

Pan-Dorset Multi-agency Escalation Policy

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1. Introduction

This policy sets out the expectations and pathways for managing differences of professional opinions in the child's best interest. It has a focus on resolving multi-agency safeguarding challenges.

The policy can be used between any agencies working to safeguard children.

The policy promotes emergency action when needed but allows time for reflection and opportunities for discussion and review in non-urgent situations.

Some good practice examples have been captured in appendix 3 to support practitioners to consider how they can make challenges.

2. Principles of professional challenge and escalation

The use of professional challenge and escalation is expected and promoted in multi-agency working to enable to children (including young people) to be safeguarded effectively. The child's welfare and safety is paramount.

The Pan-Dorset Multi-Agency Safeguarding Policies and Procedures Manual provides detail of expected practice and this should be referenced by practitioners in

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their challenge and escalations. Particular policies such as the 'Threshold documents', 'Hard to engage families' and child protection procedures will be used in many escalations.

<https://pandorsetscb.proceduresonline.com/index.html>

As in any safeguarding work, the experience of the child is the focus and the use of professional challenge and escalation may be needed to re-focus decisions around what the child is telling us, what is observed and assessed as needed.

It is understood that different agencies will have specialisms and ways of working which will not be understood by partners. All agencies need to be curious and be open to explaining their decision making, actions and ways of working. This enables a shared understanding and opportunities for partners to support each others' work by adding information, working in an aligned way and providing consistent messages to children and their families. It also allows partners to understand if they have a legitimate challenge to make or if they have not previously fully understood the rationale for approaches.

All challenges in multi-agency working should be resolved in a timely way so that the welfare of the child remains paramount. This policy sets out timescales as a guide, but in some situations, it may be required to instigate all of the stages within a short period of time so that the safety of the child is not compromised

3. Standard and expected practice of professional challenge

Most disagreements and misunderstandings can be resolved through discussion and exploration and negotiation. The team working with the child should have a culture of sharing information, reasons for decisions and actions, and joint working approaches. This is expected practice; challenge should always be evident between professionals working together. Listening to the professionals who know the children well is key to being able to understand what is in their best interest and what might help reduce needs for the child.

Staff need permission, support and encouragement to be able to make constructive challenge and this policy is designed to create the permission in Pan-Dorset safeguarding culture. Each agency has line management and supervisory arrangements for staff involved in safeguarding and there are sometimes training opportunities such as 'courageous conversations' which can assist.

4. Stage One Escalation – Professional to professional

Where one or more professionals are concerned about the decisions made, the progress of agreed plans, resource or capacity issues, they should attempt to resolve differences as already outlined.

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It may be helpful to invite multi-agency colleagues to a professionals' meeting to review the plans, decision and progress. This is a potential way of managing challenge at any stage of the challenge and escalation process.

Once it is clear that it cannot be resolved in this way, the professional involved should make their own line manager (or equivalent) aware. The professional and their line manager will decide whether to move into Stage Two Escalation.

5. Stage Two Escalation - Manager to Manager Procedure (1 – 4 working days)

Line managers who have agreed to escalate a concern at Stage Two should do so within 24 hours of the decision. 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 in preference to use of line management. With respect to most day-to-day issues, the relevant line managers will be able to resolve the disagreement.

Where it is not possible to resolve the matter within 4 working days at a line management level, the line manager will need to discuss the concerns with a senior manager in their organisation and if agreed the matter should move into Stage Three Escalation.

6. Stage Three Escalation - Senior Manager to Senior Manager Procedure (no longer than 10 working days)

Senior Managers in the organisation will manage a Stage Three Escalation and may need to involve practitioners and line managers to ensure clear understanding of the issues and concerns. The appropriate Senior Manager will need to be identified, who could be a Service Manager or a Strategic Safeguarding Manager. Different agencies will have different structures, which cannot be accounted for in this policy.

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 between agencies with an agreed way forward where the interests of the child take precedence over a professional stalemate. In some cases there will need to be a note made that disagreement to the plan remains. It will be helpful to think about contingency planning for reviewing the decision if concerns are not reduced over time.

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7. Scrutiny of Decisions where disagreement remains

In the unlikely event that the professional disagreement remains despite a decision being reached, the issues raised will be referred to the Head of Safeguarding of any agency involved so that they can note significant challenges to working together to safeguard children. (see also section 9).

8. Recording the escalation and resolution

Any challenge and the decision made should be fed back immediately to the relevant practitioners involved and the detail of the challenge and agreements reached should be recorded on the child's file.

9. Learning lessons

Most escalations will highlight joint working issues, misunderstandings, competing priorities, resource or capacity issues. It is important that reasons for escalations and their resolutions are logged and collated within organisations as indicators of practice / procedure or system issues. The logs need regular review to consider themes and whether these need addressing in single agency or multi-agency work.

Data will be collated for the LSCB on the numbers of escalations and the types of challenges resolved. The QA sub-group will review this and identify any need for multi-agency review of joint working practices.

10. Contacts

Those involved in raising escalations have fed back that it would be useful to have a list of people and their roles, but this is unmanageable in a policy, so practitioners and managers are signposted to the Local Directory of Contacts in the Pan-Dorset procedures:

<https://pandorsetscb.proceduresonline.com/contents.html>

In any individual case practitioners and managers should be able to ask for and be supplied with the contact details of line managers and senior managers who can respond to the escalation.

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Appendix One - Flowchart of escalation stages

Decision made but professional disagreement remains

In the unlikely event that the professional disagreement remains despite a decision being reached, the issues raised will be referred to the Head of Safeguarding of any agency involved so that they can note significant challenges to working together to safeguard children.

STAGE THREE: NO LATER THAN WORKING DAY 10

STAGE THREE: BETWEEN SENIOR MANAGERS

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Ultimately a decision will need to be reached between agencies with an agreed way forward where the interests of the child take precedence over a professional stalemate. In some cases there will need to be a note made that disagreement to the plan remains. It will be helpful to think about contingency.

STAGE TWO: BY WORKING DAYS 4

STAGE TWO: BETWEEN AGENCY LINE MANAGERS/SAFEGUARDING LEADS. These representatives should discuss the concerns/responses with their opposite manager in the relevant agency. **Where not resolved the line manager will escalate to a senior manager to decide whether to proceed to a stage 3**

STAGE ONE: TAKE ACTION WITHIN ONE DAY OF AGREEMENT TO MOVE TO STAGE 2

STAGE ONE: PROFESSIONAL TO PROFESSIONAL When concern regarding practice or decision-making by a practitioner/agency arises, the initial response should be made between agencies to resolve the issue. If resolution cannot be agreed, practitioners must escalate to their line manager or safeguarding lead in their organisation to decide whether to proceed to a stage 2 escalation.

(Act immediately if there is a risk of significant harm)



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Appendix Two

Recording template to be completed at the end of the escalation and added to the child's case record in agencies involved in the escalation

Name of child/young person:	
Date of birth:	
Concern at stage 2 escalated by:	<i>insert name, role, agency</i>
To:	<i>insert name, role, agency</i>
Concern at stage 3 escalated by:	<i>insert name, role, agency</i>
To:	<i>insert name, role, agency</i>
Date escalation commenced	
Date escalation completed	

Brief details of reason for inter-agency escalation:

Brief details of resolution, including actions / contingency plans agreed and stage of escalation at conclusion:

If escalation concluded but dissatisfaction remains, summarise the outstanding areas of concern that will be considered by senior managers and the LSCB.

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Appendix Three Potential areas of disagreement

Below is a non-exhaustive list of

- The response to a situation by any agency which is not perceived to be in the child's best interest.
- A plan for a child at any level on the continuum of need which is not making the progress anticipated.
- There is not a shared understanding of why an agency has made a particular decision.
- A referral not considered to meet the threshold for assessment by Children's social care.
- There is disagreement as to whether the child protection procedures should be invoked.
- 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.

Appendix 4 – Scenarios and example wording

Scenarios

1. A practitioner has sent a referral form to CSC MASH with concerns about a family. The response from CSC MASH is that the concerns do not reach Level 4 in the continuum of need and that the practitioner should undertake an early help assessment and bring together the others working with the child and family to hold a Team Around the Family meeting. The practitioner's line manager escalates this to the CSC MASH manager and they have a discussion looking at the continuum of need document and seeing that there are elements of Level 4 need, but the CSC MASH manager is able to explain that at present services do not know if the family can recognise and address these needs with services and input at Level 3. The practitioner's manager accepts the advice and understands better the reason for the decision.
2. A child in need case has a plan which is addressing some areas of risk and the child is known to be suffering a level of harm. There is a sense that the family are trying to change, but there is the potential that this is disguised compliance. There have been regular planning meetings, but in supervision one of the partner's line managers is unhappy that the case has not been considered at a strategy discussion to have a multi-agency view on whether the concerns indicate s47 enquiries should be undertaken. There is a discussion between the managers of the partner agency and CSC. The CSC

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manager explains that reason for not previously convening a strategy discussion is that the team around the family have been working together for three months and that it is felt that information has been gathered and is known by everyone. However, it is agreed that a formal strategy discussion will be convened for the agencies to look at the cumulative information together and consider whether there should be s47 enquiries.

3. A practitioner is concerned that a child with a child in need plan is not making progress expected and that the plan is not addressing needs. The practitioner's safeguarding lead contacts the CSC manager and has a discussion about these concerns. They review the plan together and agree that there need to be some clearer timescales set for some of the objectives. The practitioner is able to contribute with an additional outcome expected for the child by a certain time and the work they will undertake to support this improvement. The plan is enhanced, and all agencies are clearer about when there will need to be a change of approach because goals have not been achieved.
4. A practitioner is concerned that they hear from a parent that the commitment made by another agency to visit and undertake direct work with the child has not been happening. There is an initial discussion between practitioners, but this does not resolve the concern and there is risk that progress in improving the child's situation is not happening at the pace expected. The practitioner discusses with their line manager who shares the concern and escalates this to the manager in the other service. There is an email exchange between the managers and input improves once the role and purpose of visiting is discussed in supervision by the manager and worker.
5. An adult service agrees actions with a parent that has potential to impact on their child's welfare. The children's services manager confirms that front-line practitioners have discussed and not been able to resolve the situation and then raises an escalation with the adult service manager. This escalation outlines the challenges faced in the multi-agency work with parent and child. The managers discuss the concerns and recognise that the adult services have not been fully involved in the children services planning and so had not seen the links. There is an agreement that the team around the family is widened to include adult services. Both managers agree to review their systems to ensure this practice is embedded.
6. There is a disagreement at child protection conference that the plan is going to create enough change for the child. A partner line manager escalates the concern to the CSC manager, and they review the plan together. They cannot agree and so both liaise with their senior managers who again review the plan and discuss the case. They cannot reach agreement, but have gained an understanding of each other's position, which is recorded on the child's

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record. The plan continues with agreement for more frequent core groups to check progress which will be reported to both senior managers. As the escalation process is complete without reaching agreement, service leads are copied into the records so that they can consider joint working arrangements.

Wording that could be used:

7. I made a referral last week and understand that there was a decision not to progress with a Level 4 assessment. Please can we discuss as I need to understand that the concerns have been fully understood?
8. I am concerned that the work agreed in our joint plan has not progressed. I understand that there have been pressures in workloads, but I need to understand what can be done for the family which will achieve the goals we set out.
9. I am worried that the behaviours that are being observed in our setting are not being given the weight they deserve by the practitioner drawing together the assessment. How can we work together to ensure that what this child is trying to tell us through different behaviours is understood?
10. I am making this request under Stage 2 of our Escalation Policy.
11. I am responsible for raising this as there is a concern that we are not being effective as a multi-agency group in helping this family create improvements.