



Title: Stockport Multi-Agency Step Up/Step Down Protocol

Policy Summary

This Policy describes the multi-agency protocol for use in the application of 'step up' and 'step down' mechanisms across Stockport to ensure a seamless journey for the child through services.

It should be read in conjunction with Stockport Levels of Need document which can be found here:

<http://www.safeguardingchildreninstockport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Stockport-Multi-Agency-Guidance-on-Levels-of-Needs.pdf>

using link below.

Quality Assurance

Reviewed every 2 years.

Supporting Documents

Stockport Levels of Need Document (link above)

Early Help Assessment

<https://www.stockport.gov.uk/early-help-assessment>

Social Work Assessment

Version	Date	Authors	Issue Reason	Revision Date
1	25.11.2013	SC/DW		26.11.2015
2	15.03.2017	PW/SR		14.03.2019

Introduction:

The process of **Step Up and Step Down** is an extremely important function in the journey of a child through services and in ensuring that children and families receive consistent, seamless support, at the right time and from the right range of professionals.

Definition Step Up:

Step Up describes the process of supporting children and families when additional, escalating need occurs. Step Up can occur at various points across the child concern continuum of need (see Appendix 1). Below are examples of when Step Up should be considered.

A child receiving universal provision can require Step Up to trigger the Early Help Assessment (EHA) because additional unmet needs are identified.

Step Up can occur when intervention via the Early Help Assessment and Team Around the Child/Family process is established but the child's needs are escalating and desired outcomes are not being met. For example, it may be that a step up to a social care led TAC or Child Protection Plan is needed.

Definition Step Down:

Step Down describes the process that occurs when problems experienced by a child and family have been addressed, the objectives within the plan for the family have been met and the identified level of need has moved down on the level of need.

Step Down is a crucial part of practice to prevent re-escalation and re-referral. It is important that professionals work together to sustain positive progress. Examples of when Step Down should be considered:

- Step Down can occur within statutory frameworks. An example of this is when a child has been subject to a Child Protection Plan and risks have diminished as the child and family have made positive progress. In this instance step down to TAC/TAF would occur when a Child Protection Plan is no longer required. However, Step Down would mean that the child and family are supported in the first instance as a child in need (section 17 Children Act 1989) and is held within children's social care.
- Step Down can occur following an Early Help Assessment (EHA) and Team Around the Child/Family (TAC/TAF) process. If issues have been addressed satisfactorily and the additional needs have been met the child and family can step down to universal provision.

Definition Step In:

Step In or 'call in' is when an additional service is required to meet an identified need in a plan and the service is asked to join the existing process. The Lead Professional will ensure that the service being called in provides the required support, advice or guidance.,

Definition Step Out:

Step Out occurs when a service with an action in a plan has been completed satisfactorily and the family no longer require that particular support. The service will then step out of the process.

Lack of engagement by a family or failure to keep appointments is not a reason for a service to step out of a plan. If there is a lack of engagement a risk assessment will be required to identify if Step Up to the next level of need is required or if Step Out is safe and appropriate.

Key Principles

Decisions around Step Up and Step Down should be underpinned by the needs of the child and family. This ensures a 'needs led' not 'service led' approach.

- Promoting a culture that is underpinned by a true partnership ethos will support quality provision for our children and families in Stockport.
- The Early Help Assessment and subsequent TAC Plan are crucial elements of the Step Up and Step Down processes, to ensure that effective plans follow the child and family through services and families experience consistency at all times.
- Services delivering at contrasting levels of need should work together to ensure a seamless journey through provision for children and families with the ultimate aim of Step Down to universal provision if this is safe to do.
- Step Up/Down should be a negotiated and agreed process which will take place in the ongoing work with the family and the other practitioners involved. The negotiations to identify the change from one lead professional to another should usually be discussed and agreed prior to the TAC meeting. This should then be clearly recorded in the TAC meeting record. Step Down can only be achieved if this negotiation has happened and a lead professional is agreed. In almost all circumstances Step Down should then be confirmed in a TAC meeting.
- If there is any disagreement with the proposal to Step Down /Step Out, or any reluctance by professionals to take on the Lead Professional responsibility, this should be discussed by the withdrawing service with their line manager in supervision. The line manager should negotiate with the line managers of the other agencies involved in the TAC to try and resolve the situation. If a solution cannot be agreed then the team leader or a TAC champion senior practitioner should step in and offer support to reach an agreed resolution which is then confirmed at the TAC meeting.

Practice Process to Step Up

Immediate concerns of a child protection nature should always be communicated to the case holding social worker (if there is one) or telephoned through immediately to the MASSH and followed by written confirmation on a child protection referral form.

Step Up from universal provision:

- When considering stepping a case up because there is evidence of additional need for support, but not of a child protection nature, it is important to discuss this in the first instance with the parent/carer and if age appropriate with the child. This discussion should involve a description of the Early Help Assessment (EHA) process and how it can help and support families that may be experiencing difficulties.
- In instances of Step Up from universal provision an EHA should always be completed with the family. Relevant colleagues and professionals from universal and targeted provision should be invited to contribute to this process and discuss how best to support the family via the Team Around the Child/Family process (TAC/TAF). This should include communication with the GP.
- When the child is of school age it is always important for discussion to take place between the lead professional, parents/carers and schools so that appropriate support can be considered and offered by the **team around the school**.
- Where other services/agencies are required to support the child and family it is important to discuss this with the parent/carer and then discuss this with the relevant service(s). These conversations are crucial to call-in the best possible support for children and families.
- Other services/agencies should be invited to contribute to and support the Early Help Assessment and TAC/TAF process.
- <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/early-help-assessment>

Step up from Early Help Assessment & established tier 2 TAC:

- When considering Step Up where an EHA and TAC/TAF intervention is already in progress, the lead practitioner should consult with children's social care to agree a way forward and seek a view on whether the issues highlighted warrant allocation to a Children's Social Care social worker.
- Consultation with Children's Social Care is always welcome. Lead Professionals can speak to the link social worker in the team around the school, or telephone the MASSH (Multiagency Safeguarding and Support HUB) to have a consultation with a **TAC Champion senior practitioner**.
- As part of the consultation to consider if step up may be required the current updated EHA should be shared with the MASSH with an

invitation to the next TAC/TAF. This invite to 'step in' to determine whether a social work assessment would be appropriate is a useful mechanism as it enables full discussion between Children's Social Care and professionals/parents/carers and children to ascertain the most appropriate next steps.

- Cases can also Step Up to more intensive statutory intervention if needs and risk continue to escalate and subsequently require a Child Protection Plan to support the child and family and keep the child safe from harm.

Practice Process to Step Down

When children and families have received a statutory intervention and the family have progressed positively, it is important that the progress made is sustained and that children and families do not feel that they are being passed from service to service. Effective dialogue between the social worker and the future Lead Professional is crucial to pave the way for a seamless transition for children and families. When Children's Social Care Step Out of a case, communication is important to gain agreement on who the Lead Professional will be and this should be recorded clearly. The Step Down process enables relevant professionals from Children's Social Care and a range of other services to support the intervention plan appropriately. EHA and TAC/TAF are crucial to the Step Down process as it enables the effective planning and support to children and families once statutory services step out of the team around the child.

Step Down from child protection plan to TAC plan led by Children's Social Care

- The Child Protection conference makes the decision to end the child protection plan as the child no longer meets the requirements for a child protection plan.
- The conference chair should always make a recommendation that the child/family continue to be supported via a TAC plan usually initially led by social care. There may be specific circumstances agreed by the conference where different recommendations are made. For example, Step Down to a TAC which is led by someone other than social care, or for the case to close.
- Where the Child Protection conference recommends for the TAC plan to be led initially by children's social care the case will remain with the allocated social worker who will then review the plan under TAC processes. Through the TAC process a Lead Professional to step down to will be identified at the appropriate time and the Step Down TAC meeting process outlined below should be followed.

Step Down from Social Work Assessment to the Early Help Assessment

- When Children's Social Care conclude an assessment with the decision to Step Out of a case where the TAC plan will continue, the social worker should discuss Step Down of case with key stakeholders and negotiate a Lead Professional to take over coordination of the case at the step down TAC meeting convened by the social worker.
- If the social Work Assessment identifies that TAC plan is not required and a step down to universal services is appropriate this will be discussed and agreed directly with the universal service professional and recorded on a social care closure record.

The Step Down TAC meeting

- When Step Down has been agreed and a lead professional identified, the social worker will chair a **step down TAC meeting** to confirm the plan and agree the current information to be recorded in the EHA.
- The social worker will record the agreement and current plan on the **"step down TAC record"**.
- The social worker is responsible for opening the step down EHA on EIS and will complete the following sections:
 - reason for step down,
 - confirmation of verbal consent from the family to begin the step down EHA (this will be confirmed in the step down TAC meeting),
 - agency completing the assessment recorded,
 - Stockport Family Support Plan and initial family plan.
 - The social worker may also have additional information that is useful for the new lead practitioner and it is good practise to include this in the EHA.
- The Social worker will then reassign the EHA to the lead professional
- New Lead Professional coordinates intervention using agreed Stockport Family Support Plan
- EHA and TAC/ Support Plan should be regularly updated to reflect activity and intervention/ outcomes for child/family

Step Down from Early Help Assessment to Universal provision:

- When all issues and needs have been addressed satisfactorily and the child/family no longer require additional support, the EHA should always be closed. This is done by clicking 'complete' on the EHA in the EIS (Early Intervention System). The outcome 'needs met close the Stockport Family EHA' should be selected for each child and form completed using the complete button.

Information sharing after Step Up/Down

At the point of step up and step down the lead professional should notify the **GP** of the current plan.

Following step up/down, if a professional who is no longer involved with the family receives new information they must share this directly with the new lead professional. To check who the lead professional is, please ring the EHA facilitator based in the MASSH on 0161 217 6160. The MASSH will share any new information they receive with the lead professional. It is the lead professional's responsibility to share information with the TAC members and review their assessment and plan to make any changes necessary in light of the new information. In addition to their own line management arrangements, the lead practitioner may also seek advice and guidance from the team around the school, social care TAC senior practitioners, and for safeguarding queries via the MASSH 0161 217 6028.

Monitoring effective application of Step Up/ Step Down

- Data on the application of Step Up and Step down processes will be captured through the MASSH quarterly monitoring reports. This will provide quantitative evidence of the effectiveness of the process.
- Audit reports to the EHA TAC Strategic Steering Group will provide further qualitative analysis of impact and effectiveness of Step up and Step Down processes.
- The EHA TAC Strategic Steering Group will regularly monitor and oversee effectiveness and report progress to relevant boards.