

**Multi-agency Guide to Conducting Strategy Meetings and Section 47 Enquiries**

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Responsibility for convening a strategy meeting lies with the Local Authority Children's Social Care Department in whose area the child lives or is found. For the purposes of this guidance the Children's social care area in which the child lives, is called the 'home authority' and the Local Authority Children's social care in which the child is found is the child's 'host authority'.

Hull Children's Services has a statutory duty to convene a strategy meeting in any of the following circumstances:

* When for a child who lives or is found in its area, there is 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer Significant Harm';
* When a child is subject to an [Emergency Protection Order](https://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/yxkpto/appendices/local-keywords#s1504);
* When a child is subject to [Police Protection](https://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/yxkpto/appendices/local-keywords#s1505l);
* When a person who has been convicted of or cautioned for an offence against a child and is considered to pose a risk to children moves into the household or has regular contact with a child.

**Attendance/participation**

It is the responsibility of the Team Manager convening the strategy meeting to ensure that invites to attend/participate in the strategy meeting are sent to the following partner agencies;

* Police representative
* Health Practitioner
* The child’s school or nursery
* Any other services the child or family members are receiving
* The practitioner or agency which made the referral

Police Health and Education should, as a minimum, be involved in the strategy discussion. Other relevant practitioners will depend on the nature of the individual case.

It should be noted that Strategy Meetings are likely to be convened at short notice due to the nature of the process and the need to ensure safety plans are in place.

**The Purpose of Strategy Discussions / Meetings is to;**

* Share relevant information with those in attendance to determine whether a child is ***suffering or likely to suffer significant harm***;
* Decide whether the threshold has been met for Section 47 enquiries to be initiated and if so agree the plan for how the Section 47 should be undertaken including, who should be interviewed, by whom, for what purpose and when, need for medical examination, medical treatment if required, who will carry out what actions, by when and for what purpose;
* Agree how the Children’s Social Care Assessment should be completed and reviewed, what further information is required and how it should be obtained and recorded, in particular, when the child will be seen alone (unless to do so would be inappropriate for the child) by the 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;
* Agree what action is required immediately to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child and provide interim services and support, including contingency planning,
* Considering the needs of other children who may be affected (e.g. siblings and other children, such as those living in the same establishment, in contact with alleged perpetrator).
* Determine what information will be shared with the family / what consent will be sought;
* Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation;
* Determine if legal action is required.

The strategy meeting is not the forum in which to make a decision about whether the case needs to progress to an Initial Child Protection Conference as this will be determined by the outcome of the Section 47 enquiry. It is noteworthy that if the outcome of the Section 47 enquiry is to progress to an Initial Child Protection Conference this needs to take place within fifteen days of the initial strategy meeting.

Responsibility for undertaking [Section 47](https://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?term=Section+47&g=xgjN#gl15) Enquiries lies with Hull Children's Services being the area in which the child lives or has been found, even though the child may ordinarily be resident in another local authorities area.

If the outcome of the strategy meeting is to progress to a Section 47 enquiry the participants of the strategy meeting must be confident that the threshold is met in that the child or children have either suffered or are likely to suffer significant harm requiring the intervention of the agencies involved to ensure their future safety.

***Threshold Indicator Guide for Section 47 Enquiries***

* Any allegation of abuse or neglect or any suspicious injury in a pre- or non-mobile child.
* Allegations or suspicions about a serious injury / sexual abuse to a child.
* Two or more minor injuries in pre-mobile or non-verbal babies or young children (including disabled children).
* Inconsistent explanations or an admission about a clear non-accidental injury.
* Repeated allegations or reasonable suspicions of non-accidental injury.
* A child being traumatised injured or neglected as a result of domestic violence.
* Repeated allegations involving serious verbal threats and/or emotional abuse.
* Allegations / reasonable suspicions of serious neglect.
* Medical referral of non-organic failure to thrive in under-fives.
* Direct allegation of sexual abuse made by child or abuser’s confession to such abuse.
* Any allegation suggesting connections between sexually abused children in different families or more than one abuser.
* An individual (adult or child) posing a risk to children.
* Any suspicious injury or allegation involving a child subject of a current child protection plan or looked after by a local authority.
* No available parent and child vulnerable to significant harm (e.g. an abandoned baby).
* Suspicion that child has suffered or is at risk of significant harm due to fabricated or induced illness.
* Children subject of parental delusions.
* Child at risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking.
* Pregnancy in a child aged under 13,
* Child at risk of FGM, honour based violence or forced marriage.

***Threshold for Section 47 enquiry***

In determining the threshold and justification of Section 47 Enquiries, all participants (CSC, Police, Health, Education and others invited) should consider;

* Seriousness of the concern(s);
* Combinations of concerns;
* Recurrence and duration of concern(s);
* Vulnerability of child (through age, developmental stage, disability or other predisposing factor e.g. Looked After);
* Source of concern(s);
* Accumulation of sufficient information;
* Context in which the child is living - e.g. a child in the household already subject to Child Protection Plan, No recourse to public funds
* Emotional environment of child, especially high criticism / low warmth;
* Any predisposing factors in the family that may suggest a higher level of risk e.g. domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health
* The impact on the child's health and development.

***Purpose of Section 47 Enquiries***

Section 47 enquiries must always be commenced immediately when:

* There is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is ***suffering or likely to suffer significant harm*** in the form of physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect;
* Following an EPO or the use of police powers of protection is initiated.

Participants of the strategy meeting will decide whether the Section 47 enquiry will be a joint or single agency enquiry. In most cases the enquiry should be undertaken by both police and Children’s Social care.

***Joint Agency Investigation***

A joint investigation should be initiated whenever there is an allegation or reasonable suspicion that one of the circumstances described below has been committed against a child, regardless of the likelihood of a prosecution:

* Any intra familial sexual offence committed against a child of either gender under 18 years of age,
* Sexual offences committed by young people,
* Complex investigations (may require formal strategy meeting)
* Fabricated or induced illness,
* Serious allegations against staff or volunteers of a professional agency represented on the LSCB, and those whose employment or position gives them access to or control over children,
* Serious neglect or ill-treatment constituting an offence under Section1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933;
* Physical/ serious injury against a child under 18 constituting a criminal offence (includes murder, manslaughter, any assault involving actual or grievous bodily harm and repeated assaults involving minor injury).

In other cases of minor injury, the circumstances surrounding the incident must be considered to determine the 'seriousness' of the alleged abuse. The following factors should be included in any consideration by the Police and Children's Social Care;

* Age, special needs and vulnerability of the child;
* Any previous history of minor injuries;
* The intent of the assault e.g. strangulation may leave no marks, but is very serious;
* If a weapon was used;
* Previous concerns from a supporting agency;
* Consistency with and clarity / credibility of the child's account of the injuries;
* Predisposing factors about the alleged perpetrator e.g. criminal conviction(s), history of violence, domestic abuse, substance misuse and / or mental health problems.

Parents must be involved at the earliest opportunity unless to do so would prejudice the safety of the child. The needs and safety of the child will be paramount when determining at what point parents or carers are given information. Parents must be kept informed throughout about the enquiry, its outcome and any subsequent action unless this would jeopardise the welfare of the child.

In explaining the process of [Section 47](https://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?term=Section+47&g=xgjN#gl15) Enquiries to parents, the following points should be covered:

* An explanation of the reason for concern and when appropriate the source of information;
* The procedures to be followed (this must include an explanation of the need for the child to be seen, interviewed and/or medically assessed, consultation about the gender of the medical practitioner where time allows and seeking parental agreement for these aspects of the enquiry);
* An explanation of their rights as parents including the need for support and guidance from an advocate whom they trust (advice should be given about the right to seek legal advice);
* An explanation of the role of the various agencies involved in the enquiry and explanation of the wish to work in partnership with them to secure the welfare of their child;
* The need to gather initial information on the history and structure of the family, the child and other relevant information to enable an assessment of the injuries and/or allegations and the continuing risk to the child to be made;
* In situations of [domestic abuse](https://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?term=Domestic+abuse&g=0cjN#gl8), the possibility of working with the parents separately;
* The provision of an opportunity for parents to be able to ask questions and receive support and guidance.

Any objections or reservations expressed by parents during a [Section 47](https://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?term=Section+47&g=xgjN#gl15) Enquiry, and the response to these objections or reservations, must be clearly recorded.

***Recording***

* It is the responsibility of the chair of the strategy meeting to ensure that the decisions and agreed actions are fully recorded using the LL template (Appendix 1).
* All agencies attending should take notes of the actions agreed at the time of the meeting/discussion.
* A copy of the record should be made available for all those, who had been invited, as soon as practicable by LA children's social care.

***Note:***

*In exceptional circumstances, such as fabricated and induced illness for example, enquiries will be more complicated and may require more than one strategy discussion. If the strategy meeting / discussion concludes that a further strategy meeting / discussion is required, then a clear timescale should be set and be subject to regular review by the social work manager bearing in mind the safety of the child at all times.*

**Flow Chart for strategy meetings**

