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Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Board

MANAGING INDIVIDUAL CASES

INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

Section C 05

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C 05 Initial Child Protection Conferences



You can scroll through the document or use the links in the contents list below.

CONTENTS

- 01 [Purpose of Initial Child Protection Conference](#)
- 02 [Convening ICPC](#)
- 03 [Timing of ICPC](#)
- 04 [Pre-birth Conference](#)
- 05 [Who Should Attend](#)
- 06 [Quorate Conferences](#)
- 07 [Parental Participation](#)
- 08 [Exclusion / Restriction](#)
- 09 [Children's Participation](#)
- 10 [Social Worker](#)
- 11 [The Board's Procedures](#)
- 12 [Conference & Review Manager](#)
- 13 [Dissent from the Decision](#)
- 14 [Minutes of CP Conferences](#)

01 Purpose of Initial Child Protection Conference

The Initial Child Protection Conference will include a decision as to whether a child should be the subject of a Child Protection Plan. It brings together family members, the child (where appropriate), supporter or advocates and those professionals most involved with the child and family to share information, assess risks and to formulate an agreed Child Protection Plan if appropriate, with the child's safety and welfare as its paramount aim.

Within this, there are the following requirements:

- To share and analyse information about the family history, the child's health, development and functioning and the parents capacity to ensure the child's safety and promote his/her well being.
- To consider the evidence and form a view about the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm in the future and decide whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm.
- To decide whether the child should be the subject of a Child Protection Plan
- If so, to agree an outline, inter-agency Child Protection Plan setting out how the agreed actions will be taken forward and with what intended outcomes and time-scales.
- To nominate a lead worker (who will be the child's social worker), to develop and co-ordinate the implementation of the Child Protection Plan.
- To identify the membership of the multi agency Core Group to develop and monitor the Child Protection Plan

- To set the date for the first Core Group meeting to take place within 10 working days of the Conference. To set the date for the Child Protection Review Conference

Where the child does not require a Child Protection Plan but is considered to be In Need, to recommend if appropriate that services are provided to promote the child's health or development and/or a continuation of the Child and Family Assessment

02 Convening Initial Child Protection Conference

When an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) should be convened:

An Initial Child Protection Conference must be convened when it is believed that a child may continue to suffer or to be at risk of suffering significant harm.

The conference must consider all the children in the household, even if concerns are only being expressed about one child.

The relevant Children's Social Care manager is responsible for making the decision to convene an ICPC and the reasons for calling the conference must be recorded as a strategy discussion.

Where a senior manager from another agency requests that an ICPC is convened, this request will be given serious consideration by the Children & Family Services, Children's Social Care manager and a response will be given in writing.

An ICPC will normally be convened within 15 working days of the strategy discussion or the strategy discussion at which the section 47 enquiry was initiated if more than one has been held under the following circumstances (for recording purposes the 15 days usually starts from the opening of the Section 47):

- Following a Section 47 Enquiry, where it is believed that a child is at risk of suffering or may continue to suffer significant harm and that following assessment and analysis an ICPC is deemed to be the most appropriate means of affording the child protection;
- If the S47 requires a further strategy discussion to be arranged the 15 days will commence from the second strategy discussion.

03 Timing of ICPC

In the time between the conclusion of the Section 47 Enquiry and the ICPC, a short term Child Protection Plan must be agreed with clear roles and responsibilities, based on the outcome of the Section 47 Enquiry, in order to ensure that the child is protected until the Conference is held.

All ICPC should take place within 15 working days of the:

- Strategy Discussion that started the Section 47; or
- Notification by another local authority that a child who is the subject of a Child Protection Plan has moved into the area.

In the exceptional circumstance of complex enquiries or pre-birth assessments, the ICPC may be delayed.

Any such delay must have written authorisation from the relevant Strategic Manager (including reasons for the delay). The case manager must arrange to notify all relevant agencies of the delay and ensure that risks to the child are monitored and a short term Child Protection Plan is in place to safeguard the child. The reasons for the delay will also be recorded in the conference minutes.

04 Pre-birth Conference

A pre-birth conference is an ICPC concerning an unborn child.

The decision to hold a conference pre-birth will usually follow from a pre-birth Child and Family Assessment and a conference should be held:

- Where a pre-birth assessment gives rise to concerns that an unborn child may be at risk of significant harm;
- Where a previous child has died or been removed from parent/s or carer/s as a result of significant harm;
- Where a child is to be born into a family or household which already has children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan;
- Where a person known to pose a risk to children resides in the household or is known to be a regular visitor

Risk factors to be considered include the impact of a parent's mental ill-health, learning disabilities, substance misuse or of domestic abuse. This list is not exhaustive – for further guidance see Responding to Concerns about Unborn Children (see Section D10).

All agencies involved with the expectant mother should consider the need for an early referral to Children & Family Services, Children's Social Care so that assessments are undertaken and family support services provided as early as possible in the pregnancy.

Timing of Pre-Birth Conferences

The pre-birth conference should take place no later than 3 months before the due date of delivery, to allow as much time as possible for planning support for the baby and family.

Where there is a known likelihood of a premature birth, the conference should be held earlier.

Attendance

In addition to those who normally attend an ICPC, midwifery, relevant neo-natal and support services must be invited.

Parents or carers should be invited as they would be to other Child Protection Conferences and should be fully involved in plans for the child's future.

An Unborn Child with a Child Protection Plan

A Child Protection Plan must be outlined prior to the birth of the baby.

The Core Group must be established and meet prior to the birth, and certainly prior to the baby's return home after a hospital birth.

The unborn baby's name and expected date of delivery should form part of the child protection plan. The surname used must be that of the mother. The lead worker must then ensure that the name and correct birth date is recorded on the child's case records following the birth.

If the child is resident outside of the area at birth, the local authority in whose area the child is resident must be advised that the child is in their area and the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

Timing of Review Conferences

The first Child Protection Review Conference (CPRC) will be scheduled to take place within normal time scales or within 1 month of the child's birth, whichever is earlier.

05 Who Should Attend

See section 07: Parental Participation and 09: Children's Participation.

The conference should consist of the smallest number of people consistent with effective case management, but the following should normally be invited:

- Parents/carers and /or family members
- The child where deemed to be age appropriate and/or the child's representative or advocate
- The child's social worker and supervisor
- The child's carer
- The Police Central Referral Unit
- The relevant Health Trust staff involved with the child/ren - e.g. health visitor, school nurse, ward staff where appropriate
- The child's GP and the parents/carers' GP (if different)
- Schools for all children of school age in the household
- Probation service
- The paediatrician responsible for any medical assessment of the child
- Any other agency who has involvement with the child/family
- CPN

In addition, attendees may include those whose contribution relates to their professional expertise and/or knowledge of the family and/or responsibility for relevant services, and should be limited to those with a need to know or who have a significant contribution to make to the assessment of the child and family. These may include:

- Legal services - if it is anticipated that legal advice will be required
- The [Children's Guardian] and the child's solicitor where there are current court proceedings
- Health services involved with parent(s) e.g. specialist doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists
- Midwifery services where the conference concerns an unborn or new-born child ([see 04: Pre-birth conferences](#))
- Education Welfare Service
- Family Placement Service (with or on behalf of a foster carer)

- Housing services
- Mental health (adult or child) services
- Alcohol and substance abuse services
- Domestic Violence Officers
- Any professional or service provider involved with the children or adults in the family, including foster carers, residential staff and/or early years staff
- A representative of the Armed Services, where relevant
- Any other relevant professional or service provider
- Supporter (including advocate), friend or solicitor (for the child and parent/carer)

A professional observer can only attend with the prior consent of the conference and review manager and the family, and must not take part in discussions or decision-making. This may be for the observer's professional development or to assist in the process of whether professional standards are being met. Requests must be made to the conference and review manager at least 3 days in advance of the conference. Only one observer will be permitted to attend, subject to consent being given.

Professionals who are invited but unable to attend for unavoidable reasons should:

- Arrange wherever possible for another well briefed agency representative to attend
- Inform the conference administrator and conference and review manager
- Submit a written report – see 11: [Safeguarding Children Board's Procedures](#).

The time of day at which a conference is convened should, if possible, be arranged to facilitate attendance of the family and key contributors.

06 Quorate Conferences

The primary principle for determining quoracy is that there should be sufficient information from agencies present to enable safe decisions to be made.

Normally, minimum representation is the social worker and at least two other agencies which have had direct contact with the child and family. Where a conference is not quorate the conference will proceed and the conference and review manager must ensure that:

- A Child Protection Plan is produced or
- The existing plan is reviewed with the professionals and family members that do attend, in order to safeguard the welfare of the child/ren. This may mean that a child/ren in need plan will be formulated.

If the conference is not quorate, the decision and recommendations made are provisional. Copies of these minutes are to be sent to those agencies not present with the following statement:

“This conference was not quorate and, therefore, the decision and recommendations made are provisional.”

If they are not in agreement with the provisional decision / recommendations, they should contact the Chairperson for consideration of the need to reconvene the conference.

07 Parental Participation

Enabling Parental Participation

All parents and persons with Parental Responsibility must be invited to conferences (unless exclusion is justified See 08: Exclusions / Restrictions). Parents will be encouraged to contribute to conferences; usually by attending, unless it is likely to prejudice the welfare of the child.

Role of the Social Worker

The social worker must facilitate the constructive involvement of the parents by ensuring in advance of the conference that they are given sufficient information and practical support to make a meaningful contribution. 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.

The social worker must explain to parents the purpose of the meeting, who will attend, the way in which it will operate, the purpose and meaning if their child is deemed to require a Child Protection Plan and their right to challenge the outcome under the Appeals Procedure.

The parents should be provided with a copy of the leaflet "A Guide to Child Protection Conferences – information for parents, carers and children" (see Section H), which includes information regarding the right to bring a friend, supporter (including an advocate) or solicitor (in the role of supporter), details of any local advice and advocacy services and the Appeals Procedure.

Invitations for the parents to attend the conference should be verbally conveyed to them by the social worker and will be confirmed in writing by the Safeguarding Unit.

Provision should be made to ensure that visually or hearing impaired or otherwise disabled parents are enabled to participate, including whether they need assistance with transport to enable their attendance

An interpreter should be provided for those who require it. A family member should not be expected to act as an interpreter of spoken or signed language.

Preparation should also include consideration of childcare arrangements to enable the attendance of parents.

If parents do not wish to attend the conference they must be provided with full opportunities to contribute their views. The social worker must facilitate this by:

- Enabling the parent to represent their views by alternative means
- Meeting the conference and review manager prior to conference
- Agreeing that the social worker, or any other professional, expresses their views

Role of the Conference and Review Manager (CRM)

Immediately prior to the conference, the conference and review manager should meet with any family members to ensure that they understand the process. This may, where the potential for conflict exists, involve separate meeting with the different parties.

The conference and review manager will ensure that all those participating in the conference, including supporters, sign the confidentiality undertaking.

A professional who is independent of operational or line management responsibilities for the case should chair the conference. The conference chair is accountable to the Director of Children and Family Services. The status of the chair should be sufficient to ensure inter-agency commitment to the conference and the child protection plan. Wherever possible, the same person should also chair subsequent child protection reviews in respect of a specific child. The responsibilities of the chair include:

- meeting the child and family members in advance, to ensure that they understand the purpose of the conference and what will happen;
- setting out the purpose of the conference to all present, determining the agenda and emphasising the confidential nature of the occasion;
- enabling all those present, and absent contributors, to make their full contribution to discussion and decision-making;
- ensuring that the conference takes the decisions required of it in an informed, systematic and explicit way; and
- being accountable to the Director of People's Services for the conduct of conferences.

A conference chair should be trained in the role and should have:

- a good understanding and professional knowledge of children's welfare and development, and best practice in working with children and families;
- the ability to look at objectively and assess the implications of the evidence on which judgments should be based;
- skills in chairing meetings in a way which encourages constructive participation, while maintaining a clear focus on the welfare of the child and the decisions which have to be taken;
- knowledge and understanding of anti-discriminatory practice; and
- knowledge of relevant legislation, including that relating to children's services and human rights.

08 Exclusion / Restriction

Criteria for Excluding Parents or Restricting their Participation

In circumstances where it may be necessary to exclude one or more family members from part or all of a conference, the request to exclude or restrict a parents participation should be discussed with the conference and review manager and confirmed in writing if possible at least 3 days in advance.

The agency concerned must indicate which of the grounds it believes is met and the information or evidence the request is based on. The conference and review manager must consider the representation carefully and may need legal advice.

The decision should be made according to the following criteria:

- Indications that the presence of the parent may seriously prejudice the welfare of the child, for example where information shared could further victimise the child or increase the child's vulnerability to further abuse

- Sufficient evidence that a parent/carer may behave in such a way as to disrupt the conference such as violence, threats of violence, racist, or other forms of discriminatory or oppressive behaviour or being in an unfit state 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 is not present while s/he is present
- The need (agreed in advance with the conference and review manager) for members to receive confidential information that would otherwise be unavailable, such as legal advice or information about a third party or criminal investigation
- Conflicts between different family members who may not be able to attend at the same time e.g. in situations of domestic abuse
- It is necessary to present information to the conference which, if shared with certain family members, might increase the risk to the child
- Attendance by a known, alleged or suspected perpetrator may threaten or otherwise place the child at risk
- Their presence may prejudice any legal proceedings or Police investigation, for example because they have yet to be interviewed or because bail conditions restrict their attendance
- There is a serious threat of violence toward any person at the conference

Exclusion at one conference is not reason enough in itself for exclusion at further conferences.

The possibility that the parent may be prosecuted for an offence against a child is not in itself a reason for exclusion although in these circumstances the conference and review manager may take advice from the Police and, if criminal proceedings have been initiated, the Crown Prosecution Service, about the implications arising from an alleged perpetrator's attendance.

Those excluded should usually be provided with a copy of the social worker's report to the conference and be provided with the opportunity to have their views recorded and presented to the conference.

If, in planning a conference, it becomes clear to the conference and review manager that there may be conflict of interests between the children and parents, the conference should be planned so that the welfare of the child can remain paramount.

This may mean arranging for parents to participate in separate parts of the conference and make separate waiting arrangements.

It may also become clear in the course of a conference, that its effectiveness will be seriously impaired by the presence of the parent. In these circumstances, the conference and review manager may ask them to leave.

Where a parent is on bail, or subject to an active police investigation, it is the responsibility of the conference and review manager to ensure that the Police can fully present their information and views and also that the parents participate as fully as circumstances allow.

The decision of the conference and review manager over matters of exclusion is final.

Where a parent/carer attends only part of a conference as a result of exclusion, s/he will receive the record of the conference. The conference and review manager should decide if the entire record is provided or only that part attended by the excluded parent/carer.

09 Children's Participation

Enabling Children's Participation

The child must be kept informed and involved throughout the Section 47 Enquiry and, if their age and level of understanding is sufficient, should be invited to contribute to the conference; which can include attendance. In practice, the appropriateness of enabling an individual child to attend must be assessed in advance and relevant arrangements made to facilitate attendance at all or part of the conference. Consideration must also be given to the impact on siblings who don't or can't attend

In addition a referral for an independent advocate must be made for all eligible children – (see the Child's Independent Advocate below).

Criteria for attendance of child at conference

The key considerations are:

- Does the child have sufficient understanding of the process?
- Has the child expressed an explicit or implicit wish to be involved?
- What are the parents' views about the child's proposed presence?
- Is inclusion assessed to be of benefit to the child?
- Whether the child's attendance at the conference will cause him or her harm.

The test of 'sufficient understanding', is partly a function of age and partly the child's capacity to understand.

In order to establish their wishes with respect to attendance the child must be first provided with a full and clear explanation of the purpose, conduct, membership of the conference and potential provision of an independent advocate.

The child should be provided with a copy of the leaflet "A Guide to Child Protection Conferences – information for parents, carers and children" (see Section H), which includes information regarding the right to bring a supporter (including an advocate) or solicitor (in the role of supporter), details of any local advice and advocacy services and the Appeals Procedure.

Written information should be translated into the appropriate language for those able to read and an alternative medium offered for those who need it.

A declared wish not to attend a conference must be respected.

Consideration should be given to the views of and impact on the parent /carer of the child's proposed attendance; however, where there is a conflict between the wishes of the child and the views of the parents/carers, the child's interests should be the priority. When necessary, separate attendance should be arranged.

Decision that a child should or should not attend

A decision about whether to invite the child should be made in advance of the conference by the conference and review manager, in consultation with the social worker, his or her manager and any other relevant professional, including the child's independent advocate where relevant.

Any decision that a child should not attend conference should be made using the following criteria:

- The child's age and understanding indicate that attendance would be inappropriate;
- The conference would be unable to fulfill its own aims of protection due to the disruptive behaviour of the child;
- Criminal charges or Court appearances of the parent/carer are pending and the child may be a witness.

The decision of the conference and review manager should be recorded, with reasons.

This decision must be explained to the child by his or her social worker.

Indirect Participation

If it is decided that the child should not attend or to restrict the child's participation, every effort should be made by the social worker to obtain and present the views and wishes of the child, which can include:

- a submission by letter, email, text message, a picture, an audio or video tape – prepared alone or with support
- the child's independent advocate (see below) or other professional speaking on the child's behalf (for example, a person with specialist skills or knowledge);
- the child meeting the conference and review manager before the conference to share his or her views;

Direct Participation

If the decision is that the child is to attend all or part of the conference, then the social worker should:

- Identify and agree a supporter or independent advocate with the child (see below)
- Ensure that the child has an opportunity to discuss any concerns that s/he may have about attendance
- Explain to the child who will be at the conference, their roles and responsibilities in the meeting, the information likely to be discussed and the possible outcomes
- Decide with the child the extent to which s/he wishes to participate and how his or her wishes and views will be presented
- Share and discuss the content of the social work report for the Conference
- Ensure appropriate support following conference.

If the child is attending the Conference, it is the responsibility of the Conference and Review Manager to:

- Clarify with the child's social worker what information will be available to the child both before and during the conference
- Meet with the child and independent advocate or supporter separately to the parents/carers for 15 minutes prior to the conference
- Ensure that the child has sufficient support to present his or her wishes and views during the conference
- Monitor the child's welfare throughout the conference, and arrange for the child to have a break if necessary

- Ensure that the child is informed of the decisions and recommendations of the conference
- Write personally to the child to confirm the decision and recommendations
- Ensure that the conference record adequately reflects the child's contribution

If the child is attending the conference, it is the responsibility of all professionals to:

- Complete a family report with separate sections for each child in the family
- Make it clear which parts of the report can be shared with the child
- Share and discuss the report with the child prior to the conference
- Use language that is understandable to both the child and the family
- Discuss with the social worker any potential difficulties arising from the child's participation

It is essential that planning takes place prior to the conference to ensure that the practical arrangements are suitable. The social worker should in discussion with the conference and review manager:

- Ensure that the venue is as child friendly as possible
- Identify and meet any special needs
- Ensure that at least 15 minutes is available before the start for the child and his or her independent advocate to meet with the conference and review manager
- Arrange transport to and from the venue
- Identify a separate, comfortable waiting area for the child and the supporter (with suitable refreshments and accessible toilets)

The Child's Independent Advocate

The social worker should inform the child about any advocacy service and help them to make contact if they wish to contact the service themselves.

The advocate will attend the conference with the child, subject to the child's consent. The advocate will not be present for any part of the conference where information is presented which will not be made available to the child.

Where an advocate is to attend a case conference the social worker must inform the conference and review manager before the conference.

Support to the child after the conference

The social worker should meet with the child as soon as possible after the conference to feedback and discuss the outcomes of the conference and to allow the child to ask any questions about the decisions made.

10 The Social Worker

Responsibilities of the Social Worker before the Conference

The social worker is responsible for the following:

- Completing the Section 47 Enquiry and preparing and presenting a written report to the conference using the pro forma;
- Considering, as described in 07: Parental Participation and 09: Children's Participation, the participation of parents and children in the conference;
- Arranging for the child to attend if appropriate;
- Arranging the parent(s)' attendance unless a decision is reached to exclude them;
- Preparing the child and parent(s) and informing them about the role, purpose and process of the conference (unless a decision is reached not to inform them). This information should include an explanation of who will be there and why. Parents should be helped to understand their own responsibilities and rights, including the fact that they may wish to invite a supporter.

Parent(s) and children should be given a copy of the leaflet "A Guide to Child Protection Conferences – information for parents, carers and children" (see 07: Parental Participation and 09: Children's Participation).

They should be provided with support and advice to help them prepare for and contribute to the conference.

If the child or parents are not invited or do not wish to attend, they should be encouraged to present their contributions in writing or in another form and assisted to do so.

The social worker is responsible for establishing whether an interpreter is required and briefing the interpreter as necessary, or whether parent(s) or children need assistance, for example, with transport or child care arrangements.

Report to Conference

Via Care First, the social worker should provide to the conference a dated report, which must be endorsed and counter-signed by a children's social care manager.

Information on all children in the household must be provided and the report should be clear about which children are the subjects of the conference. The report should be provided to parents/carers and older children (see 07: Parental Participation and 09: Children's Participation) at least two working days in advance of the ICPC to enable any factual inaccuracies to be identified, and any areas of disagreement noted. Comments or suggestions made by the child or parents as a result of seeing the report must be included or conveyed verbally to the conference.

Depending on the source of this information permission should be sought to enable a disclosure to be held to enabling a certain level of information to be shared.

In exceptional circumstances where confidential information cannot be shared with the child or parent(s) beforehand, the social worker should seek guidance from their manager, who may wish to consult the conference and review manager.

Where necessary, the reports should be translated into the relevant language or medium, taking account of the language and any sensory or learning difficulties of the child or parents.

The report should be made available to the conference and review manager at least two working days prior to the Initial Child Protection Conference. The report will be attached to the minutes for circulation.

11 The Safeguarding Children Board's Procedures

Responsibilities of other Professionals/Agencies

All participants are responsible for the following:

- To make attendance at conferences high priority;
- To make available relevant information in a written report to the conference (using the Report for Initial Child Protection Conference) and contribute to the discussion, assessment of risk and decision.
- Confirming in advance with the Safeguarding Unit their attendance at the conference or informing the Unit if they are unable to attend;
- Ensuring that information to be presented by them at conference is known to, and shared with the child and parents 2 working days beforehand;
- Ensuring that their contribution is non-discriminatory;
- In exceptional circumstances where confidential information cannot be shared with the child or parent(s) beforehand, they should seek guidance from their manager, who must discuss with the conference and review manager. Exclusions must be considered wherever possible and alternatives considered
- Ensuring that information is communicated or translated in the most appropriate way taking account of the language and any sensory or learning difficulties of the child or parents.
- Ensuring that they are clear about their role within the conference and the extent to which they have authority to make decisions on behalf of their agency.

Reports to Conference

The report should include details of the agency's involvement with the child and family, and information concerning the agency's knowledge of the child's developmental needs, the capacity of the parents/carers to meet the needs of their child within their family and environmental context.

Agency representatives attending conferences should confer with their colleagues before preparing their contribution to a conference, to make sure it contains all relevant and available information and, where a report is prepared, this should be typed and signed with sufficient copies of the report for all attendees at the conference.

The reports must make it clear which children are the subjects of the conference, but address any known circumstances of all children in the household.

Where necessary, reports should be translated into the relevant language or medium, taking account of the language and any sensory or learning difficulties of the child or parents.

The reports should be shared with the parents/carers and the child (if old enough) before the conference, in the same way as described for social workers (minimum of 2 days before the conference).

Such reports should also be made available to the conference and review manager 2 working days in advance of the conference.

Where agency representatives are unable to attend the conference, they must ensure that their typed report is made available to the conference, through the Safeguarding Unit, and where possible that a colleague attends in their place. The reports will be attached to, or summarised within the minutes, for circulation.

12 Conference & Review Manager

Responsibilities of the Conference and Review Manager

The Safeguarding Unit provides a conference and review manager for all conferences, i.e. a person who has no operational or line management responsibility for the case. The conference and review manager will ensure that the conference is conducted in line with the procedures and guidance set out by the Safeguarding Children Board.

The conference and review manager must ensure that at least three agencies are represented at the conference unless agreed otherwise - see quorum for conference in 06: Quorate Conferences.

The conference and review manager is responsible for ensuring that conferences are conducted in an anti-discriminatory manner, ensuring that everyone uses unambiguous and respectful language. See page 7.

Before the Conference

The responsibilities of the conference and review manager in relation to the decision-making about parents and children's participation are set out in 07: Parental Participation and 09: Children's Participation.

Before the conference begins, the conference and review manager should meet the parents, the child and child's advocate, to ensure that they understand the purpose of the conference and how it will be conducted.

Where necessary, interpreters or translators should be made available to facilitate family participation.

At the Start of the Conference

At the start of the conference the conference and review manager will:

- Set out the purpose of the conference
- Confirm the Initial Child Protection Conference Agenda
- Emphasise the need for confidentiality and ensure that all participants have signed the confidentiality agreement
- Advise participants of the guiding principles
- Facilitate introductions
- Clarify the contributions of those present, including supporters of the family
- Clarify any need for a confidential discussion during the conference
- If the parent(s) or the child brings an advocate or supporter, the conference and review manager will need to clarify the advocate or supporter's role, ensuring that any solicitor who attends in this role is clear that s/he may support parent(s), clarify information but may not cross-examine any contributor.

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. For example, Children's Social Care are required (by section 26 of the Children Act 1989) to establish complaints procedures to deal with complaints arising in respect of Part III of the Act.

During the Conference

The conference and review manager will ensure that:

- Parents are given a reasonable opportunity to:
 - Understand the purpose of the meeting and the role of all agencies involved in the protection of their children;
 - Respond to and challenge appropriately any suspicions, allegations or opinions expressed by other participants;
 - Contribute and participate as fully as possible to the planning process;
 - Play a part in helping to safeguard and promote their children's welfare;
- The conference maintains a focus on the welfare of the children and is conducted as set out in the Child Protection Conferences: Guiding Principles
- Consideration is given to the welfare and safety of all children in the household and within the family network
- All relevant people, including the subject children and parents, have been given appropriate opportunities to make a full contribution and that full consideration is given to the information they present.
- Reports of those not present are made known to the participants.
- The wishes and feelings of the children are clearly outlined.
- Needs arising from the child's gender, any disabilities, racial, cultural, linguistic or religious background, are fully considered and accounted for when making decisions or developing plans
- All participants distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion. When information is provided from another source, i.e. second or third hand, this should be made clear.
- A debate takes place, which examines the findings of reports, risk assessments and analysis are encouraged, all options are considered and the conference reaches decisions in an informed and non-discriminatory way.
- All concerned are advised and reminded of the Appeals Procedure.
- Where a decision has been taken to exclude or restrict the level of parental or child participation, arrangements are made with the social worker for absent parents and children to be informed of the decisions of conferences.

The Decision Making Process – Criteria for making a child the subject of a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

The conference should determine the following question when determining whether the criteria for a child protection plan has been met.

Is the child at continuing risk of significant harm?

The test should be either that:

- The child is 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 are likely; or
- Professional judgement, substantiated by finding 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 or development as a result of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect.

If the child is at continuing risk of significant harm, the child will be made the subject of a child protection plan.

The conference and review manager must ensure that the decision about the need for a Child Protection Plan is based on the views of all agencies represented, including written reports. This discussion will normally take place with the parents/carers present.

The decision will be taken by the Safeguarding Children Board member agencies attending the conference; this will not include the child, parents, carers, foster carers, childminders, voluntary playgroups, although they may be asked to comment on the strengths, concerns, risks, future plans and protection.

The conference and review manager must ensure that all members of the conference are clear about the conclusions reached, decision reached and recommendations made, and that the conference minutes accurately reflect the discussions and decision.

All child protection conferences, both initial and review should have a dedicated administrative person to take notes and produce a record of the meeting. The record of the conference is a crucial working document for all relevant professionals and the family. It should include:

- The essential facts of the case;
- a summary of discussion at the conference, which accurately reflects contributions made;
- all decisions reached, with information outlining the reasons for decisions; and
- a translation of decisions into an outline or revised child protection plan enabling everyone to be clear about their tasks.

A copy should be sent as soon as possible after 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. This is in addition to sharing the main decisions within one working day of the conference. The record is confidential and should not be passed by professionals to third parties without the consent of either the conference chair or the lead social worker. However, in cases of criminal proceedings, the police may reveal the existence of the notes to the CPS in accordance with the Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act 1996. The record of the decisions of the child protection conference should be retained by the recipient agencies and professionals in accordance with their record retention policies.

Any dissent must be recorded in the conference minutes (see C05 13, [Dissent from Decision](#)).

If parents, those with Parental Responsibility or the child (if of sufficient age and understanding) disagree with the decision, the conference and review manager must discuss the issue with them, and explain their right to and the process for challenge under the Appeals Procedure.

Categories for which a child is made the subject of a child protection plan

If the decision is that the child is at continuing risk of significant harm and in need of a Child Protection Plan, the conference should determine the category of risk. The category used must indicate to those consulting the Child Protection plan what the primary presenting concerns are at the time when the child was made the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

The categories are: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse or neglect.

The need for a Child Protection Plan should be considered separately in respect of each child in the family or household.

If a child is made the subject of a Child Protection Plan

Where a decision is reached that a child needs to be the subject of a child protection plan, the conference and review manager must ensure that:

- A Child Protection Plan is outlined and clearly understood by all concerned including the parents and where appropriate, the child; and the outline plan sets out what needs to change in order to safeguard the child
- A keyworker is appointed to develop, co-ordinate and implement the Child Protection Plan
- The membership of a Core Group of professionals and family members is identified, who will develop, implement and monitor the Child Protection Plan as a detailed working tool
- It is established how children, parents and wider family members should be involved in the ongoing assessment, planning and implementation process, and the support, advice and advocacy available to them
- Any other assessments of the child and family are identified, in order to make sound judgements on how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child
- A contingency plan is in place if agreed actions are not completed and/or circumstances change
- The parents and child know the name of the lead worker and Core Group members
- The parent(s), those with Parental Responsibility and child(ren) are advised of their right to challenge the decisions made by those present at the conference under the Appeals Procedure
- The decisions and recommendations of the conference have been summarised
- A date is set for the first Core Group meeting within 10 working days of the ICPC
- Conference and timescales set for subsequent meetings which are to take place at a minimum of four-weekly intervals
- A date is set for the first Child Protection Review Conference within three months and at six monthly intervals thereafter, and an indication given of the circumstances in which it might be necessary to convene the Review Conference before that date

If a child is not made the subject of a Child Protection Plan

The conference and review manager must ensure that the conference considers the need to draw up a Child in Need Plan when the criteria for a child protection plan are not met but the child is still in need of help to promote his health and development.

13 Dissent from the Conference Decision

Wherever possible, the conference and review manager should endeavor to enable all the agencies to reach agreement about whether the child should be made the subject of a Child Protection plan.

If a consensus view cannot be reached and to avoid the conference being unable to conclude its agenda, each Safeguarding Children Board member agency at the conference will be asked to provide a view on making the child the subject of a child protection plan on

behalf of their agency and again to give an analysis of the reasons. A majority view will then be taken and dissent recorded in the minutes.

In the event of no majority view, the conference and review manager will make the decision.

The child, the [Children's Guardian] or solicitor, the family or their solicitor/support person, Legal Services and anyone representing non Safeguarding Children Board member agencies will not be asked to give a view.

In the event of the conference and review manager disagreeing with the majority decision, s/he will make explicit at the conference:-

- the fact that he disagrees and his intention to note this in the minutes
- that the conference will be adjourned to allow relevant managers and practitioners to discuss and reconsider their views on whether the child needs a plan. All agencies should consider what seniority of manager will attend the reconvened conference. Every effort should be made to resolve disagreements between agencies.

This should be an exceptional occurrence.

Conferences can only decide if a child should be made the subject of a child protection plan in accordance with safeguarding board procedures. Apart from this decision, the conference may only make recommendations regarding the nature of other agency's intervention. This is particularly the case where a recommendation is made by the conference to consider legal proceedings. A decision in respect of this recommendation is for the local authority's Children and Family Services, Children's Social Care.

If parents/carers, those with Parental Responsibility or the child (if of sufficient age and understanding) disagree with the conference decision, the conference and review manager must further discuss their concerns and explain the appeals process – see [Procedure C08 Appeals](#).

14 Minutes of CP Conferences

The record of the conference is a crucial working document for all relevant professionals and the family.

Minutes will be taken of all conferences by a Conference and Panel Coordinator from the Safeguarding Unit whose sole task within the conference is to provide a written record of proceedings in a consistent format; these minutes are not a verbatim record. The conference and review manager is responsible for ensuring that the minutes accurately reflect the discussion held and decisions and recommendations made.

Contents

Conference minutes should include:

- Name, date of birth, ethnicity and address of the subject/s of the conference, parents/carers and other adults in the household
- Who was invited, who attended the conference and who submitted their apologies
- The reason for the conference
- A list of written reports available to conference and whether open to parents/carers or not

- A summary of the information shared and discussion
- Views and wishes of each child
- Views of parents/carers
- Opinions of agencies on risk and whether the criteria for registration have been met, requiring the child to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan
- Decision on whether a Child Protection Plan is required, with information outlining the reasons, including the category
- The outline Child Protection Plan or any Child in Need Plan
- Name of lead worker if the child has a Child Protection Plan
- Members of the Core Group if the child has a Child Protection Plan and date of first meeting
- Date of next Child Protection Review Conference

All written reports submitted to the conference will be appended to the minutes unless the authors request otherwise.

Circulation of Minutes

The decision of the conference and, where appropriate, details of the category of concern, the name of the Lead Worker/Lead Professional and Core Group membership should be recorded and circulated to all those invited to attend the conference within three working days.

The minutes of the conference, signed by the conference and review manager, will be sent to all agencies who attended, or were invited and to relevant family members (except for any part of the conference from which they were excluded) within 15 working days of the conference.

Copies of the minutes, edited as necessary, should be given to the parents/carers, child (if old enough) and the child's advocate by the lead worker.

Where parents/carers and/or the children have a sensory disability or where English is not their first language, steps must be taken to ensure that they can fully understand the minutes.

Where a parent or child has been fully excluded from the conference, the decision on what information they should receive will be taken by the conference and review manager in consultation with other conference members.

Where a supporter, solicitor, other family member or observer has attended a conference, the minutes will not be distributed to them unless they have a role in the Child Protection Plan and the conference agrees it appropriate.

Where a child has attended a Child Protection Conference, the child's social worker must arrange to see them and arrange to discuss relevant sections of the minutes and the Child Protection Plan.

Retention of Minutes

The central copy of the minutes will be retained on the main case file with a further copy in the Safeguarding Unit held for 75 years following the discontinuation of the Child Protection Plan.

The recipient agencies and professionals should retain the minutes of the Child Protection Conference in a manner that ensures their confidentiality and in accordance with their agency's record retention policy.

Access to Minutes

Each agency should determine who within that agency should have access to the minutes.

Conference minutes are confidential and should not be passed to third parties without the consent of the Conference and Review Manager, or the relevant Strategic Manager, or a Court Order.

Where there are ongoing criminal proceedings, there should be consultation between the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to the sharing of the minutes.

Subsequent requests for access to the minutes by professionals who do not have a legal or direct role in the case should be referred to the Conference and Review Manager.

Children (if of sufficient age and understanding) and/or parents/carers on their behalf may have the right of access to their records held by Children and Family Services, Children's Social Care.

Access can be refused if it is likely to result in serious harm to some-one or on other limited grounds, but where the criteria for refusal do not apply, the Safeguarding Unit will release the open access sections of the conference minutes without any further checks with professional colleagues.

The closed access section of the minutes will not be released without full consultation with all parties. However, time and events often overtake the significance of closed access, for example where Court proceedings have taken place and evidence has been exchanged, and withholding access may not be justified. There will be a presumption in favour of disclosure although while Court proceedings are ongoing, there may be legal grounds for refusing access.