The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

The CAF is a standardised approach to conducting an assessment of a child’s additional needs and deciding how those needs should be met. A Common Assessment can be undertaken by any practitioner who is designated by their agency to carry out the function. Parents/carers can also initiate this process. It would be beneficial for practitioners to have completed the two-part Integrated Working training prior to completion of the Common Assessment process.

Tools to aid Decision-Making

If a practitioner is considering whether a child/young person’s needs a Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the following actions can be taken to aid decision making:

• Seek guidance from line manager;

• Seek guidance from the Additional Support Manager

Consultation/seeking advice across services and professional disciplines is seen as essential if the right response is to be provided at the right time in the right way by the right people. All instances where guidance is sought have to be recorded. The practitioner requesting guidance has the responsibility for making a brief summary on the child’s record of:

• Who was approached for guidance;

• What advice was being sought;

• The guidance given;

• Whether consent to seek guidance and discuss with another professional has been obtained, and;
• What decision was made in the light of the guidance, including whether it was followed and the reasoning for not doing so?

Guidance may be sought without the consent of the parent and young person.
The CAF process in Cornwall

1. Child identified as not achieving at least one of the 5 outcomes with support from universal services and needs a multi-agency approach. You now have a responsibility to act. Pre-assessment checklist.

2. Is child at risk of significant harm or reaches the threshold for referral to Social Care?
   - Yes: Refer to Social Care in line with South West Child Protection Procedures.
   - No: Has CAF been initiated or is an LP in place? Check with locality team where child resides.
     - Yes: Discuss concerns with initiator or LP and/or join TAC.
     - No: Do parents/young person/child consent to a CAF?
       - Yes: Assess child’s needs using eCAF (to be completed as fully as possible).
       - No: Can needs be met by family/friends network?
         - Yes: Follow South West Child Protection Procedures if child is at risk of harm.
         - No: Can needs be met by a single agency response?
           - Yes: Service request to Family Group Conferencing.
           - No: TAC meeting to be held.

3. TAC takes place. Develop multi-agency plan and appoint Lead Professional. Plan may include referral for more specialist assessments.

4. Plan to be reviewed at 6 weeks, 3 months and 6 monthly intervals as appropriate.
Engagement and Obtaining consent

Before undertaking the common assessment, informed consent must be obtained from the family and where appropriate the child/young person (see section on Information Sharing for more detail). Consent should be written and explicit wherever possible. Consent should be recorded on the CAF form. Engagement with parents/carers and the child/young person is integral to the effectiveness of this process, which should be done ‘with’ parents/young people and not ‘to’ them.

Effective engagement is the key to securing effective outcomes for children and young people. Empowering parents/carers/young people is at the heart of this agenda which focuses on strengths as well as needs.

If consent is proving difficult to secure, practitioners should consult with their line manager and the ASM. If consent is ultimately refused, this should be recorded by the practitioner who tried to initiate the common assessment in line with their agency’s record keeping procedures. If consent is refused and the child’s needs remain unmet, continue to monitor and review consent in consultation with the child and/or family.

It is important to establish whether a common assessment has already been undertaken to avoid unnecessary duplication by contacting Locality Business Support:

If there are children/young people of varying ages within the family and the practitioner who has identified the need for a common assessment is not able to work across the age ranges, they should complete the common assessment for the child/young person with whom they are involved. They should identify which other practitioners may be able to undertake common assessments in respect of the other children/young people if required. They should communicate clearly with the relevant practitioners and alert them to the need to complete a common assessment in respect of the other children/young people within the family and involve them in the team working with the family, if appropriate.

The common assessment is a holistic assessment of the child/young person within the context of the family and community. It is not a comprehensive, core or specialist assessment, and provides the opportunity for practitioners and the family to gain a better initial understanding of the child/young person’s needs. The common assessment is not a referral to other services but it can be an aid in identifying more targeted or specialist support and/or inform more specialist assessments. The common assessment should be recorded on the Cornwall eCaf System.

The CAF Guidance should help with understanding and completion of the relevant parts of the CAF form:
This ensures that:

- Basic information about the child/young person and family is collected;

- Consideration has to be given to the child/young person’s development, the capacity of their parents to meet their needs and environmental factors;

- The views of the child/young person and their parents/carers have been considered;

- Information from other services involved with the family is taken into account (e.g. school, Health). It is the initiator’s responsibility to seek information from other agencies, where appropriate. It is the responsibility of practitioners from whom information is requested to ensure that information is relevant and up to date;

- The child/young person’s needs are clearly set out.

The common assessment should be completed as fully as possible by the initiator before the Team Around the Child (TAC) meeting. Through the eCaf system, the locality Business Support will circulate the CAF to members of the TAC prior to the first meeting.

When you complete the common assessment, it is good practice to:

- See the child/young person and seek their views;

- Include information about the child/young person’s home circumstances. This may often be based on a visit to the home;

- Discuss with the parent(s)/carer (unless the common assessment is being done for a young person who has not consented for the parents to be involved in the process, see section on Information Sharing for more detail).

The following are the potential outcomes upon completion of a common assessment:

- No further action where no needs have been identified or needs are already being met within initiating agency;

- Needs can be met through the family and friends network, this can include a referral to Family Group Conferencing (FGC);

- Referral to a single agency, where the assessment has clarified that the child/young person has additional needs which can be met by that single agency;
• Convene a Team Around the Child (TAC) meeting, where the assessment identifies a range of needs requiring a multi-agency response;

• Refer to specialist service, where the child/young person reaches the complex or acute threshold.

The completed common assessment form remains the responsibility of the initiating agency to retain in accordance with each agency’s own record-keeping procedures. One copy of the common assessment will remain in the Child’s electronic folder to be held centrally in accordance with Cornwall Council record-keeping procedures. **Another copy should always be given to the parents/carers (if the young person has consented) and the child/young person themselves** (taking into account their age and understanding). Consent must be obtained to share the common assessment form with other practitioners and agencies as appropriate (see section on Information Sharing), except where it supports a referral to Social Work on the grounds that the child may be at risk of significant harm.

*The process of undertaking a common assessment should not prevent services being delivered. Services can be delivered in parallel to a common assessment being undertaken.*

**Team Around the Child (TAC) Meeting**

A TAC meeting is convened whenever a common assessment identifies the child needs an integrated multi-agency response. If consideration is being given to whether a specialist assessment is needed an appropriate representative of the relevant agency should be invited to the meeting.

Further detail on the interfaces and pathways between the common assessment and specialist assessments and other services can be found on the Family Information Service website.

The practitioner and agency that carried out the common assessment is responsible for deciding who should be invited. Practitioners may seek guidance on this from their line manager, the ASM, the Family Information Services hub or the Services Directory. After submission of the eCaf, locality Business Support will ensure invitations to the Initial Team Around the Child (ITAC) are circulated. It is the initiators responsibility to ensure that invitations include:

• The parents/carers (unless a young person has not consented for the parents to be involved in the process);

• The child/young person, subject to their age and understanding;

• Any person currently actively involved with the child/young person and family, including universal services.
• Any other professional the initiator considers appropriate.

A TAC meeting’s **purpose** is to agree:

• A multi-agency action plan to meet the needs of the child/young person;

• Whether any specialist assessment is required (service directory can be consulted when appropriate);

• Who will be the Lead Professional;

• When the action plan will be reviewed;

• Identify what needs cannot be met;

• How the TAC will know when things have improved;

• The Action Plan will be completed electronically and submitted within 14 calendar days of the initial meeting.

During TAC meetings, professionals must be clear about services they can and cannot deliver. If there is a need which cannot be met by agencies represented in the TAC, the action point is likely to be a referral to or to contact the agency, rather than specifying the services that agency should deliver.

Every agency invited to the TAC meeting should give priority to attending the meeting. If nonattendance is unavoidable, a written report should be submitted identifying what needs they can meet and whether they consider it is appropriate for them to take on the role of the Lead Professional.

The initiator of the CAF has a responsibility to find out any dates or times on which parents are unable to attend the TAC meeting and also if the parents have any additional needs, e.g. problems with literacy, disabilities or access issues. All members of the TAC will be informed of the date, time and venue of the meeting via the eCaf system. Any verbal negotiations which are needed with parents about the date of the meeting should be done by the initiator. Meetings should be organised to facilitate parental attendance and it is the responsibility of the initiator to ensure this is the case.

If the parents do not intend to attend the meeting, it can go ahead **with their consent** but their views must be available at the meeting. If there is unexpected parental absence at the meeting, it is advisable to postpone the meeting. If the parents disagree or withdraw consent, the Lead Professional informs the other members of the TAC and the locality Business Support. In this circumstance, the Lead Professional should seek advice from their line manager or the ASM.
Needs of siblings may emerge during the TAC meeting. The Lead Professional takes responsibility for linking into the appropriate person to ensure a common assessment is undertaken for each child/young person with additional needs, if required. The TAC meetings may cover more than one sibling to prevent duplication, although each child’s needs should be considered on an individual basis.

The Initial TAC (ITAC) meeting can be chaired by an independent person, which can be requested when the eCaf is completed. The chair will record the multi-agency action plan and the nominated Lead Professional and will forward this via the eCaf system. Locality Business Support will circulate this to all those invited to the TAC meeting.

**Multi-Agency Action Plan**

The multi-agency action plan will specify what action will be taken by all those involved, detailing who has responsibility and what outcome is expected from the action. Actions must be timely, taking into account the fact that children grow up and delays can have a significant impact on development.

The record of the TAC meeting will be held in the Child’s electronic folder centrally, in accordance with Cornwall Council’s record keeping procedures. Each agency should retain a copy of the plan in accordance with it’s own record-keeping procedures.

The Lead Professional will chair further TAC meetings as often as necessary, but at a minimum every six months. Review meetings should be scheduled during the previous TAC meeting. The family can request a review at any time as can any practitioner involved with the family.

The review must evidence that:

- Each action specified in the plan is reviewed against the stated desired outcome;
- The views of the child/young person and their parents/carers have been clearly recorded;
- The outcome of any specialist assessment is considered;
- The plan is revised and updated
- Any identified unmet needs are recorded on the multi-agency action plan. The Lead Professional can contact the ASM for advice/support.

The amended multi-agency action plan agreed at the review meeting should be submitted and will be circulated to all members of the TAC, including parents through the electronic eCaf system.
Identifying Unmet Needs

It is important for planning purposes to identify circumstances where needs have not been met. If in the course of a Common Assessment or TAC Meeting, after exploring all services available, there are needs which are still not being met, the Lead Professional should record unmet need on the multi-agency action plan.

The ASM quality assures every CAF and multi-agency action plan. This will enable them to identify areas of unmet need, however it remains the responsibility of the Lead Professional to highlight unmet need to the ASM who may be able to help address this through creative and flexible use of resources.

What makes a well-completed CAF?

Quantity of information
- Sets the scene well - comments on all 3 domains,
- Something in every box but OK to only complete info known
- Enough detail but not too much
- Does not leave too many gaps
- Compromises between enough/fit for purpose
- Well-ordered
- Weighting of issues
- Says where info comes from and attributes comments
- Avoids jargon/sector-specific acronyms
- Well-presented: bullet points
- Comments are clearly explained for example, the comment “Mum says”
- Qualifies frequency/duration, not ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’

Approach
- Engages whole family; helps trust
- Clarity of purpose is important
- Evidence – informed by fact and opinion
- Non-judgemental
- Is a one-off: a snapshot in time
- Owned by the author
- Links observations to analysis
- Involves child throughout (not just at end)
- Makes comments specific e.g. who said what
- Focuses on impact on child not others
- Includes positives, strengths before needs
- Includes detail if necessary and relevant (explain why relevant now)
- Gives child’s views enough prominence
- Comments indicate it has been discussed with child
- Distinguishes ‘not known’ from ‘not relevant’
- Clear analysis
- Strong and clear conclusion, well pitched and achievable

Action Planning
- Sets clear plan of action: dates, responsible people
- Action plan has to be tailored to next stage of the process
- Prioritise actions
- Action plan must have timings within reasonable times.