

Policy on Resolution of Professional Disagreements Relating to the Safeguarding & Protection of Children

Multi Agency Escalation Policy

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Introduction

Escalation is a process of challenging a decision made by another professional or organisation. The escalation policy ensures that all professionals have a quick and straightforward means of resolving professional differences in order to safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

When working with children and their families' professional disagreement can be a positive, as challenge allows for review and can foster creative ways of working. However, disagreements can negatively impact on positive working relationships and consequently on the ability to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Professional disagreements always require resolution.

Differences of professional opinion arise on a safeguarding case when professionals deem decisions not to be in the best interests of the child. These professional differences are most likely to occur around:

- Levels of need and intervention-differing opinions about thresholds
- Lack of understanding about roles and responsibilities
- Disagreement regarding decision making and action to be taken e.g. At a strategy meeting, at a Child Protection Conference or any other professional meeting
- Concern about the lack of action of another professional in relation to a child or family member
- The need for action and communication
- Concern there is a drift or unreasonable delay in progressing a case.
- Disagreement over the provision of services

Recent Case Reviews have highlighted a lack of awareness and use of escalation within agencies and it seems that for various reasons professionals have tended not to refer to the policy. This has led to drift and delay in individual cases and means that practitioners have not been able to satisfactorily resolve professional disagreements.

SCR U identified that the "Safeguarding Partnership need to give a positive message about disagreeing and challenging and that partner agencies ensure that when a challenge happens that it is taken seriously and is responded to in appropriate timescales."

"The SSP escalation policy should be used if there is a disagreement about the provision of an assessment or service, if this will adversely impact on a child. Professionals should use the policy jointly if they share a disagreement about another agency's response to concerns"

The safety of individual children is the paramount consideration in any professional difference /disagreement and any unresolved issues should be addressed with due consideration to the risks that might exist for the child. All workers should feel able to challenge decision-making and to see this as their professional right and responsibility in order to safeguard the child and to promote effective multi-agency safeguarding practice.

This policy provides professionals with a framework within which they can raise concerns they may have about decisions made by other professionals or agencies in a way that:

- Avoids professional anxiety or disagreement that puts children at risk or potentially obscures the focus on the child
- Resolves the difficulties within and between agencies quickly and openly
- Identifies any areas of practice where there is a need to clarify or review multi-agency policies or procedures.

Effective working together depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies. Problem resolution is an integral part of healthy challenge, professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children.

If there are significant concerns for the child well-being at any stage of this process and there is potentially no resolution, then the SSP and SPP Executives must be informed immediately (Stage 3).

It should also be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some professionals to pursue resolution unsupported and in these cases the safeguarding lead for that organisation should support them throughout.

Any worker who feels that a professional decision is not safe or is inappropriate should initially consult their Safeguarding lead or line manager to –

- Clarify their thinking in order to identify the problem
- Be specific as to what the concern is about; and what they aim to achieve
- Evidence the nature and source of their concerns and keep a record of all discussions

It may be useful for individuals to have a de-brief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships.

Key Behaviours

The Swindon Safeguarding Partnership promotes key behaviours in working together to safeguard children. These are: -

- Accountability
- Openness
- Trust
- Innovation
- Commitment
- Curiosity
- Respectfulness

Key Principles

1. Keep the focus on what is in the child's best interests at all times.
2. Professionals must share the key information and their interpretation and assessment appropriately and what may be the likely impact on the child
3. Professionals must seek to resolve the issue in a timely way.
4. Avoid professional disagreement which may place children at further risk by obscuring the focus on the child or which may delay decision making.
5. Liaise with the lead professionals and safeguarding or child protection designates in the respective organisations at the earliest opportunity. Clarity is expected from all agencies in respect of designated roles and responsibilities.
6. Ensure that at each stage of the escalation process that there is accurate record made of the agreed actions of each agency.

N/B If at any time if a professional considers a child is at immediate risk of significant harm then the professional must ensure that their concerns are escalated on the same working day using established safeguarding procedures

A Staged Approach

It is expected that most disagreements can be resolved by professionals discussing the concerns and agreeing a way forward to meet the child's needs.

If professional agreement cannot be reached, then the concern should be escalated using this staged approach:

Stage One: Manager or Safeguarding Lead or Deputy/Designated Professional **within 5 working days.**

Stage Two: Agency SSP representative to Agency SSP Representative **within 5 working days.**

Stage Three: Refer to SSP Executive's **within 5 working days.**

Stage Four: Refer to SSP Independent Chair **within 5 working days**

Stage 1, 2, 3 & 4 are all formal stages of the escalation process

Professional to professional resolution:

Most professional differences or disagreements can be resolved by the professionals involved in the care of the child/children by discussing the concerns and risk assessing together.

The concern and the resolution must be documented in each agency's records and child's records if appropriate.

This discussion must take place as soon as possible. If the professional with who the disagreement is away, then the concern must be raised with the immediate line manager and a resolution sought.

If the issue is not resolved between the professionals, they should each escalate to their respective line managers/safeguarding leads **within 5 working days.**

Stage One: Manager/Safeguarding Lead to Manager/Safeguarding Lead

Line manager's/safeguarding leads should seek a resolution **within 5 working days.** If it is deemed that child is at risk of harm, then attempt at resolution should be made as soon as possible between the managers.

Where an acceptable resolution is reached the receiving line manager will confirm the agreed outcome of the concern and how any outstanding issues will be pursued. This must be documented, in writing to their counterpart outlining the issue **within a further 5 working days.** The manager must also ensure that the worker who first raised the initial concern is aware of the resolution.

If the manager of the professional with who the disagreement is away, then the concern must be raised with another line manager and a resolution sought.

Stage Two: Agency Partnership Representative to Agency Partnership Representative

If the problem is not resolved at stage one the managers must, without delay, report to their relevant senior manager or Safeguarding Partnership agency representative. The two senior managers or Partnership representatives must together attempt to resolve the concern **within 5 working days** or less if there is deemed to be a risk to the child.

Where a resolution is reached the receiving senior manager will confirm the outcome which must be documented in writing to their counterpart who raised the issue **within a further 5 working days**.

The organisations' Safeguarding Partnership representative or relevant senior manager must send a copy of the completed escalation pro-forma (Appendix 1) to the Safeguarding Partnership Business Team.

N.B. For all escalations in respect of Local Authority Children's Services, it is expected that if resolution is not agreed then before going to Stage 3 the CSC Director of Social Work, must be informed.

Confidential and sensitive information should be sent using a secure email system.

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership mailbox: Safeguardingpartnership@swindon.gov.uk

Stage Three: Refer to Executive Leads for the Partnership

If it has not been possible to resolve the professional differences between the agencies concerned the matter must be referred to the Executive Leads for the Partnership, **within 5 working days**. The Executives must together attempt to resolve the concern **within 5 working days** or less if there is deemed to be a risk to the child.

Where a resolution is reached the receiving executive manager will confirm the outcome which must be documented in writing to their counterpart who raised the issue **within a further 5 working days**.

The organisations' Safeguarding Partnership representative or relevant senior manager must send a copy of the completed escalation pro-forma (Appendix 1) to the Safeguarding Partnership Business Team.

The decision(s) will be documented and shared with each agency and the worker who first raised the initial concern.

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Stage Four: Refer to Safeguarding Partnership Chair

If it has not been possible to resolve the professional differences between the agencies concerned the matter must be referred to the Safeguarding Partnership Independent Chair, **within 5 working days**, who may either seek to resolve the issue direct, or to convene a Resolution Panel **within** a timescale that protects the child from harm.

The panel will consist of Safeguarding Partnership Executive representatives from three agencies (including the agencies concerned in the professional differences, where possible).

The panel will receive representations from those concerned in the professional differences and make a decision as to the next course of action, and the well-being of the child involved.

The decision(s) will be documented and shared with each agency and the worker who first raised the initial concern.

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Swindon Safeguarding Partnership

Escalation Stage One/Two Pro-forma (Copy to be kept on service user file).

Name of child/young person:	
DOB:	
Address:	
Name, Role and Agency of person completing this form	
Name, Roles and Agency of others involved	
Brief details of the professional disagreement:	

Has the disagreement been resolved at Stage 1 or 2	Yes	No
If yes, what was agreed?		
How long did it take for the issue to be resolved from the date of initial escalation?		
If not, please state why and who has the escalation been raised to as Stage 2 or 3 of the pathway and what was the date the concern was raised.		
What is the learning for your agencies from this case?		
Is there learning for the wider safeguarding partnership?		
A requirement for staff training	Yes	No
Development of a new SSP Protocol	Yes	No
Further discussion at a particular SSP Sub Group	Yes	No
Other		

Please send the completed form via secure email to: Safeguardingpartnership@swindon.gov.uk



