**Introduction**

Across Lincolnshire County Council, whilst the current COVID19 restrictions remain in pace, it is the default position within children's services that all meetings should be held virtually; unless there is a compelling reason for meetings in person to take place. Having taken into consideration all of the guidance about the use of LCC buildings, and safer ways of working that promote social distancing, it is the position of the Quality and Standards Service that some child protection conferences need to be held as hybrid meetings where some family members and LCC staff are in LCC buildings and other professionals join the meeting virtually.

**Rationale for Hybrid Meetings being considered.**

The decision, regarding which child protection conferences should be held as hybrid meetings, needs to be made on a case by case basis following a social work analysis of the risks and vulnerabilities identified within a family's individual circumstances. These meetings should only be considered where not offering to have some element of the meeting as a face to face contact would undermine the safety planning and/or the engagement of vulnerable individuals.

Alongside the issue of risk to vulnerable participants, a further compelling reason for LCC to provide space for families to engage with child protection conferences, is where families would otherwise be disadvantaged because of a paucity of access to information technology and/or the lack of personal resources to create a secure and confidential online environment where they can engage meaningfully in the decision making for their children.

Social workers and Independent Chairs are also asked to evaluate, on a family by family basis, whether an entirely virtual child protection conference will truly enable individual children and young people to meaningfully and safely engage in their meeting.

**The indicators which suggest a hybrid approach to Child Protection Conference is preferable.**

Over the last 6 months the Independent Chairs have identified a number of circumstances which should automatically trigger the consideration of a hybrid style child protection conference.

* Cases where there are issues of domestic abuse within the parents relationship and they continue to reside in the same property
* Cases where there are issues of domestic abuse within either parent's relationship history and those abusive former partners are to be involved in the Child Protection Conference.
* Cases where there is an adult sex offender within the household
* Cases where there are allegations/concerns regarding child sexual abuse within the family, including where sexually harmful behaviour by siblings is a consideration.
* Cases where there is concern regarding fabricated or induced illness
* Cases where the children are old enough to and wanting to attend conference (consideration should be given to how they are best supported by an advocate.)

**Evaluating the platform for ICPC should take place during Strategy Discussions**

Consideration of the above rationale and indicators needs to be incorporated into strategy discussions and core group meetings. It is important for social workers and practice supervisors to make the Safeguarding and Review team aware, at the earliest opportunity, of the potential need for a hybrid meeting. This enables the Covid associated risk management process to be started as early as possible and appropriate arrangements for building access and meeting management to be put in place. Duty IRO's are available every day to enable the PS/SW to have a discussion about whether a hybrid meeting is needed and what this might need to look like. Also Social workers must ensure that they assess a family's ability to make use of IT and that data/network charges are considered. Choosing the right platform for Child Protection Conferences is a key aspect of anti-oppressive practice during these unprecedented times.