

Strategy Discussions

Contents

- [Strategy Discussion or Meeting](#)
- [Purpose of Strategy Discussion/Meeting](#)
- [Participants to Strategy Discussion/Meeting](#)
- [Location of Strategy Discussion/Meeting](#)
- [Recording of Strategy Discussion/Meeting](#)
- [Timing of Strategy Discussion/Meeting](#)

Strategy Discussion or Meeting

- 4.6.1 If there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer Significant Harm, Children's Social Care should convene a Strategy Discussion.
- 4.6.2 Depending on the nature of the concerns and the urgency of the situation, this may be undertaken via an actual meeting and / or through a series of telephone discussions with the participants.
- 4.6.3 Strategy Discussions by telephone will usually be adequate to plan a straightforward enquiry or joint investigation. Meetings are likely to be more effective in complex types of maltreatment or neglect such as when there is:
- Allegations against staff, carers and volunteers or anyone professionally involved with the child (see [Allegations Against People who Work with, Care for or Volunteer with Children Procedure](#));
 - Serious Physical Abuse;
 - Fabricated or Induced Illness (see [Fabricated or induced Illness Procedure](#));
 - An allegation that a child has abused another child (separate Strategy Meetings may be held for both children (see [Children who Harm Other Children Procedure](#));
 - An on-going, cumulative concerns about the child's welfare and a need to involve all key agencies, share concerns and agree a course of action e.g. in cases of neglect;
 - Concerns about the future risk to an unborn child (see [Pre-Birth Child Protection Procedure](#));
 - Direct communication between more than 2 agencies being required for meaningful discussion.
- 4.6.4 More than one Strategy Discussion may be required.

Purpose of Strategy Discussion/Meeting

4.6.5 The discussion should be used to:

- Share available information;
- Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation;
- Decide whether a Child and Family Assessment and Section 47 Enquiry should be initiated, or continued if it has already begun;
- Plan how the Section 47 Enquiry should be undertaken (if one is to be initiated), including the need for medical assessment (a decision to have a medical should not be made by the social worker and Police alone but may require a discussion with a Paediatrician) and who will carry out what actions, by when and for what purpose (see [Section 47 Enquiries Procedure, Liaison between Children's Social Care and the Police - Single or Joint Agency Enquiries/Investigations](#));
- Agree what action is required immediately to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, and/or provide interim services and support. If the child is in hospital, decisions should also be made about how to secure the safe discharge of the child;
- Determine what information from the Strategy Discussion will be shared with the family, unless such information sharing may place a child at increased risk of Significant Harm or jeopardise police investigations into any alleged offence(s); and
- Determine if legal action is required.

4.6.6 Relevant matters will include:

- Agreeing a plan for how the Child and Family Assessment will be carried out - what further information is required about the child(ren) and family and how it should be obtained and recorded;
- Agreeing who should be interviewed, by whom, for what purpose, and when. The way in which interviews are conducted can play a significant part in minimising any distress caused to children, and increasing the likelihood of maintaining constructive working relationships with families. When a criminal offence may have been committed against a child, the timing and handling of interviews with victims, their families and witnesses, can have important implications for the collection and preservation of evidence;
- Agreeing, in particular, when the child will be seen alone (unless to do so would be inappropriate for the child) by the Lead Social Worker during the course of these enquiries and the methods by which the child's wishes and feelings will be ascertained so that they can be taken into account when making decisions under section 47 of the Children Act 1989
- In the light of the race and ethnicity of the child and family, considering how this should be taken into account, and establishing whether an interpreter will be required; and
- Considering the needs of other children who may be affected, for example, siblings and other children, such as those living in the same establishment, in contact with alleged abusers.

Participants to Strategy Discussion/Meeting

- 4.6.7 The Strategy Discussion requires professionals sufficiently senior to be able to contribute, although exceptional circumstances may arise where others may usefully contribute.
- 4.6.8 The Strategy Discussion should ordinarily be coordinated by the Children's Social Care first line manager, who will chair any Strategy Meetings held.
- 4.6.9 The discussion must involve, both Children's Social Care and the Safeguarding Investigations Unit, Health and other agencies involved with the child including, in particular the referring agency, the child's nursery / school, any health services the child or family members are receiving and (where relevant) the registered owner of the service involved and the registration authority (for example Ofsted). All participants should be aware that a Strategy Discussion/Meeting is a confidential professionals meeting and as such notes of the meeting should not be shared within anyone without the permission of the Chair.
- 4.6.10 Where issues have significant medical implications, or a paediatric examination has taken place or may be necessary, a paediatrician should always be included.
- 4.6.11 If the child is or has recently been receiving services from a hospital or child development team, the discussion should involve the responsible medical consultant and, in the case of in-patient treatment, a senior ward nurse or medical consultant must be considered essential.
- 4.6.12 The local authority solicitor's involvement may be appropriate.
- 4.6.13 Consideration should be given to the need to include a professional with expertise in particular cases of complex forms of alleged abuse and neglect. Where parents or adults in the household are experiencing problems such as domestic abuse, substance misuse or mental illness, it will also be important to consider involving the relevant adult services professionals.

Location of Strategy Discussion/Meeting

- 4.6.14 Discussions that take the form of a face to face meeting should be held at a convenient location and time for the key attendees e.g. Children's Social Care office, police station, hospital, GP surgery or school.

Recording of Strategy Discussion/Meeting

- 4.6.15 It is the responsibility of the chair of the Strategy Discussion/Meeting to ensure that the decisions and agreed actions are fully recorded using the agreed form. A copy should be made available as soon as possible and within one working day for all participants.

- 4.6.16 For telephone discussions, a copy of the notes authorised by the first line manager should be distributed to all participants.
- 4.6.17 Parents seeking access to these records should follow the appropriate agency's disclosure processes. All parties need to be consulted prior to disclosure of the records.

Timing of Strategy Discussion/Meeting

- 4.6.18 Initial Strategy Discussions and any follow up discussions should **generally be held within 3 working days**, but see exceptions below.
- 4.6.19 In the following circumstances, **a Strategy Discussion must be held on the day of the referral**:
- Allegations / concerns indicating a serious risk to the child (e.g. serious physical injury or serious neglect);
 - Allegations of recent penetrative Sexual Abuse (to ensure forensic evidence).
- 4.6.20 Where immediate action was required by any agency to safeguard and protect the child prior to a Strategy Discussion, a discussion must be held within one working day of the action - see also [Immediate Protective Action of the Referrals Procedure](#).
- 4.6.21 Where the concerns are particularly complicated e.g. complex abuse, a Strategy Discussion must occur on the day of the referral, but the (first) face to face meeting may be delayed to within a maximum of 5 working days, unless there is a need to provide immediate protection to a child.
- 4.6.22 The plan made at the Strategy Discussion/Meeting should reflect the requirement to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference within 15 working days of the Strategy Discussion/Meeting or, where more than one Strategy Discussion has taken place, within 15 working days of the Strategy Discussion that initiated the Section 47 Enquiry.