



Windsor and Maidenhead
**LOCAL SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN BOARD**

Resolving Professional Disagreements about Safeguarding Children (Escalation Policy)

May 2019

Resolving Professional Disagreement and Escalation

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1. Introduction

At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.

Safeguarding children and promoting their welfare is a responsibility shared by all organisations which often requires collaboration. This includes appropriate information sharing and working to multi-agency agreed decisions/plans.

Occasionally situations arise when workers within one organisation may believe or consider that the actions, inactions or decisions of another do not adequately safeguard a child. Learning from local and national Serious Case Reviews has highlighted the need for a clear escalation policy that all practitioners can feel confident to use.

Professionals in all agencies including schools have a duty to act proactively and assertively to ensure that a child's welfare is the paramount consideration. The Local Safeguarding Partners recognise that good practice will sometimes include constructive challenge between workers. Therefore, when a professional disagrees with the practice of another professional on the grounds of the child's welfare they should work with the colleague to first seek to understand the rationale for the decision. However, if concern still exists for the child's safety and wellbeing the professional concerned should challenge the practice using this policy. This policy provides workers, Designated Safeguarding Leads and managers with the means to raise concerns they have about decisions made by other professionals or agencies by:

- Avoiding professional disputes that put children at risk or obscure the focus on the child
- Resolving the disagreements between agencies quickly and openly
- Identifying problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity and promote resolution via amendments to multi-agency protocols and procedures

2. Potential Areas of Disagreement

This procedure identifies a non-exhaustive list of potential areas of disagreement, guidance on preventing disputes and procedures to be followed when disputes cannot be resolved through discussion and negotiation between professionals at front line level. Disagreements are most likely to arise around, but are not exclusive to;

- 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;
- The roles and responsibilities of the different organisations involved;
- The action or lack of action in progressing plans;
- There is disagreement over a decision by any agency working with the child to close the case and cease involvement with the family.

3. Stage One: Preventing Disputes

Most disagreements can be resolved through discussion and negotiation. The professionals involved should attempt to resolve differences through discussion within one working day, but if they are unable to do so, their disagreement must be reported by them to their line manager / team manager.

With respect to cases where a concern is ongoing, or progress is slow, it may be useful to instigate a professionals meeting to understand the risks and lived experience for the child. Most issues or concerns can be resolved, through discussion by the relevant line managers / team manager. This contact should take place within twenty-four hours. The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. It may be helpful to consider the involvement of the designated or named professional at this stage.

Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant managers involved and the detail of the escalation and agreements reached should be recorded on the child's file.

4. Stage Two: Informal Dispute Procedure

Where it is not possible to resolve the matter at frontline/ team manager level, the matter should be referred without delay to the next management level or appropriate safeguarding lead.

The issue will then be considered at that management level, with direct communication taking place with the designated professional or named professional for safeguarding within the individual agency that raised the dispute.

Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant managers involved and the detail of the escalation and agreements reached should be recorded on the child's file.

5. Stage Three: Formal Dispute Procedure

If despite following the Stage Two process the disagreement remains, the matter will be referred to a senior manager with responsibility for safeguarding who will consider the matter with their equivalent level of management within the concerned agency who is in dispute.

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 the 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 interests of the child take precedence over a professional stalemate.

6. Stage Four: Where Disagreements Remain

In the unlikely event that the professional disagreement remains unresolved, the matter must be referred to the departmental head with responsibility for safeguarding, who will report the matter to the relevant local Statutory Safeguarding Children Partners.

They will also instigate a meeting of senior managers with operational responsibility for the case, where a senior member from an uninvolved organisation should be identified as chair. This meeting will review the issues at hand and provide a final opportunity for the involved agencies to ensure that there is a full understanding of the issues before a decision is finalised. The Chair of this meeting will then report on issues arising from this process to the Serious Case Review Subgroup of the local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children Partnership.

In all cases where it has not been possible to resolve differences and/or where there may be lessons to be learned for future practice, consideration should be given to holding a multi-agency case review.

At any stage of the process, any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the second tier management staff involved and the detail of the conflict and agreements reached should be recorded on the child's file.

7. Conclusion

All disputes should be resolved in a timely way so that the welfare of the child remains paramount. In some situations, it may be required to instigate all of the stages within a short period of time or to escalate the process so that the safety of the child is not compromised. However, if a child is thought to be at risk of immediate harm the designated safeguarding lead/line manager in your agency should be informed immediately. The professional should use their professional judgement and as appropriate dial 999 and ask for Police assistance.

If the process highlights gaps in policies and procedures this must be brought to the attention of the Local Statutory Safeguarding Children Partners and referred to the Berkshire Child Protection Policy and Procedures Sub Group.