



Working together to promote good practice for children and families in Gloucestershire: celebrating success and resolving differences

1. Introduction:

Gloucestershire County Council is committed to the delivery of good services to children and their families. This vision is encapsulated in the Council Strategy Document:

Gloucestershire, Looking to the Future, 2019-2022:

“Children who are in need or at risk get high quality support that makes a real and lasting difference to their lives”

“Children in care and care leavers get the best possible opportunities.”

Gloucestershire children’s Services are committed to consistently delivering high-quality practice that achieves good outcomes for children, young people and families. Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs have an important role in recognising and celebrating good practice. They also have a clearly defined quality assurance role and a statutory duty to challenge where practice and decision making are not meeting the needs of children.

This protocol aims to provide the basis of a shared endeavour across children’s services; to recognise and celebrate good practice and to challenge practice and decision making that is not meeting the needs of the children and families that we are working with. Underpinning this process are some key principles.

2. Principles:

- We will work together to promote good outcomes for children and families.
- The views, wishes and experiences of children and families will be at the centre of our work.
- We will hold high expectations of ourselves and colleagues and be accountable for progressing actions that we are responsible for, challenging as needed where systems and process creates delay for children.
- All communication about differences will be respectful and constructive; listening with an intent to understand and taking the views of others on board.
- We will reflect on our own practice, our own strengths and areas for development and commit to doing what works for children and families.

3. Responding to good and outstanding practice

Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers have an important role to play in identifying, promoting and celebrating good practice. During the course of their work, Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers will identify examples of good and outstanding practice and these should be acknowledged through a 'good practice note'. The note should be completed with details of the good practice and how it has impacted on the child and family involved. This note should be sent directly to the social worker, copying in their team manager.

4. Responding to practice concerns

4.1. Informal resolution: Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers are responsible for identifying practice concerns and ensuring that they are effectively addressed on behalf of children and families receiving a service in Gloucestershire. Where concerns are identified, they should be raised informally with the social worker and discussed with the team manager unless the seriousness and/or urgency of the situation precludes an informal discussion. If resolution can be reached, the actions agreed should be completed within 5 days or within a timescale mutually agreed as in the child's interests. The Child Protection Chair or Independent Reviewing Officer will be responsible for recording agreed actions,

monitoring completion of the task and noting resolution at an informal level on the child's record.

4.2. Formal resolution: If the matters cannot be resolved informally within 5 days, or a timescale that is in line with the child's needs, the Independent Reviewing Officer or Child Protection Chair should take formal action. At this point it is assumed that informal discussions with the Social Worker have not been sufficient to resolve the concerns. The IRO/CP Chair will contact the Team Manager to discuss their concerns. They will follow this up with completion of a concern/escalation form, detailing the dispute and requesting a response from the Team Manager in the first instance (Formal Level 1). If the agreed actions are not completed within the agreed timescale the concern should be escalated to the Service Manager and Head of Service, copying in the Director of Safeguarding (Formal Level 2). Within Level 2, the Head of Service remains the accountable manager and they will agree with the Service Manager who will attend to the concern and respond as soon as possible and no later than 5 days. If the concerns are not resolved, they will be escalated to the Director of Safeguarding and Care (Formal Level 3), and ultimately the Director of Children's Services (Formal Level 4) for resolution if necessary. The timescale from the point of being formally raised to resolution should be no more than 20 days (IRO Handbook, 6.2). For this reason, each stage of the formal process has a maximum response time of 5 days.

It is important to note that the Independent Reviewing Officer or Child Protection Chair may bypass any stage of the process and raise the concern at the level they consider to be most appropriate (IRO Handbook, 6.2) in line with the needs of the child concerned. The Independent Reviewing Officer also has the authority to refer a concern to CAFCASS if they consider it necessary to do so (regulation 45). In most cases, contact with CAFCASS will be appropriate after local dispute resolution processes have been unsuccessful however, should a matter be of sufficient urgency, the IRO can curtail the timescales detailed in the dispute resolution process and refer the matter to CAFCASS to ensure issues are resolved in the child's timescale. Where an IRO does this they will inform relevant colleagues including the Head of Service for the Independent Reviewing Service, the relevant operational Head of Service, the Director of Safeguarding, and the Director of Children's Services.

5. Checking and monitoring:

Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers have a responsibility to monitor the progress of children receiving a service towards achieving good outcomes. This is undertaken formally through completion of a progress check/Quality Assurance Review between formal statutory reviews, and informally through everyday contact with the child's case. Children will have a minimum of 3 progress checks/ Quality Assurance Reviews in their first-year subject to a Child Protection Plan or in the care of the local authority and 2 checks in subsequent years. Progress checks/Quality Assurance Reviews can be completed more regularly in line with the needs of the child but must not drop below the frequencies noted above.

As a result of this checking and monitoring good practice and practice concerns will be identified and subject to the respective processes described in this guidance.

5.1. Categories of practice quality:

Good practice and concerns will be categorised as follows:

- Children's safety & wellbeing
- Participation and Relational Practice
- Drift and Delay in achieving timely permanence for children
- Key decision-making
- Resources (i.e. resources being delivered as agreed; or the resource offered being a good match for the child)
- Key procedural/administrative tasks that relate directly to progress for the child.

6. Reciprocal escalation

In line with the relational principles inherent in this document, Gloucestershire encourages colleagues to identify and celebrate good practice by Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs. Equally, where there are concerns about the practice of these independent officers this needs to be raised accordingly.

Where good practice is celebrated, this should be through a note to the independent officer and their manager that outlines the good practice and benefit to the child and/or their family. Where practice of concern is identified this needs to be responded to through the following routes:

- [GSCP Escalation Policy](#): where differences relate to professional decision-making and practice.
- [GSCP Complaints in Relation to Child Protection Conference](#): where difference relate to the process of a conference, the outcome of a conference, and/or the threshold decision within conference.

Where there is notable disagreement about how a professional has conducted themselves, this should be attended to informally and relationally in the first instance with a priority to repair and strengthen working relationships. If, however, this remains unsuccessful then this can be raised formally through the relevant complaints, grievance or whistleblowing processes as required.

7. Progress checking

7.1. IRO progress check template headings:

- Discussion with social worker/carers/child/others as considered appropriate by the IRO.
- Review of audits/child of concern notifications/escalations in last period.
- Progress of actions from statutory review:
- Is child's record up to date and does it reflect the completion of statutory tasks:
- Is the child safe enough?
- Has the child achieved permanence?

Overall outcome of progress check: Outstanding progress/good progress/progress requires improvement/progress is inadequate.

- IRO to agree actions to be completed and timescales with social worker.

7.2. Child Protection Chair: Quality Assurance form

- It is proposed that the Child Protection Chairs use the existing quality assurance form to undertake their mid-way checks.

Outcome of quality assurance review: Outstanding progress/good progress/progress requires improvement/progress is inadequate.

8. Promoting good information sharing

8.1. Independent Reviewing Officers: Good information sharing has a central role to play in good practice and timely information sharing is vital to allow Independent Reviewing Officers to fulfil their statutory responsibilities in respect of children in care. Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 IRO Guidance (Regulation 8), the Local Authority must inform the IRO of, "Any significant change of circumstances occurring after the review that affects arrangements".

Paragraph 3.74 of the IRO Handbook sets out what constitutes a significant change and as a minimum standard the IRO should be informed of the following:

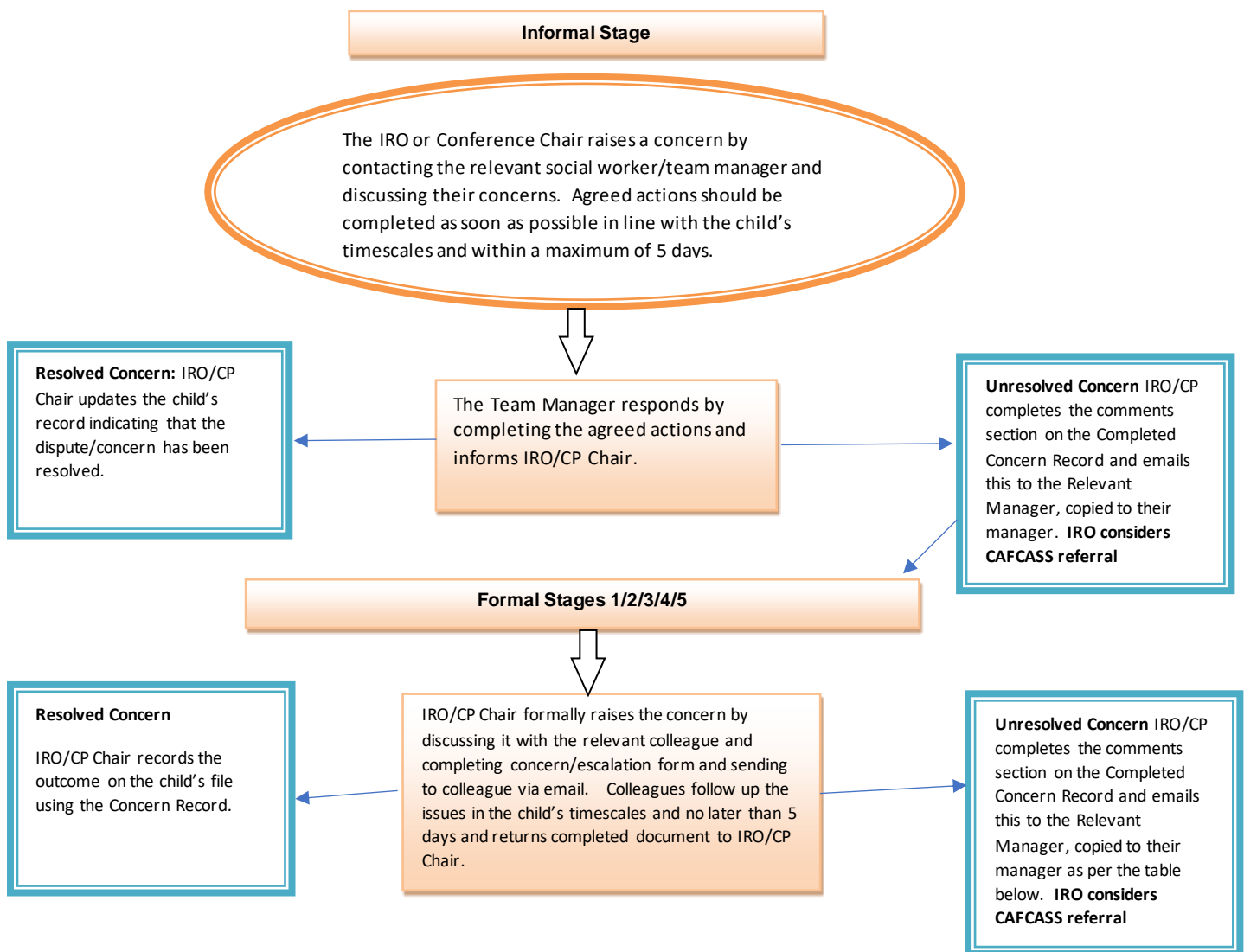
- Outcomes of any Panel applications or presentations.
- Outcomes of presentations to the Fostering Panel or Agency Decision Maker;
- Unexpected changes in the child's placement provision (which may significantly impact on placement stability);
- Proposed change of placements, and where unavoidable, actual change of placements;
- Court Orders and outcomes from Directions hearings;
- Significant delays in completing any looked after review decisions;
- Any missing from care episodes;
- Details of any strategy discussions/meetings or other meetings where the IRO was not present;
- Any period of exclusion from school (including informal exclusions);
- Outcomes from health assessments or medical consultations which identify/confirm any serious previously undiagnosed conditions;

- Unexpected changes in the child's family or foster carer's circumstances (births, deaths, etc.);
- Arrests, bail, and convictions;
- Serious accidents;
- Changes of allocated social workers;
- Unexpected proposed or actual discharge from care;
- Complaints from or on behalf of the child, parent, or carer.
- Any relevant parallel planning (e.g. Personal Education Planning, Education Health and Care Planning or Youth Justice).

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

- Death, serious incident or significant harm to the child;
- Change of address of the 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;
- Court Orders and outcomes from hearings (including Private Law, Public Law Outline, and Youth Justice);
- 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.

Dispute Resolution- flow chart



Stage	Discussion/follow up in writing to:	CC:	Timescale
Informal	Social Worker	Team Manager	The timescale for resolution of all concerns should be dictated by the needs of the child. In respect of all formal concerns, a written response should be provided to the IRO/CP Chair within 5 days.
Formal 1	Team Manager	Service Manager	
Formal 2	Head of Service & Service Manager	Director of Safeguarding	
Formal 3	Director of Safeguarding		
Formal 4	Director of Children's Services		