



Multi-Agency Dispute Resolution Agreement

Dispute resolution at a strategic level

Working collaboratively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and families leading to better outcomes is at the heart of our Safeguarding Children partnership (SCP) arrangements.

When working with adults, children and their families, professional disagreement can be positive, as challenge allows for review and can foster creative ways of working. However, if not appropriately resolved, disagreements can impact negatively on positive working relationships and consequently on the ability to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Disagreements always require resolution.

In the event of any disagreement between practitioners involved in the NELSCP arrangements relating to multi- agency practice it is necessary to have in place a quick and straightforward means of ensuring safeguarding arrangements and resolving professional differences of opinion, as detailed in the Partnership Escalation Procedure. <https://www.safernel.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Escalation-Procedure.pdf>

Through effective leadership, openness, transparency and effective professional challenge, there is a commitment to resolving any disputes or concerns locally between the safeguarding partners, selected relevant agencies and other organisations and agencies in a timely fashion.

Handling concerns

Any agency concerns regarding the work of the Partnership or the implementation of the safeguarding arrangements will be processed in accordance with this Multi-Agency Dispute Resolution Agreement that the three partners, Local Authority, Police, Clinical Commissioning Group have agreed. This will ensure that concerns are dealt with seamlessly, promptly and through a clearly co-ordinated process.

Process

In the majority of instances areas of concern will be resolved through consideration and discussion. Concerns/ disputes should be raised at the relevant SCP strategic delivery group by the agency lead in order to seek a swift resolution.

In the event that following discussion the issue cannot be resolved it should be formally raised with the chair of the Safeguarding Children Partnership/ SCB Manager in writing. An acknowledgement will be provided within 5 working days.

The first point of resolution of issues is consideration by the three safeguarding partners. If a clear, single point of leadership is required, the safeguarding partners will agree the most appropriate partner, who will act on behalf of and in the interest of all three safeguarding partners. This will be done through a discussion at the NELSCP Executive Board or if done outside of the Partnership arena, it shall be referenced and recorded at the NELSCP Executive Board as required. The outcome and agreed actions will be shared with the partner agency raising the issue in writing by the SCP Chair within 15 working days of the dispute being received.

In the event that a resolution cannot be reached, the issue would be escalated to an Independent Scrutiny Officer in the first instance for consideration, mediation (if required) and resolution. If a meeting is required, the meeting will be chaired by the Independent Scrutiny Officer with an agenda / remit agreed prior to the meeting by all parties involved. This stage of the Dispute Process will be completed within 25 working days. Disputes will be formally recorded within the SCP board minutes and held within the SCP records.

Duties and powers of regulators

It is acknowledged that any safeguarding partner that fails to comply with their obligations under law are held to account through a variety of regulatory and inspection activity, for example Ofsted, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Care Quality Commission. If no resolution can be reached, consideration should be given by the three safeguarding partners to seek formal independent arbitration via a professional body such as the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators to reach an acceptable conclusion. Where necessary, legislation allows the Secretary of State to take enforcement action against any agency that is not meeting its statutory obligations as part of local safeguarding arrangements.