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**Policy Title - Risk Assessment Policy**

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<b>Management Information</b>	
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**Definition: Policy – A course of action or set of standards adopted by the City of Edinburgh Council.**

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### 1. PURPOSE

This policy represents the Council's overarching statement in relation to the assessment and management of risk. From it flow policies, procedures, specialised assessment tools and guidance for each service area (child protection, adult protection and the management of dangerous offenders). These will be available on the Council's Intranet, which will provide hyperlinks to all relevant materials and assessment tools.

This policy is consistent with the recommendations of the Report of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review: Changing Lives. It reflects the aim of the Changing Lives review to develop an organisational approach to risk management and governance, which promotes excellence and learning from mistakes. The principles that underpin risk assessment and management are congruent with core social work values; these are described in Section 4 below. The policy identifies the key risk assessment and risk management tasks in child protection, adult protection and offender management. It sets out a shared statement regarding the language of risk that will inform the risk assessment and risk management policy documents for each area of work for social work and social care staff.

The context for the assessment and management of risk is the multi-disciplinary and multi-agency shared responsibility for the protection of individuals and this policy recognises and is consistent with the principles of other initiatives such as "Getting It Right for Every Child", the support and protection of vulnerable adults and the multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA).

The underpinning principle of this policy is that employees will not be limited by their own specialist role in identifying risk and will be potential gateways to all of our protective services.

In addition to this policy, protocols for the effective management of the boundaries between related services will be finalised to ensure seamless transitions for individuals moving between service areas or receiving services from more than one specialism. Failure to manage transitions effectively between social work service areas is likely to increase risk and it is important therefore that protocols are in place to ensure that social work and social care staff are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities.

### 2. SCOPE

The responsibilities of the City of Edinburgh Council social work and social care staff include the assessment of need and risk and the planning, co-ordination and review of services.

**This is in order to safeguard the well being of the most vulnerable adults and children, in particular those who:**

- are in need of protection due to their age or particular vulnerability; and/or
- are in danger of exploitation or significant harm; and/or
- are at risk of causing significant harm to themselves or others; and/or
- are unable to provide informed consent.

This policy, together with related and service specific policies and procedures, takes account of the fact that some very vulnerable people who require protection may also pose a risk to others, and the services they require must address both these aspects.

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Everyone has a responsibility to be aware of the risks the people who use our services may be exposed to, or present to others. They should be aware of the vulnerabilities of individuals and families and take steps to minimise these risks.

Key processes such as child protection, adult protection and offender management are broadly similar in terms of the need to identify individuals at risk or presenting a risk; share information; complete a risk assessment; develop a plan to manage that risk; and monitor that plan. Risk assessment and management are therefore central to the work of social work and social care staff in children and families, community care and criminal justice services. Increasingly, the above tasks are carried out primarily in a multi-agency forum and social work and social care staff will need to participate in discussions about risk outside their own specialisms. Staff from other services and disciplines will also have responsibilities in relation to the assessment and management of risk.

In order to carry out these tasks with maximum efficiency, consistency and effectiveness, it is important that social work and social care staff have a shared language and understanding of risk. Effective risk assessment and management require working together with others, both within agencies and across agency boundaries. Even within social work and social care, different organisational cultures within criminal justice, community care and children's services have implications for a common understanding and language of risk. Differences in language may be acute where agencies have differing value bases and cultural differences.

### 3. DEFINITIONS

**Risk** is defined as the probability of a future negative or harmful event \* occurring.

**Serious Harm** is defined as a risk which is life threatening and/or traumatic and from which recovery, whether physical or psychological, can be expected to be difficult or impossible. This may not be from a single event. Serious harm may result from exposure to repeated, less identifiable actions, neglect or emotional abuse, which cumulatively impact on the individual's proper development.

**Any assessment of risk of harm must consider the interaction between likelihood, impact/harm and imminence:**

- the relative likelihood that harm will be caused by an act or events \*
- the relative impact or harm caused by that act or events – what exactly might happen, to what or whom, under what circumstances and why
- imminence – how soon might it happen?
- relative vulnerability or resilience due to age and capacity.

**When thinking about risk of harm in these terms, the following may help workers develop a shared understanding:**

**Very high risk:** There is an imminent risk of serious harm. The potential event \* is *more likely than not* to happen imminently, and the impact could be serious.

**High risk:** There are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. The potential event \* *could* happen at any time and the impact could be serious.

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**Medium risk:** There are identifiable indicators of risk of serious harm. There is the potential for harm to be caused, but it is unlikely to happen unless there is a significant change in circumstances.

**Low risk:** Current evidence does not indicate likelihood of causing serious harm.

\*The term “event” does not necessarily imply a single episode. The impact of a series of events, each of which may be less critical on its own, may have a very serious impact on a child or adult’s development and well-being and therefore constitutes high or very high risk.

Professional judgment must be applied to circumstances where the impact of chronic neglect and/or emotional abuse will have an unacceptably harmful effect on a child’s development or an adult’s quality of life or self-determination. These events may include interventions made in the lives of individuals in order to protect them, and which may have some negative impact in themselves, e.g. removal from home, loss of primary carers, etc.

Sensitivity to the varying impact of risks on different individuals or groups is an essential characteristic of effective risk assessment and management. For example, the likelihood of harm and its relative impact will be different for a young child than for an adult faced with the same risk. Age and stage of development and associated resilience factors must be assessed on a case by case basis.

**Risk factors may be:**

- historical and not amenable to change, e.g. a conviction for an offence against a vulnerable person or child
- those areas of an individual or family’s circumstances that are enduring over a period of time over months or years, but are amenable to change and if changed may be expected to reduce the likelihood of a harmful event occurring, e.g. social isolation, parenting skills
- those areas of an individual or family’s circumstances that change quickly, perhaps over days or hours, and whose emergence indicates a period of critical risk, e.g. alcohol or drug abuse
- the weakness of protective aspects of an individual or family’s personal, inter-personal and environmental context that diminish or inhibit the likelihood of a harmful event occurring, e.g. family supports
- known characteristics or vulnerabilities, essentially internal to the individual, that might predispose them to risk of harm, e.g. age, learning difficulties.

## 4. POLICY STATEMENT

**Key principles of risk assessment and management:**

- risk assessment is a continuous and dynamic process
- risk assessment should be fair and balanced
- effective risk assessment and risk management depend on appropriate sharing of information between services, disciplines and agencies
- risk assessment should seek to engage and involve the individual (child or adult)
- risk assessment must encompass an assessment of needs as well as risks
- risk assessment in relation to minority ethnic groups and asylum seekers must be carried out

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in a culturally sensitive way, informed by expert advice, as necessary

- risk assessment should engage all agencies and perspectives
- risk assessment should lead to and inform risk management
- risk management is intended to reduce risk, but may not result in risk elimination
- risk management can support risk taking as long as all efforts are made to reduce the likelihood of harmful results
- effective risk management depends on all reasonable steps being taken in the light of reliable assessments that have evaluated and weighed all relevant information; on decisions being recorded and implemented; and on policy and procedure being followed appropriately.

**The Report of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review: Changing Lives identifies the core values of social work as:**

- respecting the right to self-determination
- promoting participation
- taking a whole-person approach
- understanding each individual in the context of family and community
- identifying and building on strengths.

These values can be expressed through protecting individuals, families and communities at risk of harm. Whilst risk assessment and management activities require to be rigorous, robust and defensible, they also need to be individualised, contextualised and responsive.

The relationship between worker and people who use services is paramount to effective working in risk assessment and management, and care must be taken to ensure that this is not eroded by the language and politics of risk. Practice must not become defensive and risk averse, but must be underpinned by good quality professional judgement and clear accountability.

Social workers should have access to risk assessment frameworks, which guide their thinking and promote consistency. These should allow them to evidence their professional assessment by helping them focus on key information and risk factors and avoid assumptions.

The outcome of such an assessment will allow the worker to determine what action requires to be taken and to develop a plan to manage the risk. Effective risk management is underpinned by good risk assessment.

**Risk management involves attempts to put in place controls that will minimise:**

- “risky circumstances”
- the likelihood of a harmful event(s) occurring
- the impact of the harm.

**and that will promote protective factors.**

The risk management plan (or elements included in the care plan, which can be described as a risk management plan) should clearly link to the identified risk factors and should incorporate objectives that are specific and measurable, with identified responsible officers and clear timescales.

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### 5. RESPONSIBILITIES

Social work staff are responsible for the effective application of risk assessment tools, combined with the exercise of professional judgement; and for risk management planning, monitoring and review. Operational and senior managers are responsible for supporting staff in discharging their responsibilities, providing them with the necessary tools to do so, and for ensuring compliance with this policy and the procedures that flow from it. The Chief Social Work Officer is responsible for standard-setting and overall governance arrangements with regard to the management of risk.

### 6. LEGISLATION AND POLICY CONTEXT

This policy takes account of and has been developed with reference to the following legislation, policy and procedure documents.

[Adult Support and Protection \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#)

[Adults With Incapacity \(Scotland\) Act 2000](#)

[Management of Offenders \(Scotland\) Act \(2005\)](#)

[Mental Health \(Care and Treatment\) \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#)

[The Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#)

### 7 ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

[Adult Protection Policy \(Joint\)](#)

[Adult Protection Procedure \(Joint\)](#)

City of Edinburgh Council, Children and Families Assessment of Children in Need and Standard Assessment Policy (*under revision*)

[Code of Practice for Adult Support and Protection Act \(2007\)](#)

[Code of Practice for Adults with Incapacity Act \(2000\)](#)

[Edinburgh and Lothians Inter-Agency Child Protection Procedures \(2007\)](#)

[ELBEG Child Protection Office Risk Assessment Framework March 2008](#)

[ELBEG Protection of Vulnerable Adults Guidance \(under review\)](#)

[Its everyone's job to make sure I'm alright \(Scottish Executive 2002\)](#)

Lothian and Borders Criminal Justice Social Work Consortium Risk Assessment and Risk Management Planning Staff Procedure (January 2007) (*under review*)

[Protecting Children and Young People: Framework for Standards \(Scottish Executive 2004\)](#)

[Protecting children living in families with problem substance use: guidelines for agencies in Edinburgh and the Lothians \(August 2005\)](#)

[The Report of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review: Changing Lives](#)

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