

Sussex Social Work Initial Statement Guidance

The three Sussex Local Authorities – Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council, and West Sussex County Council have developed this guidance and template to enable social workers to complete the national template for social work evidence effectively.

Social workers need to make explicit their evidence base and the strength on which their judgements are being made.

It must be made clear how the information has been triangulated, e.g. what have you observed the child to do and what information has been provided about the child.

Social workers must be clear that the evidence base is your own social work judgement based on your observations and analysis as well as what your experience and research tells us. When using research discuss this with your manager and legal representative and ensure that it is a reliable source. You must be aware of the counter arguments and have a rationale as to why you reject these counter arguments. Bring copies of the piece of research into court with you if you have not already provided them to your legal representative.

How to use the templates

The document can act both as a template and guidance. It is a Word document and so can be used directly to draft your statement. In order to use this successfully please note the colour coding, which will require adaptation before any statement can be submitted for the comments of your manager or lawyer.

Please remove all comments in **purple** before submitting – the comments in purple are guidance to assist you in the completion of the statement.

You are invited to adopt any of the wording in **blue** which is useful, but feel free to delete/adapt as you wish. Please ensure that the colour of any blue text adopted in your statement is changed to black before submitting.

General tone

To show due respect, adults should be referred to as Ms, Mr, Mrs... and children should be referred to by full names initially and thereafter by their first names.

Professionals should be referred to as Dr, Ms, Mr, Mrs with their professional role identified.

Additional Guidance

1. Placement options (7.1)

This is one of the most important sections of the statement, and perhaps the most difficult to get right.

Each LA has provided specific additional guidance on how to set out the evaluation of placement options, which will need to be the subject of tailored legal advice in each case. You are asked to read this additional guidance and consider seeking legal advice before drafting this section.

(consider at this stage whether there is any need to consider a sibling attachment assessment)

2. ADM process

The details of this process are set out in MIN 31 which should be consulted. MIN 31 may be revised in due course.

It is essential at this stage to consider the need to book a slot for the child/children with the Agency Decision Maker. The ADM should have considered the case before final evidence is submitted.

At the time of booking the ADM slot the social worker must also arrange the adoption medical without which the ADM cannot consider the case.

If the social worker is unsure about the timing of the ADM slot they should discuss this with their allocated lawyer. It is not prejudging the outcome of assessments to book the ADM slot at an early stage, rather it is ensuring that if adoption is the outcome, there is no delay to proceedings and there is sufficient time to make use of the findings of any assessment in planning for the individual child.

Section 7 of the Statement

In appropriate cases this may be the best place to include information about whether the local authority is considering placing the child in a "fostering to adopt" placement. If this is the case the social worker would already have discussed this with the allocated lawyer - if not they should seek legal advice immediately.

Timescales

The three Sussex authorities are committed to filing evidence of a consistently high standard.

To achieve this all statements should be sense and spell checked, and the content approved by the social work direct line manager before being submitted to the allocated lawyer. The lawyer needs to receive the draft for consideration no less than two working days prior to either the date identified for the issue of proceedings or the court deadline for the filing of evidence.

Sara Boothroyd
West Sussex County Council
01.12.14