

7 CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

7.1 INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION

- 7.1.1 Child protection conferences bring together family members, the child (where appropriate), supporters/advocates and those professionals most involved with the child and family.
- 7.1.2 All agencies must make reasonable efforts to ensure that staff involved in child protection work are committed to and achieve:
- Sharing of information
 - Careful preparation for conferences, including the provision of reports
 - Attendance at conferences
 - Contribution to decision making
 - Delivery of actions that are planned to safeguard the child /ren

7.2 TYPES OF CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE

Purpose of initial conference

- 7.2.1 The purpose of the initial child protection conference is to:
- Share and evaluate information in an inter-agency setting regarding the child's health, development and functioning and the parent / carer's capacity to ensure the child's safety and promote their well being within the context of their wider family and environment
 - Make judgements about the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm in future and decide whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm
 - Decide if the child should be the subject of a child protection plan and if so the category of abuse or neglect the child has suffered
 - Decide what future action is needed to safeguard the child and promote her/his welfare, how that action will be taken forward and with what intended outcomes and time-scales
- 7.2.2 The conference must consider **all** the children in the household, even if concerns are only being expressed about one child.

Threshold for convening an initial conference

- 7.2.3 Children's Social Care must convene an initial child protection conference when it is believed that a child may continue to suffer or be at risk of suffering significant harm.
- 7.2.4 This decision will be the outcome of the assessment undertaken during the s.47 enquiry that concludes that the concerns were substantiated and the child is judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm.
- 7.2.5 The Children's Social Care team manager makes the decision to convene a child protection conference and must record her/his reasons.
- 7.2.6 Where the outcome of a s.47 enquiry was not to convene a conference, a senior member of another agency may request a conference be convened if s/he has serious concerns that a child's welfare may not otherwise be adequately safeguarded. Any such request should normally be agreed (see also [6.12 Professional Disagreement at Enquiry Stage](#)).

Timing of initial child protection conference

- 7.2.7 The initial child protection conference should take place (offering those invited as much notice as is practicable within 15 working days of the last strategy discussion of the s.47 enquiry.
- 7.2.8 The initial conference should, when possible, be held before expiry of an Emergency Protection Order, unless further legal action is planned to safeguard the child.
- 7.2.9 Where a Child Assessment Order has been made the conference should be held immediately on conclusion of examinations and assessments.
- 7.2.10 Any delay must have written authorisation from the Children's Service Manager (including reasons for the delay) and Children's Social Care must ensure risks to the child are monitored and action taken to safeguard the child. All such actions must be recorded on file.

REVIEW CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE

Purpose of review child protection conference

- 7.2.11 The purpose of the review conference is to:
- Review the safety, health and development of the child against the intended outcomes set out in the child protection plan
 - Ensure measures put into place to ensure the child is adequately protected from the risk of harm are effective and appropriate
 - Bring together and analyse information about the child's health, development and functioning and the parent / carer's capacity to ensure the child's welfare and promote their welfare
 - Make judgements about the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm in the future
 - Decide if the child should continue to be the subject of a child protection plan and if so, the category of abuse or neglect s/he has suffered
 - Decide what future action is needed to safeguard the child and promote her/his welfare, how that action will be taken forward and with what intended outcomes and time-scales
 - Consider any required changes to the child protection plan
 - Determine any need for a new Core Assessment
- 7.2.12 The conference must decide explicitly if the child is still at continued risk of significant harm and hence whether a protection plan is required. If so, the category of abuse or neglect the child has suffered must be re-considered.
- 7.2.13 If the child is judged to no longer require a child protection plan, the conference should consider what support may benefit the child and family and who is responsible for providing that support.

Timing

- 7.2.14 The first review conference must be held within three months of the initial conference. Further reviews must be held at intervals of not more than six months, for as long as the child remains subject to a child protection plan.
- 7.2.15 Consideration should always be given to bringing the date of a conference forward where:
- Child protection concerns relating to a new incident or allegation of abuse have been substantiated
 - There are significant difficulties in carrying out the child protection plan including failure to engage or meet appointments

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- A child is to be born into the household of a child who is the subject of a child protection plan
- A person identified as presenting a risk, or potential risk, to children is to join or commences regular contact with the household
- There is a significant change in the circumstances of the child or family not anticipated at the previous conference and with implications for the safety of the child
- A child subject to a child protection plan is looked after by the local authority and consideration is being given to returning the child to the circumstances where care of the child initially required a protection plan (unless this step is anticipated in the existing protection plan)
- The core group believe that consideration should be given to ending the child protection plan

PRE-BIRTH CONFERENCE

Purpose

- 7.2.16 A pre-birth conference is an initial child protection conference concerning an unborn child. Such a conference has the same status and purpose and must be conducted in a comparable manner to an initial child protection conference (see Pre Birth Procedures [9.19](#)).

Threshold for pre-birth conference

- 7.2.17 Pre-birth conferences should always be convened where there is a need to consider if a multi-agency child protection plan is required. This decision will usually follow from a pre-birth assessment (see [9.19.32](#))
- 7.2.18 A pre-birth conference should be held where a:
- Pre - birth assessment gives rise to concerns that an unborn child may be at risk of significant harm
 - Decision to initiate care proceedings has been made as a result of a pre-birth assessment
 - Previous child has died or been removed from parent/s as a result of significant harm
 - Child is to be born into a family or household which already have child/ren subject to child protection plan/s
 - Person identified as presenting a risk, or potential risk, to children resides in the household or is known to be a regular visitor

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- 7.2.19 Other risk factors to be considered are:
- The impact of parental risk factors such as mental ill-health, learning disabilities, substance misuse and domestic violence
 - A mother under sixteen about whom there are concerns regarding her ability to self care and/or to care for the child
 - A parent previously suspected of fabricating or inducing illness in a child
- 7.2.20 If the conclusion of the pre-birth assessment is that a pre-birth child protection conference should be held, or the criteria in 7.2.18 apply, the conference must still be convened if the prospective parent/s plan to move to another local authority.
- 7.2.21 All agencies involved with pregnant women should consider the need for an early referral to Children's Social Care, so that assessments are undertaken and family support services provided as early as possible in the pregnancy.

Timing of conference

- 7.2.22 The pre-birth conference should take place as soon as it has been identified either by a Core Assessment or a strategy meeting that the unborn child is likely to be at risk of significant harm.
- 7.2.23 This should generally be by twenty to twenty four weeks of pregnancy to allow sufficient time for an assessment of parenting ability, planning support during the pregnancy and following the birth of the baby.
- 7.2.24 Where there is a known likelihood of a premature birth, the conference should be held earlier.
- 7.2.25 Where the outcome of an assessment is to convene a child protection conference, the meeting should be held within fifteen working days of the decision.

Timing of review conference

- 7.2.26 The timing of the first review conference should be decided at the initial conference but must be within three months.

TRANSFER CONFERENCE

- 7.2.27 If another local authority notify Children's Social Care that a child subject to a child protection plan has moved permanently to Hertfordshire, a transfer conference should be held within fifteen working days of the receipt of the notification.

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- 7.2.28 Responsibility for the case rests with the original authority until the conference has been held, but local staff should co-operate with the key worker from the originating authority to implement the child protection plan and record a 'temporary child protection plan' on the child's social care record (see 12.3).
- 7.2.29 The key worker from the originating authority must be invited to the transfer conference and asked to submit a report. The transfer conference is an initial conference. However, discontinuation of the child protection plan from the previous local authority should only be agreed at this conference following a full assessment of the child and family in their new situation. Such an assessment should be undertaken by CSF in conjunction with other agencies in Hertfordshire and from the originating authority.
- 7.2.30 If a child protection plan is agreed at a transfer conference, a review conference should be held after three months.

7.3 MEMBERSHIP OF CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE

- 7.3.1 A conference should consist of the smallest number of people consistent with effective case management, but the following should normally be **invited**:
- Parents / carers
 - Child (if of sufficient age and understanding (see 7.5))
 - Children's Social Care Social / key worker and team manager
 - Those involved in any enquiries e.g. Police CAIU officer
 - Health services staff involved with child/ren - e.g. health visitor, school nurse, GP
 - Education services (schools, education welfare officers etc)
- 7.3.2 Additional invitations to conference should be limited to those who are, have been or will be involved with the child and/or parents / carers or have a specialist contribution to the task and may include:
- Childcare Litigation Unit
 - Foster carers (current or former) and their supervising social worker
 - Probation service, YOT or Prison staff
 - Health (including mental health) services involved with or able to provide relevant medical information regarding parent/s / carers and / or child/ren e.g. paediatricians, specialist doctors, ward staff, psychiatrists, community psychiatric nurses, social workers, specialist learning disability services, speech therapists etc

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- Midwifery, midwifery managers and relevant neonatal services where the conference concerns an unborn or new-born child (see 7.2.16)
- Housing services
- Alcohol and substance abuse services
- Domestic Violence Officer (Hertfordshire Constabulary) or other domestic violence advisors
- A representative of the Armed Services (where appropriate)
- Any professional or service provider currently or previously involved with the children or adults in the family, e.g. family centre, early years staff, Connexions
- Any other relevant professional or service provider (including involved voluntary organisations)
- Supporter (including advocate), friend or solicitor (as supporters for the child and parent / carers)
- Wider family members
- The children's guardian where there are current court proceedings (in the role of an observer, but entitled to a copy of the notes to use in court proceedings)

Child protection team attendance at child protection conferences:

7.3.3 The 'child protection team' consists of Police, child protection school liaison officer (CPSLO), child protection nurse and the community paediatrician.

Initial conferences

7.3.4 Three members of the Child Protection Team (Police, CPSLO and child protection nurse) are expected to attend initial conferences.

7.3.5 Community paediatricians will attend in the following circumstances:

- The child has suffered a new physical injury; since the last conference there is a new medical report or results of a forensic medical examination that requires interpreting
- The parents are in dispute about medical findings
- The child has a medical disorder / disability
- There is concern about growth and / or development

Review conferences

7.3.6 The child protection nurse should attend every review.

7.3.7 CPSLOs should attend every review at which a child of school age is being discussed.

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- 7.3.8 Police will only attend if there are specific issues upon which their advice / expertise is required such as when there is an ongoing police investigation, domestic violence or neglect.
- 7.3.9 Community paediatricians will attend in the circumstances described in 7.3.5 above:
- 7.3.10 When there are medical issues relating to parents / carers (e.g. physical / mental health issues, drug / alcohol abuse concerns) every effort should be made to secure the attendance of the relevant health professional – whilst paediatricians can offer advice in such situations, it is not their specialist area of expertise.

Legal attendance at conferences

- 7.3.11 The Law Society provides professional guidance on attendance by lawyers at child protection conferences.
- 7.3.12 The local authority legal advisor is both a legal advisor to the chair and to the local authority, although will not normally provide advice during a conference. S/he may not question parents directly and in exceptional circumstances may have to withdraw if there are any indications that admissions are to be made by parents.
- 7.3.13 The solicitor for parent or child may attend as a representative of child or supporter of parent to assist her/his clients to participate and, with the chair's permission, to speak on their behalf. See www.lawsociety.org

Attendance of agency representatives

- 7.3.14 Professionals who are invited but unable to attend for unavoidable reasons should:
- Arrange wherever possible for another representative to attend on her / his behalf
 - Inform the Child Protection Co-ordinator
 - Submit a written report (see 7.7)
- 7.3.15 Requests for a professional observer to attend a conference should be made to the Child Protection Co-ordinator a minimum of 3 working days before the conference. The observer must not take part in discussions or decision-making.

QUORATE CONFERENCES

- 7.3.16 The **primary principle** for determining quoracy is that there should be sufficient agencies or key disciplines present to enable safe decisions to be made in the individual circumstances.

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- 7.3.17 Normally, minimum representation is Children's Social Care social work team and at least two other agencies or key disciplines that have had direct contact with the child and family.
- 7.3.18 In exceptional cases, where a child has not had relevant contact with three agencies, this minimum quorum may be breached. The Chair should exercise discretion as to whether to proceed with a conference which is inquorate, taking into account the available information and the need to safeguard the welfare of the child.
- 7.3.19 Where an inquorate conference is held an early review conference, should be arranged, if the child protection plan is continued.
- 7.3.20 If the decision of the inquorate conference was to discontinue the protection plan, the chair should seek the views of other involved agencies first. This should be done in writing within ten working days, and written responses provided within a further ten working days. In the event of disagreement see Professional Disagreement at / Arising from Child Protection Conferences at [7.10](#)

7.4 INVOLVING PARENTS / CARERS & FAMILY MEMBERS

- 7.4.1 Parents and carers must be invited to conferences, unless exclusion is justified as described (see [7.6](#)).

Information provision & planning

- 7.4.2 The social worker must facilitate their constructive involvement by ensuring in advance of the conference that they are given sufficient information and practical support to make a meaningful contribution.
- 7.4.3 The social worker must explain to parents / carers the purpose of the meeting, who will attend, the way it will operate, purpose and meaning of implementing a child protection plan and the complaints process.
- 7.4.4 Preparation should include consideration of childcare arrangements to enable the attendance of parent/s.
- 7.4.5 Written information should be left with the family regarding conferences, the right to bring a friend, supporter (including an advocate) or solicitor (in role of supporter), details of any local advice and advocacy services and the conference complaints procedure.
- 7.4.6 The role of the supporter is to enable the parent / carer to put her/his point of view, not to take an adversarial position or cross-examine participants. The family need to be aware that any supporter will hear personal information about the child/ren, parents and partners.

Use of interpreters

- 7.4.7 Those for whom English is not a first language must be offered and provided with an interpreter, if required.
- 7.4.8 Provision should be made to ensure that visually or hearing impaired or otherwise disabled parents / carers are enabled to participate. A family member should not be expected to act as an interpreter of spoken or signed language (see 9.12).

Parent / carer provision of information to the conference

- 7.4.9 Parents / carers should be helped in advance to consider what they wish to convey, within the time available, how they wish to do this and what help and support is required e.g. communicating in writing or by tape to provide a summary of their perception of concerns and of their strengths to meet their child's needs.
- 7.4.10 If parents / carers are unable or do not wish to attend the conference they should be provided with full opportunities to contribute their views and the social worker will facilitate this by:
- Providing alternative means to communicate with the chair
 - Exploring the use of an advocate or supporter to attend on behalf of the parent / carer
 - Enabling the parent / carer to write or tape her/his views
 - Agreeing that the social worker, or any other professional, expresses her/his views

Prior meeting with chair

- 7.4.11 Immediately before the conference, the chair should meet with family members to ensure they understand the process. If there is potential for conflict, separate meetings with different parties may be needed.

Potential of conflict between family members

- 7.4.12 Explicit consideration should be given to the potential of conflict between family members and possible need for children or adults to speak without other family members present (see 7.6).

7.5 INVOLVING CHILDREN

- 7.5.1 The child, subject to her/his level of understanding, needs to be given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the conference. In practice, the appropriateness of including an individual child must be assessed in advance and relevant arrangements made to facilitate attendance at all or part of the conference.

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- 7.5.2 If, in accordance with the criteria below, it is assessed that it would be inappropriate for the child to attend, alternative arrangements should be made to ensure her/his wishes and feelings are made clear to all relevant parties - e.g. use of advocate, written or taped comments.

Criteria for presence of child at conference

- 7.5.3 The primary questions to be addressed are:
- Does the child have sufficient understanding of the process?
 - Has s/he expressed an explicit or implicit wish to be involved?
 - Parents' views about the child's proposed presence
 - Is inclusion assessed to be of benefit to the child?
- 7.5.4 The test of 'sufficient understanding', is partly a function of age and partly of capacity to understand. Generally, a child of less than twelve years is unlikely to be able to be a direct and/or full participant in a conference. An older child is potentially able to contribute. However, each child should be considered individually and consideration taken of her/his maturity, intellectual and cognitive development.
- 7.5.5 To establish her/his wish with respect to attendance, the child must be first provided with a full and clear explanation of its purpose, conduct and membership and potential provision of an advocate or support person.
- 7.5.6 Written information translated into the appropriate language should be provided to those able to read and an alternative medium e.g. tape, offered those who cannot read.
- 7.5.7 A declared wish **not** to attend a conference (having been given such an explanation) must be respected.
- 7.5.8 Consideration should be given to the:
- Views of and impact on parent/s of the child's proposed attendance
 - Impact of the conference on the child e.g. if s/he has a significant learning disability or if it will be impossible to ensure s/he is kept apart from a parent who may be hostile and/or attribute responsibility to the child

Indirect contributions when a child is not attending

- 7.5.9 When a child is not attending, the social worker must ensure her/his wishes and feelings are effectively represented. Means to achieve this might include agreeing one or more of the following:
- A pre-meeting with the conference chair

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- Representation via an advocate or supporter
- Written statements, e-mails, text messages, taped comments and/or drawings prepared alone, with the social worker or with independent support
- A social worker / any other professional, express her/his views

Direct involvement of a child in a conference

- 7.5.10 In advance of the conference, the chair and social worker should agree whether:
- The child attends for all or part of the conference, taking into account confidentiality of parents and/or siblings
 - S/he should be present with one or more of her/his parents
 - The chair meets the child alone or with a parent / carer prior to the meeting
- 7.5.11 If the child attends all or part of the conference, it is essential that s/he is prepared by the social worker or independent advocate, who can help her/him prepare a report / tape recording or rehearse any particular points that the child wishes to make.
- 7.5.12 Those for whom English is not a first language should be offered and provided with an interpreter (see 9.12).
- 7.5.13 Provision should be made to facilitate a child who has any form of disability to participate.
- 7.5.14 Consideration should be given to enabling the child to be accompanied by a supporter or an advocate.

7.6 EXCLUSION OF FAMILY MEMBERS FROM A CONFERENCE

- 7.6.1 Exceptionally it may be necessary to exclude one or more family members from part or all of a conference.
- 7.6.2 These situations will be rare, and the conference chair, must be notified as soon as possible by the social worker or other professional, if it is considered necessary to exclude one or both parents for all or part of a conference.
- 7.6.3 The chair should make a decision according to the following criteria:
- Indications that the presence of the family member may seriously prejudice the welfare of the child
 - Sufficient evidence that a parent / carer may behave in such a way as to interfere seriously with the work of the conference such as violence, threats of violence, racist, or other forms of discriminatory or oppressive behaviour or being in an unfit state

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e.g. through drug, alcohol consumption or acute mental health difficulty (but in their absence a friend or advocate may represent them at the conference)

- A child requests that the parent / person with parental responsibility or carer are not present while s/he is present
- The presence of parents would prevent a participant from making her/his proper contribution
- The need (agreed in advance with the conference chair) for members to receive confidential information that would otherwise be unavailable, such as legal advice or information about a criminal investigation
- The need (agreed in advance with the conference chair) for members to receive information which cannot be shared with one or more parents / carers as this could put at risk family members or professionals
- Potential conflicts between different family members may suggest they attend at separate times e.g. in situations of domestic violence

7.6.4 If a worker from any agency believes a parent should, on the basis of the above criteria, be excluded, representation must be made, if possible at least three days in advance, to the conference chair.

7.6.5 The agency concerned must indicate which of the grounds it believes is met and the evidential basis of its request. The chair must consider the representation carefully and may need legal advice.

7.6.6 If, in planning it, it becomes clear to the chair there may be conflict of interests between child/ren and parents, the conference should be planned so that the welfare of the child/ren remain paramount.

7.6.7 This may mean arranging for child and parents to participate in separate parts of the conference and organising separate waiting arrangements. Any exclusion period should be for the minimum duration necessary and must be clearly recorded in conference notes.

7.6.8 It may also become clear at the beginning or in the course of a conference, that its effectiveness will be seriously impaired by the presence of the parent/s. In these circumstances, the chair may ask them to leave.

7.6.9 Where a parent is on bail, or subject to an active Police investigation, it is the responsibility of the chair to ensure the Police can fully present their information and views and also that the parents participate as fully as circumstances allow. This may involve the chair and Police having a confidential meeting prior to the conference.

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- 7.6.10 The decision of the chair over matters of exclusion is final regarding both parents and the child/ren.
- 7.6.11 If the chair has decided, prior to the conference, to exclude a parent, this must be communicated in writing to the parent who must be informed about how to make their views known, how s/he will be told the outcome of the conference and about the conference complaints procedure (see [7.13](#)).
- 7.6.12 If a decision to exclude a parent is made, this must be fully recorded in the notes. Exclusion at one conference is not reason enough in itself for exclusion at further conferences.
- 7.6.13 Those excluded should be provided with a copy of the social workers report to the conference and be provided with the opportunity to have their views recorded and presented to the conference.
- 7.6.14 Where a parent / carer attends only part of a conference as a result of exclusion, s/he should receive the record of the decisions made at the conference.
- 7.6.15 The chair has the authority to decide if:
- If the entire record may be provided or
 - (Usually) only that part attended by the excluded parent / carer
- 7.6.16 A decision to withhold part of the record is justifiable on the basis of:
- **Health and safety**, where to provide the entire record might increase the risk to the child or relevant others or
 - **Sensitive third party information** the sharing of which is unjustified e.g. health related information
 - **A current criminal investigation**, the effectiveness of which might otherwise be undermined or
 - **Other legal considerations** (usually on basis of legal advice)
- 7.6.17 The relevant procedural responses to professional or service user dissatisfaction about the above decisions are provided at [7.10](#) and [7.13](#) respectively.

7.7 INFORMATION FOR CONFERENCE

SOCIAL WORK REPORT

- 7.7.1 The social worker should provide to the conference a legible, signed and dated written report, using the ICS exemplar for initial and review child protection conference reports.
- 7.7.2 A separate report must be prepared for each child who is a **subject** of the conference (as previously determined by the social worker and her/his manager).
- 7.7.3 Even if not the subject of the conference, **all children** in the household **need to be considered** at both initial and review conferences and information provided on each of them.
- 7.7.4 The report should be provided to parents and older children (to the extent that it is believed to be in their interests) at least one day before initial conferences and two days before review conferences to enable any factual inaccuracies to be identified, amended and areas of disagreement noted.
- 7.7.5 When necessary, a report should be translated into the relevant language or medium.
- 7.7.6 A report should be provided to the chair at least one working day before an initial, and two working days before a review conference, having been previously shared with the parent/s.

INFORMATION FROM OTHER AGENCIES

- 7.7.7 It is the responsibility of **all** the agencies who have participated in the enquiry or who have relevant information to make this available to the conference in the form of a written, legible and signed report.
- 7.7.8 All agencies should have a pro forma for reports.
- 7.7.9 Reports must make it clear which child/ren are the subject of the conference, but address any known circumstances of **all** children in the household.
- 7.7.10 Reports should not contain information which would be more appropriately provided in the absence of one or more family members (see exclusion of family members from conference 7.6.3 5th and 6th bullet point).

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- 7.7.11 The report should be provided to parents and older children (to the extent it is believed to be in their interests) at least forty eight hours in advance of initial and five working days before review conferences so that any factual inaccuracies are identified, amended and areas of disagreement noted.
- 7.7.12 When necessary, a report should be translated into the relevant language or medium.
- 7.7.13 The report should be provided to the chair at least one working day before an initial, and two working days in advance of a review conference.
- 7.7.14 If any agency representatives are unable to attend the conference s/he must ensure a written report is made available through the chair and, if possible, that a colleague attend in her/his place.

7.8 CHAIRING OF CONFERENCE

- 7.8.1 The chair of a child protection conference:
- Should be a professional with sufficient status to ensure inter-agency commitment to the conference and child protection plan
 - Should be independent of operational or line management responsibilities for the case
 - Is accountable to the Director of Children, Schools, Families
- 7.8.2 Wherever possible the chair of the initial conference should also chair any subsequent review conferences.
- 7.8.3 The chair must meet with child and family members (and interpreters if required) prior to the conference to ensure they understand the purpose of the conference and how it will be conducted.
- 7.8.4 At the start of the conference the chair should:
- Set out the purpose of the conference
 - Confirm the agenda
 - Emphasise the need for confidentiality
 - Address diversity issues e.g. specifying that racist, sexist, homophobic and threatening behaviour will not be tolerated
 - Clarify contributions of those present, including family supporters
- 7.8.5 During the conference the chair should ensure that:
- The conference maintains a focus on the welfare of the child/ren
 - Consideration is given to all the children in the household

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- All those present (including if relevant parents and child/ren) make a full contribution and that full consideration is given to the information they offer
- Reports of those not present are made known to parties
- The wishes and feelings of the child/ren are clearly outlined
- Issues of race, religion, language, class, gender, sexuality and disability are fully taken into account
- Appropriate arrangements are made to receive 3rd party confidential information
- Decisions are reached in an informed and systematic way
- All concerned are advised / reminded of the complaints procedure
- Arrangements are made with the social worker for absent parents or carers to be informed verbally (wherever possible) of the decisions of conferences, in addition to written notification

7.8.6 If the child is made the subject of a child protection plan the chair should ensure that:

- A key worker from Children's Social Care is identified to develop, co-ordinate and implement the child protection plan (if this is not possible, the relevant team manager should be the point of contact and procedures in 8.9 followed)
- A core group is identified of family members and professionals
- A date is set for the 1st core group meeting within ten working days of the initial conference and timescales set for subsequent meetings
- A date for the child protection review conference is set
- The child protection plan is outlined and clearly understood by all concerned including the parents and where appropriate the child

7.8.7 If the child is not made the subject of a child protection plan or the child protection plan is discontinued, the chair must ensure consideration is given to any need to promote the child's welfare, through the use of a child's plan and/or other appropriate recommendations made (see 7.9.26-28).

7.8.8 If parents / carers disagree with the decision of the conference, the chair must further discuss their concerns and explain the complaints process (see 7.13).

7.8.9 The Child Protection Unit will enter the decisions of the conference on the database.

7.9 ACTIONS & DECISIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

THRESHOLD FOR A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

- 7.9.1 The conference should consider the following question when determining whether the child needs to be the subject of a child protection plan:
- Is the child at continuing risk of significant harm?
- 7.9.2 The test is that either:
- The child can be shown to have suffered ill-treatment or impairment of health or development as a result of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect, **and** professional judgement is that further ill-treatment or impairment is likely; or
 - A professional judgement, substantiated by the findings of enquiries in this individual case or by research evidence, is that the child is likely to suffer ill-treatment or the impairment of health and development as a result of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect
- 7.9.3 If the child is at continuing risk of significant harm, s/he will require inter-agency help and intervention delivered through a formal child protection plan.
- 7.9.4 This threshold must be considered at both initial and review conferences, for each subject child.

AGREEING TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

- 7.9.5 The chair of a conference is responsible for the conference decision. S/he will consult conference members, take account of any written contributions received and aim for a consensus as to the need for a child protection plan, but ultimately will make the decision and note any dissenting views.
- 7.9.6 Any dissent by professionals must be recorded in the conference notes.
- 7.9.7 The decision making process will normally take place with parents / carers present.
- 7.9.8 The need for a child protection plan should be considered separately in respect of each child.

Unborn baby

- 7.9.9 If a pre-birth conference determines an unborn child is in need of a child protection plan, her/his surname and expected d.o.b. should be entered onto the social care record at once and name and d.o.b. confirmed and entered onto all agencies' records at birth (see also [9.19](#))

CATEGORY OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

- 7.9.10 If the decision is that the child is at continuing risk of significant harm and in need of a child protection plan, the chair should determine under which category of abuse or neglect the child has suffered.
- 7.9.11 This decision making process must occur at both initial and review conferences. Where the category is changed at a review conference, the chair must ensure there are sufficient grounds.
- 7.9.12 The category/ies used (physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect) must indicate to those consulting the child's social care record the primary presenting concerns (reflecting all information obtained during assessments and analysis) at the time the child became subject of a child protection plan. For further information on the definition of these categories see module [3](#).
- 7.9.13 Multiple categories should not be used to cover all eventualities, but it may, on occasions be appropriate to use more than one category if each of the categories reaches the threshold for significant harm and if a specific risk might otherwise be underestimated.
- 7.9.14 Emotional abuse should only be used as a secondary category if substantial concern is indicated.

Unborn baby

- 7.9.15 If a decision is made an unborn baby will be subject to a protection plan, the main cause for concern must determine the category and the plan outlined to commence **prior** to birth (see [9.19](#)).
- 7.9.16 The core group must be established and meet if at all possible prior to the birth, and certainly prior to the baby's return home after a hospital birth. This should not delay the baby's discharge from hospital.

'Outline' child protection plan

- 7.9.17 When it has been agreed that the child should be subject to a child protection plan, the chair should ensure that the outline child protection plan drawn up by conference members enables both professionals and the family to understand exactly what is expected of them and what they can expect of others. This should include:
- Any immediate action to safeguard the child/ren
 - Time limited short and longer term objectives clearly linked to action to promote the child/ren's health and development and reduction of the likelihood of harm
 - Required outcomes, linked to a reduction in the risk to the child/ren i.e. what needs to change
 - Identification of further action, core and specialist assessments of the child and family that may be required to ensure sound judgements can be made on how best to safeguard the child and promote her/his welfare (assessments should include all parents / carers with whom the child lives or stays with)
 - Responsibility for tasks ascribed to specific members of the conference, including family members
 - Planned outcomes of each intervention, including required progress to be achieved within specified timescales
 - Method of monitoring and evaluating progress, including identifying which professional is responsible for checking required changes and frequency and nature of agency contact
 - Consideration of a contingency plan if agreed actions not completed and / or circumstances change e.g. legal action and the circumstances that would necessitate its use
 - Identification of a key worker, a qualified experienced social worker (see 8.4)
 - Identification of core group membership, and timescales for their meetings and the production of the protection plan (see 8.2 and 8.3)
- 7.9.18 The outline plan should include an indication of what the conference believes needs to change before the child protection plan can be discontinued.
- 7.9.19 There should be an individual plan outlined for each child subject to a child protection plan (see module 8 for further details of outline child protection plan, key worker and core group role).

DISCONTINUING THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

- 7.9.20 The same decision making procedure (described above) for agreeing the use of a child protection plan, is used to discontinue the use of a child protection plan for a specified child.
- 7.9.21 A child's name should no longer be the subject of a child protection plan if:
- A review conference judges that the child is no longer at continuing risk of significant harm and no longer requires safeguarding by means of a child protection plan
 - The child has moved permanently to another local authority area and the new area has convened a child protection conference (see [12.3.16-12.3.21](#))
 - The child has reached eighteen years of age, has died or has permanently left the UK
- 7.9.22 See [9.13](#) for procedures with regard to discontinuing the child protection plan for looked after children.
- 7.9.23 It is permissible for the Head of Child Protection to discontinue a child protection plan, without the need to convene a child protection conference, only when one or other of the latter two criteria in paragraphs [7.9.21](#) are satisfied.
- 7.9.24 When a child's protection plan has been discontinued on the authorisation of the Head of Child Protection, the decision and the consultation with other agencies must be clearly recorded in the child's social care record.
- 7.9.25 When a child's protection plan has been discontinued as a result of a conference conclusion, notification should be sent, at a minimum, to all agencies representatives who were invited to attend the initial conference which led to formulation of a child protection plan.

IF CHILD IS NOT THE SUBJECT OF A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

- 7.9.26 If it is considered that the circumstances do not meet the threshold for a child protection plan to be made or if a child protection plan is to be discontinued, but the child is judged to be in need of help to promote her/his health or development, the conference must ensure that recommendations are made to this effect.
- 7.9.27 Subject to the family's views and consent, it may be appropriate to:
- Continue the Core Assessment (if not already completed) of the child's needs to help determine the support required

- Make recommendations about support and help, allocation of a social worker or other lead professional
- Establish commitment to inter-agency working, particularly where the child's needs are complex (this should involve a regularly reviewed child's plan)

7.9.28 Any ongoing support should be provided using an ICS child's plan, using multi-agency meetings (and/or family group conferences) as the vehicle to make and review plans.

7.10 PROFESSIONAL DISAGREEMENT AT / ARISING FROM CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE

7.10.1 The chair of a conference is responsible for the conference decision. S/he should consult conference members and aim for a consensus, but ultimately make the decision and note any dissenting views.

7.10.2 Research and fatal case reviews have shown that differences of opinion between all agencies can lead to conflict and result in a less favourable outcome for the child. When dissent occurs, the social worker must therefore involve that agency in future decision-making and any child protection or child in need plan.

7.10.3 An individual who dissents from the chair's decision must determine whether s/he wishes to further challenge the result.

7.10.4 The following procedure may also be employed if a participating professional has serious concerns about the process followed by the conference and feels unable to resolve these on a face to face basis with those concerned.

7.10.5 In the unlikely event that the dissenting professional believes the decision reached by the chair places a child at (further) risk of significant harm, s/he should formally raise the matter with her/his manager or agency's designated doctor / nurse / teacher.

7.10.6 If that designated doctor / teacher / nurse concurs with the concerns of the professional, s/he should immediately alert the Head of Child Protection in the local authority.

7.10.7 In the light of the representations made, the Head of Child Protection must determine whether to:

- Uphold the decision reached by the conference chair or
- Require that a review conference be brought forward

- 7.10.8 In the unlikely event the outcome of these alternate steps fail to satisfy the concerned professional, the issue should be put as a matter of urgency to the LSCB chair who can determine what further responses (if any) are a justifiable and proportionate response.

7.11 ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

- 7.11.1 Those attending should be notified of conferences as far as possible in advance, and the conference held at a time and place likely to be convenient to as many people as possible.
- 7.11.2 All child protection conferences (initial and review), should have a dedicated person to take notes and produce records of the meetings.
- 7.11.3 The written record of the conference is a crucial working document for all relevant professionals and the family and should include:
- The essential facts of the case
 - A summary of discussion at the conference, which accurately reflects all contributions
 - All decisions reached, with information outlining the reasons
 - A translation of decisions into an outline child protection plan enabling everyone to be clear about their tasks
- 7.11.4 The decision of the conference and where appropriate details of the category of abuse or neglect, the name of the key worker and the core group membership should be circulated to those invited to the conference within 1 working day.
- 7.11.5 A copy of the written record of the conference should be sent within ten working days of the conference to all those who attended or were invited to attend, including family members (except for any part of the conference from which they were excluded).
- 7.11.6 If parents and / or the child/ren have a sensory disability or if English is not their first language, steps must be taken to ensure that they can understand and make full use of the conference record.
- 7.11.7 When a friend, supporter or solicitor has been involved, the chair should clarify with the parent whether the record should be provided for those individuals.
- 7.11.8 If a child has attended a child protection conference, the social worker must arrange to see her/him and arrange to discuss relevant sections of the conference record. Consideration should be given to whether a child should be given copies of the record. They may be supplied on request, to her/his legal representative.

CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

- 7.11.9 The record is confidential and should not be passed by professionals to third parties without the consent of the conference chair or order of the court.
- 7.11.10 In criminal proceedings the police may reveal the existence of child protection records to the Crown Prosecution Service (in accordance with the Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act 1996) and in care proceedings the record of the conference may be revealed in court.
- 7.11.11 Every agency must establish arrangements for the storage of child protection conference records and associated records in accordance with their own confidentiality and record retention policies.

7.12 RECORDING CHILD IS SUBJECT OF A PROTECTION PLAN

The record

- 7.12.1 Children's Social Care IT systems should be capable of recording in the child's case record when the child is the subject of a child protection plan.
- 7.12.2 Each local authority's IT system which is supporting the Integrated Children's System (ICS) (required to be fully operational by 01.01.07) should be capable of producing a list of all the children resident in the area (including those who have been placed there by another local authority or agency) who are considered to be at continuing risk of significant harm, and for whom there is a child protection plan.
- 7.12.3 The principal purpose of having the IT capacity to record that a child is the subject of a child protection plan is to enable agencies and professionals to be aware of those children who are judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm and who are the subject of a child protection plan. It is equally important that agencies and professionals can obtain relevant information about other children who are known or have been known to the local authority. Consequently, agencies and professionals who have concerns about a child should be able to obtain information about a child that is recorded on the local authority's IT system; see www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/ics
- 7.12.4 It is essential that legitimate enquirers such as Police and health professionals are able to obtain this information both in and outside office hours.
- 7.12.5 Children should be recorded as having been abused or neglected under one or more of the categories of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect, according to a decision by the chair of the child protection conference. These categories help indicate the nature of

the current concerns. Recording information in this way also allows for the collation and analysis of information locally and nationally and for its use in planning the provision of services. The categories selected should reflect all the information obtained in the course of the Initial and Core Assessment under s.47 of the Children Act 1989 and subsequent analysis and should not just relate to one or more abusive incidents.

Managing & providing information about a child

- 7.12.6 Hertfordshire's Head of Child Protection (who is accountable to the Director of Children's Social Care) has responsibility for:
- Ensuring that records on children who have a child protection plan are kept up to date
 - Ensuring enquiries about children about whom there are concerns or who have child protection plans are recorded and considered in accordance with paragraph 5.152 *Working Together To Safeguard Children 2006*
 - Managing other notifications of movements of children into or out of the local authority area such as children who have a child protection plan
 - Managing notifications of people who may pose a risk of significant harm to children who are either identified with the local authority area or have moved into the local authority area and
 - Managing requests for checks to be made to ensure unsuitable people are prevented from working with children
- 7.12.7 Information on each child known to Children's Social Care should be kept up-to-date on the local authority ICS IT system, and the content of the child's record should be confidential, available only to legitimate enquirers. This information should be accessible at all times to such enquirers.
- 7.12.8 The details of enquirers should always be checked and recorded on the system before information is provided.
- 7.12.9 If an enquiry is made about a child and the child's case is open to Children's Social Care the enquirer should be given the name of the child's key worker and the key worker informed of this enquiry so that they can follow it up.
- 7.12.10 If an enquiry is made about a child at the same address as a child subject of a child protection plan, this information should be sent to the latter child's key worker.
- 7.12.11 If an enquiry is made but the child is not known to Children's Social Care, this enquiry should be recorded on a contact sheet together with the advice given to the enquirer.

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- 7.12.12 In the event of there being a second enquiry about a child who is not known to Children's Social Care, not only should the fact of the earlier enquiry be notified to the later enquirer, but the designated manager in Children's Social Care should ensure that the local authority's consider whether this is or may be a child in need (chapter 5.153 *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2006*).
- 7.12.13 The DfES holds lists of the names of designated managers and should be notified of any changes.
- 7.12.14 Module 2 provides further guidance about law and best practice with respect to information exchange.

7.13 COMPLAINTS BY SERVICE USERS

- 7.13.1 Parents / carers and, on occasion children, may have concerns about which they may wish to make representations or complain, in respect of one or more of the following aspects of the functioning of child protection conferences:
- The process of the conference
 - The outcome, in terms of the fact of and/or the category of primary concern at the time the child became the subject of a child protection plan
 - A decision for the child to become, or not to become, the subject of a child protection plan or not to cease being the subject of a child protection plan
- 7.13.2 Complaints about individual agencies, their performance and provision (or non-provision) of services should be responded to in accordance with the relevant agency's complaints handling process.
- 7.13.3 Any complaint about aspects of the functioning of conferences described above should be addressed to the conference chair. In the first instance s/he should attempt to address the complaint informally and this may include holding a meeting with the complainant.
- 7.13.4 If matters cannot be resolved at this stage the complaint should be passed on to CSF and be responded to in accordance with the '*Complaints Policy and Procedure November 2006*'.
- 7.13.5 In considering and responding to complaints Children's Social Care should form an inter-agency panel made up of senior representatives from LSCB member agencies. The panel should consider whether the relevant procedures have been observed correctly, and whether the decision that is being complained about follows reasonably from the proper observation of the relevant protocols and procedures.

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- 7.13.6 If following this process, the complaint is upheld, the inter-agency panel (including any review panel that is set up further to review an ongoing complaint) should refer any recommendation regarding the criteria in bullet points 1-3 of [17.13.1](#) to a reconvened child protection conference.
- 7.13.7 This should be held as quickly as possible under the authority of a different chair and child protection team, which should again consider, taking into account any recommendation made, whether the test for registration (namely the risk of continuing significant harm) is met and if so the relevant category for concern.
- 7.13.8 A complainant who continues to be dissatisfied with the outcome of the reconvened child protection conference may seek a review of the position from the inter-agency panel. The review panel should be convened and operated in accordance with the current complaints regulations.
- 7.13.9 In addition, representations and complaints may be received by individual agencies in respect of services provided (or not provided) as a consequence of assessments and conferences, including those set out in child protection plans. Such concerns should be responded to by the relevant agency in accordance with its own processes for responding to such matters.