

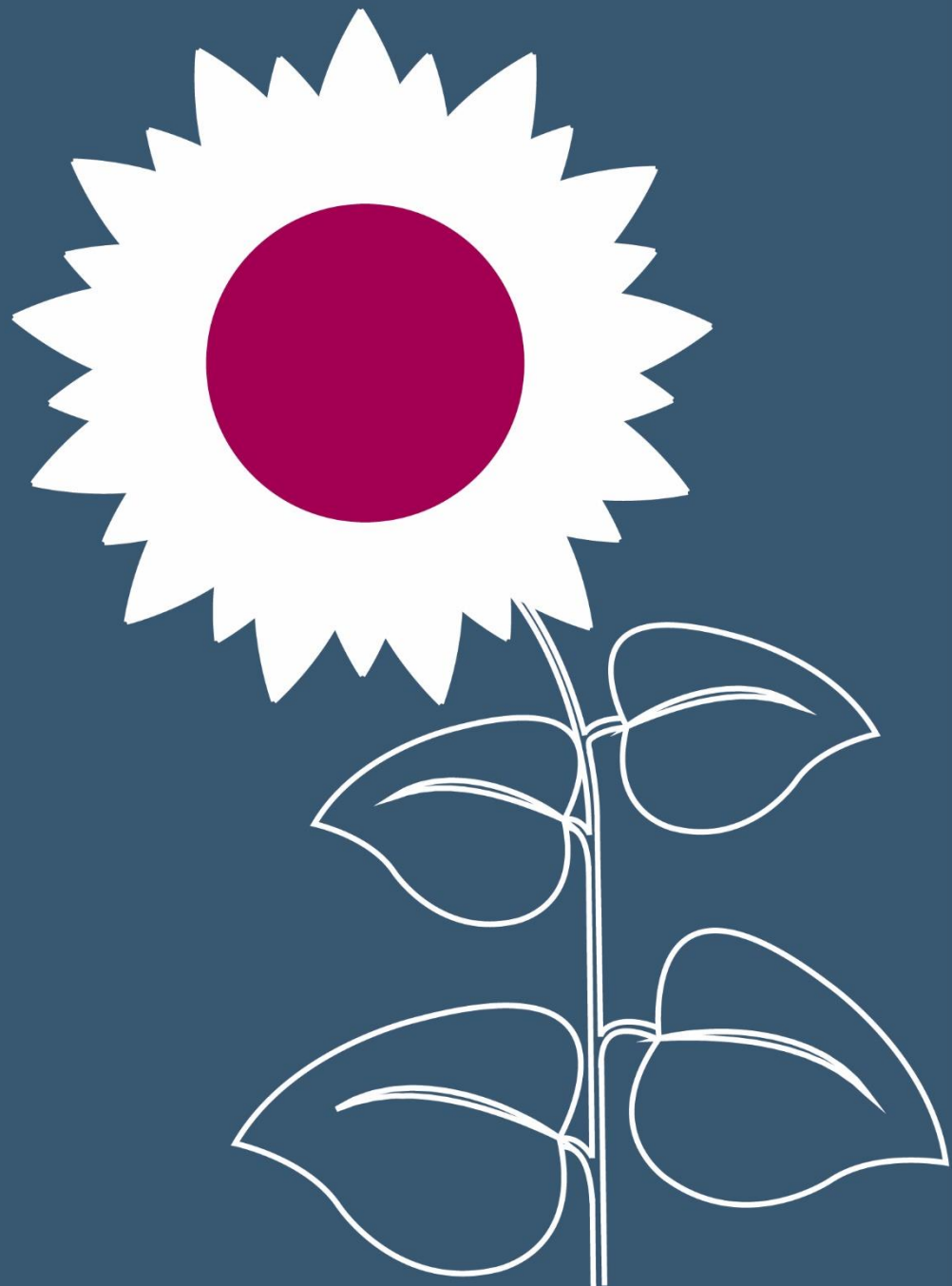


City of
Stoke-on-Trent

Child Protection Case Dispute Escalation Policy

Tri x 1_3_10 (October 2021)

Review October 2022



Scope of Escalation Process

This protocol has been developed to ensure that Stoke-on-Trent City Council has a robust escalation process through which issues or concerns might be raised and resolved involving children who are subject of a child protection plan. It aims to encourage that issues are appropriately addressed and resolved at the earliest point possible; to prevent drift and delay for children; to promote more consistency across the service and to improve practice standards in Children's Social Care.

This protocol was devised in October 2021

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Conference and Review Manager

Child Protection Conferences are crucial to the multi-agency decision making process that keeps children safe from harm. They bring together family members, supporters, advocates and those professionals most involved with the child to share and analyse the information which has been obtained about the child's developmental needs, the parental capacity to meet those needs, and family and environmental factors. The conference makes judgements about the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm in the future and decides whether the child is at continuing risk of significant

harm. If the child is likely to suffer significant harm, they will require inter-agency help and intervention delivered through a formal Child Protection Plan. The primary purposes of this plan is to prevent the child suffering harm or a recurrence of harm in the future and to promote the child's welfare. The Child Protection Plan outlines clear actions and timescales, including a clear sense of how much improvement is needed, by when, so that success can be judged clearly.

It is crucial; therefore, that the social work input to Child Protection Conferences is of the highest possible standard.

To ensure that Child Protection Conferences are effective protection mechanisms, this dispute escalation process provides a clear structure for Conference and Review Managers (CRM's) to escalate concerns. This process mirrors the one which is clearly defined for Independent Reviewing Officers in the IRO handbook.

2. Reasons for Raising Concerns

There are various situations where a Conference and Review Manager might have concerns and initiate the case management escalation process. It is a matter of professional judgement as to what level of escalation is needed and the impact on the child is the significant factor.

2.1 Concerns that may be dealt with at an informal level

- Poor preparation by the social worker for the Conference;
- Quality of reports provided at Review or Conference;
- Not being informed of any significant events as outlined below;
- Repeated absence or late arrivals at conference;
- Inadequate management oversight/supervision of a social worker;
- Concerns about lack of effective partnership working with parents.

2.2 Concerns that might need formal escalation, but should be attempted to be resolved at an informal level in first instance

- Assessments not being completed/progressed in time;
- If reports for Conference have not been shared 3 working days before an ICPC or 72 hours before a RCPC with parent;
- Core Group minutes and the updated plan not being completed and distributed to parents and Core Group members;
- Key documents not completed;
- Non-completion of actions within timescales;
- Social worker visits to the child/ren not being within the expected timescales;
- Concerns about the quality of risk assessments;
- Workers not following Stoke on Trent City Council's policy and procedures;
- Discriminatory practice;
- Evidence of poor partnership working amongst agencies which has compromised the effectiveness of a Child Protection Plan;
- Concerns about lack of child participation;
- Avoidable drift and delay in children's plans;
- Health provision;
- Education provision;

3. Restorative Practice

Restorative practice plays a significant role in the work undertaken across Children's Services in Stoke on Trent. This provides a framework that enables Conference and Review Managers (CRM's) to communicate with social workers and team managers to resolve any issues in a positive and productive way. This form of relationship-based work means that CRM's will look to resolve any issues prior to raising any formal dispute, through the informal dispute process.

It is an expectation of CRM's' social worker and team managers to develop positive working relationships which are respectful of each other's roles and responsibilities. All disputes raised, whether at an informal or formal level should be open and transparent to allow for productive communication and resolution of issues raised. All information around the dispute process should be recorded on the child's file.

4 Informal Resolution

Informal escalation/ case discussion is viewed as part of the quality assurance role of the Conference and Review Service. Wherever possible, the CRM will attempt to resolve a problem by negotiation, including contacting the social worker responsible and their team manager; attempting to resolve the problem directly with the team. The CRM should first seek to resolve difficulties face to face or by talking on the telephone rather than relying on e-mail if this is not part of the mid-point review process or from checks at the time of the conference. Issues raised from a mid-point review will form the basis for the informal process.

The discussions and/or emails should be recorded on the child's file and agreements made between the CRM, social worker and team manager as to when any outstanding actions will be addressed and by who. This informal process should be resolved within a week, either by the social worker or team manager. If there is no satisfactory resolution within the agreed timescales (ie 5 working days) the formal dispute will be raised following discussion and agreement with the service manager who will ensure that all attempts have been made to resolve the issue at an informal stage.

5 Escalation and Formal Resolution

Where issues relating to practice are identified and the CRM is not satisfied with the informal response or timely solution to the issue, they will continue to negotiate with management up to the highest level if necessary in order to resolve the issue.

There are four stages to the formal resolution process. Exceptionally when more urgent or serious concerns remain unresolved, the Conference and Review Manager has the discretion to proceed directly to the level they consider most appropriate. This would usually be stage 2. Where any stage of the escalation process has been skipped, the Conference and Review Manager will outline the reasons for this within the escalation. The stages are:

Table 1

Stage	Responsible Officer	Response Expected within Working Days
Informal	Social Worker/Team Manager	5
Stage 1	Service Manager	
Stage 2:	Strategic Manager	5
Stage 3:	Assistant Director	5
Stage 4:	Director of Children's Services	5

It is noted that although there is some flexibility within the timeframe at each stage of the escalation process, as agreed by the CRM, the formal process from start to finish should be completed within 20 working days.

It may be more agreeable for a meeting to take place at stage 2 with service managers in attendance to quickly iron out any issues and resolve them rather than just through emails and liquid logic. This will be at the discretion on the CP and QA Service Manager combined with communication with the other Service Manager.

6. Recording that a Child's case has been Escalated

The CRM completes a monitoring form after each Child Protection Conference and at the mid-point review, which includes whether escalation is required in this case. This provides the social worker and Team Manager full details of the strengths and deficits of the conference. Where there is an informal escalation, the CRM will confirm any discussion with the social worker/ team manager in an e-mail and also confirm whether the concern has been resolved at an informal stage. It is important that the CRM records the concern via the escalation form on Liquid Logic at the point of escalation, setting out the facts and when the concern has been resolved also recording this to complete the form. Any other documentation should be attached to this form.

The Liquid Logic escalation form should not be a reiteration of e-mails trails, but a standalone document highlighting the overall reason the case has been escalated and whether or not this was resolved, including how resolution was found. When completing this form this will trigger the form also going to the manager whom the CRM has identified as best placed to resolve the dispute.

7. Informing the Conference and Review Manager of any Significant Change in the Child's Circumstances

The majority of changes in the child's circumstances are discussed at Child Protection Conferences. However, the CP Chair will need to be informed of significant changes at anytime. These include:

- Death, further injury or abuse to the child;
- Change of address, primary carer, primary carer's partner;
- The child has moved out of county;
- The child has become looked after or has ceased to be looked after;
- The child is looked after and a care plan has been agreed which is that the child will not return to the situation that led to the child becoming subject to a child protection plan;
- Court Orders and outcomes from hearings;
- Unexpected changes in the child's family circumstances (births, deaths, etc.);
- Changes of allocated social workers;
- Complaints from or on behalf of the child, parent, or carer;
- If it is not possible to implement the child protection plan for any reason;
- Concerns for the child have increased and an early Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) is being considered/requested;
- Concerns for the child have decreased and an early Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) is being considered/requested.

8. Gathering Data on Formal Escalation and Resolution

The Team Manager will be responsible for the collection of data and will report on the number of Informal and Formal Case Management Escalations and the timescales reached in resolving them.

9. Escalating Concerns in Relation to Conference and Review Managers

It is important to recognise that Conference and Review Managers should also remain open to scrutiny and challenge if required. Wherever possible, the social work staff and management will attempt to resolve a problem by negotiation, including contacting the CRM and attempting to resolve the problem directly with them. This can be escalated to their Service Manager if not resolved.