



Multi-Agency

LIAISON GROUPS

Guidance and Information

MULTI-AGENCY LIAISON GROUPS GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION

This booklet is intended as a resource for members of Liaison Groups, to provide background information about the strategic framework within which Liaison Groups sit. This includes the move towards Integrated Children's Services, the staged approach, and the use of Solution focused Approaches.

It also provides general guidance on the core principles relating to Liaison Groups that have been shown to be most effective in including children/young people and their families and ensuring equal participation with the wider Multi Agency Network, as well as leading to positive outcomes for those involved.

To assist groups in professional development and the process of evaluating effectiveness, a training audit and evaluation tool are also included as part of the guidance and information.

The guidance and information provided within this document is not exhaustive and should be used to augment other aspects of good practice.

Although it would be expected that Liaison Groups arrangements or meetings would be adapted to meet the needs of individual groups, the core principles of inclusion, equal participation, effective joint working with a solution focus and least intrusive intervention should be adhered to as far as possible at all times.

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MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

Professor Chris Huxham, a writer in the field of multi-agency working, proposes the concept of *collaborative advantage* in relation to services and agencies working together and defines it thus:

Collaborative advantage will be achieved when something unusually creative is produced - perhaps an objective is met - that no organisation could have produced on its own and when each organisation, through collaboration, is able to achieve its own objectives better than it could alone. In some cases, it should also be possible to achieve some higher level objectives for society as a whole rather than just for the participating organisations.

Huxham (1996)

The essential element of this definition is its focus on the *outputs* of joint working which are only achievable through collaboration.

In contrast, Huxham defines collaborative inertia as:

...a situation when the apparent rate of work output from a collaboration is slowed down considerably compared to what a casual observer might expect it to be.

Huxham (1996)

Among the difficulties that can lead to collaborative inertia are:

- differences in aims, language, procedures, culture and perceived power
- the tension between differing levels of autonomy, accountability and authority structures among participant organisations
- the resources required to manage the logistics of collaboration

Evidence of collaborative advantage is something we should be looking for in each liaison arrangement or meeting. Evidence of collaborative inertia, on the other hand, should raise the question of the advisability of pursuing the collaboration as it stands and should signal the need for reviewing aims and procedures and evaluating the process as it currently exists.

Several factors emerge from research as important for effective integrated working:

Common Aims

The establishment of common aims and objectives will assist in ensuring that agencies are working towards the same purposes, rather than cutting across each other with conflicting agendas. Having clear outcomes and priorities also aids the identification of tasks.

Accommodation

Relocation of agencies to one site can benefit the development of informal communications systems in addition to more formal structures. It can also benefit clients to have a single location for contact with services.

Finance

Challenges arise from budgetary issues - lack of funding, uncertain future funding arrangements or short-term ventures, and ultimately which agency has control of spending. One way forward is pooled budgets and joint funding initiatives.

Communication

Multi-agency working requires good information sharing between and within agencies. A barrier to this can be the perceived and actual restrictions on free flow of information, either through data-protection requirements, or lack of appropriate protocols for sharing information. Professionals may be unwilling to divulge information they may regard as confidential, but which is important for services to be aware of in order to provide appropriate supports to children and families.

Opportunities for dialogue between agencies are needed and also full involvement of the child and family. Skills of listening and negotiating need to be deployed, as do procedures and protocols to appropriately share information at a systems and a human level. Communication is necessary between agencies at both strategic and operational levels, which may have implications for planning regular meetings to promote the two-way flow of information.

Organisation

The development of interagency protocols helps ensure consistency of decision making and growth of trust between agencies. Within organisation, both top-down and bottom-up, flows of information are needed to communicate policies effectively and to make strategic decisions based on experiences at operational level.

Cultures

Different agencies will have developed different cultures and values, or have a different ethos and operational practices, depending to some extent on their purpose and the nature of their contact with clients. For effective integrated working, it is important to be aware of these differences, to acknowledge that they exist and to respect them.

Personal Relationships

Good personal and working relationships can be a significant factor in promoting positive multi-agency working. It is essential to create trust with others, to manage differences and to encourage personal growth.

Time and Effort

Studies of multi-agency working suggest that it takes up significant amounts of time, with increased frequency of meetings. Doing the tasks allocated to meet deadlines, preparing effectively for meetings, and also demonstrating commitment and willingness, are all necessary elements of effective practice. It follows therefore that other pressures of work and competing demands will present barriers to effective working.

Roles

An initial task for any joint working venture includes understanding the roles of other participants, both as individuals and as members of their own organisation. A possible barrier is the potential conflict of roles or responsibilities that an individual may have in relation to the multi-agency task as compared to the agency being represented. There may also be conflicts over areas of responsibility between agencies.

Different roles also carry different levels of power and decision-making authority, and it is important that a representative has sufficient scope to make required decisions on behalf of his/her organisation.

The need to move beyond existing roles has been raised in various studies, with more flexibility and less protectiveness seen as desirable. However, this creates the potential conflict over roles and disputes over professional boundaries.

Data Collection

It is important for review and development, to keep track of children and families, to assist in evaluating whether stated aims and desired outcomes are being achieved and for making strategic decisions regarding allocation of resources. Appropriate systems therefore require to be put in place to enable this function to be carried out. The absence of appropriate data will obviously hinder the evaluation and development of multi-agency service delivery.

Training

Staff training to improve multi-agency working often focuses on understanding each other's roles and on specific topics such as child protection. There has been little development of systematic training in this area. A key difficulty is that CPD for the various services and agencies involved in working together is arranged in different ways and with competing priorities. Varying working hours and commitments make it additionally difficult to bring services together at the same time for training.

Stability

This can apply to the people working together, as well as the contexts of the wider organisations and local and national government. Effective working is disrupted by changes in personnel, which require new relationships to be established, ways of working to be negotiated, and familiarity with systems and histories to be learned. Should a key member of a team be unable to attend a particular meeting, or a replacement attends without the detailed background knowledge, efforts to move business along can become frustrated. Staffing turnover, shortages and fragmentation can all present major challenges.

Leadership

Leadership tasks and qualities include organisation, diplomacy, facilitation, consultation, pushing through, pulling together and problem solving. A leader is required to maintain the focus of work but also recognise and reflect the contribution of all parties and to develop a balance of top-down and bottom-up management. Desired qualities include vision and tenacity and encouraging risk taking, but also transparency, and a degree of trust and confidence in other members of the team so that the joint working venture does not simply become the vehicle for the 'leader' to carry through or legitimise his/her own agenda.

The general consensus from both theoretical and practitioner perspectives, is that multi-agency working is a 'good thing' and a necessary approach to meeting the needs of all children and families, particularly the most vulnerable. However, there are evidently significant concerns that many multi-agency approaches that are well motivated, with committed people, fail to impact on the longer term outcomes for some children and families.

Working together across organisations is time consuming and therefore needs to be more effective in outcomes. Practical experience and academic research highlight several factors which can affect the success of multi-agency working and demonstrate that it is a complex and dynamic process.

Adapted from Balchin et al 2004

THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

'For Scotland's Children' (2001) was a report commissioned by the Scottish Executive in its drive to improve services for children, especially those who are most disadvantaged. The premise of the Report is that outcomes for children will be better if all agencies concerned work together to integrate services.

There is a clear expectation that all agencies providing services to children should be working more closely together. The current challenge in implementation is in bringing together different service providers with diverse organisational structures, working practices, communication systems, data management systems, cultures and aims, into a coherent cooperative framework.

The plan for services for children and families in Highland is built around general fundamental principles, including a commitment to agencies working in partnership with parents and carers.

The integrated structure for planning and delivering children's services operates at three levels, each with an emphasis on community partnership and multi-agency cooperation and flexibility:

- At Council level, the Joint Committee on Children and Young People coordinates policy, service development and delivery across Council Services and NHS Highland partners. It also includes other key partners, including the voluntary sector.
- At a more local level, services come together in Area Children's Service Forums (ACSF). These forums bring together Area Managers from Education, Culture and Sport, Social Work, Housing and Service Managers from the local Health Care Cooperatives. In addition, the ACSFs include membership from voluntary organisations, community groups and other key local services. The functions of the forums are to:
 - Establish appropriate assessment, placing and resourcing networks within a specific geographic area.
 - Identify children with complex needs and link this with planning and allocation of resources within the Area.
 - Consider issues of policy and practice in consultation with members and senior officers.
- Liaison Groups operate within the Areas co-ordinated by the ACSFs, around each individual school, associated school group or pre-school provision. These involve school/nursery staff, educational psychologists, medical practitioners, social work staff and others, working in partnership with parents and pupils with a solution focused orientation to:
 - Co-ordinate early intervention to individual pupils and families.
 - Engage in multi-disciplinary assessment and planning.
 - Identify resource issues and unmet need for specific pupils/families.
 - Plan individual casework.

Liaison Groups provide the focus for devolved responsibility and power to a very local level. When effective, they ensure the inclusion of all partners in equal decision making at all levels, a flexibility of approach, and a willingness to cross boundaries, retaining professional identities.

Adapted from "For Highlands Children" (2003)

STAGED INTERVENTION AND THE STRUCTURED INTERVENTION APPROACH

Staged Intervention

Many professionals are familiar with the principal of staged intervention in relation to children with additional support needs. This process helps target resources more effectively and ensures that the least intrusive intervention appropriate to a particular situation is employed.

Within a school context, rather than referring all challenging pupils or situations out of the class, a school operating a staged intervention policy analyses approaches to learning, teaching and classroom management to help identify what may be causing some of the problems, and agreeing a plan to tackle them. As the name suggests, interventions are planned in stages in order to establish the most appropriate strategy for dealing with the difficulties encountered at any given time. Only where universal services are not effective or require to be augmented to support a child, young person or family, is a formal referral made to an external agency or support service.

A staged intervention approach provides a structure to support the adults involved with a child/young person in dealing with difficult situations and issues that often relate to learning or behavioural difficulties or social/emotional development.

A discipline policy alone will not provide a school with all the answers to behavioural problems. The inter-relationship of that policy to other policies, particularly those on inclusion, equality of opportunity, additional support needs and anti-bullying, and more importantly the relationship between policy, practice, organisation and ethos are more likely to produce a climate in which the needs of all can be met. A staged approach to addressing difficulties therefore provides a structure and compliments, but does not replace the school's discipline system.

The Structured Intervention Approach

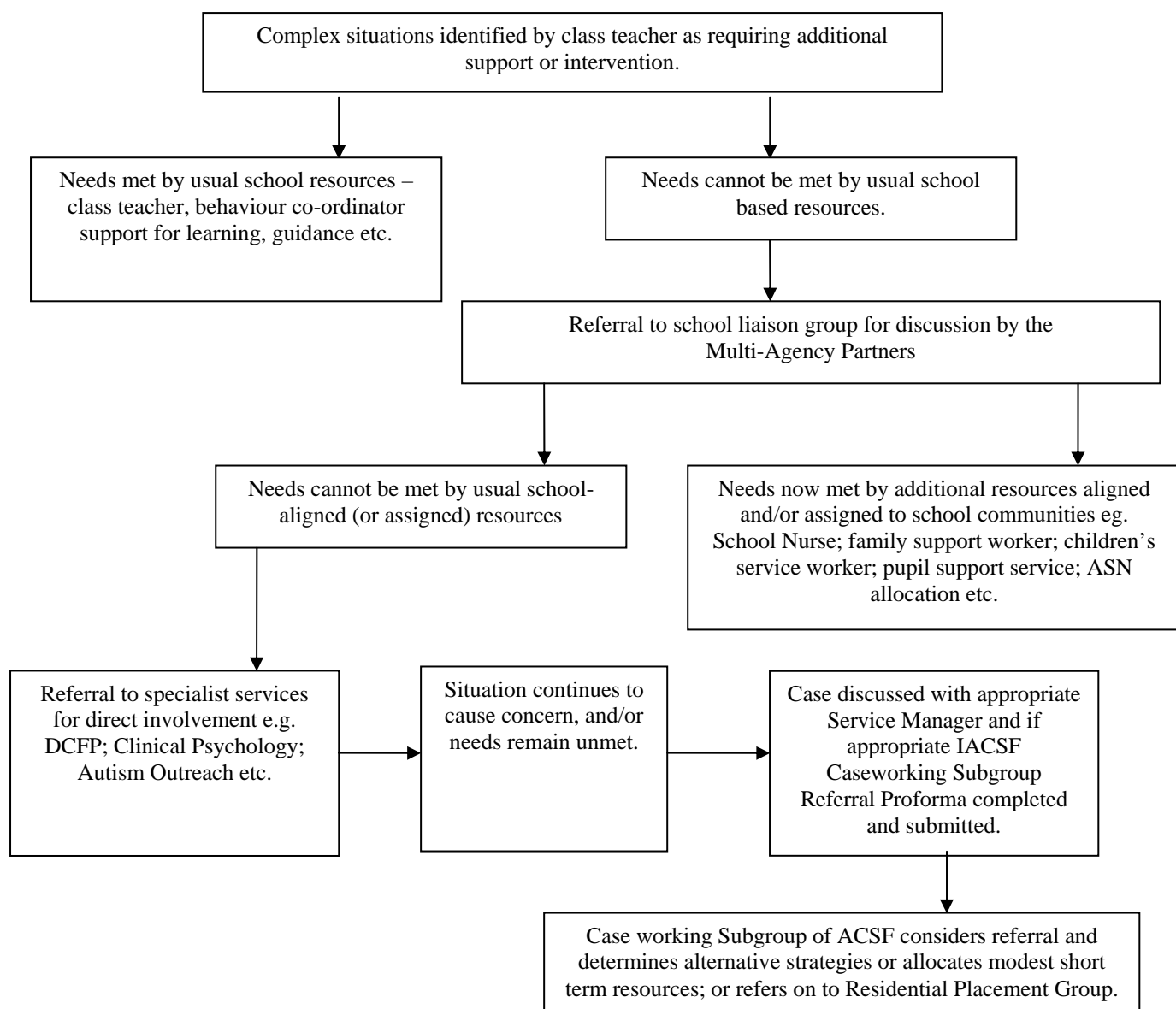
The principles of the Structured Intervention Approach with a Highland context provide a more formal interpretation of a staged intervention. For simplicity, the Structured Intervention Approach provides a process covering the full range of behaviours which cause concern from the child who 'acts out' to the child who is withdrawn. Above all, it offers real support rather than blame. Schools operating this system usually have a 'behaviour coordinator' who has responsibility for advising teachers and senior management about approaches to behaviour management at individual class and whole-school levels.

The Structured Intervention Approach can be simplified and summarised as follows:

Stage	Action
Stage 1	If a teacher has a concern about a pupil, or a group of pupils, a number of steps can be taken to address this within the class setting. For example, after self-evaluation, some changes might be made to class routines such as the lesson openings, seating arrangements, approaches to question and answer sessions, etc. The class teacher will choose to seek support in analysing and planning the situation with an in-school Behaviour Coordinator. The planned intervention(s) are tried and evaluated over a number of weeks.

Stage 2	If after implementing the behaviour environment plan (the planned intervention which focuses on the physical environment of the classroom) over an agreed period of time, the teacher and Behaviour Coordinator are of the view that the problem may stem from a specific pupil, the focus of the stage two intervention is on that particular pupil. This may involve specific support or interventions planned in conjunction with a Support for Learning Teacher, Guidance Teacher, Pupil support Teacher or CSW, as the focus is now on the pupil rather than the overall environment, parents/carers should be involved at this stage. The individual plans in stage two may run in conjunction with the planned interventions in stage one.
Stage 3	At this stage, it may be that intensive support is needed for a specific pupil and several agencies may be involved in a more formal way through the Liaison Group process. It may be that an individual educational programme will be drawn up. A small number of children and young people have needs which are very complex and they will require significant, multi-agency professional support throughout their school life. A Coordinated Support Plan may be opened for such pupils.

A MODEL OF STAGED INTERVENTION



Throughout the whole process there should be Parental involvement and regular review and Evaluation at school, individual Service and liaison group levels.

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Liaison Groups must be multi-agency in nature as they aim to support the key principle of providing Integrated Children's Services for children, young people and their families.

Core Group

Although individual liaison groups may vary in terms of their membership, the Core Group should consist of:

- (a) The Head of Establishment (early years)
- (b) The Head Teacher (primary) or the Depute Head Teacher (secondary).
- (c) The liaison Educational Psychologist.
- (d) The liaison Social Worker.
- (e) The liaison Community Paediatrician and/or the School Nurse.
- (f) The Health Visitor (early years).

Wider Group

Additional members of the team may be invited for specific meetings if they are already involved with the child, young person or family or if it is thought that they may be able to provide a useful contribution to the meeting or service to the child, young person or family:

- (a) Other pre-school/school representatives e.g. - nursery assistant
- class teacher
- pupil support staff (school based).
- (b) Other Education Service representatives e.g. Pupil Support Teachers (Pupil Support Service), Autism Outreach etc
- (c) Other Social Work Service representatives e.g. Children's' Service Workers, SFLO.
- (d) Other Health representatives e.g. - primary Mental Health Worker, DCFP, clinical Psychology, community nurses (learning disabilities) etc
- (e) Representatives of voluntary organisations and parent support services

Children of primary school age who are considered old enough and competent enough to participate in the meeting should be invited to attend. Unless it is felt not to be in the child's best interests, young people of secondary age should always be invited to attend.

Where children and young people are not invited to the meeting, or decide not to attend the meeting, time must be taken to discuss with them the key issues and to ask them for their views and possible solutions in a way that is appropriate to their age and stage of development.

Parents should always be invited to liaison group meetings.

PREPARATION AND SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS/CARERS

In order that parents/carers and children/young people can contribute effectively to the liaison group process, there needs to be appropriate and targeted preparation.

Preparation can take many forms, but must cover issues such as why the Liaison Group has been called, who will attend, what format the meeting will take, what contribution the child/young person and/or parent/carer will be expected to make.

Ideally, the liaison group will be part of a staged approach within the school and so will not be the first point of contact for the child/young person, parent/carer, except under exceptional circumstances. The key issues should already have been discussed within other forums and with individual members of the Liaison Group.

An individual and personal invitation for parents to attend the liaison group is generally less threatening and more likely to result in parents attending. A personal contact also gives the parents an opportunity to discuss any issues they may have prior to a liaison group meeting, to clarify who will attend, how the meeting will be run and why the liaison group discussion has been suggested.

Even when a personal invitation has been extended to parents/carers however, this should be followed up by a formal written invitation, confirming the details of the liaison group - venue, date and time. To signal that a liaison group meeting is solution focused, and to ensure that people are clear what the focus of the meeting may be, it is helpful to give a title for the meeting which is quite general, but worded using solution focused language e.g. 'To Consider Possible ways to Support John with his Friendships'; 'To Discuss Possible ways of Helping John Feel Happier'.

Parents/carers and children/young people may benefit from having a copy of the liaison group leaflet (appendix 1), or a similar personalised leaflet produced by the liaison group, including specific names (and photographs) to personalise the information provided.

Particular consideration should be given to the specific support needs of children/young people, to ensure they understand the liaison group process and how they can effectively contribute to this. Preparation for them should include discussion about the key issues and how they would like their views expressed at the meeting. This could be done verbally by themselves or a supportive adult or in writing and conveyed to the group by a supportive adult.

At the start of any meeting, the scene should be set by the chair or facilitator. People should always be introduced. A brief explanation of the purpose of the meeting should be given, along with a summary of the way the meeting will be run, since parents may not be too familiar with a solution focused style and need to be prepared for participating in a meeting which may have an unusual format.

PLANNING FOR TRANSITIONS

Early identification of and advanced planning for, vulnerable pupils or pupils with additional support needs, is beneficial at all transition stages. Most schools already have systems in place for transferring information from pre-school to primary and from primary to secondary school and some have systems that also link secondary schools to post-school educational establishments, training providers and employers. For children and young people with complex needs the liaison group is often central to this transition process.

Where a child/young person's placement is settled, planning for transitions can be straight forward. However, difficulties can occur in the planning process when placing requests are made for schools outwith the catchment area of the previously attended school or pre-school provision, or when pupils with significant additional support needs arrive in the area just prior to transfer, reducing the time available for planning. In addition, when all relevant agencies are not involved in the process, key information may not be available and therefore plans will be incomplete, potentially leading to difficulties in the future placement.

Although key transition stages are considered to be pre-school, school and post-school transitions, some children and young people may also require additional support when transferring to a different class, when there are significant changes in their home circumstances, or when key people in their lives move on and are replaced by other people working with them or caring for them.

At each of these transition stages, the liaison group may be involved in supporting the child/young person and his/her family and coordinating and planning with them to ensure that the transition occurs with the best possible outcomes. Liaison should take place with those professionals who are already involved with the child/family, or whom it is envisaged will become involved in the near future. Ideally, in a school transition, key members of the liaison group from the receiving school would be invited to attend a liaison group meeting in the current school to help plan the transfer. Once the transition has occurred, the new school may wish to invite a key member of the previous liaison group to the initial review meeting in the new context, to check that the transition has gone well and to use his/her prior knowledge and experience to help address any outstanding issues that may have been raised during the transition process or in the early days in the new setting.

For children/young people where needs are complex and long term, it may be possible to start the planning process well in advance. Particular liaison arrangements will be required at least three years in advance of the transfer where practical building adaptations are required. Preparation in relation to necessary staff training should be considered at least two years in advance of transfer where possible, so that there is time to access specialist training courses and whole school or staff group training can be arranged prior to the child/young person transferring.

Parents and young people should be fully involved in the planning process. Detailed information should be passed on to the receiving school/placement/support service, with parents and the child/young person having opportunities to meet with the new key people and to visit and get to know proposed new surroundings.

For school transitions, it is most useful to have an early meeting in the first term of the year prior to moving, with each member of the group taking responsibility for any agreed action points, and contact being maintained with parents to ensure the process is followed through. More formal review, in the spring at the latest, can then ensure that there is time to address any issues that remain outstanding, or that have been missed in the initial planning process.

ADMINISTRATION

Setting Dates

- Dates for regularly held liaison group meetings in larger schools should be set well in advance and annually where possible. This allows all core members to agree dates and schedule them into their diaries, thus ensuring time is protected and attendance assured.
- Smaller schools or pre-school groups may consider joining together to form a cluster group, where there are common core group members from other agencies. Dates can be agreed and scheduled on a regular basis throughout the year, with time being allocated to each school or pre-school group within the time available. This has the advantage of being time effective for professionals, while allowing flexibility for individual schools or pre-school group who may not require a very frequent liaison group arrangement.

Setting the Agenda

- Names of children/families to be discussed at liaison group meetings should be set in advance, in order that core members coming to the meeting can come prepared with relevant information to share with colleagues and families where this is available. Advance notice also allows parents to make arrangements to attend eg. arrange time off work, child care etc.
- Any member of the core group can request that a child's name be placed on the agenda. These should be children/families that have complex needs that would benefit from multi-agency discussion. Ideally, the agenda will not therefore be dominated by any one service.
- Care should be taken to ensure that adequate time is allowed for full discussion of each child/family. Generally 45 minutes would be sufficient for each discussion.
- Consideration should be given to ensuring that siblings are discussed - this may mean that staff from other schools will be invited. This can reduce the number of meetings families may need to attend and also the replication of work by Services. It also better coordinates the support and interventions by Services.

Chairing/Facilitating Meetings

The role of the chair or facilitator of a liaison group is crucial. This person has to have a commitment to the process, be able to have the group agree solutions and an action plan. Ideally some group members will be able to access or agree personal involvement, or resourcing if necessary or manage or be able to commit from a budget and the chair should be aware of this where it applies. They need to be able to communicate well, organise meetings and events well in advance and ensure minutes are accurate, clear, circulated timeously etc. The power of emotional intelligence and the softer skills of management and leadership are key aspects for the chair to possess. An effective manager of meetings ensures full cooperation and engagement of participants but also manages any conflict between the various partners involved.

Although various actions and direct interventions may be engaged in by individual liaison group members at other times, the liaison group meeting is the part of the process where actions are

reported upon, information is shared and work is evaluated. It is also where group decisions are made and action plans drawn up and is therefore a crucial aspect of multi-agency working.

With pressures on everyone's time, it is important that liaison group meetings work well, as ineffective meetings will lead to an unwillingness to participate in future meetings by members of the team.

In many groups, the membership will change from time to time. If the representative from any agency changes, the group effectively becomes a new group as the group dynamics also changes. A well functioning group may assimilate a new member into the group, but in many cases the chair will have to return to re-establish norms, roles and responsibilities again with the group members, before they can work to best effect.

The chair should ensure that the liaison group membership is big enough to generate discussion and be representative of a number of different agencies, but if too big will not be effective in their functioning. Generally it is accepted that group effectiveness is best around 6 to 8 and falls when numbers exceed 10.

Because many liaison groups take place in schools or pre-school settings, it is found to be most efficient if the advance notice of meetings, invitations, agendas, minutes, are sent out by school based staff. Given the skills required to be an effective chair, the liaison group core membership may wish to consider who would be best placed to provide these skills and therefore chair the group and not always rely on the Head Teacher. It may be agreed to have a single chair and minute taker, or consideration could be given to rotate these responsibilities. Alternatively, the group may agree that the Head Teacher will formally host and chair the meeting, but that another member of the group, more experienced or skilled in group management, will lead discussion etc.

Minuting Meetings - The Action Plan

Every Liaison Group discussion should result in an action plan which would be drawn up from the summary action points from the solutions generated during the meeting.

The action plan then becomes the minute of the meeting and should be circulated to core group members, additional contributions to the meeting and parents (and where appropriate children/young people). The action plan should be provided for group members as soon as possible after the meeting.

The action plan should include a list of actions agreed, linked to people who have agreed to follow through on each action, with an identified timescale.

The chair (or key person if identified) can then follow up action points and report back to the core group on the progress of the action plan at a later date.

Reviews

It is useful to include a review date as part of the action plan, especially for complex situations. A case may be reviewed by a subgroup of the Core Liaison Group, or a school based group only, where it is expected that a monitoring role only is required and progress is anticipated. This process must also include feedback to parents and where appropriate further face to face discussion with parents.

Full review (including parents/carers and children/young people) by the liaison group is time consuming, but is very useful in complex cases, or where situations may change significantly. It is perhaps more likely that for many children discussed at a liaison group meeting, the review takes place with a smaller group, with an update of progress provided to the core group.

Next Steps - Referral On

Individual members of the core group are likely to be the key practitioners in providing appropriate intervention for a child/young person or family discussed at a liaison group meeting. From time to time however, the liaison group will agree that it is appropriate to involve another agency or voluntary organisation and with parental permission will refer on to others who may be able to provide effective support. In these instances and with parental agreement, the chair will write to the organisation or individual on behalf of the liaison group, and coordinate their involvement with the child/family. Details of services that may be useful to contact or refer to are listed in the Easy Guide to Liaison Groups.

The Easy Guide is available on the Council's intranet and provides a list of the various support groups, agencies or personal resources available within the Inverness Area. Liaison groups may wish to refer to this when considering possible interventions for children/young people/families and in widening the support strategies that may be available to support individual situations. Additional services brought on board in this way will automatically provide wider group membership for future meetings.

For some children/young people, the liaison group may identify a resource that could be beneficial, which is not readily available to the core group members due to lack of financial resources, availability of personnel or due to the needs being so extreme that specialist resources are required e.g. offsite educational provision. In such cases the chair of the liaison group, on behalf of core members, can refer to the Area Children's Service Forum and request that the case be discussed by service managers. All referrals to the ACSF must be supported by a completed referral form (see enclosed) stating dates of liaison group discussions, with appended minutes.

Where the ACSF agrees to fund a resource, this would be time limited and if the initiative was shown to be successful but required the continuation of a particular resource, consideration should be given for this to be supported by mainstream budgets.

Any recommendation that a child/young person would benefit from an educational placement outwith mainstream education must be referred to the ACSF so that service managers are aware of the significant need that has been identified and either consider alternative courses of action, or support a request for further discussion at the Residential Placement Group.

The liaison group will also be the forum where discussion takes place about children or young people with Additional Support Needs who may have complex needs requiring input from several agencies in addition to education. Where these children have significant additional support needs, the liaison group may consider how these needs might be met and whether a coordinated support plan would be appropriate for the child/young person.

If it is agreed that this would be appropriate, the details should be referred on to the case working subgroup of the ACSF for the information of service managers. The key person from the liaison group will then coordinate the appropriate assessments required and link with parents and AEM in relation to the CSP process.

INVERNESS AREA CHILDREN'S SERVICES FORUM

Referral to IACSF Caseworking Sub-Group by:

Date of Referral:

NAME OF CHILD:

D.o.B:

SCHOOL:

LAC?

Yes No

Has situation been discussed at a School Liaison Group?

Yes No

SLG Date:

Agencies Involved:

Psychologist Nurse/Paediatrician

Social worker Other (specify):

Issues Unresolved:

Behaviour Attendance

Other (specify):

Actions already taken:

Unmet needs identified:

Case discussed with:

Senior Education Officer

Senior Educational Psychologist

Area Children's Services Manager

Resources Manager

Consultant Community Paediatrician

LHCC Manager

If required, who is best informed and therefore should be invited to attend IACSF Caseworking Sub-Group Meeting?

Background information available:

SOLUTION FOCUSED APPROACHES

A solution focused approach supports children, professionals and parents/carers in their wish to make changes to difficult situations. It does much more than simply emphasising positives. It allows for the experience and feelings of individuals to be listened to and validated, but also enables a different story to be told, one that emphasises the skills, strengths and resources of people involved.

A solution focused approach allows for the acknowledgement of the seriousness of the situation, but emphasises the coping strategies demonstrated by the adults and children involved and highlights the exceptions identified in the difficult behaviour pattern that may support individuals in identifying possible solutions and a more supportive way forward.

Fundamental Assumptions of a Solution Focused Approach

- An emphasis on the past and on details of the problem is not necessary for the development of solutions.
- There are always exceptions i.e. times when the problem is less evident or even absent.
- People have the internal resources and competencies to resolve their difficulties.
- A small change can lead to widespread changes.
- People generally want things to get better.
- The individuals own goal is central.

In multi-agency liaison group meetings, a solution focused approach is linked with a creative approach to problem solving. Parents and children are involved whenever possible to ensure that their goals and solution patterns are central to the process. The meeting acknowledges the issues, but also looks at times when the problem is less evident or doesn't exist. In finding solutions, there is a focus on one aspect which is seen to be a priority issue, which can be explored in greater detail in terms of focusing the process of looking for solutions and this can start the process of change.

The Process of a Solution Focused Meeting (Model 1)

- Brief discussion of the issues by the 'problem owner' (5-10 minutes). Brainstorm responses to the question "What really are the issues around child X?" and record responses on a flip chart (10 minutes).
- Each participant has 5 'votes' to indicate their priority issues for the child/family.

Votes can be cast by sticking self adhesive dots next to the relevant issues or marked on the flip chart with a marker pen (5 minutes).

- Brainstorm responses to the question "In how many ways may we address the issue of (priority issue from previous step)?" Phrase positively e.g. "Help X to get on better with his peers". Record on flip chart (10 minutes).
- Each participant has 5 votes again to cast, to identify the solution they feel would be most effective (5 minutes).

- The solution with most votes can be dealt with immediately. Draw up an action plan. Other solutions can be added to the action plan if appropriate. (5 minutes)
- Problem Owner coordinates the action plan.

The Process of a Solution Focused Meeting (Model 2)

- Brief discussion of the issues and concerns by the group (10 minutes).
As these are voiced, scribe records them on a flip chart.
- Facilitator leads discussion on what is going well at present and why while scribe notes responses on a second flip chart sheet.
- As answers are given, transfer these onto 3rd flip chart sheet under heading "future goals".
- Facilitator moves discussion on to times when these concerns have not been around, or have impacted less on the child/family/situation (looking for exceptions).
- Again, a list of times when the problem does not exist is listed on flip chart sheet 2, with possible linked solutions from this also being listed on flip chart sheet 3.
- At the end of discussion, flipchart sheet 3 "future goals", is an outline of the possible solutions and provides the framework for an action plan.
- The action plan is completed by assigning "jobs" from the list of "future goals" to group members, with specific time scales for completion.

More detailed training and briefing on running or participating in solution focused meetings can be provided by the Educational Psychology Service.

The Solution Oriented School Programme

Some schools in Highland Council have begun a journey to become Solution Oriented. The SOS programme provides the tools for meeting a range of challenges presented by children and young people in schools. This is a schools based training programme lead by the Educational Psychology Service that "is the most extensive solution focused school improvement programme ever designed" (Ben Furman).

It is an extensive programme that invites school staff to consider how solution focused approaches can be used across all aspects of the daily life of a school, influencing not only multi-agency meetings, but the language used in daily conversations, the way policies are written, the approach to supporting the learning and teaching within the school and the various strategies used to support pupils, parents and school staff alike.

Further information on the SOS can be provided by the Educational Psychology Service

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Multi agency liaison groups are not static processes and the core membership should be looking at continuing professional development and improvement to ensure the process remains effective and dynamic.

An essential component of professional development is both informal and formal training leading to skills development and enhanced knowledge and understanding. There is no prescriptive checklist for professional development, but there is a need to regularly consider what is required of individual core group members. Useful joint training collectively for the core group has been beneficial for some groups, as has awareness raising opportunities and training initiatives involving parents, voluntary organisations, whole service teams, or whole school staff groups.

Informal training may be experiential eg attending another liaison group to experience a different format that is considered to be working well. Informal training or development may also include discussion or reading around a particular topic area to improve knowledge or understanding.

More formal training may be organised at an individual level or for a whole liaison group, or even at Service level. This may be in-house training, with group members/participants training each other on various aspects of their individual work or responsibilities, or may be provided externally by presenters focusing on a specific aspect of work of relevance to the liaison group.

The training needs analysis provided below is a useful starting point for any individual core group member, who should consider at what level training is required and on what topic and then to consider what presentational style would be most appropriate and who might be best placed to provide this training/development, either individually or for the group as a whole.

Some possibilities for training and development might include:

- Training in solution focused approaches.
- Training in running and participating in solution focused meetings.
- The Solution Oriented School.
- Multi-Agency Working - what it is, how to do it, how to do it better.
- In-house training as a liaison group core team - developing a better understanding of different services, agencies and how they work.
- Working with parents, inclusive practices, involving/listening to young people.
- Better meetings - facilitation, preparation, roles, setting etc.

Spending time as a core group getting to know each other can be very powerful and ensure the development of trust and understanding. More formal training can be provided in a variety of ways and consultation with the Educational Psychology Service may be a useful point of contact for training delivery.

TRAINING AUDIT

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is having little knowledge or understanding and 10 is being very skilled and knowledgeable, rate yourself in relation to each of the areas below:

1 Knowledge and skill in using solution focused approaches.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2 Knowledge and skill in running or participating in solution focused meetings.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3 Knowledge and understanding of what makes effective multi-agency working.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4 Knowledge and understanding of what makes meetings effective.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5 Understanding and skill in working in effective partnerships with parents.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6 Understanding and skill in listening to and working effectively with children/young people.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7 Knowledge and understanding of the priorities and processes involved in working as a :

Social Worker: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Teacher/HT: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Ed Psych: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comm Paed: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

School Nurse: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8 Knowledge and understanding of where the liaison group process fits within the Highland Council's process of integrated children's services and the Wellbeing Alliance.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Training Priorities (as indicated from low scores).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Date: _____

ACTION PLAN:

SELF EVALUATION FOR LIAISON GROUPS

For any process to be shown to be successful there must be a clear expression of the aims and objectives of the process and expected outcomes upon which success can be measured.

The liaison group process requires a significant commitment from core group members and aims to support children/young people and their parents/carers during difficult periods in their lives and lead to positive outcomes.

In order to consider whether these positive outcomes have been achieved, it is crucial to build into the process some evaluative measures. These could include:

- Looking at outcomes for children and families.
- Developing the involvement of parents and pupils.
- Consideration of priorities, referral pathways, criteria for success
- Discussion of why members don't attend/how to make meetings a higher priority for core members.
- Formal evaluation methods (to target wider issues that need to be addressed).
- An action plan for future development of the liaison group.
- A training needs analysis for the core group

Etc

Evaluation can be informal e.g. asking parents for their anecdotal views on the process and it can be formal e.g. using semi-structured questions to obtain views of core group members.

Evaluation can be qualitative e.g. how people feel about liaison group meetings; and it can be quantitative e.g. how often various agencies attend meetings.

It is essential however to build some form of evaluation into the process and is recommended that this is undertaken with and by core members at least annually. Liaison groups may wish to use the evaluation tool provided below as a way of looking at various aspects of the process and identifying areas that require further development or discussion.

LIAISON GROUP - INTERNAL EVALUATION

It is intended that this evaluation is completed with all members of the liaison group. Although there are some sections that are quantitative in nature and clearly indicate areas where the liaison group is working effectively, or requires further development, many sections are more qualitative in nature and are intended to stimulate conversation within the liaison group as a means of facilitating change within the process, where necessary. Liaison groups should informally evaluate their effectiveness regularly, and formally, perhaps using this format, evaluate their practices at least annually.

1 ATTENDANCE

1.1 How often do core group members attend liaison groups?

	Always	Sometimes	Never
HT/AHT			
Other school staff			
Community Paediatrician			
Social Worker			
Educational Psychologist			
School Nurse			
Other			
Other			

1.2 If attendance is poor:

- i) Consider the reason why eg. Staff shortages, not prioritised by professionals etc.
- ii) Consider ways of making attendance at liaison groups more beneficial to professionals.
- iii) If the liaison group meets regularly, are meeting dates agreed termly or annually with core group members.

1.3 If attendance is good:

- i) Consider the reasons why and ensure as far as possible these positive conditions are maintained.

Comment - Ideally all liaison group core members would attend all liaison group meetings.

2 FUNCTION

2.1 Does the liaison group have a set of aims and objectives agreed by all core members
YES NO

2.2 If Yes, what are these?

2.3 If No, the liaison group may consider the following task:

- a. If you were a parent attending the liaison group, how would you want to be treated?
- b. Brainstorm responses by the liaison group members and record on a flip chart.
- c. Look for common themes and draw out key principles and aims from these.
- d. Look for agreed processes and draw out key objectives from these.
- e. Ensure these aims and objectives are revisited annually and are shared with any new core group members

2.4 Consider as a group, how the aims and objectives are translated into practice within the liaison group process.

Comment - In order to function effectively, each individual core group member should be aware of the aims and objectives of the liaison group and work towards these collectively.

3 TRAINING

3.1 What are the training needs of the liaison group?

Consider individual liaison group members' knowledge and training in - Solution focused approaches

Solution focused meetings
Multi-agency working
Effective meetings
Working with parents
Involving children/young people
Other.....

The Training Audit provided in the "Guidance for Liaison Groups" may be useful to use when considering training needs. If several members of the liaison group require training in a particular area, the liaison group should consider joint training. Where only one member requires training in a specific area, they should take responsibility for updating their individual skills as soon as possible.

4 PREPARATION

- 4.1 Are parents always invited to liaison group meetings? **YES** **NO**
If NO, the liaison group must consider how this situation can be rectified.
- 4.2 Do invited parents always attend? **YES** **NO**
If NO, the liaison group should discuss why this may be and consider changes that could be made to the liaison group process that could encourage more parents to attend more often.
- 4.3 Are children/young people always invited to attend meetings where their situation is being discussed? **YES** **NO**
If NO, the liaison group should consider changes that could be made to the liaison group process that could support the attendance of all children/young people considered old enough and capable of understanding and engaging with the process.
- 4.4 For children/young people not invited to attend, or invited and choosing not to attend, what measures are taken to ensure their views are **always** shared with members of the liaison group?
- 4.5 Is there clarity regarding preparation for families in relation to attendance at liaison group meetings?
Members should consider:
- Who invites the family
 - How the invitation is extended to the family
 - How is the parent/care prepared for the meeting?
 - purpose, core group members, format etc
 - What specific preparation is there for children/young people prior to the meeting?
 - What opportunities are there for follow up/debriefing from the meeting for parent/carers and children/young people?

Comment -

Parents should always be invited to attend meetings where their child is being discussed.

Ideally, parents invited to attend meetings should always attend, except in exceptional circumstances.

Children and young people should be invited to attend meetings where they are to be discussed, where it is felt they would be able to understand and engage with the process.

In all circumstances the views of parents/carers and children/young people should be brought to the meeting.

Preparation of families should facilitate attendance and engagement with the process.

5 PROCESS

- 5.1 What proportion of time is given during the liaison group meeting, to discussing problems as opposed to solutions?
- 5.2 Are written records kept of liaison group discussions?
What format do these records take?
Do parents and group members find these useful?
▪ How do you know?
- 5.3 What is the mechanism for reviewing the action plan?
- 5.4 What is the mechanism for keeping parents updated on the progress of the action plan ?
- 5.5 Are agreed action points followed through - **ALWAYS SOMETIMES SELDOM NEVER**
i) Why is this?
ii) What changes can be made to the liaison group process to ensure that action points are always followed through timeously and feedback is given to group members, parents/carers and children/young people.

Comment -

Ideally meetings should have a 80:20 split, with more time being spent on discussing solutions than problems.

In a 45 minute meeting, no more than 10 minutes should be spent on discussing problems.

If more time is required from a particular group member or parent to discuss the 'problems', this may be an indication that preparation has been incomplete and the group member or parent has not been able to express their concern or anxiety appropriately prior to the meeting, or that they have not felt 'heard' on previous occasions.

An action plan should be created from the discussion of the meeting and circulated to all invited shortly following the meeting.

A process of review should be agreed at the time of the meeting, so that the action plan can be followed-up, progress can be monitored and there can be feedback to families and group members.

6 EFFECTIVENESS

Consider the effectiveness of the liaison group meeting.

- Is the most appropriate/skilled person in the chair?
- Is the group an effective size (between 6-8 persons)?
- Is there shared responsibility between core group members regarding the functions of the group?
- Are roles within the liaison group clear?
- Is the administration of the group efficient - invitations, action plan, review etc?
- Is the time allocated for each meeting adequate and appropriate?
- Is the time used well eg solution focused?
- Are the outcomes for children and young people and their families better as a result of the liaison group discussion? How do you know?

OPTIONAL PROCESS FOR EVALUATING MULTI-AGENCY GROUPS

If liaison group members are unsure where specific issues lie, but feel that the liaison group is not effective, even though individual members are working well together, the group may consider the following activity.

In developing integrated systems of working there are implications for the individual professionals involved, the group that has to work together, and the organisation which the group members represent. At all levels these implications concern issues of readiness, the process of service delivery and the evaluation or outcomes of the work undertaken.

These two dimensions interact to form a matrix (Balchin et al, 2004).

Figure 1

	Readiness	Process	Outcomes
Individual			
Group			
Organisation			

The purpose of the matrix is two-fold:

1. To describe multi-agency work more effectively.
2. To use it in a Reflective Approach to foster more effective multi-agency work.

The first dimension to consider is at which level you want to reflect on your practice. The three levels are those of

- I. the individual practitioner,
- II. the multi-agency liaison group that work together and
- III. the service or organisation that the individual is a member of.

The second dimension is the stage of work to be analysed. There are three facets to a system:

- I. readiness;
- II. the process ;
- III. the outcomes.

Readiness

This cluster of factors is associated with what can be done prior to engaging in multi-agency work. For example the skills and experience a practitioner may need in order that they might engage in a piece of work. For example, where the practitioner is inexperienced, training or shadowing may be appropriate prior to the start.

Process

This cluster of factors is associated with both the immediate process, as in a meeting, as well as the ongoing process of engaging with several agencies. It could include the actual model of the meeting that is used, or reflection upon the work: how it is done and how this could be improved.

Outcome

This cluster of factors includes evaluation of the piece of work, reflection and feeding back into the next stage of the cycle. This would generally involve outcome measures, e.g. personal satisfaction,

attainment levels, or other success criteria, as well as the evaluation of the process as a whole, i.e. was it efficient or did it add value?

The Matrix

The two dimensions considered above are interacting dimensions. The readiness, process and outcomes provide important clusters at each level of work (individual, group and organisation). There are therefore nine clusters of factors, which fit into individual cells within the matrix.

examples of some factors appropriate to individual cells

	Readiness	Process	Outcomes
Individual	expertise, skills, attitudes	Interpersonal skills	satisfaction, action points
Group	purpose, relationships	group dynamics	meets goals, action plan
Organisation	practice, philosophy, policy	empowerment by agency	meets service objectives

ACTIVITY

To use this model to consider where the issues may lie in relation to a liaison group which is not working well, members should brainstorm 'What are the issues of concern in relation to the liaison group?' The responses should be recorded on a flip chart. Each issue can then be linked to each of the 9 cells in the matrix. The cell where most issues lie would be considered the priority area. Liaison group members can then consider 'In how many ways they may address the issues from this cell?' This then becomes the action plan for addressing the priority issues that are preventing the liaison group being effective.

Once these issues have been addressed, a second cell can be considered in the same way, addressing another group of issues, and so on.

REFERENCES

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Liaison Group Easy Guide found at <http://ntintra/educ/integrated-childrens-services/ics-inverness/>