

# The journey from inadequate to good using the Common Assessment Framework processes and 'team around the child': Swindon Borough Council

**Local authority:** Swindon

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## Brief description

The development of the common assessment framework and 'team around the child' approaches were used by Swindon Borough Council and its partners as part of the change management process to improve both practice and the provision of services for children and families in the Borough.

## Overview – the provider's message

'One of the key issues has been overcoming the reluctance of practitioners to take on the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). It has been an integral part of the change management process which has involved ensuring that consistent messages have come down from the top across all organisations. We've had, and shared, a firm belief across the partnership that developing the CAF and improving preventative work is the mechanism for improving outcomes for children across the Borough. The CAF has been the foundation of a cultural shift in Swindon to a 'whole-system' approach which has helped all organisations to understand their role in safeguarding and helped us develop a clear vision of where we needed to be.'

*Sara Tough, Director, Integrated Children and Young People's Services*

## The good practice in detail

Swindon Safeguarding Services received a 'good' rating in their latest [Ofsted inspection](#) – a step on the path of improvement from being inadequate six years ago. Underpinning the improvement has been the development of the [Common Assessment Framework](#) (CAF) and the 'team around the child' (TAC) processes enabling strong preventative work to take place and supporting the message that safeguarding is everyone's business.



*The team*

the top that this was the way forward and it was reinforced in supervision. Now we can see the positive outcomes of this way of working.'

Overcoming the reluctance of practitioners to take on the CAF, or the role of the lead professional, and encouraging the process to be seen as an integral part of any role has been crucial in ensuring success; practitioners have been challenged across the partnership, supported by a firm belief that this is the mechanism to improve outcomes for children and young people across Swindon. One headteacher commented that, 'At the start, CAFs were daunting but with peer-support and management support we realised that we are not working in isolation. We are all learning together. There was a strong message from

The cross-organisation leadership team has been consistent in their messages promoting CAF as the key vehicle for safeguarding processes and using it as a means to shift the culture to one of prevention. This cultural shift has enabled children to access services earlier and has encouraged practitioners to use the CAF as the mechanism for supporting families.

### **Building relationships and support**

Relationships have been strengthened at all levels, from practitioner through to senior manager, enabling professionals to build a better understanding of each other's roles. A central administrative team offers support and guidance to practitioners, and oversees performance reporting.

A CAF coordinator, based in the Social Care Referral and Assessment Team, is currently piloting a new approach to managing requests for support from Children Services. The coordinator acts as a conduit between social care and the Integrated Locality Teams offering support to children, young people and families within the CAF. The CAF coordinator ensures that those families who do not require an allocated social worker are offered, where appropriate, support from the Integrated Locality Teams. This ensures a consistent approach to anyone contacting the Referral and Assessment Team by offering support to complete a CAF.

Work has been undertaken with headteachers to increase their understanding of the CAF process while offering support to enable schools to undertake assessments and support families. Schools have reported that outcomes for children and young people have improved following CAFs and therefore they have felt empowered to undertake assessments, knowing that support is at hand when necessary. The CAF is seen as a way of sharing information, but also as a way of valuing the information held by different professionals in order to offer the most appropriate support.

There is a sense across the partnership that everyone involved with a child has a role and can use the CAF to share information, gather further information and request expert input when necessary. But there is also a commitment to facilitate the provision of appropriate support rather than merely referring on to another professional or organisation.

The framework for the CAF is clear for both professionals and families and, because of the focus on strengths and finding solutions, it is seen as less threatening than other interventions. Practitioners have access to a wealth of information about the process and about other services which are available. Parents feel a part of the solution-focused process. As one of the team says, 'Practitioners are seeing the benefit of the CAF approach, especially

in that parents only have to give their information once so it avoids duplication. Parents are an integral part of the TAC meeting so rather than things being done to them, they are a real part of it. It also encourages the involvement of the young person, so they get a lot more out of it.'

Families attending TAC meetings have commented:

'I think the people in the meeting did a good job and are trying everything to help'

'I found the meeting very good and hope that something will come of it'

'They all listened. I was pleased with what was said. It made me feel happy'

'Very well explained and planned'

'It was a bit daunting walking in at first. But everyone was friendly and explained things'.

The TAC meeting, with its focus on multi-agency support and solution finding is a crucial part of the jigsaw. This approach allows appropriate support to be offered at the right time, meaning that issues are less likely to escalate and need more intensive intervention. One of the practitioners explains, 'TAC allows things to happen, and to happen earlier. It prevents things escalating and provides support at the earliest stages. Because families see that it makes a difference they are more engaged than before.' An anonymous case example can be viewed [here](#).

The CAF has clearly been the foundation for a cultural shift to a whole-system approach, underpinning the overall vision for Swindon. There has been a measurable impact on outcomes for children and families, reducing costs, improving outcomes and helping children's attainment overall.

## **Provider background**

[Swindon Borough Council](#)

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