immediate and serious risk of harm, action is not taken to protect the child
- previous referrals to the service are not considered so that the long-term harm or neglect of children can be carefully considered, and active steps are not taken to promote children's safety and welfare; as a result, children are left in situations of potential or actual harm.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.4**

Children and families have timely access to child protection and welfare services that support the family and protect the child.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A good child protection and welfare service is planned and delivered taking into account the rights and needs of children and families, available resources, national policy and Children First. The service has a defined model of service provision which is evidence-based. In a good child protection and welfare service, there are no waiting lists for children and families to receive a service. Where waiting lists occur, these are limited and are well managed to ensure that waiting times are as short as possible, managers have effective oversight of waiting lists and are they subject to continual review and reprioritisation as appropriate.

Where there are early indications of concerns about the welfare of children, then services promote and support early interventions to address these. A child and family's needs and risks must be determined through timely assessment. This assessment should be factual, based on family strengths, support networks and clearly describe the needs of the child.

In an effective child protection and welfare service, children and families are treated equally and no family is discriminated against when accessing services. Information should be provided to all families who need it on how to access different types of support services, including community supports.

As outlined within Children First, special consideration is given to vulnerable groups of children who may be more susceptible to harm: in particular, children with disabilities, children with communication difficulties, children in care or living away from home, children from new communities, or children with a parent or parents with problems in their own lives.

A good child protection and welfare services engages families and involves them in all aspects of planning to prevent risk of harm to children. Interventions such as family welfare conferences and family support help to identify and promote strengths within a family. Plans agreed between social workers, families and other support networks, including any professionals involved, would clearly describe the worries for the child as well as the child's needs. These plans would be reviewed regularly and where it is thought that a child remains at risk, even with a family-led support plan in place, then their case would be escalated and referred to a child protection service.

### **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. Staff are aware of the potential impact of cumulative harm on children and take appropriate steps to address this risk. 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.

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.

### **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 before 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.

### **What this means for the child**

The service that children get is based on their needs and an assessment of any risks that may be present in their lives. Children and their families are consulted and they know why decisions are made.

All children are treated equally and where additional vulnerabilities exist these are given due consideration.

Signs that children need supports are recognised and they get these supports early. Children's families are engaged where possible and supported to prevent risks of harm to them. Information on all supports is easily available to children and their families.

Plans to ensure children's safety are developed based on prompt assessments of their needs with the involvement of all adults in their lives. Services remain involved with families for as long as they need support to ensure plans are effective at keeping children safe. If a decision is made that a service is no longer required, then children understand what has changed and why this



decision has been made. Children and their families know how to re-engage with services if circumstances change and they require supports in the future.

If a child remains unsafe, even with supports in place for their family, then social workers become more involved and take greater responsibility for ensuring the child is safe and protected.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates examination of:

- the duty and intake system.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- the support they receive from their social worker
- other services or professionals who have supported their family.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- the support they received from the service and how plans or actions had been decided
- the assessment of the child's needs and how involved they had been in this assessment
- if they had been waiting for the service to start working with them for any period of time
- if information has been provided to them about other services which may support the family to meet children's needs

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care staff and their managers to explore:

- how the service is planned and delivered to meet the needs of children and their families, including any waitlists for the service
- how early intervention services are used to meet children's needs

- how assessments of children's needs are completed
- how information is provided to families about services who can support them in ensuring children's safety and welfare is promoted.

**Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records including a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant), including management oversight of waiting list policies, procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals
- management oversight systems in relation to child protection and welfare cases
- review of frameworks to determine thresholds of harm, levels of risk and prioritisation of cases, and observation of them being applied.

**Compliance indicators**

**Indicators of compliance include:**

- there are no children waiting for a child protection and welfare service
- information is provided to all families who need it on how to access different types of support services, including community supports
- interventions such as family welfare conferences and family support are used effectively to identify and promote strengths within a family
- children's welfare needs are identified through timely assessments and appropriate plans are in place that are reviewed regularly
- special consideration is given to vulnerable groups of children who may be more susceptible to harm
- when referrals of concern are received about the same child and their family more than once, the impact of cumulative harm is assessed
- children and families are informed when their case is closed
- case closures are reviewed by management and the reasons for closing

a case are clearly recorded.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while some children are awaiting a service, waiting times are limited and as short as possible
- waiting lists are well managed and reviewed to ensure that managers have effective oversight, and cases are re-prioritised when required
- there are delays in the assessment of child welfare needs and interventions such as family welfare conferences and family support
- while the provider ensures that all relevant information is taken into account and children have not been found to be placed at risk, improvements are required to ensure children receive the right service at the right time
- case closures are not always timely or there are deficiencies in recording the reasons for case closures.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- children are on a waiting list for a service and there are lengthy delays in the assessment and allocation of resources
- due to the operation of a waitlist, children's needs are not assessed in a timely manner and they do not have interventions that ensure their safety, meaning children who are particularly vulnerable are left in situations placing them at increased risk
- child welfare needs are not assessed and interventions such as family welfare conferences and family support are not put in place
- when referrals of concern are received about the same child and their family more than once, information about the other referrals is not held together; this results in information being missed and children are placed at risk of harm as a result
- cases are closed prior to appropriate services or supports being put in place to ensure children's safety
- case closures are not reviewed by social work managers prior to closure.

## **Standard 2.5**

All reports of child protection concerns are assessed in line with Children First and best available evidence.

### **What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A good child protection and welfare service ensures that that a qualified and experienced social worker carries out good quality assessments which are comprehensive and 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, or relevant professional, 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 children protection and welfare

service, from receipt of referral through to completion of good quality assessments, which are in line with Children First (2017) and Tusla's own assessment framework. This means they know how many families the service is concerned about and what the social workers are doing to help these families at each stage of the child protection and welfare process, including children in receipt of long-term child protection and welfare services. 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. Children's needs and risks must be continuously assessed and where changes in circumstances occur these should be reflected within assessment reports. If a risk of significant harm and or neglect threatens the safety of children, then the child protection and welfare service must act promptly and use legislation effectively to protect those children.

When children require ongoing support following the completion of an initial assessment, a good service provider ensures that comprehensive assessments of children's needs and any identified risks occur in a timely manner. These assessments will involve other Tusla-led services, external agencies and services, as appropriate. This will assist in assessing and supporting children and their families in the most appropriate way to meet their needs. An assessment is an ongoing process and children's needs and risk of harm are assessed over time to reflect changes in circumstances. They are factual and objective and clearly set out the ongoing risk of harm to the child. Assessments identify personal and family strengths and support networks. Comprehensive assessments clearly identify what the child needs and this may be related to a support service where there is a welfare concern. When a child is deemed to be at risk of ongoing significant harm, the assessment should clearly set out the child's safety plan and recommend that a child protection conference is required in order to decide if the child is required to be placed on the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS) with a child protection safety plan in place.

In a good child protection and welfare service, when staff suspect that a crime has been committed, they formally notify An Garda Síochána in writing without delay. The Gardaí and the social workers work well together and always follow the joint working protocols. These agreements are in place to support social workers and members of An Garda Síochána to share appropriate information and to work well together. Records of liaison between both agencies documenting agreed actions are maintained and updated as required.

The provider 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. All decisions and actions taken at the strategy meeting inform the progression of the case and are documented.

### **What this means for the child**

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 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. When the child's circumstances change the professionals know about it and respond accordingly.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates examination of:

- the duty and intake system.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- if children are met on their own and are actively involved when social workers complete the assessment of their needs
- whether they have been given reasons for any actions taken.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- how the service included them in the assessment of the child's needs
- have the reasons for any actions taken been clearly explained to them.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care staff and their managers to explore:

- how they involve children and their families in the assessment of the child's needs
- how they inform families of actions being taken and how they are assured that children are not left in unsafe circumstances.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records to include a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant), including management oversight of waiting list policies, procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals
- 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
- evidence of liaison with An Garda Síochána and other professionals as required

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- good quality initial assessments with multidisciplinary involvement where relevant are completed in a timely manner, where children and their families are appropriately communicated with and their views are taken into account



- a social worker meets with children and their families with to determine their level of need and risk of harm in order to ensure they receive the most appropriate level of support
- initial assessments contain good quality analysis of the strengths and difficulties of the child's situation and the impact of the family's circumstances on each child in a family
- initial assessments are factual and objective, and describe the needs of the child and any potential harm to the child
- initial assessments also outline the outcome of the assessment and the recommendations about what actions should be taken, which is shared with the child and their family as appropriate
- managers in the service maintain effective oversight of all stages of the child protection and welfare processes
- the service notifies An Garda Síochána of cases of suspected or confirmed child abuse and neglect, in writing, without delay
- the service ensures the timely and regular sharing of information and planning to keep children safe, while strategy meetings are used to facilitate the sharing of information and to prepare a plan of action.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- the service had some delays in completing good quality assessments
- children were not consistently listened to, or communicated with in the most appropriate manner suited to their needs during the assessment and their views were not taken into account
- initial assessments did not record all of the required information, such as outline the outcome of the assessment and the recommendations about what actions should be taken
- the outcome of social work assessments was not always shared with the child and their family as appropriate
- the service had slight delays in notifying An Garda Síochána of cases of suspected or confirmed child abuse and neglect which did not impact on children's safety
- there are delays in sharing information, but this does not pose a risk to children's safety.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- assessments are delayed, and are not comprehensive and are of poor quality
- children and their families had not been appropriately communicated with and their views had not been taken into account; this resulted in a poor quality initial assessment
- the service had not individually assessed each child's needs within the same family
- other professionals, who are working with the family, had not been included in the planning to meet the child's needs and to keep them safe, and there had been delays in sharing necessary information
- strategy meetings are not routinely convened
- the service had not notified An Garda Síochána about cases of suspected or confirmed child abuse and neglect
- there were significant gaps in managerial oversight which had the potential to or had placed children at significant risk.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.6**

Children who are at risk of harm or neglect have child protection plans in place to protect and promote their welfare.

**What a rights based quality service looks like**

Children assessed as being at ongoing significant risk<sup>3</sup> have a multidisciplinary child protection conference.

<sup>3</sup> "The threshold of significant harm is reached when the problems are persistent and there is impairment to the health, development or well-being of the child. Such impairment may be physical or mental, or a combination of both. Harm can be caused by a single event, such as a sexual assault; it can be episodic, such as occasional physical abuse; or it can be on-going such as persistent neglect or the withdrawal of affection in emotional abuse." (Statement of Purpose HSE Child and Family Service, 2012).

This service holds an initial child protection conference to decide whether a child's name should be placed on the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS). If a child's name is placed on the CPNS, this service ensures a child protection plan is put in place.

A good child protection and welfare service will ensure that requests for a child protection conference are made in a timely manner and that the conference is held without delay. The service will have policies and processes in place which reflect the requirements of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017) and provide clear guidance to staff about managing children at ongoing risk of significant harm and or where a social worker is concerned that progress is not being made under the child welfare plan.

The case conference is chaired by a professional who is independent and has no involvement in the assessment of the child and family's needs. The chairperson has received appropriate training in order to chair the meeting and to facilitate the participation of all attendees. They are responsible for ensuring that all relevant assessments/information and reports are presented to the conference. The chair works with all participants to identify the strengths and concerns relating to each child. There is an appropriate quorum maintained in line with Tusla policies.

### **Initial case conference**

In a good service, social workers consult with children and their parents on their views and explain the initial case conference process, in advance of the initial case conference. Social workers are creative in how they get children's views; for example, they use child-friendly tools, letter and so on. They also meet with parents, their network and professionals or agencies before the review conference to find out their views. In a good service, social workers routinely go through their assessment and case conference reports and recommendations with parents in advance of the review case conference — at least seven days before the conference being held.

The provider of a good service actively considers children's attendance at initial case conferences and records the reasons if a child does not attend, which may be related to the child's age and developmental stage, their choice and their health or wellbeing. The provider, managers and staff of a good service believe that parental participation, along with the support network of families, is essential in developing and sustaining safety for children. Parents are routinely invited to attend child protection conferences. However, in

exceptional circumstances where there is a risk that the parents' attendance may pose a risk to the child or if there is a risk of violence and aggression towards attendees, the chairperson of the child protection conference will make a decision about parental attendance. It is the responsibility of the chairperson to be assured that the views of the parent or parents is represented at the initial case conference and that arrangements are in place to advise the parent or parents of the discussion and outcome of the conference.

The **initial case conference** considers the following information:

- what is working well for the child and their family
- what are the concerns
- the views of the child, their parents and their network
- assessments and information from key professionals and agencies including the strengths and challenges experienced by the family, the child's safety plan, the capacity of the parents to safely care for the child and Tusla's minimum requirements to avoid a child coming into care
- the child's history on the CPNS, including previous periods of being active on the CPNS.

The chairperson along with the professionals attending the meeting will reach a decision on whether the child requires a child protection plan and whether their name should be added to the CPNS.

The chairperson of the conference facilitates good quality discussion among attendees. Safety of the child is of paramount importance and decisions to enable the child's safety and wellbeing are made, including the decision to take a child into care when required. The chairperson facilitates a discussion with the key professionals and a decision is reached on whether the child's name is required to be placed on the CPNS. If the decision is that the child's name is to be placed on the CPNS, the conference sets down clear minimum requirements that that have to be in place in order for the child to continue in the care of their parents along with other specific actions, such as the safety plan.

Parents are informed at the meeting of this decision and also they receive this information also in writing, along with information on the CPNS. Parents who

are not present at the conference are also issued with the decision and related information in writing.

The service develops a clear time-limited child protection plan which reflects consideration of both the child's immediate and long-term needs. The child protection plan is based on the findings from the assessment of the child protection case. This service consults children, parents and appropriate professionals when the plan is being prepared.

The provider of a good service maintains a record of the meeting and the chairperson ensures that children and families receive a copy of the minutes and the child protection plan, including the safety plan, in a timely manner. In line with good safeguarding practice, the record and plan are routinely distributed to the child's general practitioner (GP) and if the child is under five years old to the child's public health nurse (PHN), regardless of whether or not they attend the case conference.

The child protection plan outlines the following:

- the social worker with lead responsibility for implementing the plan is identified
- existing strengths and safety measures and the actions that need to be taken to strengthen the child's safety
- appropriate resources are identified and actioned
- detailed arrangements of the safety plan that may be put in place during the conference or during separate safety planning meetings held outside of the case conference process
- each specific action, including monitoring arrangements, is clearly recorded along with assigning specific responsibility, where appropriate, about who is responsible for delivering each action.

This service reviews the progress of interventions and information from professionals involved with the family. Following the child protection conference, the family, social worker and the identified safety network will have a series of child protection safety planning meetings to review the progress of actions on the child protection plan and safety plan. In addition, further child protection safety planning details will be agreed, reviewed and refined. The service will ensure that child protection safety plans are overseen

by management and monitored, evaluated and updated regularly and in response to changing circumstances in the family.

A good child protection and welfare service works with children and their families to ensure that the actions taken to promote the safety and welfare of the child. Good child protection 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.

The CPNS is held securely, is accurate and accessible to designated professionals and external agencies. The area manager or their designate is responsible for ensuring that the CPNS is appropriately updated, including if the CPNS has been accessed by other professionals or agencies. Parents are informed in a timely manner of their child's status on the CPNS. Access to the CPNS is strictly confined to Tulsa social workers, members of An Garda Síochána, out-of-hours GPs and hospital medical, social work or nursing staff.

### **What this means for the child**

The child or young person is consulted by their social worker in advance of the initial case conference. They actively participate in their initial child protection conference and are given the opportunity to ask questions.

In circumstances, where a child or young person does not attend the initial case conference due to their choice or their developmental stage or their health or wellbeing, then their views are represented to the child protection conference by the social worker. The outcome of the conference is explained clearly to the child by their social worker in appropriate language, and the child has an opportunity to ask questions.

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 child protection safety plans are put in place, 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.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates observation and review of:

- child protection conferences.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- have they been actively involved in the child protection case conferences to date
- have they been informed of the outcomes of child protection case conferences and understand what actions are being taken.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- have they been actively involved in the child protection case conferences to date
- have they been informed of the outcomes of child protection case conferences and understand what actions are being taken.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- their understanding of the child protection case conference processes in the area
- how they involve children and their families in the child protection case conference.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records to include a review of closed files where child is inactive on CPNS
- case conference files including a review of the CPNS
- waiting lists for case conferences (if relevant)
- management oversight systems of the case conference system, CPNS, implementation of child protection plans, monitoring of child protection plans (including safety plans)
- review of policies, procedures and processes in relation to case conferences and the CPNS
- procedures and frameworks in place in relation to children assessed as being at ongoing risk of significant harm.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- the initial child protection conference is chaired by an independent person and considers all relevant information about the child and their family
- a social worker consults with the child, their parents, their network, professionals and or agencies to obtain their views and explain the process
- a clear time-limited and comprehensive child protection safety plan is developed in consultation with the relevant people
- a person with lead responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the plan is clearly identified
- child protection safety plans are reviewed to measure the progress of interventions and actions and these are amended if required
- the CPNS is accurate, accessible to appropriate staff and held securely.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**



- initial child protection conferences are held with some delays, but these delays do not impact on the safety of children
- child protection safety plans lack clearly time-defined goals, which may lead to delays in service provision or timely actions being taken.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- initial child protection conferences are not requested or held in a timely manner and or do not occur
- initial child protection case conferences are of poor quality as they do not involve the participation of all relevant people
- child protection safety plans are unclear and not focused on time-limited actions to ensure children's safety
- child protection safety plans are not reviewed to measure the progress of interventions and actions
- interventions and actions agreed at conferences are not amended if they are ineffective in meeting the needs of the child and their family
- the CPNS is inaccurate, not secure or inaccessible to appropriate staff.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.7**

Children's protection plans and interventions are reviewed in line with requirements in Children First.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

Children at ongoing significant risk have a child protection plan that is reviewed at a multidisciplinary child protection conference at regular intervals and at a minimum of every six months. The primary focus of the service is the safety of children and this forms the basis of every decision made at the review case conference.

## **Review case conferences**

The provider of a good service actively considers children's attendance at **review case conferences** and records the reasons if a child does not attend, which may be related to their age and developmental stage, their choice, their health or wellbeing. Staff and managers in a good service believe that parental involvement along with the support network of families is essential in developing and sustaining safety for children. Parents are routinely invited to attend these review conferences. However, in exceptional circumstances where there is a risk that the parents' attendance may pose a risk to the child or if there is a risk of violence and aggression towards attendees, the chairperson will decide on whether or not to invite parents to the review case conference. It is the responsibility of the chairperson to be assured that the views of the parent or parents are represented at the review child protection conference and that arrangements are in place to advise them of the discussion and outcome of the conference.

In a good service, social workers consult with children on their views and explain in advance of the review case conference. Social workers are creative in how they determine children's views; for example, through the use of child friendly tools. They also meet with parents, their network and professionals and or agencies prior to the review conference to check their views. In a good service, social workers routinely goes through their case conference report and recommendations with parents.

Similar to the initial case conference, the review case conference is also chaired by an independent chairperson who is appropriately trained in child protection conferencing. The chairperson endeavours to ensure that children, parents and their network are facilitated to participate in the review conference. The child's participation may take different forms as they may choose not to attend but still want their views presented through the direct work that they have completed with their social worker and so on. The chairperson must also ensure that the meeting is focused with the key professionals in attendance, in order to have all of the relevant professional information and also potential members of the child's network.

The **review case conference** considers the following information:

- what has been working well for the child and their family since the last conference
- what are the concerns since the last conference

- progress on actions from the last child protection plan, including the effectiveness of the safety plan
- the views of the child, their parents and their network
- assessments and information from key professionals and agencies including the strengths and challenges experienced by the family, the capacity of the parents to safely care for the child and Tusla's minimum requirements to avoid a child coming into care
- the child's history on the CPNS
- whether the child remains at ongoing risk of significant harm
- whether a further child protection plan is required and whether the child is to remain **active** on the CPNS or
- whether other interventions such as a safety plan would be appropriate and the child's name becomes **inactive** on the CPNS.

The chairperson of the review conference facilitates good quality discussion at the conference. Safety of the child is of paramount importance and decisions to enable the child's safety and wellbeing are made, including the decision to take a child into care when required. The chairperson facilitates a discussion with the key professionals and a decision is reached on whether the child's name is required to remain on the CPNS. If the decision is that the child's name remains on the CPNS, the conference sets down clear minimum requirements that have to be in place in order for the child to continue in the care of their parents along with other specific actions such as the child protection safety plan. The detailed arrangements of the child protection safety plan may be put in place during the review conference or during separate child protection safety planning meetings held outside of the case conference process. These meetings are arranged by the social worker in a timely manner after the conference and involve the child, and where appropriate, the parents, family network and key professionals.

All those who participated at the review conference receive the record of the case conference and the recommendations from the meeting including the safety arrangements. If parents did not attend the review, they should be informed on the outcome of the review in a timely manner

The CPNS is appropriately updated after each review child protection conference.

### **What this means for the child**

The child or young person is consulted by their social worker in advance of the review case conference. They actively participate in their review child protection conference and are given the opportunity to ask questions.

In circumstances, where a child or young person does not attend the review case conference due to their choice, their developmental stage or their health or wellbeing, then the outcome of the conference is explained clearly to the child or young person by their social worker in appropriate language and the child or young person has an opportunity to ask questions.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates review and examination of:

- review case conferences.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- have they been actively involved in the review child protection conferences to date
- have they been informed of the outcomes of review child protection conferences and understand what actions are being taken

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- have they been actively involved in the review child protection conferences to date
- have they been informed of the outcomes of review child protection conferences and understand what actions are being taken.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- their understanding of the review child protection conference processes in the area
- how they involve children and their families in the review child

protection conference.

**Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records, including a review of closed files where child is inactive on the CPNS
- case conference files, including a review of the CPNS
- waiting lists for case conferences (if relevant)
- management oversight systems of the case conference system, child protection notification system, implementation of child protection plans, monitoring of child protection plans (including safety plans)
- review of policies, procedures and processes in relation to case conferences and the CPNS.
- procedures and frameworks in place in relation to children assessed as being at ongoing risk of significant harm.

**Compliance indicators**

**Indicators of compliance include:**

- review child protection conferences are convened in a timely manner and are chaired by a trained person who is independent of the management of the case
- children and their families are involved in the review child protection conference as appropriate, and creative ways are used to facilitate their participation
- decisions are taken to ensure the safety of children identified as at ongoing risk of significant harm
- children's names are appropriately removed from the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS).

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- review child protection conferences are not convened in a timely manner

- review child protection conferences are not chaired by a consistent person who is aware of the circumstances of the case
- children have not been included in the review child protection conference process and a rationale has not been outlined in the record.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- there are long delays in the convening of review child protection conferences
- children and families are not included in the review child protection conference process or meeting
- timely decisions have not been taken to ensure the safety of children identified as at ongoing risk of significant harm
- children's names have been removed from the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS) before risks have been appropriately addressed.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.8**

Child protection and welfare interventions achieve the best outcomes for the child.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

At all times, decisions are made in the best interest of children and on evidence of what is likely to bring about the best outcome for children. Interventions to support children and their family are put in place for as long as is needed and reviewed regularly.

The provider of a good service regularly evaluates the child protection and welfare interventions to ensure the best outcomes for a child. The risk of cumulative harm to children subjected to ongoing risks for prolonged periods is given appropriate consideration in evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. If original actions outlined in a family support plan, a child welfare plan, a safety plan, a child protection plan or a combination of these are ineffective at ensuring progress or do not continue to meet the child's assessed needs, then

alternative actions are considered. This is a common feature of any good service. Staff and managers in a good service ensure that plans are adapted as required to meet the changing needs of children and families, and decisions are based on evidence of what is likely to bring about best outcomes for a child.

Plans to address risks and to meet the assessed needs of children are amended where there is a lack of progress or if circumstances impacting on the risk to children change. In an effective child protection and welfare service, there is good interagency communication and cooperation. Service and professionals work together to protect each child and the necessary support networks are made available to children and families when required to achieve the best outcome.

### **What this means for the child**

Children are safe when evidence-based decision-making leads to actions that bring about the best outcomes for them. Children know that if actions are not working to ensure their safety, alternative actions will be identified and put in place. Plans for their safety and protection will be reviewed and changed until everyone is assured children are safe and protected.

Children will be confident that there are enough supports available to them and their families. Children will have people both within their families and outside of their families (safety network) who know what the risks to their safety are. Children will know that their safety network has agreed to make sure that they are safe and protected. Children will see that services and professionals are working with them and their parents. Children know that the plans in place are designed to make things better and safer for them and their families.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates review and observation of:

- interagency meetings.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- how the service provides them with support.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- how the service provides them with support
- if plans have been changed when they were not working.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- how supports are put in place and are they reviewed regularly
- how they ensure plans are adapted to meet the changing needs of children
- interagency collaboration to meet children's needs.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records, including a review of child protection plans and safety plans
- waiting lists (if relevant), including the management oversight of waiting list policies, procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals
- evidence of interagency cooperation and communication
- minutes of meetings with other services and agencies, such as Meitheal, PPFs, An Garda Síochána, community support, family support services. 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.

### **Compliance indicators**



**Indicators of compliance include:**

- child protection, child welfare and family support plans are put in place for families and are implemented, reviewed and amended to reflect the changing circumstances of the child and their family, and the desired outcome is achieved
- when desired outcomes are not achieved or progress has not been made with plans, this is reviewed and appropriate actions taken to identify the reasons for this and identify alternative actions
- services and professionals work well together to protect children, taking into account all available information
- support networks are made available to families.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- some child protection, child welfare or family support plans are not reviewed as required
- monitoring and amendment of plans to reflect changing circumstances is insufficient.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- actions identified as part of child protection, child welfare and family support plans have not been implemented
- monitoring of child protection, child welfare and family support plans is poor and does not lead to improved outcomes for children
- families do not have support networks in place
- services and professionals do not work together to protect children.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.9**

Interagency and inter-professional cooperation supports and promotes the protection and welfare of children.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A rights-based quality service has clear national policies, procedures and protocols in place to progress and enable the timely and appropriate sharing of information between the service and agencies such as An Garda Síochána, Health Service Executive (HSE), child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), adult mental health services and addiction services. Good quality information is sought from and appropriately shared with other agencies to inform all child protection assessments, planning and interventions.

Close interagency and intra-agency cooperation promotes good safeguarding practices. The management of the service has systems in place to ensure that there is excellent information sharing and coordination of child protection cases, which is paramount in implementing and monitoring children's plans, including child protection plans and safety plans. These systems include interagency forums; for example, meetings with CAMHS and Garda-Tusla liaison meetings.

Strategy meetings are routinely held with a range of professionals to enable good quality coordination of children's cases. The provider of a good service is proactive in arranging timely strategy meetings with An Garda Síochána when abuse is suspected. The two agencies work together to create an appropriate investigation and safeguarding arrangements.

All meetings are recorded with clear records of decisions and actions, including the rationale for decision-making and with named persons responsible for implementing actions. This ensures the implementation of all agreed actions and plans.

The service has formal protocols and memorandums of understanding in place which enables children to have timely access to external services for children when required. For example, timely access to child and adolescent mental health assessment and or psychological assessments. Tusla staff have regular contact with other agencies to monitor progress of actions agreed.

Managers, staff and social workers in a service liaise with external agencies and professionals to promote their awareness of their responsibilities under the Children First Act 2015, including the role of a mandated person where applicable. A mandated person may need to be included in the implementation of a child protection plan. Multidisciplinary and multiagency training is provided by the service to promote effective multidisciplinary and interagency working. As a result of the training, agencies and professionals are aware of their child protection responsibilities, and there is excellent cooperation between agencies

in working together to deliver services to both promote the welfare of children and safeguard them when required.

### **What this means for the child**

The child receives a coordinated service from Tusla and other agencies. They get the appropriate services at the appropriate time. Good coordinated investigations and safeguarding arrangements ensure children repeat their life stories for the minimum number of times. Children and their families are aware of the roles and responsibilities of each professional and agency involved in supporting them.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates review and observation of:

- interagency meetings.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- how the service provides them with support
- the roles of different professionals.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- how the service provides them with support
- if other agencies are involved in providing support and how this is coordinated.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- the service's working relationships with other agencies
- multiagency training arrangements
- formal protocols and memorandums of understanding in place.

#### **Through a review of documents during or after onsite activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records, including a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant), including management oversight of waiting list policies, procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals
- observation of duty intake system
- 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
- memorandums of understanding between agencies
- joint forum such as HSE Tusla area forum.

### **Compliance indicators**

Indicators of compliance include:

- there are strong procedures in place for information sharing between agencies and professionals, and these work well in practice
- families are clear about the roles and responsibilities of the different agencies they are involved with
- Tusla regularly contacts other agencies as part of the monitoring of child protection, family welfare and child welfare plans with the agencies responsible for implementing them and or parts of these plans
- professionals working with children are trained together to facilitate key learning and strengthen working relationships.

### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- information has not always been shared in the best interests of a child
- families are not always clear about why different agencies and or professionals are involved with them
- training is not provided on a multidisciplinary and interagency basis, and

this is a missed opportunity to strengthen working relationships.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- information-sharing procedures are weak and do not work well to ensure that all information about a child is shared with the appropriate personnel
- services do not work well together to provide a seamless service to children and their families
- families are not clear about the roles and responsibilities of agencies involved with them
- Tusla does not contact other agencies as part of the monitoring of child protection, child welfare and family support plans
- interagency and multidisciplinary working is weak, and professionals do not work together in the best interests of the child
- there is no multidisciplinary or interagency training provided, and this is a missed opportunity to improve working relationships.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.10**

Child protection and welfare case planning is managed and monitored to improve practice and outcomes for children.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A good child protection and welfare service is planned to ensure it is safe and effective in monitoring case planning and achieving best outcomes for children. The service has policies, procedures and guidelines in place which guide and support staff and managers in doing so. Staff are confident in their knowledge of, and consistently adhere to, the provider's policies and procedures.

There are systems in place to ensure a safe, sustainable service is delivered within a child-centred culture. There are defined, manageable caseloads for all social workers, which are reviewed on an ongoing basis and appropriate steps taken to address challenges as they arise. Where a caseload is deemed unmanageable, these are identified in a timely manner and appropriate actions are taken to address this. Children who are identified as being at risk of harm

or neglect are prioritised for a service, kept safe and protected from harm and their welfare promoted.

The best interests of the child are served at every level of the organisation. Intra-agency structures and arrangements ensure good cooperation and working relationships between all of those with responsibility for the protection and welfare of children.

Social workers are supported to engage with children and families and there are procedures in place which allow for continuity in service provision throughout children and families involvement with the services, including cover during periods of leave.

The service has clear arrangements in place to meet its obligations under the Child Care Act, 1991, the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 and Children First Act 2015. Regular meetings are held to ensure effective case planning and management oversight of progress for children and families. Social workers are supported to discuss and evaluate their work with children and families and reflect on the effectiveness of interventions to improve practice and outcomes for children.

There are monitoring and oversight systems in place to ensure that the service is child-centred and that the child's needs are at the centre of all processes. Experienced managers provide strong leadership to social workers, supporting their engagement both with children and families and on their behalf where necessary in a multidisciplinary context.

A good child protection and welfare service has effective procedures in place for the identification and management of complex cases. Such procedures may include good quality supervision, complex case forums, and joint working with relevant agencies to ensure children's needs are met.

A good service is well run and has strong systems in place for the monitoring and review of case management processes and quality of service provision. Learning from the review of cases informs the development of good practice and leads to improved services for children and families.

### **What this means for the child**

Children have direct contact with their social worker. They are consulted and kept informed of plans for their safety in a way that is appropriate to their age and ability.

Children who are at risk of harm or neglect have a consistent social worker who is familiar with them and their family. Children know that there are people dedicated to ensuring that they receive the supports needed to improve their safety. When there are a number of professionals involved with a family, everyone's role is clear

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates review and observation of:

- interagency meetings.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- their contact with their social worker
- if they are asked about their views.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- the contact made by the social worker
- are children's needs prioritised by the service.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- the caseloads for social workers, and the monitoring arrangements for case planning
- the processes in place for managing complex cases
- how they ensure the service is child-centred.

#### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records, including a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant), including management oversight of waiting list

policies, procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals

- minutes of complex case forum and group supervision
- management oversight systems of the screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning, initial assessments, further intervention, child protection case conferencing, child protection notification system and closure processes
- review of frameworks to determine thresholds of harm, levels of risk and prioritisation of cases, and observation of them being applied.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- the provider has robust structures and systems in place that support staff to spend their time with children, and these systems ensure continuity of service for children and their families
- caseloads are well managed to ensure they are manageable, while children who are identified as being at risk of significant harm have an allocated social worker
- there are good team, inter-gency and multidisciplinary structures in place that support good working relationships to the benefit of children
- social work teams hold regular case planning meetings, in order that social workers can reflect on direct work and plans for children and families, and the effectiveness of services delivered and case decisions
- managers support and facilitate the development of best practice, and teams work well together providing cover for each other to ensure continuity of service
- complex cases are identified and well managed
- the service monitors and reviews how cases are managed and the standard of service provision
- there is a culture of learning facilitated, promoted and encouraged within the service.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**



- children and their families do not always receive a continuity of service delivery when staff are on periods of leave
- while caseloads are sometimes identified as unmanageable, this does not result in children being placed at risk
- while some children do not have an allocated social worker, there are systems in place to ensure that statutory obligations are met and immediate action is taken, and cases are allocated as quickly as possible.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- children are left without an allocated social worker for long periods of time
- caseloads are not well managed, and caseloads identified as unmanageable are not subject to review
- there is no system to ensure a continuity of service for children when staff are on periods of leave
- there are no procedures in place for the identification and management of complex cases; as a result, these cases do not receive an appropriate response
- managers do not support and facilitate the development of best practice
- a culture of learning is not facilitated, promoted and encouraged within the service.

**Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services**

**Standard 2.11**

Serious incidents are notified and reviewed in a timely manner and all recommendations and actions are implemented to ensure that outcomes effectively inform practice at all levels.

**What a rights-based quality service looks like**

A good child protection and welfare service is well run and has clear policies and procedures in place for the notification and review of serious incidents. Serious incidents are notified to the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) as required. Actions and recommendations arising from the review of serious incidents effectively informs improvements in practice at all levels.

The system for review of serious incidents includes monitoring of action plans put in place following such incidents. Management arrangements for monitoring of progress on individual cases, are clearly agreed and documented, to ensure children and families concerned receive all necessary supports and interventions.

Learning from serious incidents is promptly shared with all staff and implemented efficiently, ensuring improved service provision. A provider of a good service has procedures in place for sharing learning, which should include communicating findings from reviews of serious incidents with all of those who have a vested interest in the development of best practice in child protection and welfare service.

### **What this means for the child**

Children and families receive better interventions and supports in a timely way as a result of the service learning from serious reviews. Delays in service provision or intervention to effect positive changes for children and families are identified quickly and action to address deficiencies.

### **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

#### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates review and observation of:

- interagency meetings.

#### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children and families to explore:

- how services have improved interventions and supports.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- policies and procedures for the notification and review of serious incidents
- are actions and recommendations arising from reviews improving service provision
- how the service shares learning within the service.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records
- management oversight systems of the screening, preliminary enquiry, safety planning, initial assessments, further intervention, child protection case conferencing, child protection notification system and closure processes
- notifications of serious incidents, child deaths and risk escalations
- rapid and local reviews relating to serious incidents and child deaths
- review of processes by which learning from serious incidents is shared with staff
- evidence of how practice has improved as a result of learning from serious incidents
- internal and external reviews of serious incidents
- service improvement planning
- minutes of team meeting and learning forums
- support and supervision records.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- serious incidents are notified appropriately and in line with Tusla procedures, both within Tusla and to HIQA as required

- all staff are clear about their reporting responsibility for the notification of serious incidents and are familiar with the procedures involved
- serious incidents are systematically reviewed
- individual incidents are reviewed and well managed to ensure they progress and are managed in line with protocols, with action plans developed and implemented in a timely manner
- recommendations and learning from reviews of serious incidents are shared with staff and the public, and inform the development of best practice and quality improvements.

**Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- serious incidents are appropriately notified, reported and reviewed, but actions plans arising from reviews are not implemented in a timely manner.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- serious incidents are not well managed according to procedures, and there are poor monitoring and evaluation systems in place; learning is not identified or shared with the staff or the public
- the service misses the opportunity to use serious incidents as opportunities for learning, developing and improving the service.

## Theme 2: Safe and Effective Services

### Standard 2.12

The specific circumstances and needs of children subjected to organisational and/or institutional abuse and children who are deemed to be especially vulnerable are identified and responded to.

#### What a rights-based quality service looks like

A good quality rights-based child protection and welfare service ensures that the public know about and promote the safety and protection of children — in particular vulnerable children, including children with disabilities, homeless children, children exposed to human trafficking and separated children. The signs and specific risks associated with children who may be subject to

organisational and or institutional abuse are made known to parents and those who are in a position to recognise such abuse.

An effective child protection and welfare service has clear procedures in place for managing and investigating allegations of abuse, including retrospective disclosures in line with Children First.

When a concern arises relating to an organisation and or institution, the assessment of this concern should include exploring potential risks to other children or any possible pattern of abuse. All relevant information including historical information or previous referrals are considered.

A rights-based quality protection and welfare service works closely with all relevant professionals to identify and respond quickly to protect vulnerable children. Procedures for sharing information and working collaboratively with other professionals are clearly defined. Where there are concerns of organised abuse of children by an adult or adults, close liaison between child protection services and An Garda Síochána are well established and effective at protecting children who may be at risk.

The extent to which the services have the above elements in place will inform a judgment on their level of compliance with National Standard 2.12.

### **What this means for the child**

Children who are at risk of organisational or institutional abuse are protected, and potential risks to their safety are known to all of those in a position to protect them. When concerns arise about an organisation or person who has regular contact with children, risk to all of these children will be considered in assessing the concerns.

When an adult retrospectively alleges that they were abused as a child, social workers will ensure that any children who has contact with this person suspected of alleged abuse are protected while such allegations are being assessed.

A child who is identified as experiencing abuse by another child receives the same protective response as any child victim of abuse. The child perpetrating the abuse receives supports and interventions necessary to ensure their protection and that of other children.

## **Examples of information that will be reviewed and how this will be done**

### **Through observation**

The provider facilitates review and observation of:

- interagency meetings.

### **Through communication**

Inspectors will communicate with children to explore:

- their contact with their social worker.

Inspectors will communicate with families to explore:

- how the service has advised them about how to promote the safety and protection of children
- other services involved to support the family.

Inspectors will communicate with social workers, social care workers and their managers to explore:

- how they ensure the public know about and promote the safety and protection of children, in particular vulnerable children
- procedures in place for managing and investigating allegations of abuse
- work undertaken by other agencies to identify and respond quickly to protection vulnerable children.

### **Through a review of documents during or after on-site activity**

Inspectors will review the provider's documentation, such as:

- data set and information provided by the service area
- children's records, including a review of closed files
- waiting lists (if relevant), to include the management oversight of waiting list policies, procedures and frameworks in place in relation to management of referrals
- observation of duty intake system
- review of process for retrospective referrals and all systems in place

supporting this

- 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.

### **Compliance indicators**

#### **Indicators of compliance include:**

- there are clear procedures for the investigation and management of organisational and institutional abuse allegations
- the service informs the public and is successful at raising awareness about the safety and protection of children, especially in regard to organisational and institutional abuse
- assessments of individual concerns always include the possibility that other children may have been harmed in an organisation or institutional setting
- patterns of abuse are identified using historical information about previous incidents of reported abuse
- there is close multidisciplinary and interagency working among professionals to ensure that all children involved are protected
- Tusla and An Garda Síochána closely together, especially where there are concerns about the organised abuse of children by adults
- all reports of abuse, including retrospective disclosures, are managed in line with Children First.

#### **Indicators of substantial compliance include:**

- while there are clear procedures for the investigation and management of organisational and institutional abuse allegations, staff are not familiar with their implementation
- the service has not informed the public and has not raised awareness about organisational and institutional abuse.

**Indicators of non-compliance include:**

- assessments do not consider the possibility that other children may have been harmed in an organisational or institutional setting
- patterns of abuse have been missed and historical information is not considered in current investigations
- multidisciplinary and interagency working has been poor
- reports of organisational or institutional abuse are not managed in line with Children First.



## Appendix 1

### Summary of published guidance

Please note that guidance may be updated and that published website links may change over time. If a website link does not work, please search online using the title of the document. If you cannot locate a document from the list below, it may have been replaced, superseded or removed from our website.

An individual report will be generated for each service inspected. Inspection reports will be published on HIQA's website at [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie).

Name of Guidance	Publication date	Location on <a href="http://www.hiqa.ie">www.hiqa.ie</a>
Making a Submission on a Stage-2 Inspection Report to the Chief Inspector of Social Services: Standard Operating Procedure (SOP): Updated August 2023	Published August 2023	<a href="https://www.hiqa.ie/reports-and-publications/guide/making-submission-stage-2-inspection-report-chief-inspector-social">https://www.hiqa.ie/reports-and-publications/guide/making-submission-stage-2-inspection-report-chief-inspector-social</a>

## Appendix 2 'Authority Monitoring Approach'

### The purpose of this guide

This guide provides information to service providers on the national standards that will be monitored by inspectors and should also be used by service providers to self-assess their own service in order to improve their service.

Queries or questions in relation to this programme or the information contained within this guide can be forwarded by email to [children@hiqa.ie](mailto:children@hiqa.ie). Such queries will be referred to a member of the Children's team involved in the programme for consideration and reply. It should be noted, however, that specific queries about an inspection can only be accepted from the manager in overall charge of the Tusla service area being inspected.

### How HIQA will inspect services

The following section of this guidance outlines how HIQA will conduct each inspection and progress to the publication of individual inspection reports under this programme of monitoring. Further details of what HIQA will be assessing against the national standards is outlined in Section 3 of this document.

### Inspection teams

Inspection teams comprise HIQA staff who have been appointed by HIQA as authorised persons under the Health Act 2007 (as amended), and work within the powers described in the Act to monitor compliance with standards. Inspectors are obliged to comply with HIQA's Code of Conduct for staff, which is available at [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie).

### Inspection

HIQA will review key pieces of information relating to the way the service is organised and operated. Key pieces of information include:

- information from previous HIQA inspections of the service
- notifications of serious incidents or death of a child
- relevant unsolicited information received by HIQA in relation to the service.

HIQA may conduct a full inspection of a child protection and welfare service against all of the *National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2012). A child protection inspection that monitors a service under all of the child protection

and welfare standards will be announced 20 working days in advance of the inspection.

Risk-based inspections will monitor providers of services against specific standards, which will be referenced in the announcement letter. Services may receive short notice of these inspections.<sup>4</sup>

### **On-site fieldwork**

At the beginning of the inspection, inspectors will introduce themselves, outline the purpose and duration of the inspection to the person with overall responsibility for the service. Information will be gathered by the inspection team through:

- communicating with management, staff, children and children's families and other professionals
- reviewing documents and data to determine if appropriate records are kept and reflect practice
- observing meetings, where appropriate.

The service provider will be asked to nominate a liaison person who will be responsible for engagement with HIQA during the course of the inspection.

### **Documentation, data and information request**

HIQA will review documentation and data received prior to inspection and review documentation, data and information as part of the inspection while on site.

### **Confidentiality**

In line with current data protection legislation, HIQA requests that unless specifically requested to do so, services should not send personal data that could identify an individual child to HIQA, either by email or by post.

### **Communication**

The inspection team will arrange a time to meet with key personnel within the service. For example, inspectors will communicate with:

- social workers
- social work team leaders
- principal social workers

---

<sup>4</sup> A short-notice announcement of an inspection can be issued less than 20 days prior to the inspection fieldwork.

- area manager.

The purpose of this communication is to gather information about:

- how the service is led and managed
- how risks are identified and managed
- how the management team is assured that the service provided is safe and effective.

### Risk management and escalation

HIQA takes a risk-based approach to monitoring. This approach informs how frequently HIQA will inspect any individual service. It also informs the nature, intensity and the type of inspection carried out.

Risk identified by HIQA during inspections will be escalated to the area manager of the service and/or to the senior accountable manager regionally and or nationally when required.

### Judgments on compliance with standards

Inspectors will judge whether the provider has been found to be **compliant**, **substantially compliant** or **not compliant** with the standards. The compliance descriptors are defined as follows:

Compliant	A judgment of compliant means the service is meeting or exceeding the standard and is delivering a high-quality service which is responsive to the needs of children.
Compliant: Substantially compliant	A judgment of substantially compliant means 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.
Not compliant	A judgment of not compliant means the service has not complied with a standard and that considerable action is required to come into compliance. Continued non-compliance or where the non-compliance poses a significant risk to the safety, health and welfare of children using the service will be risk-rated red (high risk) and the inspector will identify the date by which the provider must comply. Where the non-compliance does not pose a significant risk to the safety, health and welfare of children using the service, it is risk-rated orange (moderate risk) and the

		provider must take action within a reasonable time frame to come into compliance.
--	--	---

Once a judgment on compliance is made, inspectors will review the risk to children of the non-compliance. Inspectors will report on this risk as:

- Red: there is high risk associated with the non-compliance
- Orange: there is moderate risk associated with the non-compliance
- Yellow: there is low risk associated with the non-compliance
- Green: there is no risk.

The assessment-judgment framework should be applied in conjunction with the following:

- Health Act 2007 (as amended)
- Child Care Act, 1991
- Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015
- Children First Act 2015
- *National Standards for Child Protection and Welfare* (2012)
- *National Standards for Foster Care*, 2003
- *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017).

### **Freedom of Information**

HIQA is subject to the Freedom of Information Acts and the statutory Code of Practice regarding Freedom of Information.



**Published by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).**

Issued by the Chief Inspector  
Health Information and Quality Authority  
George's Court  
George's Lane  
Smithfield  
Dublin 7  
D07 E98Y

+353 (0)1 814 7400  
info@hiqa.ie  
www.hiqa.ie

© Health Information and Quality Authority 2023