**Independent Advocacy - Pilot Process in Buckinghamshire**

1. ***Referral***

When agreement is given that a child aged 10 years or older will be considered at an Initial Child Protection Conference, CP Admin will email the ICPC Request Form to the FGC Manager / Administrator, copying in the allocated social worker. The email will detail which children are aged 10 years and older and should therefore be offered an advocate.

The FGC Service will allocate an advocate.

The advocate will contact the allocated social worker to consider:

* Has the child protection conference process been explained to the child in an age appropriate way?
* Has s/he expressed an explicit or implicit wish to be involved?
* What are the parent’s views about the child’s proposed attendance?
* Is inclusion assessed to be of benefit to the child?
* Will the conference be able to fulfil its aims of protecting the child if the child is present?
1. ***Parental Consent***

With the social workers agreement, the advocate will contact the parents by telephone to explain their role and seek their verbal consent for the advocate to meet directly with the child. Where access to the advocacy service is denied the advocate will inform the social worker and Child Protection Conference Chair and this will be included in the social workers assessment report for conference.

1. ***Initial Meeting with the Child***

The Initial Meeting will usually take place within school or within an appropriately agreed community setting. During the advocates first meeting with the child they will:

* Provide the child with a full and clear child friendly explanation of the purpose, conduct and membership of the conference
* Potential provision of their services as an independent advocate
* Establish her/his wish with respect to conference attendance
* Establish her/his wish to have the independent advocate to support their attendance, or speak on their behalf
* Establish her/his views about the professional concerns, understand the child’s daily lived experience and agree what the child would like to share with the conference

If the child does not wish to attend the conference their views must be respected. However, if there is a conflict between the wishes of the child and the views of the parents, the child’s interests should be the priority and the final decision around their attendance will need to be made by the Child Protection Conference Chair. The Chairs decision should be recorded on LCS with reasons.

1. ***Conference***

The advocate will attend the Initial Child Protection Conference on behalf of the child or alongside the child to support them to present their wishes and views.

The advocate will:

* Support the child to meet with the Child Protection Conference Chair immediately before the meeting and agree whether the child will attend all or some of the meeting
* Support the Child Protection Conference Chair in monitoring the child’s welfare throughout the conference, and arranging for them to have breaks if necessary
* Step out of the conference with the child if there are conversations / topics that they cannot be in the room to hear, as the advocate should not be present for any part of the conference where information is presented which would not be made available to the child
1. ***After Conference***

The advocate will provide an opportunity for the child to discuss what happened during conference, the decisions made and the plan agreed. If the child is made subject to a Child Protection Plan the advocate will make arrangements to meet with the child a couple of weeks before the next conference, to support the child through Review Conferences in the same manner.