

Devon Child Protection Service Practice Standards

Why are Practice Standards Important?

This guidance is local to Devon and should be understood in the context of the HM Government guidance on child protection conferences contained in '[Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#)', with which it complies and accords.

Devon County Council's [Strengths-based Model](#) for Child Protection Planning and Reviewing model considers the **primary harm within the family home**. The model balances a rigorous exploration of danger/harm alongside indicators of strengths and safety but is strongly focused on harnessing, developing and targeting those positive areas far more intensively and deliberately. It is intended to improve family involvement and understanding of the concerns and risks that professionals have for their children is intended to improve family involvement and understanding of the concerns and risks that professionals have for their children.

The [Adolescent Safety Framework](#) is Devon's response for multi-agency coordination of the risks to young people where the **primary harm is outside the family home**. The [Safer Me Plus](#) approach provides an alternative conference model with the **same** duties and responsibilities as any other Initial or Review Child Protection Conference.

Within the Child Protection / Safer Me Plus Conference, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer (ISRO) is pivotal to the outcome of Child Protection / Safer Me Plus conferences, in terms of participant experience, information sharing, scrutiny in reviewing and good quality planning. As a 'safety gate', the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer are ensuring children are safe and any plan agreed can keep them so and if not, that they are escalating this in a timely and robust way. They are responsible for keeping the child at the centre of the discussions and planning. A commitment to restorative and strengths-based approaches underpin this and all practice with children and families in Devon. In this role, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer are also contributing to the evaluation of data and the overall Quality Assurance framework

Key Principles

The experience of the child or young person and their views and experience are central to the child protection process.

Families will receive a strong and explicit message we will try to develop a trusting and positive working relationship with them. We will help them identify their own strengths and resources and be crystal clear about what we are worried about and what we need to do together to bring about positive change.

Decisions made at Child Protection / Safer Me Plus Conferences are based on a good assessment and understanding of the needs of children and young people and the impact on the children and young people when their needs are not met.

There are clear plans that are appropriate, strength based, outcome focused and fully understood by the parents, young person or child. The progress of the plan is reviewed regularly.

Monitoring and quality assurance are in place to improve practice and outcomes for children or young people with a Child Protection / Safer Me Plus plans

Practice Standards

Child Protection Enquiry

Where a multi-agency initial strategy discussion and subsequent Section 47 Children Act 1989 enquiry has required an escalation to an Initial Child Protection (ICPC) / Safer Me Plus Conference, the strategy meeting worklist and child protection enquiry (Section 47) worklist must be completed by the social worker. The Team Manager authorises and agrees to convene ICPC/ Safer Me Plus Conference. It is important the Section 47 Enquiry form is authorised by the Team Manager in a timely manner to ensure the whole process stays within timescale. The social worker must then reassign the worklist to the Quality Assurance Reviewing and Safeguarding Service locality team (QARSS) within a maximum of 5 days of the strategy meeting the **first strategy** meeting when the Section 47 enquiries were initiated; or notification by another local authority that a child subject of a Child Protection Plan has moved into the area.

Assessment Timescales

Single assessments in relation to a Section 47 enquiry must be undertaken by the social worker within 10 calendar days.

The Safer Me Assessment in relation to a Section 47 must be started in order to convene an Initial Safer Me Plus Child Protection Conference within 10 calendar days.

The Initial Child Protection / Safer Me Plus Conference will be convened within 15 days of the Initial Strategy discussions or notification by another local authority that a child subject of a Child Protection Plan has moved into the area.

Allocation of an Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer (ISRO)

An Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will be allocated to the child. They will not have any operational or management responsibility for the child.

Preparation

In preparation for the Initial Conference, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will read the strategy discussion minutes, the S.47 assessment, all professional reports and any other relevant information from the child's records (Safer Me Assessment). For a Review Child Protection/ Safer Me Plus Conference, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will read all professional reports and previous core group minutes and plan and updated Safer Me Assessment if it is a Safer Me Plus Conference.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will speak with the parents on the telephone and, if appropriate the children, to ensure that they understand the purpose of the Initial Child Protection / Safe Me Plus Conference and how it will be conducted. For Initial Safer Me Plus / Child Protection Conferences, where appropriate the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will visit the child at home.

All Social Work reports should be submitted at least 2 working days prior to an initial conference and 5 working days in advance of a review conference. Reports should be seen by children, young people and families where appropriate for comment prior to the final reports being sent to the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer.

For further reading on preparing a Social Work report please access [Social Work Report](#) guidance.

Conference Participation

Within two working days of receipt of the notification to convene an Initial Conference, the allocated Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will contact the social worker to complete the Quality Assurance Screening Tool. This ensures threshold is met and that an Initial Child Protection or Safer Me Plus conference is the most appropriate way to proceed.

It also ensures the parents are aware of the conference request and that parents and children are invited to attend with consideration of how to best enable their participation. For example, advocacy or an interpreter if the child/young person or parents' first language is not English or if the child/young person or parents' have a disability and have specific needs.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the relevant professionals are invited to attend and their reports are provided in the agreed format. Guidance on the agreed format can be found [here](#) for Child Protection Conferences and [here](#) for Safer Me Conferences.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will advise professionals who are invited but unable to attend to arrange for another agency representative to attend and/or submit a written report. The Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Officer needs to ensure the meeting has sufficient attendance of key professionals at the Conference.

As a minimum quorum, at every conference there should be attendance by local authority children's social care and at least two other professional groups or agencies, which have had direct contact with each child who is the subject of the conference. In exceptional circumstances, the

Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer may decide to proceed with the conference despite lack of agency representation. This would be relevant where:

- A child has not had relevant contact with three agencies (e.g. pre-birth conferences);
- Sufficient information is available from the relevant agencies; and
- A delay will be detrimental to the child.

Where an inquorate conference is held, an early review conference should be arranged. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer must ensure that the reasons for proceeding with the conference and any arrangements to safeguard the child in the meantime are noted in the conference records.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will make appropriate arrangements to receive and share third party information

30 minutes prior to a Conference starting there is a pre-meeting consultation for all attendees. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will meet with the parents and children to ensure all information has been shared, ensure professionals have brought copies of reports and sit together to read all information prior to meeting. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will remind professionals there should be no discussions regarding the family during this preparation period.

Explicit consideration will be given by the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer to the potential of conflict between family members and the possible need for children and adults to speak without other family members present. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will arrange for the Conference to be held in two parts or split where appropriate to allow attendance of all whose engagement in the discussion and decisions are required.

In circumstances where it may be necessary, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer may need to exclude one or more family members from the Initial or Review Child Protection Conference or restrict a parents' participation. The exclusion should be of the minimum duration necessary, clearly recorded in the minutes.

Where a child is attending the Conference, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the child/young person is fully prepared, with support where appropriate. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the child or young person is not exposed to information that may be distressing or age inappropriate during the Conference.

When a Child is Not in Attendance

Where a child/young person is not attending the Conference, because it is not appropriate or they do not want to, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure that their views, wishes and feelings will have been ascertained and shared with the Conference. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the outcome of the Conference, and the plan is fed back to and shared with the child/young person.

Conference Timing

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the Conference starts on time so good use of the discussion and decision time can be made. Conferences should last no longer than two hours under any circumstances as it becomes difficult for participants to maintain concentration and that may result in poor planning.

During the Conference

The meeting will adhere to the agenda. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the meeting is facilitated with skill so that the meeting progresses effectively.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will promote the voice and experience of the child/young person throughout the meeting and ensure they are heard and listened to.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will promote the voice and experience of the parents throughout the meeting and enable them to identify their own strengths and ways to reduce risks and improve outcomes for children.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will invite the family members to volunteer information about themselves and their family and friends' network – names, ages, relationships, addresses. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer assembles the information into a genogram or family tree, drawing it on the whiteboard or on an adjacent flipchart.

Decision Making at a Conference

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will use the scaling process to help people break down their perception of their situation into 'grades' and motivate hope and engagement. It aims to create discussion and understanding of what people are worried about and what a good outcome looks like. In Safer Me Plus conferences there will also be consideration of context weighting.

At Reviews, following scaling, a comparison will be made to the previous Conference and consideration given to whether adequate progress is being made. If so, parents should be given positive credit for their progress.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure all conference attendees are aware of the threshold of significant harm so they can make informed decisions regarding the appropriateness of a child being made subject to a Child Protection / Safer Me Plus Child Protection Plan.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure all professionals contribute to the discussions and specifically to the recommendation regarding whether the child/young person should be subject of a Child Protection Plan and under what category. In a Safer Me Plus Conference it needs to be recorded there is harm outside the family home.

Where there is a difference of opinion regarding whether the child/young person should be subject of a Child Protection Plan, these will be recorded in the minutes. If agreement cannot be reached, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer has the final decision. In exceptional circumstances, when the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer does not agree with the recommendations of professionals relating to child protection planning or category then they can override the decision. This needs to be clearly recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Any dissenting views (professional dissent will be recorded in the minutes. Professionals can formally raise concerns using the [Resolution policy](#). If parents wish to challenge about the functioning of conferences, the outcome or the decision this should be addressed to the conference Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Officer and passed to the QARSS Operations Manager and the local authority complaints manager for follow up.

Child's Plan

All participants will leave a conference with a clear SMART plan and/or to be provided with one within one working day of the Conference. This is not the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer's Plan but a collaborative plan, with contributions made by all those who are influential in a child's life and journey. The Child Protection / Safer Me Plus Child Protection Plan will be outcome focussed, strength based and SMART.

There is one plan per family and the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the needs of all the children/ young people in the family are addressed.

The plan will be written in clear language. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will describe the improved outcomes (the safety destination) for the child which the plan needs to aim for. These will be specific to the child and the harm which they are vulnerable to.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will clarify what an increase in risk may look like and contingency plans may be outlined if the 'bottom lines' are transgressed and professionals feel the children are at increased risk. Consideration should also be given to what plans will be made for the children if either or both parents are unable to care for the child. Both Contingency plans will be recorded on the Family's Plan.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure during the Conference the name of the lead social worker is known, the date of the first Core Group and the membership of the Core Group who will develop and implement the Child Protection/ Safer Me Plus Child Protection Plan with the family.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the Plan is sent to the family and professionals within 1 day of the Conference.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will make sure where there is a decision for the child / young person to be supported in other ways rather than to be made subject of a Child

Protection Plan, for example step down to Child in Need/ Safer Me Child in Need, that there is an agreed Child in Need Plan that is SMART.

Ending the Conference

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will conclude the meeting by thanking attendees for their contributions and time, paying attention to acknowledge the challenges faced by families in such circumstances and noting the strengths they showed.

Record Keeping

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the minutes of the Conference are an accurate summary of the discussions.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the minutes to the Conferences are amended and ready for distribution within 20 working days of the meeting.

Within 5 working days of the conference, Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will complete a Quality Assurance monitoring form on Eclipse.

Feedback

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will remind parents and young people that Devon takes very seriously its commitment to providing the best services possible to families and we would like to know if there are things we could do to improve and how it felt to come to a conference. Copies of feedback forms and information leaflets will be available as these include different options for providing feedback. <https://www.dcfp.org.uk/training-and-resources/child-protection-pathway/>

If it is appropriate only, families will be asked to complete feedback forms prior to leaving the conference.

Reviewing and Ending a Plan

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the first Review Child Protection/Safer Me Plus Conference takes place within 3 months of the Initial Conference and further reviews are convened at intervals of not more than 6 months for as long as the child has a Child Protection/ Safer Me Plus Plan.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure the focus at reviews is on progress towards achieving the planned outcomes. They will identify whether the actions in the plan have been acted upon within the agreed timescales and the outcome and impact on the child. The

reviews will evaluate the extent to which the plan is reducing the risks, identifying any changes needed and consideration of the threshold for a Child Protection / Safer Me Plus plan to continue.

At the Review, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure any significant changes to the child's life are followed through in the Review of the Plan and action taken as required.

When a Child Protection Plan is discontinued, the social worker must discuss with the parents and child/ren what services might be needed and required, based on the re-assessment of the needs of the child and family. A Child in Need Plan or an Early Help Assessment should be developed for any continuing support. The Plan should be formally reviewed at regular intervals of no more than 12 weekly.

When a child no longer requires a Child Protection Plan, notification should be sent, as a minimum, to the agencies' representatives who were invited to attend the Initial Conference that led to the Plan.

If a child subject of a Child Protection Plan becomes looked after under Section 20 of Children Act 1989, their legal situation is not permanently secure and the next Child Protection / Safer Me Plus Review conference should consider the child's safety in the light of the possibility the parent can request the child's return to their care from the local authority. The Review Conference must be sure the Child in Care Plan and Placement Plan provide adequate security for the child and sufficiently reduces or eliminates the risk of significant harm identified by the Initial Child Protection/ Safer Me Plus conference.

If a court grants a Care Order in respect of a child who is has a Child Protection Plan, the child can be adequately protected through the framework of the Child in Care Review. This means their Child Protection Plan can be automatically ended by the Quality Assurance Reviewing and Safeguarding service Business Support following agreement with the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer. The child will then be allocated a new Independent Reviewing Officer for Children in Care.

Cancellation of a Conference

Where a meeting needs to be cancelled or re-arranged, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will need to discuss with the Quality Assurance Reviewing and Safeguarding Service Operations Manager the reason for this. The reason and the agreement for the cancellation is clearly recorded on the child's record and shared with the family and partner agencies. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure there is a safety plan in place until the meeting can be reconvened.

Quality Assurance

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will have an awareness of learning from audits, practice reviews, inspections and research to inform their practice and Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officering of conferences.

The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will ensure timely progression of the Child Protection/Safer Me Plus Child Protection Plan and undertake a mid-point review between the Initial Conference and the Review Conference to monitor the progression of the key tasks to ensure the risk of harm is being reduced. The midpoint point check tool will be used alongside a discussion with the social worker.

Where timescales have not been achieved in relation to decisions, planning, recommendations or frequency of statutory visits, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will discuss with the relevant social worker. Where there is any persistent failure, this will be discussed with the Team Manager. The Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will use the [Resolution Protocol](#) where appropriate to improve outcomes for children.

Following a child's Child Protection Plan or Safer Me Plus Plan ending, or being changed to an alternative Plan for example, Child in Need, the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Officer will complete a 10-week practice monitoring check using the midpoint check tool of the progress made under the new Plan arrangements.