



Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board

Professionals' Escalation and Resolution Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy has been produced by the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board to ensure that all agencies working with children, young people and families within Plymouth are supported to quickly resolve, and if necessary escalate, professional differences where there are concerns that the safeguarding and welfare of children and young people are being compromised or put at risk.
- 1.2 Safeguarding partners and agencies must act in accordance with the safeguarding arrangements for Plymouth, and will be expected to work together to resolve any concerns or disagreements. This Policy seeks to promote effective multi-agency practice and engagement, and support healthy professional challenge within the multi-agency system.
- 1.3 Occasionally situations arise when professional disagreements occur. Agencies which are able to professionally challenge each other, and understand the process for escalating concerns, can provide better outcomes for children and are an indicator of a healthy safeguarding partnership.
- 1.4 All workers should feel able to challenge decision making and to see this as their responsibility in order to promote the best multi-agency safeguarding practice. This Policy provides workers with the means to raise concerns that they have about decisions made by other professionals or agencies.
- 1.5 The Policy is not designed to replace the statutory complaints processes established within individual agencies. It does not include procedures when there is a disagreement regarding the need to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference or the implementation of the Child Protection Plan. Such complaints must be addressed using the Plymouth City Council Children, Young People & Families Service complaint process. All agencies are responsible for ensuring that their staff are supported and know how to appropriately escalate and resolve interagency concerns and disagreements about a child or young person's well-being, and respond to safeguarding needs.
- 1.6 **At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.**

2. Potential Areas of Disagreement

2.1 The following is a non-exhaustive list of potential areas of disagreement for which this Policy may be used:

- A referral not considered to meet the threshold for assessment by Children's social care;
- Children's social care conclude that further information should be sought by the referrer before a referral is progressed;
- There is disagreement as to whether the child protection procedures should be invoked;
- Children's social care and the Police place different interpretations on the need for significant agency response in relation to a child protection enquiry;
- There is a disagreement over the sharing of information and/or provision of services;
- There is disagreement over the outcome of any assessment and whether the appropriate action plan is in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

3. Key Principles

3.1 Professionals should always:-

- Share key information in a lawful, timely and appropriate manner. Further information is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice>;
- Seek to resolve the issue quickly and at the practice rather than at the management level;
- Ensure professional differences do not place children at further risk by obscuring the focus on the child or delay decision making;
- Keep focus on the child's safety and welfare at all times
- Familiarise themselves with the escalation routes within their agency for resolution and escalation
- Ensure accurate and contemporary recording on the child's file of key decisions and conversations in relation to this resolution process;
- Stay proactively involved – **safeguarding is everyone's responsibility**;

4. THE PROCESS

4.1 Professionals involved in this resolution process must keep an up to date record of all discussions they have, including within agency and multi-agency conversations. Agreed actions and outcomes must also be recorded along with any outstanding issues and how these will be addressed. Records must be approved and dated and included in the child's file together with any other written communication and information.

4.2 Some matters may be resolved very quickly, and this will be determined by the complexity of the issue. In all cases, the matter should be resolved as swiftly as possible, and the primary focus shall be on ensuring the safety and welfare of the child concerned is assured at all times.

4.3 Stage 1: Preventing Disputes

In the first instance the professional with concerns should raise the matter with the relevant practitioner/decision maker in the other agency verbally and attempt to resolve differences through discussion within one working day. Where resolution is reached the outcome will be confirmed in writing between the relevant practitioners and details of the concern and its resolution must be recorded on the child's file.

If the practitioners are unable to resolve their concerns it must be reported by them to their front line managers or equivalent in writing within the same working day. With respect to most day to day issues, the relevant line managers will be able to resolve the disagreement. The respective front line managers shall make contact with each other within 1 working day of receipt of the written notification of disagreement. The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. The front line managers shall seek to resolve the concern within 2 working days, or a timescale which protects the child from harm (whichever is the less), of receipt of the written notification of disagreement.

Where necessary the relevant front line managers should seek advice from their agency's designated safeguarding children professional.

Where resolution is reached the outcome will be confirmed in writing between the relevant front line managers and reported to the relevant practitioner within 2 working days of said resolution. The detail of the concern and its resolution must be recorded on the child's file.

4.4 Stage 2: Informal Dispute Procedure

Where it is not possible to resolve the matter at front line management level, the matter should be referred, within the same working day, to second tier management level. The issues shall be considered at second tier management level and/or include Team around the Family. The second tier manager or Team around the Family must contact their agency's designated safeguarding children professional and seek their advice (if not already done so). If the area of concern relates to whether a case meets the threshold for a referral or for a service from Children's social care, then the relevant Service Manager will also be involved in the discussion.

A resolution should be achieved within a further 5 working days or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less). Where a resolution is reached, the receiving second tier manager shall confirm the same in writing to their counterpart in the agency raising the concern within 2 working days of said agreement.

4.5 Stage 3: Formal Dispute Procedure

If despite following Stage 2 an agreement has not been reached, the concern must be referred within 1 working day to the appropriate Head of Service, (e.g. safeguarding manager, detective inspector, head teacher or other senior designated manager or health professional) who will consider the matter with their equivalent level of management within the agency raising the concern.

The purpose of escalating the dispute to this level is to reach a position where differing professional opinions have been taken into account and efforts made to explore whether dispute has arisen through lack of clarity or understanding in the professional dialogue. Ultimately a decision will need to be reached where agencies agree a way forward where the decision of the child takes precedence over a professional stalemate.

A resolution should be achieved within 5 working days or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less), of receipt of the concern. Where a resolution is reached, the receiving Head of Service shall confirm the same in writing to their counterpart in the agency raising the concern within 2 working days of the said agreement.

4.6 Stage 4: Where disagreements remain

In the unlikely event that the professional disagreement remains unresolved, the matter must be referred without delay to the Assistant Director of Children, Young People and Family Services) who will determine a course of action and report the matter, within 1 working day of receipt, to the Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The LSCB Business Manager shall be copied into disagreements that have escalated to this level. In the absence of the LSCB Chair, the matter will be addressed by the Vice Chair.

The LSCB Chair may seek further written information and will confer as necessary with senior managers/named professionals/designated professionals in the agencies involved and others as may be required. Senior managers, professionals and practitioners shall use all best endeavours to make themselves available to the LSCB Chair.

The LSCB Chair shall make written recommendations to the agencies involved within 5 working days (or a timescale that protects the child, whichever is the sooner) of the issue being brought to his/her attention.

Where there may be lessons to be learned for future practice the LSCB Chair can consider holding a multi-agency case review.

The LSCB is not an operational body, and cannot direct the actions of partner agencies. However, the LSCB as a body has a strong expectation that agencies will work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child and shall act upon the recommendations of the LSCB Chair.

The recommendations of the LSCB Chair and actions undertaken shall be recorded by the respective agencies upon the child's file and fed back to all those involved.

5. Contact

For more information, please contact the Plymouth Safeguarding Children Board Business Unit at:

Telephone: 01752 307144
Email: pscb@plymouth.gov.uk
Website: www.plymouthscb.co.uk

6. Learning

- 6.1 This protocol provides information on how the process of resolving professional differences should be managed. It is helpful to promote good working relationships by resolving differences at the earliest opportunity on the same day if possible. If the process is followed in full to resolve the difference then this should also be seen positively as a way to promote shared understanding of issues and inform future practice. At any stage a reflective practice meeting can be convened.

7. Review

This Policy will be reviewed and monitored through the PSCB Quality and Assurance Group.

Issue Date: 23 April 2019
Next Review: 29 September 2019

8. PROCESS FLOWCHART

