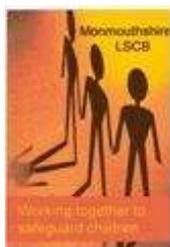


South East Wales Regional Safeguarding Forum



Multi-Agency Practice Guidance Resolving Professional Differences



Author: SE Wales Regional Safeguarding Forum	Sept 2011	Date for Review: 01.07.14
Version: Final	Page 1 of 6	Disposal:
Status: Unprotected		

1. Purpose and Context

The South East Wales Regional Safeguarding Forum and the Local Safeguarding Children Boards and constituent agencies it represents, are committed to the continuous improvement of joint working arrangements to safeguard children and promote their welfare.

One way of achieving this, is by providing practitioners with a framework for expressing concerns that may arise about the management of children and young people's cases in which there is a child protection concern. This practice guidance sets out that framework.

The protection of children and young people fundamentally depends on effective joint working between professionals and agencies. This requires an open and honest approach that recognises that resolving professional differences are an integral part of professional cooperation in child protection.

Effective joint working arrangements are supported by legislation, national policy and guidance and local protocols and practice guidance developed by Local Safeguarding Children Boards.

However, it is still possible for professionals to disagree about the management of a child/young person's case. Differences can arise about a number of aspects of a case, but are most likely to arise around:

- thresholds for action
- roles and responsibilities
- inter-agency communication
- timeliness of interventions.

It is essential that professional differences are resolved as swiftly as possible so as not to lose focus on the safety and welfare of the children/young people involved. Professional differences must not impede the progress of case working.

2. Professional Responsibility

Research and case reviews have consistently emphasized the need for good inter-agency communication, constructive professional challenge and the swift resolution of professional differences of opinion.

It is the responsibility of all professionals, regardless of status or agency, to challenge other professionals appropriately if they believe that the action or inaction of that professional/agency is placing a child at risk of harm.

Some professionals may require support from their line managers in order to challenge other professionals, as they may feel inexperienced, lacking in authority or wary of causing conflict. It is essential that managers provide this support.

3. The Process

All discussions must be recorded in accordance with the recording policies and procedures of the individual agency. There should be no unnecessary delays in implementing this process.

1. In the first instance the staff member who has a concern about a differing professional opinion should attempt to resolve any differences with the other professional / agency involved. This should be done as soon as possible with a view to resolving the differences and agreeing a course of action.
2. If they are unable to agree a way forward they should discuss this with their respective line manager / supervisor as soon as possible.
3. The line manager/supervisor should discuss the concerns raised with their counterpart in the other agency / organization and attempt to resolve the matter. This may involve a meeting to agree a course of action between the professionals concerned and their line managers/supervisors.
4. If agreement cannot be reached at this stage then the line manager/supervisor should contact the designated lead for child protection or their agency representative on the LSCB who will then contact their counterpart in the other agency. It may be useful at this stage to consider a multi-agency meeting involving practitioners, line managers and child protection leads. The meeting should be chaired by the LSCB Coordinator or an appropriate member of the LSCB. The purpose of this meeting is to resolve the differences and / or consider whether to recommend an LSCB review or learning event. The chair of the professional differences meeting should inform the chair of the LSCB of the outcome of the meeting.
5. If resolution cannot be achieved by this stage then the matter should be referred in writing to the LSCB Coordinator, requesting a LSCB review of the case.
6. The LSCB Coordinator will discuss this recommendation with the Chair of the LSCB and the Chair of the Local Audit / Quality Assurance sub group (or equivalent). This may involve further discussion with the child protection leads from both agencies.

The request will be considered against the criteria for a LSCB review i.e. one or more professional believes that the child/young person is at risk as a consequence of another agency's action/inaction and steps 1 to 5 of this process have been followed and there is still no resolution.

A decision will be made as to whether the case will be referred to the

Quality Assurance sub group for review or whether a review needs to be undertaken by an individual agency.

The Chair of the Quality Assurance sub group will write to the requesting agency detailing the decision made within 5 working days and if it is decided that a single agency review needs to be undertaken will also write to the identified agency outlining the concerns.

7. If the case does meet the criteria for a LSCB review it will be considered at the next meeting of the Quality Assurance sub group and the agreed audit process will be followed. The LSCB Co-ordinator will write to the requesting agency advising them of the expected date of completion of the review within 5 working days of the meeting.
8. There is an expectation that the practitioners involved will be included in the review / learning event and will be kept fully informed. Following completion of the review a report will be provided to the next meeting of the LSCB. The report will identify any key learning points, actions taken and outcomes for the child/young person.

NB: If at any stage in this process it is identified that immediate action is necessary to safeguard a child/children, then this must be referred to Children's Services.

PROCESS FLOW CHART

