



Child Protection and Planning Practice Guidance

Introduction

This Practice Guidance has been written to assist Social Workers and Team Managers alongside Child Protection Principal Officers to improve the quality of decisions being made at Child Protection Conferences (both ICPC and Reviews). It also sets out how and why core groups should be utilised to effectively progress plans and improve outcomes and consistency for children across the service.

Childrens Services have been using the [Strengthening Families Framework](#) to facilitate Child Protection Conferences since March 2014.

The 'Strengthening Families' model aims to foster as far as possible a spirit of collaborative working between professionals and families. The model incorporates a stage of information sharing in which all of those present (including family members) are invited to participate. Family members are asked to put forward their views, to talk about their own strengths/concerns and to contribute ideas about the best way forwards. This provides a balanced picture of the family, and an awareness of some of the positives that already exist, and can be built upon. The approach is designed to help families participate more easily and to help all participants to better assess the needs of children to ensure that these are effectively safeguarded.

This practice guidance should be read in conjunction with Working Together 2015, The Chairs Handbook, May 2017 and the West Midlands Safeguarding Children Procedures- Statutory CP procedures which can be found on the BSCB website: www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk

Preparation for Conferences

Good preparation is important to achieving successful outcomes from Child Protection Conferences. It is also the key to creating an environment where families participate as fully as they can to identify the resources they bring as a family to resolve the issues they face; give them hope for making the changes required and engage in a meaningful way with the agencies involved with them and their children.

Role of the Social Worker

As soon as possible after the decision has been taken to hold an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC), the Social Worker should meet with the family to do the following:

- inform them of this and to explain why the decision to hold an ICPC has been taken;
- inform family members what the meeting is for and give written information advising how conferences work;
- discuss who from the family (in its widest sense) should be invited to the meeting, including the children, and how they might be supported, advocacy, transport, childcare, interpreting services, etc;

- identify what practical and emotional help – including advocacy – the children and adults will need to help them participate effectively in the conference;
- establish any difficulties or circumstances that should be discussed with the chair, e.g. any court orders or bail conditions that are in place, which would prevent parties to attend together; any conflict or risk that will need to be managed in order to communicate this in good time to the chair of the conference to enable them also to prepare for chairing the conference effectively;
- formulate a Danger/Harm Statement with the family wherever possible.

Role of the Chair

Before the start of the ICPC, the chair of the meeting should also meet with the family.

The purpose of this meeting is:

- to go over again the issues already raised by the Social Worker as to why we are holding a Child Protection Conference;
- to give the family the opportunity to raise any issues of concern with the chair;
- for the chair to explain in detail how the ICPC will be run, to clarify how difficult or sensitive information will be shared; to work out with the family how their participation can be best facilitated; and to put them at their ease as far as is possible.

There may be other occasions when the Social Worker or Team Manager and the chair need to meet and have a professional conversation prior to the meeting taking place – for example if the recommendation from the Social Worker Team is that a child/ren should be de-listed from a plan at 3 months, if the CP plan has been changed from the ICPC or last Review to discuss rational and progress – this will allow for the chair to prepare and incorporate the updated plan into the meeting.

ICPC/Review Child Protection Conferences

Role of the Social Worker

- alongside the family where possible to present the Danger/Harm Statement formulated in preparation for the conference with the family having contributed to this;
- to have prepared a plan with the family to be considered at the ICPC or Review Conference.
- To agree with the chair who will discuss the outcome of the meeting and share the safety plan with the child/ren.

Role of the Chair

- To ask and explore why the conference has been called.
- Establish key recent events or incidents that have brought the case over the significant harm threshold.
- Consider other relevant information which indicates potential for or actual evidence of patterns of behaviours/events of significant harm.
- Help the participants of the meeting to develop a safety statement with desired outcomes for the child/ren.
- Help provide clarity of what the plan must achieve and what the child's lived experience should look like if the factors leading to the significant harm were successfully addressed.
- Facilitate the development of an outline child protection plan which engages the family and agencies and to encourage ownership and a commitment to progressing and updating this in the intervening review period.
- Determine whether the plan should be CP or CIN plan.
- Disrupt group think and act as devil's advocate to assist in avoiding the rules of optimism and pessimism.
- Establish safety "bottom lines" which are non-negotiable.

- For Review Conferences the chair should act as a critical friend in reviewing the previous plan which will have been updated and reviewed via core groups during the review period. Effectively quality assuring the review of the plan before a new plan is formulated.
- To ensure that conferences are all quorate and reports are received from agencies who are currently involved with the family.
- To write to any professional who did not attend or send a report for a conference and request an explanation as to why this has happened. If there are patterns or themes across the partnership regarding non-attendance this should be escalated through the CP and review management structure to enable this to be explored further with Safeguarding leads for the relevant agency.
- In the exceptional circumstances where most or all of the conference attendees score 0, the chair should escalate this to the Social Worker Management Team for oversight around decision making and immediate next steps to ensure that the child's needs are effectively safeguarded. In addition the chair should explore with rigour the rationale for the scoring and facilitate a discussion which incorporates the safety plan devised within the conference to assist people to consider existing safety based on the intervention identified as part of the plan.
- In circumstances where the majority score is above 5, the chair should facilitate a discussion to consider whether a CIN plan would suffice.
- To ensure that all children who are de-listed from a CP plan have in place, for at least 3 months, a CIN plan, except in those circumstances where a child/ren have become looked after or have moved to live in another Local Authority.

Core Groups

The first core group is responsible for developing the plan previously outlined at the conference into a detailed working tool for the family. Whilst agencies should ensure that members of the core group undertake their roles and responsibilities effectively in accordance with the agreed child protection plan, the Social Worker will take the lead in the convening of core groups.

The subsequent core groups should be used to further refine and develop the plan whilst overseeing the implementation by measuring progress against outcomes and actions. This may take more than one core group to achieve.

The updated plan should be reflected within the running core group minutes which are held within the child's electronic case record.

The CP chair should be advised of any changes to the plan as part of the preparation for the child protection review. The rationale for the development of the plan should be reflected in the reports presented to the conference to review the decision in respect of the plan. The CP chair should then ensure the changes to the plan during the review period are incorporated within the minutes of the conference.

The core group, *before* the Review Conference, should consider and discuss the recommendation being presented to conference in relation to whether a further period of CP listing is required and the rationale for this. Additionally, if the recommendation to conference is to de-list then a CIN plan needs to be considered and formulated with a view that this will be put in place for at least 3 months following any child being delisted from a child protection plan. If in the exceptional circumstances where it has been assessed that a CIN plan is not necessary a clear rationale as to why this is the case needs to be recorded on the child's file and within the minutes of the review.

A follow up discussion in supervision between the responsible Team Manager and Head of Service (HOS) should take place citing the reasons and ensuring that the HOS has oversight. All members of the core group are jointly responsible for:

- Collecting information to assist the lead Social Worker in completing the assessment to inform the progress and review of the plan.
- Participating in the compilation and analysis of the assessment.
- The formulation and implementation of the detailed child protection plan, specifying who should do what, by when.
- Carrying out their part in implementing the plan including the commitment of identified resources.
- Monitoring and evaluating progress against specified outcomes for the child of the detailed child protection plan.
- Making recommendations to subsequent Review Conferences about future protection plans and the child's needs being met stipulating specific outcomes.
- Attending core group meetings and reviewing progress to ensure that there is no drift in achieving the aims of the child protection plan. Where difficulties arise around attendance, and this impacts on the progress of the plan for the child, the Social Worker should inform their Team Manager who should make attempts to promptly resolve with the agency. If this cannot be achieved, the matter should be escalated in writing with a view to problem solving to ensure children's needs are being met within the plan.
- The core group must ensure that the child protection plan sets out the frequency for all core group members to see the child and the frequency of all contacts.
- All action points must be clearly recorded, analysis of the risk of harm to the child should be made and all the information should be shared with the lead Social Worker and the core group.

THERE ARE NO HARD OR FAST RULES WHEN IMPLEMENTING CP PLANS. THIS GUIDANCE PROVIDES A FRAMEWORK FOR BEST PRACTICE. IT DOES NOT OR WILL NOT REPLACE THE NEED FOR CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE SW/TM AND CPR SERVICE AND WILL ENSURE THAT WE ARE FOCUSED ON THE NEEDS AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES AND NOT PROCESS.

Double Loop Learning in the Child Protection System

