

# CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

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## 1. THE INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE (ICPC)

**NB.** All of the current procedures should be read in conjunction with revised guidance on Signs of Safety. Where CP Plans are referenced; these will be superseded incrementally with Danger Statements and Family Safety Plans.

Following substantiated Section 47 Enquiries, an Initial Child Protection Conference brings together family members (and the child where appropriate), supporters or Advocates for the family and key professionals involved with the family, to make decisions and inform planning around the child's future safety, health, development and welfare. If concerns relate to an unborn child, or a parent of children about whom safeguarding concerns are being considered is expecting another child, consideration should also be given as to whether a child protection conference should be held prior to the child's birth. Consideration should also be given to the impact of a new-born child on the family and parenting capacity.

### PURPOSE OF ICPC

- To bring together and analyse all relevant information in an interagency forum to plan how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. It is the responsibility of the conference to consider the evidence and information and decide whether or not the child is suffering or is at continuing risk of suffering significant harm. It is the task of conference to make recommendations on how agencies should plan and work together to safeguard the child in future. Conference tasks include:

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- Appointing a Lead Social Worker, who should be a qualified, experienced social worker.
- Identifying membership of the Core Group of professionals and family members who will develop and implement the outline Child Protection Plan.
- Establishing timescales for meetings of the core group, production of a Child Protection Plan and for child protection review meetings; and
- Agreeing an outline child protection plan, with clear actions and timescales, including a clear sense of how much improvement is needed, what changes are needed, by when, so that success can be judged clearly. The plan should identify the outcomes to be achieved.
- Conference should also identify who will be responsible for contributing to, implementing and reviewing the plan.

It is essential that the child's, and the parent/carer's views wishes and feelings are heard and or represented at conference.

The conference should assess the evidence of harm and likelihood of continuing risk of Significant Harm to the child; taking into account information obtained about the child's developmental needs and the parent/carer's capacity to meet these to ensure the child's safety, protect the child from harm and promote his/her health and development within a context of wider family and environment.

Conference should consider these issues using the Thresholds of Need Guidance 2020 and the Signs of Safety model ensuring that families are aware of what professionals are 'Worried about' and what the perceived Dangers are via a 'Danger Statement'.

### **THE CONFERENCE CHAIR:**

- Is accountable to the Strategic Director of People Directorate. Where possible the same person should chair subsequent child protection review conferences.
- Should be a professional, independent of operational and/or line management responsibilities for the case; and
- Should meet the child and parents prior to conference to ensure they understand the purpose and the process.
- Should ensure that relevant reports are submitted and that the parents and child where appropriate have had sight of these prior to conference.
- Should ensure and note whether or not the child has been invited to the conference and whether or not the child has been offered the opportunity to choose whether an advocate is required and if so whether she or he had access to an advocate. and ensure that the child's views have been sought and considered.
- Conference chairs should also note when a child has not been consulted or prepared prior to conference and his or her views have not been sought. Where this has not happened, the conference chair should ensure that the reasons are recorded and action taken for future conferences where required. Dependent upon age and understanding the chair should ensure that arrangements are made for the e-consultation programme, Viewpoint to be made available to the child.

### **SOCIAL WORKERS WITH THEIR MANAGERS SHOULD:**

Consult with the Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing service to convene a conference within the required timescales; that is as soon as possible following the strategy meeting that confirmed the status of the S47 investigation and no more than 15 working days following the strategy meeting.

### **PRIOR TO CONFERENCE, THE SOCIAL WORKER SHOULD**

- Consult with the parents and the children concerned to ensure that they understand the purpose of the conference and are informed about who will attend.

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- Help prepare the child if he or she is attending the conference.
- Ensure that the child has had or gets help to support and prepare if the child wishes to have representation via a third party to represent his or her views.
- Ensure that prior to conference the child is made aware of advocacy services and that he or she and his or her family may bring an advocate, friend or supporter to conference.;
- Share the conference information with the child and family beforehand wherever it is possible and where it will not compromise the safety or welfare of the child or children (where appropriate with regard to the age and understanding of the child).
- Prepare a report for the conference on the child and family which sets out and analyses what is known about the child and family and the local authority's recommendation.

### **AT CONFERENCE SOCIAL WORKERS SHOULD**

- Attend and present information about the reason for the conference, including an initial Early Help Assessment and current plan if applicable. The social worker should report on their understanding of the child's needs, parental capacity and family and environmental context and evidence of how the child has been abused, harmed or neglected and its impact on their health and development.
- Provide a danger statement along with their social work assessment and or report in the format agreed as compatible with the North East Lincolnshire database.
- Provide an analysis of the information to contribute to informed decisions about what action is necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child who is the subject of the conference.
- Record conference decisions and recommendations and ensure that they are fully aware of the outline plan agreed at conference and take all necessary steps and actions to implement the plan in a timely manner.

### **ALL INVOLVED PROFESSIONALS SHOULD**

- Represent their own service and organisation with regard to their involvement or duties to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and development.
- Share relevant information with conference members and the family, parents or carers where appropriate.;
- Contribute to decision making at conference identifying relevant information that is evidence of both harm and protective factors.
- Work together to safeguard the child from harm in the future, taking timely, effective action according to the plan agreed at conference and developed at the core group.

**North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership:** will monitor the effectiveness of these arrangements and ensure that procedures are reviewed annually to reflect any changes in guidance or legislation.

### **TIMING OF THE INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE**

To reach informed decisions based on evidence and facts, conference should be convened following strategy meetings that substantiate S47 investigations and inquiries and allow adequate preparation and up-to-date assessment of the child or young person's circumstances. With the exception of conferences for unborn babies, initial conferences must not be convened without the child having been seen and the investigations being completed. All Initial Conferences should take place within 15 working days of a strategy meeting or the strategy meeting that confirmed the status of the S47 investigation if more than one has been held.

Social workers must inform the CSRS team of any professionals with specialist knowledge who should be invited to participate. In North East Lincolnshire this requires that the social worker informs CSRS of all those individuals who should be invited to conference and their up-to-date contact details on the agreed invitation list format.

All agencies should contribute their information in report format prior to conference, setting out the nature of the agency's involvement; and whether or not their report can be shared with parents and children; (this includes police as an agency).

## **2. THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN**

Actions and responsibilities following the initial child protection conference.

### **PURPOSE**

The aim of the child protection plan is to:

- Ensure the child is safe from harm and prevent him or her from suffering further harm.
- Promote the child's health and development; and
- Support the family and wider family members to safeguard and promote the welfare of their child, provided it is in the best interests of the child.
- Identify the goals and outcomes to be achieved to address needs identified by the social worker and by agencies within the case conference incorporating a Signs of Safety model focused on outcomes

### **CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WILL**

- Designate a social worker to be the Lead Professional as they carry statutory responsibility for the child's welfare.
- Consider the evidence and decide what legal action to take if any, where a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm.

### **CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING AND REVIEWING SERVICE WILL**

- Define the local protocol and timescales for producing and circulating plans after the Child Protection Conference.
- Produce and outline child protection plan at the conference of which a draft is given to parents at the end of the conference. This draft plan will make clear that the final version will be held on the child's (or children's) file and placed on the electronic database by the social worker. It is this 'electronic' plan that will be used and will be developed and referred to at the core group meetings and review conferences.
- Distribute the electronic version of the outline plan within 24 hours (or 1 working day of the conference, at weekends or bank holidays).

### **SOCIAL WORKERS WITH THEIR MANAGERS WILL**

- Be the lead professional for inter-agency work with the child and family, coordinating the contribution of family members and professionals into putting the child protection plan into effect.
- Develop the outline Child Protection Plan into a more detailed inter-agency plan, enter on to the database and circulate to relevant professionals (and family where appropriate).
- Undertake direct work with the child and family in accordance with the child protection plan, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings and the views of the parents in so far as they are consistent with the child's welfare.
- Complete the child's and family's in-depth assessment, securing contributions from core group members and others as necessary.
- Explain the plan to the child in a manner consistent with their age and understanding as far as is practical, agree the plan with the child.

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- Coordinate reviews of progress against the planned outcomes set out in the plan, updating as required. The first review should be held within 3 months of the initial conference and further reviews at intervals of no more than 6 months for as long as the child remains subject of a child protection plan.
- Record decisions and actions agreed at core group meetings as well as the written views of those who were not able to attend, and follow up those actions to ensure they take place. The child protection plan should be updated as necessary; and
- Lead core group activity.

### **THE CORE GROUP SHOULD**

- Meet within 10 working days from the initial child protection conference if the child is the subject of a Child Protection Plan and at a frequency agreed at conference for review conferences.
- Develop the outline child protection plan, based on assessment findings, and set out what needs to change, by how much, and by when in order for the child to be safe and have their needs met.
- Decide what steps need to be taken, and by whom, to complete the in-depth Assessment to inform decisions about the child's safety and welfare; and
- Implement the child protection plan and take joint responsibility for carrying out the agreed tasks, monitoring progress and outcomes, and refining the plan as needed.

Where a child or young person is to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan it is the responsibility of the conference to consider and recommend how agencies, professionals and the family should work together to ensure the child or young person will be safeguarded from harm in the future. This will enable both professionals and the family to understand exactly what is expected from them and what they can expect of others.

### **SPECIFIC TASKS FOR CONFERENCE INCLUDE**

- Appointing the lead statutory body, usually the Local Authority's Children's Service and a Lead Social Worker (the lead professional) who should be a qualified and experienced Social Worker and an employee of the lead statutory body.
- Identifying the membership of a core group of professionals and family members who will develop and implement the Child Protection Plan as a detailed working tool.
- Involving family members (including those with parental responsibility), children, and young people in the planning and implementation process of the core group, making support, advice and advocacy available to them.
- Establishing time-scales for meetings of the core group, production of a Child Protection Plan and for recommendations to Child Protection Review Conferences.
- Identifying what further core and specialist assessments of the child or young person and family are required to make sound judgements on how to best safeguard and promote the child's welfare.
- Outlining the Child Protection Plan, especially, identifying *what needs to change* in order to achieve the planned outcomes to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child or young person.
- Considering the need for a contingency plan if circumstances change quickly.
- Clarifying the different purposes of Initial Conferences, Core Groups and Review Conferences.
- Agreeing a date for the first child protection review conference and under what circumstances it might be necessary to convene the conference at an earlier date.

**THE INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR AGREEING AN OUTLINE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN. PROFESSIONALS AND PARENT(S) SHOULD DEVELOP THIS IN THE CORE GROUP.**

**THE AIM OF THE PLAN IS:**

- Ensuring the child or young person is safe and prevent him or her from suffering further harm.
- Promoting the child or young person's health and development; and
- Provided it is in the child's best interests, to support parent(s) and wider family members to safeguard and to promote the welfare of the child or young person.

**THE OUTLINE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN SHOULD:**

- Identify factors associated with the likelihood of the child or young person suffering significant harm and abuse, considering the ways in which the child or young person can be protected through an inter-agency plan based on assessment findings.
- Establish short-term and longer-term aims and objectives that are clearly linked to reducing the likelihood of harm to the child or young person and promoting the child or young person's welfare, including contact with family members.
- Be clear about who will have responsibility for what actions within specified time-scales.
- Outline ways of monitoring and evaluating progress against the planned outcomes set out in the plan clear about which professionals are responsible for checking that required changes have taken place and what action will be taken if they have not.

**THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN SHOULD:**

- Describe the identified developmental needs of the child or young person and what therapeutic services if any are required to meet these needs; Include specific, achievable, child-focused outcomes intended to safe guard and promote the welfare of the child – identifying timescales by which tasks will be implemented and/or completed.
- Include realistic strategies and specific actions to bring about the changes necessary to achieve the planned outcomes.
- Identify and set out the roles and responsibilities of family members and professionals including the nature and frequency of the contact by professionals with the child or young person and family.
- Recommend how and when progress will be reviewed and the means by which success will be measured.
- Set out roles and responsibilities of those professionals with routine contact with the child or family e.g. health visitors, GP's and teachers, as well as any specialist or targeted support to the child or young person and family e.g. probation, mental health services, etc.
- Include a contingency plan to be followed if progress is not made or if circumstances change significantly and require prompt action.

The Child Protection Plan should take into account the wishes and feelings of the child or young person and the view of the parents, in so far as they are consistent with the child or young person's welfare.

The recommendations of the conference will provide the framework for the Child Protection Plan or, where the child or young person is not subject to a Child Protection Plan, Child(ren) in Need Services.

**N.B. All members of the core group have equal ownership of and responsibility for the Child Protection Plan and are required by legislation (Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004 and the SCP to cooperate to achieve its aims and to promote the child's welfare and safeguarding.**

### 3. THE DECISION TO MAKE THE CHILD SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

The decision as to whether the child should be the subject of a **Child Protection Plan** should be made jointly by conference members based on the evidence presented and contribution of all agencies attending conference. This does not imply that a single agency can veto a conference decision, but that *all agencies have a responsibility* to work towards a preferably unanimous (all parties) decision or, as a minimum, *a majority* decision (that is more than half of conference members) through discussion and validation of the evidence.

All agency staff attending conference should be sufficiently trained and experienced to enable them to participate in the decision making process. In situations where the nominated person is unable to attend, a representative from that agency should be adequately briefed to be able to participate in decision making. The decision to make or end a child protection plan will be made by unanimous (all parties) or majority agreement.

#### **CONFERENCE MEMBERS' REPORTS AND ATTENDANCE:**

Evidence shows that the reports and attendance at conference of key or delegated professionals are essential to enable evidence based analysis, progress of plans and safe decision-making at conference. Where key participants fail to submit reports, fail to attend conference or send substitutes who have not been adequately briefed, this invariably has an adverse effect on conference processes. It can result in conference relying on scant, outdated or inaccurate information and can incur delays and drift in planning and decision-making. In some cases it can result in the wrong category of harm being applied, essential information missing; an increased risk of harm to a child or children whose circumstances cannot be fully explored.

Where essential reports to conference are not submitted, or key professionals fail to attend and/or are poorly briefed substitutes attending on behalf of others conference chairs must make a professional judgement as to whether or not this will adversely affect the outcome and planning for the child.

Where the chairperson assesses that the adverse effects are so significant (as those outlined above), the chair will either postpone and reconvene the conference or, if the conference is already underway, the chair will adjourn the conference and its decision-making pending the required information becoming available or the required person's attendance.

Where the conference has to be postponed, reconvened or adjourned for any of the reasons above, a Quality Assurance Notification will be issued to the relevant line management of the professional or agency responsible.

Once a decision has been made that the child or young person is at continuing risk of significant harm and in need of a Child Protection Plan, the Chair should guide the conference members to agree which category of abuse or neglect the child has suffered, is likely to suffer or is suffering. The category used (i.e. physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect) will indicate to those consulting the child's social care record the primary presenting concerns at the time the child became the subject of a child protection plan.

Conference should also consider and note any secondary reasons underlying the main category of concern such as Domestic Abuse, CSE, substance misuse; mental health, disability etc. Where relevant it should always be noted if the child or young person is involved in Child Sexual Exploitation.

#### **CONSENSUS AND SPLIT DECISION-MAKING INITIAL AND REVIEW CHILD PROTECTION CASE CONFERENCE**

Other than in exceptional circumstances, and when there is clear evidence of continuing significant harm to the child the conference should always try to reach a *unanimous or majority decision about the need for a child protection plan. (A unanimous decision is one to which all parties are agreed).*

## NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

At initial conferences where a child is not already on a child protection plan, or where a child has transferred into NEL, conference members may not always be unanimous on whether the initial criteria and need for a CP plan is met. In such circumstances the chair person should ensure that evidence is provided by each conference member in order to reach a unanimous or majority decision.

*N.B. Conference members must be clear that opinion and concerns that are 'what-if?' and not based on evidence or fact do not constitute the criteria for significant harm. Where such concerns arise, the conference members should consider whether or not the child's needs may be met via a Child In Need (CIN) plan.*

At initial conferences, in exceptional circumstances, where a majority agreement cannot be reached about either starting a child protection plan or the category of the plan, the conference may be adjourned for no more **than 5 working days** during which time the child will be placed on an interim child protection plan and this will continue until the conference is reconvened.

In review conferences in exceptional circumstances, where a majority agreement cannot be reached about ending a child protection plan, the conference may be adjourned for no more **than 5 working days** during which time the plan *will* continue until the conference is reconvened.

### **ESCALATION PROCESSES**

The adjournment period should be used for conference members to consult with their designated agency line managers, Service Managers (or designated CP coordinators) to consider whether or not there is evidence of continuing risk of significant harm and if so what facts or evidence there are for their views and why these conflict with the views of other conference members.

Before the adjournment period ends, the chair will liaise with relevant agency managers to ascertain their views.

Agency managers must then submit a brief *written report* to the chair outlining the reasons for identifying or disputing significant harm and cite the facts or evidence on which their recommendations are based.

If the consensus from all submissions is that a plan is needed, conference will be reconvened within 5 working days and the child protection plan drawn up by conference and core groups scheduled. If following consultation with agency managers it is concluded that no plan is needed, then no further conference will be convened and all conference members will be informed in writing that a plan is no longer needed.

Where there is a 50% split decision during conference, the conference chair will adjourn the conference for a further period *not exceeding 5 working days*. During this period, conference members will consult with relevant service managers, line managers or designated child protection coordinators and submit a report to the rescheduled conference clearly citing the facts or evidence for requiring a plan.

Where the 50% split continues the child will remain on a plan pending escalation to senior managers for a review of the decision prior to the next conference review (see NEL Safeguarding Escalation Procedure).

Where the chair of an initial or review case conference is of the opinion that the threshold for needing a CP plan is not met, e.g. No clear facts or evidence to substantiate a continuing risk of significant harm; then a CP plan will be made or in the case of a review conference, the plan continued but will be referred via the NEL Safeguarding Escalation Procedure

Where at a review conference the chairperson is not satisfied that the criteria for a plan is met – the conference may be reconvened for the decision to be revised accordingly and where appropriate 'de-escalated' and 'deplanned'. A revised escalation process to address conflict of decision-making at conference and 'fast-track' for senior management decision-making is in place.

N.B. This will be subject to the 'NEL Safeguarding Escalation Procedure'.

**AT ALL CONFERENCES – WHEN REACHING A DECISION, CONFERENCE MUST CONSIDER ONE PRINCIPAL QUESTION: IS THE CHILD AT CONTINUING RISK OF SIGNIFICANT HARM?**

The test should be either that there is clear evidence that indicates:

- The child or young person 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 the professional judgement is that further ill treatment or impairment is likely.

Or

- Professional judgment, substantiated by the *findings of enquiries and evidential factors* in this particular case indicates that the child is continuing to suffer or is expected to suffer ill treatment or the impairment of health/development/harm as a result of:
  - Physical
  - Emotional
  - Sexual Abuse; or
  - Neglect.

In all reconvened conferences, the decision that a child protection plan is necessary *must be based on evidence* to support the criteria of continuing risk of harm. If the test is met, it will follow that the child requires inter-agency help and interventions delivered through a formal Child Protection Plan. Decisions on whether a child continues to be at risk of harm, will be based on revised assessments and evidence or facts about further harm. For example, the review of a child on a plan for Neglect must include a revised Neglect Assessment.

Conference participants should *base judgments on all available evidence obtained from existing records, documented observations, assessments and Section 47 enquiries*. (Decisions cannot be made based on opinion alone). If the test is satisfied, the child will become or will remain the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

NB: if the test is not satisfied, the CP plan will cease. Where there are other existing needs to be met, it may be appropriate, however, to consider whether a plan is still needed and whether the conference should recommend that a Family Group Conference is convened.

#### **4. CATEGORIES OF SIGNIFICANT HARM**

- Category 1 Neglect.
- Category 2 Physical harm.
- Category 3 Sexual harm.
- Category 4 Emotional harm only.

Examples of these categories of harm include:

**Neglect**: The persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may involve persistent exposure to a range of risks and dangers including starvation, cold, denying access to food, medication, healthcare and general care that could result in inorganic failure to thrive. This may involve a parent or carer persistently failing to:

- Provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment).
- Protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger.
- Ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers).
- Ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

- Respond to a child's basic emotional needs, E.g. Persistently ignoring children; failing to respond to a baby crying or persistently leaving a child alone for long periods.

Neglect of the unborn children may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. (In such cases, pre-birth assessment and pre-birth conferences will be appropriate).

Neglect requires it to be shown that the failures are 'persistent' so situations in which a parent becomes suddenly homeless or suffer mental health crisis and a child is left hungry or lacking clean, warm clothing for a short period does not evidence persistent neglect. Neglect would become persistent if, over a sustained period, the neglect continues despite advice and support provided to resolve the problems and end the crisis.

**Physical Harm:** Actual or likely deliberate physical injury to a child or young person, or the failure to prevent physical injury (or suffering) to a child or young person, including slapping, punching, deliberate poisoning, suffocation, fabricated/induced illness, starvation, exposure to hazard.

**Sexual Harm:** Actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child, young person or adolescent, including:

- Incest.
- Other forms of sexual activity such as fondling, mutual masturbation, oral sex and intercourse and the involvement of children and young people in pornographic activity.
- The exposure of a child or young person to any sexual experiences which are inappropriate and/or illegal and are an invasion of the child or young person's rights over their own bodies and sexuality; ➤ Child Sexual Exploitation.

**Emotional Harm:** Actual or likelihood of severe adverse and long lasting effect on the emotional and behavioural development of a child or young person caused by persistent or severe emotional ill-treatment or rejection. All harm involves some emotional ill-treatment and this category should only be used where it is the main or sole form of harm.

A conference may decide that the child or young person may not need to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan, but he or she may still require services to promote his or her health or development. In these circumstances, it will be appropriate to draw up a Child in Need Plan to be reviewed at regular intervals and/or may be appropriate for the lead social worker to consider convening a Family Group Conference.

## 5. DISCUSSING THE PLAN WITH THE CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON

The Child Protection Plan should be explained to and agreed with the child or young person in a manner which is in accordance with their age and understanding.

The child or young person should receive a copy of the plan appropriate to his or her age and understanding and in his or her preferred language. An interpreter should be used if the child's level of English means that they would not be able to participate fully in these discussions unless they are conducted in their own language.

## 6. DISCUSSING THE PLAN WITH PARENTS

Parents should be clear about the evidence of significant harm, what needs to change, what outcomes are to be achieved and what is expected of them. Social workers and conference members should ensure that this is presented in plain language, using the Signs of Safety model. Parents will receive a written copy of the *draft plan* immediately following conference so that they are clear about who is doing what and when and what the planned outcomes are for the child or young person. The draft plan will state clearly that it is in draft form only and that the final electronic version of the plan will be placed on the child's file by the social worker.

## **7. REQUESTS FOR SPECIALIST ASSESSMENT**

If the conference identifies a need for a specialist assessment to be undertaken, there must be clarity about what is being requested. E.g. If there is concern about a parent/carers behaviour/mental health, it is not sufficient to recommend a mental health assessment if what is required is assessment of how the parent/carers behaviour/mental health may impact on or pose a risk to the child or young person. Any request of this type of assessment should be in writing, clearly stating the type of assessment requested and its purpose.

## **8. THE CORE GROUP**

The core group is responsible for developing and implementing the Child Protection Plan as a working tool, within the defined remit laid down at the Initial Child Protection Conference. At the first meeting (held within 10 working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference) members should include the lead social worker who leads the core group, the child or young person if appropriate, family members and professionals who have direct contact with the family. Although the lead social worker has lead responsibility for the formulation and implementation of the child protection plan, all Core Group members are jointly responsible for carrying out these tasks, refining the plan and monitoring progress against the planned outcomes to be achieved through the plan. Agencies should ensure that core group members undertake their roles and responsibilities effectively in accordance with the CP plan.

Core Groups are a vital forum for working with parent(s) and children of sufficient age and understanding as it can often be difficult for parents to agree to a Child Protection Plan within the confines of a formal conference. Their agreement may be achieved later when details of the plan are worked out in the Core Group. Sometimes there may be conflicts of interest between family members who have a relevant interest in the work of the Core Group. The child's best interests will always take precedence over the interests of other family members.

There must be a Core Group for every child subject to a Child Protection Plan and also in cases where a package of Child(ren) in Need Services is being provided as an alternative to being subject to a Child Protection Plan. The Core Group is comprised of practitioners from the various agencies who are best placed to implement the key elements of the Child Protection/Child in Need Plan with the child and his or her family.

The Initial Conference will decide which practitioners will form the Core Group, on the basis of whose involvement is required in order to implement the plan. The Core Group will work within the Child Protection/Child(ren) Plan and within guidance given in conference regarding decision-making ability delegated to the Group. Core group members should consider where conference recommendations are not or cannot be implemented, and the key worker will then discuss this with the conference chair to determine whether this affects the child protection plan and its ability to safeguard the child. Any changes or ongoing difficulties in implementing the Plan must also be reported back to the review Conference.

The discussions and decisions of the core group will be recorded. The Core Group should ensure that a thorough review of the areas identified by the Child Protection or Child(ren) in Need Plan is carried out for each Child Protection Review. Core group records should be shared with all core group members and entered on to the child's file by the lead social worker.

## **9. INTERVENTION**

Decisions about how to intervene, including what services to offer, should be based on evidence about what is likely to work best to bring about the best outcomes for the child or young person and make him or her safe.

The quality and nature of attachment may be a key factor in decision making, especially if decisions relate to moving a child or young person from one setting to another; re-uniting a child with his or her family; or placing a child away from his or her family.

A key consideration in deciding suitable interventions will be whether the child's developmental needs can be met within his or her own family and within time-scales appropriate to the child i.e. The time required for parents and caregivers in receipt of therapeutic services may not be compatible with those of the child.

Where the child's situation is not improving or changing fast enough to meet the child's needs, decisions will need to be made about the long-term future of the child and what will be in the child's best interests particularly where this may be placement in an alternative family context. Key to 'best interest' considerations is ascertaining the child's wishes and feelings. Conference and Core Group should therefore be mindful of the ways in which the child's voice is heard, acted upon and recorded.

## **10. THE CHILD PROTECTION REVIEW CONFERENCE**

The date of the first Review Conference must be set at the Initial Conference and must be held within three months and booked within 12 working weeks of the Initial Child Protection Conference. Further reviews will be held at intervals of not more than 6 months and booked within 24 working weeks for as long as the child or young person remains the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

The Review Conference process for preparation, decision-making and other procedures should be the same as those for an initial child protection conference.

Review conferences can be brought forward or convened early where circumstances dictate the need for a further multi-agency decision regarding the need for a plan or a significant change in circumstances such as:

- In the case of unborn babies being born and or where there are other children or siblings who are already subject of a plan.
- Where an incident of significant harm occurs with a child already on a plan or where a significant change in circumstances indicates the need to change the category of harm recorded.
- Where a change in circumstances indicate that there may no longer be a need for a plan.
- Where the child or young person becomes Looked After or returns home whilst on a plan.

### **PURPOSE OF REVIEW CONFERENCE**

The review conference will consider any new information, any significant changes of circumstances and the progress made since the last conference. At the end of the conference there will be a decision as to the need or otherwise for the continuation of the plan. Its core functions are:

- To review whether the child is continuing to suffer, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, and review developmental progress against child protection plan outcomes.
- To consider whether the child protection plan should continue, be changed or ceased.

### **CONFERENCE CHAIRS SHOULD**

- Should ensure and note whether the child has been invited to the conference and whether the child has had the opportunity offered to have an advocate if required and if so whether the child has had access to an advocate and his or her views have been sought and considered.
- Conference chairs should also note when a child *has not been consulted* or prepared prior to conference and his or her views have not been sought. Where this has not happened, the conference chair should ensure that the reasons are recorded and action taken for future conferences where required.

### **SOCIAL WORKERS SHOULD PRIOR TO CONFERENCE**

- Consult with the parents and the children concerned to ensure that they understand the purpose of the conference and are informed about who will attend.
- Review and where necessary update the invitation list for conference ensuring all appropriate agencies and professionals are invited and that CSRS has up-to-date details of invitees.
- Help prepare the child if he or she is attending the conference.

- Ensure that the child gets help to support and prepare if he or she wishes to have representation via a third party to represent his or her views.
- Ensure the child is made aware of advocacy services and the child, parents and carers may bring an advocate, friend or supporter to conference.

**SOCIAL WORKERS AND THEIR MANAGERS IN CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING AND REVIEWING SERVICES WILL:**

- Attend and provide a lead to the organisation of the conference.
- Determine the most appropriate time and date for the review conference ensuring that as a minimum it is held within 3 months of the initial conference, and thereafter at a maximum of 6 monthly intervals.
- Provide an up-to-date report outlining progress and changes made to date against the outcomes identified at the previous conference.
- Provide an analysis of need and risk within their report to conference.
- Share information to enable informed decisions about action necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child who is the subject of child protection plan, and about the effectiveness and impact of action taken to date.
- Share the conference information with the child and family beforehand, where appropriate.
- Record conference outcomes; and
- Decide whether to initiate family court proceedings (all the children in the household should be considered, even if concerns are only expressed about one child) if the child is considered to be suffering significant harm.

**ALL INVOLVED PROFESSIONALS SHOULD:**

- Attend when invited and provide a full account and details of their involvement with the child and family since the last conference.
- Produce reports for the review conference that gives an overview of work undertaken by family members and professionals and an evaluation of the impact on the child's welfare against the planned outcomes set out in the child protection plan.
- Contribute to information sharing and decision-making at conference based on evidence and fact in order to decide whether or not the child continues to need a CP plan.

## **11. THE FOCUS OF THE CHILD PROTECTION REVIEW CONFERENCE**

**THE FOCUS OF THE CHILD PROTECTION REVIEW CONFERENCE IS:**

- To review whether the child is continuing to suffer or likely to suffer, significant harm and their health and developmental progress against planned outcomes set out in the child protection plan.
- To ensure that the child or young person continues to be safeguarded from harm.
- To consider whether the Child Protection Plan needs to continue, be changed or be ceased.

The Review Conference requires as much preparation, commitment and management as the Initial Child Protection Conference. Every Review Conference should consider explicitly whether there is evidence to show that the child continues to be at risk of significant harm and continues to need safeguarding through a formal Child Protection Plan.

If there is no evidence to imply the need for a plan, then the child should no longer be the subject of a Child Protection Plan. Where appropriate the case should be 'stepped-down' relevant to the Thresholds of Need Guidance 2020.

The same decision making process should be applied to reach a decision on the need for a Child Protection Plan as is used at the Initial Child Protection Conference. That is: all information, recommendations and decisions should be evidence-based considering the Signs of Safety, risk and protective factors, changes that have occurred and how this impacts on the continuing risk of harm based on the facts.

**THE CRITERIA FOR CONVENING A CHILD PROTECTION REVIEW CONFERENCE ARE:**

- Statutory requirements that the Initial Child Protection Conference must be reviewed.
- There is evidence of further harm to a child or young person already subject to a Child Protection Plan.
- Completion of an assessment of the child and family that has implications for safeguarding the child.
- Changes in family circumstances that jeopardises the Child Protection Plan or compromises the safety or wellbeing of the child or sibling/s.
- Significant changes to the child's circumstances indicates that the continuing risk of significant harm criteria no longer applies and a CP plan may no longer be appropriate.
- The appropriate time has passed since the previous conference.

**REPORTS SHOULD INCLUDE:**

- Dates of contacts with the child or family since the last Conference/Child Protection Review.
- Progress on the implementation of recommendation relating to your agency.
- Changes and progress made on reducing the risk of harm or danger.
- Any outstanding issues and where relevant a contingency plan.
- Whether, in your agency's view, the Child Protection Plan continues to meet the needs of the child and family
- Any further action to be taken.
- The views of relevant family members and the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person.

Following the decision that the child is at continuing risk of significant harm and continues to need safeguarding by way of a **Child Protection Plan**, the Chair should confirm the category of abuse or neglect the child has suffered or is suffering. The category used (i.e. physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect) will indicate to those consulting the child's social care record the primary presenting concerns at the time the child became the subject of a child protection plan or when that category changed if appropriate.

- Decisions, recommendations and plan should always indicate where Child Sexual Exploitation is an issue for the child.
- Conference should also indicate where there is a secondary category of harm underlying the need for interventions such as Domestic Abuse, parental or child mental health issues, substance or alcohol misuse or disability.

## **12. DISCONTINUING THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN**

Child protection plans should be discontinued for children in circumstances when:

- a) It is judged that the child or young person is no longer at continuing risk of **Significant Harm** or requires safeguarding by means of a Child Protection Plan (e.g. the risk of harm has been reduced by action taken through the Child Protection Plan, the child or young person's and family's circumstances have changed and/or further assessment of the child or young person and family indicates that a Child Protection Plan is not necessary).
- b) The child or young person and the family have moved permanently to another Local Authority area. In such cases the receiving Local Authority should convene a Child Protection Conference within 15 working days of being notified of the move, only after which event may discontinuing the Child Protection Plan take place in respect of the original authority's Child Protection Plan.
- c) The child or young person has reached 18 years of age, has died, or has permanently left the UK.

In North East Lincolnshire, only a Child Protection Review Conference can decide that a child or young person is no longer at continuing risk of significant harm in the case of a) and b) as above. For children who have become Looked

After, the review case conference can be combined with the Looked After Children's Review. Discontinuing the Child Protection Plan for a child who has moved out of the area can only take place once the receiving authority has held a transfer-in conference and either placed the child on a plan or decided at conference that a plan is no longer needed.

**NB: When a plan has been discontinued Social workers with their managers, including relevant staff from within the Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing Services will ensure that procedures are followed to:**

- Notify, as a minimum, all agency representatives who were invited to attend the initial child protection conference that led to the plan; and
- Consider whether support services are still required and discuss with the child and family what might be needed, based on a re-assessment of the child's needs.
- Ceasing plans for Neglect: Where conference is reviewing a plan under the category of Neglect, there must be evidence either of a significant change of circumstances e.g. the child has moved to a different family and/or evidence of sustained change and improvement before the plan is ended. Unless the changes made have been established for at least a six month period, a plan should not be ended due to sustained change and improvement. It will therefore not be appropriate to end a Neglect Category CP plan on the basis of changes and improvements made at the first review conference.

### **13. CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**

#### **REPORTS SHOULD INCLUDE:**

Where a child or young person becomes Looked After whilst also subject to a Child Protection Plan consideration should be given to discontinuing the Child Protection Plan unless any agency has specific concerns regarding the care arrangements. The Child Protection Plan should be reviewed at conference and should continue where there is continuing risk of significant harm or where there are plans to return the child or young person home. There will be cases where the child is Looked After but still meets the significant harm criteria and requires continued protection via a multi-agency child protection plan.

An example of this is where a disabled child has been made the subject of a plan due to care given within his or her family home but is also Looked After by virtue of the number of respite care days received.

Where a Looked After child is or remains the subject of a child protection plan it is expected that there will be a combined planning and reviewing process. This should be led by the Independent Reviewing Officer and the child protection conference chair person. This will meet both SCP guidance and the **Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010**.

This means that the timing of the review of the child protection plan should be combined with or at the same as the review under the Care Planning, Placement And Case Review Regulations 2010. This is to ensure that up to date information in relation to the child's welfare and safety is shared in the review meeting and informs the overall care planning process.

Where the recommendation is that the child no longer needs a child protection plan due to his or her safeguarding needs being met through the LAC placement and care plan, then all initial conference members will be notified as a minimum where a decision has been made to end the plan.

**N.B. The review conference is not a substitute for a statutory LAC review.**

## 14. REPORTS TO CONFERENCE

The Social Worker will provide a written report for the conference\* (see note at end of this section) that highlights the evidence for continuing risk of significant harm, summarises the key concerns and analyses the information obtained. The social worker's Child Protection Conference report will include as a minimum:

- A chronology of significant events and agency and professional contact with the child and family.
- Information on the child's current and past state of developmental needs.
- Information on the capacity of the parents and other family members to ensure this child is safe from harm and to respond to the child's developmental needs, within their wider family and environmental context.
- Information on the family history and both the current and past family functioning.
- The expressed views, wishes and feelings of the child, parents and other family members; and analysis of the information gathered and recorded using the assessment framework dimensions to reach a judgment on evidence of significant harm suffered, whether the child is at continued risk of suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and how best to meet his or her developmental needs. The analysis should address:
  - How the child's strengths and difficulties are impacting on each other.
  - How the parenting strengths and difficulties are affecting each other.
  - How the family and environmental factors are affecting each other.
  - How the parenting that is provided for the child is affecting the child's health and development both in terms of resilience and protective factors, and vulnerability and risk factors; and
  - How the family and environmental factors are impacting on parenting and/or the child directly; and
  - The local authority's recommendation to conference.

All other agency reports must include a Chronology of significant events known to each agency from their contact with the child or young person and family, for example:

- Injuries
- Hospital admission
- Non-attendance at school
- Family contacts with the Police (including Domestic Violence, contact with carers as victims).
- Significant behavioural indicators on the part of the child or young person.
- Significant changes in the child or young person's life e.g. address, school, GP, family composition.
- Significant 'Missing' episodes.
- Significant events for other family members e.g. mental health capacity issues, court appearances and offending, bereavement or illness, housing evictions, custodial sentences etc.

### **IN ADDITION ALL CONFERENCE REPORTS SHOULD FOCUS ON:**

- Information on the child or young person's health and development, including risks and unmet needs.
- Information on the capacity of the parent(s)/carers to ensure the child or young person's safety from harm and to promote the child or young person's health and development, including strengths and weaknesses of the parent(s)/carers and extended family members.
- The impact that the current and past family functioning and family history are having on the parents capacities to meet the child's needs.
- The expressed views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, parent(s) and other family members.
- Analysis of the implications of the information obtained for the child or young person's safety, health and development, including opportunities for change.
- Services currently being provided and services needed.

**N.B. All professionals should be aware that, as with other documentation, their report might be subject to disclosure in legal proceedings.**

**\*N.B. As the revised processes for the Early Help Assessment and Signs of Safety are progressed, social work reports to initial and review conferences will be written in the agreed formats being developed and reflect the Early Help Assessment, Signs of Safety framework including Danger Statements and Family Safety Plans. Review conference social work reports will be in the format of a revised Family Safety Plan.**

## **15. PREBIRTH CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES AND REVIEWS**

See the Pre-Birth Assessment Procedure.

Where a core assessment under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 gives rise to concerns that an unborn child may be likely to suffer Significant Harm, or it is anticipated that the pregnancy or the birth of the child will impact on other children in the family, the local authority Child Assessment and Safeguarding Services (CASS) may decide to convene an initial child protection conference prior to the child's birth. Such a conference will have the same status and proceed in the same way, as other initial child protection conferences, including decisions about the need for a child protection plan. The same will apply where child protection review conferences need to consider the unborn baby, e.g. where the initial conference has taken place more than three months before the birth or the unborn baby has siblings subject to a CP plan.

### **MIDWIFERY AND PRE-BIRTH CONFERENCES**

The involvement of midwifery is vital in such cases and they will be invited to and should attend conference providing a report and sharing information to contribute to decision making regarding the continuing risk of harm.

An initial conference will not normally be convened before the 24th week of pregnancy, but at the latest should take place by the 30th week of pregnancy and make recommendations regarding whether the new born baby will need a plan at birth. A conference will be reconvened following the birth of the baby.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, where the intention is that the baby will remain in the care of the mother and birth family, the decision of conference will normally be that the child should be placed on a plan at birth pending further assessments. Where the LA plan is for the child to become Looked After at birth, then the evidence at subsequent post birth conference is likely to inform the decision that a plan is not needed

## **16. CHILD(REN) IN NEED PLAN**

A child or young person who is no longer subject to a Child Protection Plan may still be in need of additional support and services and the discontinuation of the Child Protection Plan should never lead to the automatic withdrawal of help. The lead social worker should discuss with the parent(s) and the child or young person what services might be wanted and needed, based upon the assessment of the child or young person and family.

A Child(ren) in Need Plan should be presented to conference when the discontinuation of the Child Protection Plan is being recommended by the Core Group.

The conference should also consider whether or not the child and his or her family may benefit from a Family Group Conference (FGC) and where this is discussed at conference, a record should be made of any recommendations regarding FGC.

## **17. REVIEW OF CHILD(REN) IN NEED PLAN**

The purpose of the review is to provide an opportunity for the family and professionals to meet together to review whether or not the Child(ren) in Need plan is proving effective in meeting identified needs.

**In carrying out the review the family and professionals will:**

- Consider the work and role of the Core Group.
- Examine the services/support offered and consider whether or not they continue to meet the family's needs.
- Consider what further action/support services are necessary.
- Consider that if new concerns have emerged or there has been a deterioration the matter should be escalated. Consideration should always be given at this stage as to whether or not the child can be safeguarded by offering the family the opportunity for an FGC.

**18. MINUTES OF CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES**

Minutes are an essential working tool in child protection. Minutes are not a verbatim account but are a summary of key things said. Each conference will have a person who makes a written record of the meeting and produce this in a structured format.

Minutes should record facts, decisions, analysis of the facts and recommendations, the Child Protection Plan and professional opinion. They allow justification for recommendations and opinions to be traced. Copies of minutes will be circulated following the conference within twenty five working days to all those who attended, including family members. Reports will be shared in full, except for any part of the conference from which family members were excluded. The Chair can decide whether professionals who were not present at the meeting should have copies of the minutes.

Minutes should be kept secure and not passed to or discussed with a third party without the consent of the Chair.

Minutes are intended to be an accurate record of the meeting. Any amendments to the minutes should be received by the conference Chairperson within five working days of receipt.

**19. RECORDING THAT A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS THE SUBJECT OF A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN**

Local Authority's Children's Services Service records of the child subject of a Child Protection Plan enables IT to produce a list of all the children and young people resident in the area (including those placed there by another Local Authority or agency) who are considered to be at risk of significant harm and for whom there is a Child Protection Plan. This allows agencies and professionals to be aware of those children and young people who are judged to be at risk of significant harm and who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan. Legitimate enquirers such as the Police and health professionals are able to obtain this information both inside and outside of office hours. This information is managed within the Local Authority Children and Family Services Safeguarding and Reviewing unit.

CP information is confidential other than to legitimate enquirers and should only ever be accessed on a 'needs to know basis'.

## **20. ENQUIRIES TO THE LIST OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN**

Enquiries should be directed to the safeguarding and reviewing unit and the person making the enquiry should furnish as much detail as possible regarding the subject about whom they are enquiring.

To safeguard confidentiality a “call back” system will be operated.

If an enquiry is made about a child or young person and the child or young person’s case is open to Local Authority Children’s Services, the enquirer should be given the name of the child or young person’s lead social worker and the lead social worker informed of this enquiry so that they can follow it up.

If an enquiry is made about a child or young person at the same address as a child or young person who is the subject of a Child Protection Plan, or of an unborn baby subject to case conference, this information should be sent to the lead social worker of the child or young person who is the subject of the Child Protection Plan and or the lead social worker for the unborn baby.

If an enquiry is made but the child or young person is not known to Local Authority Children’s Services, the enquiry will be recorded as a contact, together with the advice given to the enquirer. In the event of there being a second enquiry about a child or young person who is not known to Children’s Services, not only should the fact of the earlier enquiry be notified to the later enquirer, but the designated manager in Local Authority Children’s Services should ensure that Local Authority Children’s Services consider whether this is or may be a child in need.

## **21. REQUESTS FOR A CHANGE OF WORKER**

Occasions may arise where relationships between parents, or other family members, are not productive in terms of working to safeguard and promote the welfare of their children. In such instances, agencies should respond sympathetically to a request for a change of worker, provided that such a change can be identified as being in the interests of the child or young person who is the focus of concern.

## **22. EFFECTIVE SUPPORT AND SUPERVISION**

Working to ensure children or young people are protected from harm requires sound professional judgements to be made. It is demanding work that can be distressing and stressful. All of those involved should have access to advice and support from, for example, peers, managers and named and designated professionals.

## **23. FURTHER INFORMATION**

[Working with Foreign Authorities: Child Protection Cases and Care Orders Departmental Advice for Local Authorities, Social Workers, Service Managers and Children’s Services Lawyers September 2014.](#)