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**Safeguarding and Review Service**

**Child Protection Chair Practice Standards**

**August 2022**

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| **Contents** | **Pages** |
| Scope and Introduction | 2 - 3 |
| Restorative Practice within the Safeguarding and Review Service | 4 - 5 |
| Child Protection Conference Chair Practice Standards | 6 – 10 |
| Child Protection experience | 11 - 14 |
| Governance arrangements | 16 |
| Appendix 1 Initial Child Protection Conference Timeline | 17 – 18 |
| Appendix 2 Child Protection Review Conference Timeline | 19 – 20 |

**Scope**

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| **RESTORATIVE PRACTICE**  building relationships art |
| All contact and work received by families from Dudley Children’s Service are based around restorative practice principles. This is to ensure we improve the life outcomes for all children, young people and families we work with. In Dudley we intend to use restorative principles and behaviours with colleagues as well as children and families, to help develop positive working relationships. |

This document describes the good practice standards required of the Child Protection Conference Chair regarding quality assurance, care planning and review; and outlines how the Safeguarding and Review Service will work together with children, families, partner agencies and the Children’s social work teams to enable children, young people, and their families/carers to participate in the planning process.

**Introduction**

The Child Protection Conference Service is set within the framework of the [Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf)) statutory guidance.

The Safeguarding and Review Service is committed to ensuring all children are protected from harm and have plans that ensure their needs are met, and that their developmental outcomes are promoted. The Service has a strong focus on Restorative Practice, positive outcomes and holding agencies to account for their contribution towards these outcomes.

All children and young people, and their families and carers, have the same protection regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. The Service aims to identify any additional needs of children from minority ethnic groups and children with disabilities, and seek to reduce the barriers they may face, especially around communication, in their day to day lives and in reviewing their protection plans.

The principles underpinning our work:

* The child’s welfare must be paramount, and this overrides all other considerations.
* Children have the right to be heard, to be listened to and to be taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions which may affect their lives.
* Parents/carers have a right to be respected and should be consulted and involved in matters which concern their families.
* All agencies concerned with the protection of children must work together in the best interests of children and their families.
* Each agency must have an understanding of each other’s professional values and accept their respective roles, powers, and responsibilities.

The Safeguarding and Review Service Manager is responsible for ensuring that standards are in place to ensure the quality-of-service delivery. This will include obtaining regular and routine feedback from children, parents, social workers, and partner agencies, as well as auditing of the records, supervision, and direct observations of Child Protection Conference Chairs.

**Restorative Practice within the Safeguarding and Review Service**

**The features of a restorative Child Protection Conference**

The following changes and restorative practices have been implemented in Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences:

* Tables removed as families can find this to be a barrier to conversation
* The family have their opportunity to talk first.
* The chair uses a prompt sheet to help them prepare for conference restoratively.
* The 3-point Significant Harm Checklist is used to determine criteria for a child protection plan.
* Meetings can be held in person, virtually or in a hybrid model with CP Chair face to face with others joining remotely dependent on the needs of the family. It is the expectation that all ICPCs are held at the Family Centre unless there is an exceptional reason.

Each conference discussion starts with the family being asked why they think the Conference has been convened, to outline their strengths and difficulties and start to consider solutions for the plan. Professionals may have less to say if the family have been very open and honest in their perspective and the incident/concerns/harm has been outlined. Not all questions must be asked of each participant; the Chair should be confident that each person’s perspective, particularly family members, has been obtained and sufficient information shared to reach a decision. Professionals will not be asked to read out their full report, as this will have already been shared with parents prior to the Conference, or to repeat information that has already been provided by other agencies; this will reduce the time spent on information sharing so the focus of the meeting is upon agreeing an outline plan.

**Working with the Local Authority to improve children’s outcomes**

The Safeguarding and Review Service works with Children’s Social Work Teams to enable children, young people, and their families/carers, to reach their full potential. This is achieved by challenging and supporting social workers, their managers, their teams, and wider Children’s Services departments to promote good practice. Furthermore, the Child Protection Conference service should ‘identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed’ (DCSF, 2010). Thus, the CP Chairs’ focus is both individual children’s planning and the promotion of good practice across the organisation.

As a Service, we are committed to developing more effective ways of organisational learning from individual cases. The Child Protection Conference Service carries out the following learning and support mechanisms:

* CP Chair representation at various Subgroups and Panels across the Local Authority.
* CP Chairs modelling of good practice and SMART planning principles in outline plans and recommendations and decision documents.
* Quality assurance of the work completing by the local authority; identifying good practice and providing feedback to the Children’s Social Work Teams.
* Completing Progress Reviews for every child between statutory reviews.
* Applying effective challenge as per the local Dispute Resolution Process.
* Participation in the quality assurance framework, completing audits and moderation
* Presentation of an Annual report.

**Child Protection Conference Chair Practice Standards:**

[**https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/**](https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/)

The Safeguarding and Review Service is committed to embracing Dudley’s Practice Standards set to give everyone working in Children’s Services a set of consistent values and core standards by which we will be able to measure the quality of services provided, and ultimately the impact they have on children and families in Dudley.

These are the specific standards relevant to the CP Chair’s role in working directly with children and families, and in overseeing the child’s protection plan:

**Participation**

* The child’s lived experience is at the centre of our work.
* There is evidence of direct work with the child and all practitioners will use creative methods to involve the child or young person in seeking their voice and involving them in their assessment and plans
* The child’s views and lived experience will be discussed and clearly recorded in the notes of the Conference
* We will make sure that where appropriate children will be invited to attend their Conference or be helped to take part in another way.
* We will invite parents and significant adults to attend their child’s Conference or help them to contribute in another way.

**Child Protection Planning**

* The views of children and families will always be evident within the plan and the plan will include suggestions about what families think will work best to create change
* The views of partner agencies will be considered in the planning process and the plan reflects the multi-agency ownership
* Every plan should have clear contingency arrangements.
* Plans will be reviewed and updated within required timescales.
* ICPC are held within 15 days of the strategy meeting.
* First Child Protection review is held 3 months from the Initial Meeting, then 6 monthly thereafter. A Review Conference can be brought forward if there is a significant change for the child; this decision will be made by the CP Chair.
* Child Protection Plans are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely)

**Documentation for Child Protection Conferences**

* A child’s meeting can only take place if there is an up-to-date assessment/report. At Initial Child Protection Conferences a genogram and chronology should be provided
* The Social Worker and partner agencies will share their report with parents, and also send the report to the CP Chair 3 days before the Conference to enable the CP chair to fulfil their responsibilities. The Social Worker will alert the CP chair to important changes in circumstances for the child in between Conferences, and all agencies will alert the Chair if there has been any delay or barrier to implementing the agreed plan.
* The meeting report/plan must have the manager’s comments and signature.
* When there is no Social Worker report this will be challenged through the Quality Assurance and dispute resolution process. Partner Agencies will also be challenged if they have not provided a report and where it has not been shared with parents in advance.
* We will ensure that the CP outcome form is completed within 24 hours and minutes are completed and circulated with 20 working days.
* If the CP chair finds inaccuracies about demographic details on the child’s electronic file, they will advise the Social Worker and Team Manager.

**Timeliness**

* Reviews/Child Protection Conferences and Core Group Meetings will be held within timescales.
* The Safeguarding and Review unit will record whether timescale standards are met and, if not, record the reasons.
* Ensure that the date of the next review is agreed at the meeting and is within statutory timescales.
* The Service Manager will provide oversight to the performance indicators around timeliness of Initial and Review Conferences.

**Good Practice for Progress Reviews**

**CP Chair’s monitoring of progress**

* We will ensure that all our outline plans and/or decisions and recommendations are SMART and monitor the implementation of the plan between meetings.
* We will raise any issues both individually and collectively with the appropriate persons/service when the Local Authority is failing to fulfil its responsibilities.
* Every child will have a Progress Review to monitor progress and prevent drift and delay.

The IRO Handbook outlines the duty upon IROs “to review the child’s plan and progress between formal reviews”. In Dudley we take a similar approach for Children subject to Child Protection plans, “the chair should also quality assure progress to secure improved outcomes for the child in between CP conferences. This will include a follow up on the plan’s progress within the first month of any child protection plan” (WM procedures, 2019). Thus, a Progress Review is an opportunity to ensure that Conference Chairs monitor progress to avoid unnecessary drift and delay for children.

**Minimum standards for Progress Reviews**

* Take place at any point but by the mid-point at latest. (More frequently if deemed necessary by the CP chair)
* Include dialogue with the SW as well as evidence tasks were recorded on the child’s electronic file.
* Evidence how the recommendations and decisions of the last Review were being progressed within timescales.
* Areas of concern and/or lack of progress will be raised formally with the Social Worker and/or Team Manager (as part of the QA challenge process) and with Partner Agency Safeguarding Leads as appropriate.
* Be recorded on the child’s file (LCS) using the Progress Review case note.

**Dispute Resolution**

* We will resolve disputes about a child’s plan in a timely way. This will be evidence on the child’s electronic file.
* If unresolved, or where risk is identified the dispute resolution process will be initiated
* The dispute resolution will be recorded on the child’s file using the appropriate case note/form.
* The Service have devised a Quality of Practice alert system. Consistency in the use of this challenge and feedback is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Service Managers.
* Positive working relationships are at the heart of this process.

**The Importance of Sharing Reports with Families for Child Protection**

The parent and the child should be kept informed and involved throughout the conferencing process. The family should be at the centre of the meeting, taking a leading role in the discussion and planning.

It is important that families do not hear new information within the report which comes as a ‘surprise’ at the meeting. It is the responsibility of all agencies that have relevant information to make this available to the meeting in the form of a written, legible, and signed report that is shared and discussed with the parents, and child where appropriate in advance of the Conference

The allocated social worker is responsible for facilitating the involvement of the parents by ensuring in advance of the meeting that they are given sufficient information and practical support to make a meaningful contribution (e.g. interpreters / transport, childcare arrangements), including providing them with a copy of the social work report 3 days before an initial meeting and 5 days before a review meeting.

These timescales are to give families sufficient time to prepare for such important meetings about their family life.

In exceptional circumstances and with the Safeguarding and Review Service Manager approval, the CP Chair is able to adjourn a Conference if they feel there is not sufficient information or attendance to proceed, or if the parent has not been adequately prepared. The Conference must then be rearranged within 10 working days for a Review Conference, and as soon as practically possible for an Initial Conference.

If the Conference has proceeded without attendance of all core agencies (quoracy) then this decision must be clearly documented in the notes of the meeting. The agencies who were not present have 10 working days to submit an appeal to the outcome of the conference to the Head of Safeguarding; this may mean the Conference has to be re-convened.

**Conversation between Social worker and the Child protection Chair**

The allocated social worker should have a conversation with the Conference Chair **five days** prior to the Initial Child Protection Conference to ensure arrangements for child and parental participation are appropriate. The social worker should also check that interpreters / advocates or support for parents are in place if needed and ensure that childcare arrangements have made. The CP chair should also consider if the notes of the conference will need to be translated and confirm this with business support. This pre-conference discussion should also identify if there is a need for parents to attend separately because of safety reasons. All people with Parental Responsibility should be involved within the Child Protection conference process. Where there is an identified risk for all with parental responsibility to attend the same venue, then the Conference can either be managed in two parts, or the CP Chair can make arrangements to speak to one of the parties separately.

The allocated social worker should have a conversation with the Conference Chair **seven days** prior to the Review Child Protection Conference to give an update on any significant events and discuss arrangements for the RCPC, including any changes to the invite list.

**The role and responsibility of the Child Protection Chair chairing the meeting:**

* To be fully prepared for the meeting, having read all available reports and information.
* To discuss / meet with the child/parents/carers before the Child Protection conference is held
* To open and formally introduce the meeting; highlighting confidentiality rules and the complaints process
* To manage the meeting and ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak and to be heard
* To ensure the plan decisions and recommendations are read out and agreed so that they can be formally recorded and sent to all participants within 24 hours of the meeting.
* To ensure that the notes of the meeting are written in clear language and outlines the risk and protective factors, with the threshold decision documented
* To ensure feedback is offered to the social worker in relation to their report and ongoing work with the family.
* To ensure feedback is sought from the parents, child if attended and the agency attendees on their experience of the meeting to inform and improve service delivery.

**Child Protection Conference experience.**

[**https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/**](https://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/)

**See appendix 1 for process flow chart.**

**Pre-Meeting with Parents and Children**

The Child Protection Conference Chair will welcome and meet with parents in attendance at Conference prior to the start of the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to check the parent’s understanding of their rights and responsibility within the Conference as well as their understanding as to why the meeting has been convened. This can also be a time for parents to consider their ideas for what could be included in the plan. For an Initial Child Protection Conference, 30 minutes will be booked for the pre-meeting, and 15 minutes for a Review Conference.  
  
During the pre-meeting, the Chair will explain to the parents how the Conference will be managed and share the agenda, discuss who will be in attendance and discuss whether any exclusions are required due to sharing confidential information in accordance with data protection requirements. The Chair will also explain the rules around confidentiality and any closed sections that may be required. The reason for any period of exclusion of family members in the Conference will be noted on the child’s file by the CP Chair. The Chair will explain expectations around behaviour within conferences, including the parents being entitled to take a short break during the meeting if required.

The Social Worker is responsible for ensuring the Chair is aware if the child is planning to attend Conference in order that additional time can be planned to speak to the child before the meeting starts. The Chair has the authority to make final decisions regarding the appropriateness of the child attending all or part of the meeting following discussion with the Social Worker (or whether other methods of participation should be facilitated).

The Chair will show parents and the child/ren into the Conference room, (or welcome to a virtual / hybrid meeting) prior to the rest of the attendees entering the room.  
The Chair has the authority to make decisions regarding the appropriateness of additional family members/supporters/advocates attending the Conference and ensure their role is understood.

**Decision Making**

Once the information has been shared and the details of the outline plan have been agreed, the Chair will invite each professional to provide a view as to whether the threshold criteria has been met. The Chair will remind attendees that this is whether the child/ren have/are or are likely to experience significant harm as a result of the care they are given, and therefore harm that is attributable to the parental care, or lack of. The Chair will remind professionals that where there is a sibling group, the decision may be different for each child, and this is to be specified when they provide a view. The Chair will ensure that full explanations are provided from each professional as to their rationale and that these are recorded in the minutes.

Having listened to each professional’s views, the Chair will summarise as to whether there is a unanimous/majority/split decision and confirm their agreement as to the decision of the Conference. The Chair will confirm as to whether the child/ren is to be make subject to a Child Protection Plan and determine the category of the plan (i.e., neglect, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse).   
If there is not a unanimous decision, the Chair may open a discussion to revisit professional’s views and attempt to obtain a unanimous view; where consensus cannot be reached, the Chair will make the final decision. In some circumstances the Chair will need to overrule the decision of Conference, a rationale for this decision must be clearly provided and recorded in the minutes.  
The Conference Minute Taker must ensure that the discussion regarding decision making is clearly recorded, and record any dissenting views regarding the final decision, as expressed by professionals.

The Chair will invite the Social Worker to outline the Contingency Plan applied, should the Child Protection Plan or Child In Need Plan not work as expected or risks for the child increase. The Chair will then confirm dates for the first Core Group or Child In Need Meeting as applicable and provide a date for a Review Child Protection Conference if required. The Chair will confirm membership of the Core Group and name of the allocated Social Worker.

Should parents and/or the child have not attended the Conference, the Chair will confirm with the Social Worker as to how they should be informed of the outcome of Conference, and this will be recorded within the Minutes.

**Ending the Child Protection Plan at Initial Child in Care Reviews**

The Review Child Protection Conference and Initial CIC Review need to be treated as separate meetings, although they will always be scheduled at the same time and date. If the child requires a different allocated IRO for the CIC meeting the Service Manager will inform both CP Chair and IRO prior to reallocation. The new allocated IRO will advise the Social Worker that only one report is required for the Initial CIC review and RCPC. In the majority of situations, the IRO will end the CP plan on the date of the first CIC Review, that coincides with the RCPC.

**Pre-birth Child Protection conferences**   
These are initial child protection conferences which concern an unborn child, which must be conducted in a similar manner to an initial child protection conference. This conference should be conducted as soon as the assessment is completed and at least ten weeks prior to the due delivery date (where there is known likelihood of a premature birth, the conference should be held earlier).

Pre-birth conferences should always be convened when:

All agencies involved with the expectant mother should consider the need for an early referral to Children's Social Care so that assessments are undertaken and family support services provided as early as possible in the pregnancy.

Pre-birth conferences should always be convened when:

* + Where a CYPA/Pre-Birth Assessment gives rise to concerns that an unborn child may be at risk of significant harm; or
  + A previous child has died or been removed from parent/s as a result of significant harm; or
  + Where a child is to be born into a family or household which already have children who are the subject of a child protection plan.

All agencies involved with the expectant mother should consider the need for an early referral to Children's Social Care so that assessments are undertaken and family support services provided as early as possible in the pregnancy.

**Attendance**

The key agencies involved in the delivery of the child must attend the conference.

In addition to those who normally attend an Initial [Child Protection Conference](https://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?term=Child+Protection+Conference&g=zkjN#gl27), midwifery, relevant neo-natal and Early Help Services must be invited.

Parents or carers should be invited as they would be to other [Child Protection Conferences](https://surreyscb.procedures.org.uk/page/glossary?term=Child+Protection+Conference&g=zkjN#gl27) and should be fully involved in plans for the child's future.

The social worker must ensure that an invitation is sent to the G P, community midwife, Specialist Midwife Vulnerable Women (SPMWVW) and the Dudley Group Safeguarding at the hospital where the baby will be delivered and health visitor/ Family Nurse Partnership (FNP). The invitations must be sent individually as one invitation to midwifery services is insufficient as they are in different departments. Attendance should also include any agency involved with the parents (Drugs/Alcohol Services, Mental Health, Disability Service, Probation, and Leaving Care).

All professionals should give high priority to attendance at pre-birth conferences if requested and in all incidences must provide a written report for the Chair.

Local authority legal services should be invited where legal action is being considered or where legal advice may be required.

**Decision**

If a Review Child Protection Plan is held prior to the child’s birth, the Child Protection Plan would not be ended at that point, due to the unknown risks following the significant event of the birth. A Review Conference would be convened to take place within 20 days following the child’s birth.

If a decision is made that the Unborn child needs to become the subject of a child protection plan, the category must be determined by the main risk factor. The name included on a child protection plan should be ‘unborn baby’, followed by the mother’sfamily name and the expected date of delivery. The key worker must update the Children’s Social Care LCS system with the child’s name and date of birth as soon as they are notified of the delivery. The Safeguarding Team, will ensure that a flag will be placed on the mother’s hospital IT record and this flag will be transferred to the baby once delivered.

If a Review Child Protection Plan is held prior to the child’s birth, the Child Protection Plan would not be ended at that point, due to the unknown risks following the significant event of the birth. A Review Conference would be convened to take place within 20 days following the child’s birth.

**Transfer into conferences**  
Transfer-in conferences should take place when a child who is the subject of a child protection plan moves, to live permanently from one local authority area to another. These conferences should take place within 15 working days from the date the child moved permanently into the new area (or 15 working days from when they were notified). The conference should receive reports from the professionals in the area which the child has moved from and said professionals should attend the conference wherever practical. Again, this has the same status and purpose as an initial child protection conference and should be conducted in a comparable manner to this. A nominated Social Worker from Dudley should attempt to meet the family prior to conference and feed that information to the Transfer in Conference.

**Quality Assurance of the Safeguarding and Review Service**

In order to achieve better outcomes for all vulnerable children in Dudley and drive forward practice development and improvement, there are a number of monitoring, evaluating and quality assurance arrangements in place to ensure that the Safeguarding and Review Service is effective. Jelicic et al (2014) recommends quality assurance activity includes case file audits, observations of practice, and obtaining feedback from children and their families and feedback from partner agencies. Therefore, as a service, we commit to the following quality assurance measures:

**Governance Arrangements**

The Annual CP report is presented to DSPP.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

Children, families, and multi-agency professionals who attend Conferences and Reviews are invited to comment on the service they have received. Safeguarding and Review Service Managers also chair quarterly Partnership Meetings to build relationships and develop practice across partnership agencies.

**Staff recruitment, supervision, appraisal, and continuous development**

All staff are recruited through fair, transparent, and equal opportunities process in accordance with safe recruiting practices. All staff have regular monthly supervision provided within the framework of a supervision agreement. All staff receive an annual appraisal where development and training needs are identified in addition to the service Workforce Development Plan and specifically tailored Service Development Days throughout the year.

**Observations of practice**

Each CP Chair will have their practice chairing a meeting observed by their line manager at least once a year. This will enable Chairs to continue to develop and maintain their practice skills and ensure the highest quality of service is provided to children and their families.

**Case file auditing**

All Children’s Service managers are expected to undertake audit activity each month as part of the Council’s Quality Assurance and Learning Framework. CP Chairs and Service Managers contribute to the audit cycle. This includes themed and dip sample audits.

**Measuring against National Performance Indicators**

We review our performance against the national and statistical neighbours set targets on a monthly basis. Efforts are made to maintain targets and reduce unnecessary delay for children without compromising the quality and stability and permanency.

**Complaints and representation**

All complaints are monitored by the Children’s Complaints manager to ensure that remedial actions can be taken, and service improvements delivered.

**Appendix 1: Initial Child Protection Conference Timeline**

**Appendix 2: Child Protection Review Conference Timeline**