

South East Wales Regional Safeguarding Forum



CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE PROTOCOL



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This protocol is agreed by all constituent members of South East Wales Regional safeguarding Forum in accordance with the National Assembly for Wales Guidance; Safeguarding Children: Working Together under the Children Act 2004.

This protocol should be read in conjunction with the All Wales Child Protection Procedures (2008) and with each agency’s own internal Child Protection Procedures/processes.

1. Introduction

This protocol sets out the arrangements for the following specific issues in the convening and process of Child Protection Conferences: -

- The decision whether or not to hold an Initial Conference
- Timescales
- Quorum for attendance at Conferences
- Attendance by parents and young people
- Exclusion criteria
- Decision making about registration
- Decision making about the category of abuse for registration
- Complaints and Representations Procedures.

For the purpose of this protocol any child or young person, up to the age of 18 years, will be referred to as the ‘child’.

2. Initial Child Protection Conference

2.1 Criteria for an Initial Child Protection Conference

An Initial Child Protection Conference will always be convened following section 47 enquiries:

- Where it is judged a child may continue to suffer or be at risk of suffering significant harm
- When a child on the Child Protection Register of another Local Authority moves into The relevant Local Authority .
- Where a child is born or moves into a household where other children are on the Child Protection Register.
- Where Section 47 enquiries indicate that an unborn child is likely to suffer significant harm. (This Initial Child Protection Conference should be convened prior to the child’s birth. Careful consideration should be given to the timing of this Conference. Information from the pre-birth assessment should inform the decision about the appropriate time for the Conference

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and where there are concerns re significant harm a strategy meeting should be convened.

In general, an Initial Child Protection Conference regarding an unborn child should take place between **8** and **16** weeks before the estimated date of delivery in order to ensure an effective and planned response.

Such a Conference should have the same status as other Initial Child Protection Conferences, including a decision about whether to register the child at birth. (The involvement of the community or hospital midwife is vital in those cases.)

2.1.1 Consideration should be given to convening an Initial Child Protection Conference when:

- Rehabilitation of a child who is currently looked after by the local authority or extended family / friends is being considered, where their removal was prompted by safeguarding issues.
- Children who are the subject of Care Orders are returning home to the household from which they were removed due to concerns regarding safeguarding issues and assessments indicate the need for a protection plan. This placement should always be made under the 'Placement with Parents' regulations.
- A child is living in a household that includes or is visited by a person who is an adult who poses a risk to children or who is believed to have abused a child.
- Another agency requests that a conference is convened.

2.2 **Purpose**

The Initial Child Protection Conference brings together family members, the child where appropriate and those professionals most involved with the child and family, following Section 47 enquiries.

Its purpose is to:

- Objectively analyse in an inter-agency setting, all the concerns and the information which has been obtained from the initial assessment, the child protection section 47 enquiries, the core assessment to date and from previous knowledge of the family;
- Make judgements about the likelihood of a child or any other connected or unborn children suffering significant harm in the future, i.e. the level of continuing risk

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- Decide what future action is required to safeguard the child and to promote their welfare, agree how to take this forward and clarify the intended outcomes for the child i.e. the need for registration and a child protection plan.

2.3 Timescale

- 2.3.1 The Initial Child Protection Conference should be held within **15 working days** of the first strategy meeting/strategy discussion, or of notification of a child on another area's register **permanently** moving into the relevant Local Authority.
- 2.3.2 The first core group meeting after the Initial Conference should be held within **10 working days** of the Conference.
- 2.3.3 The first Review Conference should be held within **3 months** of the Initial Conference.
- 2.3.4 Subsequent Review Conferences should be held within **6 months** of the previous conference.

2.4 Subject/Children

All children of the family/household must be considered within the Initial Child Protection Conference.

2.5 Attendance by parents and children

- 2.5.1 Parents/carers should always be invited to attend throughout child protection conferences, subject to the exclusion criteria set out below. They should be assisted to participate fully during the conference, through effective preparation by the social worker, by other agencies where appropriate, and through facilitation by the Chair, who will state and operate the Conference ground rules at each meeting.

Parents/carers may be accompanied by a friend/supporter if they wish. The Chair will discuss confidentiality issues with them prior to the Conference. Whilst parents should be encouraged to attend, this should not be at the cost of excluding a child who wishes to be present.

- 2.5.2 Children should always be given the opportunity, in line with their age and understanding, to know the reason, purpose and content of conferences and to express their wishes and feelings fully. Careful consideration must be given to whether this is best achieved through their full or partial attendance, or through a family member, professional or Advocate.

Parents and children will be fully prepared for the conference by the social worker and other agencies in contact with the family. The Chair will meet with

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both parents and child, immediately prior to the conference and they will have an opportunity to talk to the Chair, immediately after the conference, if required.

2.6 Role of Advocate

Within the child protection conference process, the advocate’s role is to support the young person to understand the process and help them formulate and contribute their views at the child protection conference, enabling conference members to be informed and to be aware of the child’s wishes and feelings.

2.7 Attendance by Professionals

Professionals should attend the Conference for one or more of the following reasons:

- To provide information regarding current involvement with the family/knowledge of the family;
- Where future engagement/service is likely;
- To bring specialist knowledge to the conference;
- To provide a view regarding the parents’ capacity to safeguard the child and promote their welfare;
- To contribute to the decision making process regarding whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm.

2.8 Reports

Those professionals who have a significant contribution to make, arising from knowledge of the child or family or both, should attend and provide a written report consistent with the domains and dimensions of the assessment framework and send it to the Chair of the Initial Child Protection Conference, 48 hours prior to the Conference.

Professional reports will be written following checks on relevant agency databases and as well as information specific to the individual agency, should include:

- Basic information about the child and family
- Nature of their involvement with the family
- Knowledge of involvement in current incident / cause for concern
- Frequency of contact and date last seen for each child
- Development details for each child
- Background / previous concerns
- Assessment of current issues / family strengths and risk factors to the child or children.

Professionals must be prepared to interpret, analyse and explain their information for the benefit of other conference attendees. The contents of this

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report should be shared with the parents and child at least one day prior to the Conference.

2.9 **Quorum for attendance at Child Protection Conferences**

2.9.1 A conference should have sufficient information and evidence to make informed decisions. A minimum of three agencies or professional groupings that have had direct contact with the child will normally need to be present before a conference can proceed.

As a minimum, there must be attendance by Children & Family Services and at least two other professional groups or agencies which have had direct contact with the subject child (other than pre-birth conferences).

In exceptional circumstances this may be breached, for example: -

- where a child has not had direct contact with 3 agencies
- where there is a need for an urgent conference for child protection reasons.

2.9.2 The decision to allow a non-quorate Conference to go ahead is made by the Chair, who will need to be satisfied that essential information is available and will record his/her decision making in the Conference minutes.

2.9.3 *Professional Groups are defined in Appendix 1*

NB, A child's guardian / family proceeding's officer, should be invited to a child protection conference in an observational capacity, provided s/he has been appointed by the court to represent the child. They do not count as an agency in terms of quoracy and have no role in the conference decision making process.

2.10 **Chairing the Child Protection Conference**

All conferences held within The relevant Local Authority will be chaired by an appropriately qualified and experienced social work professional, who is independent of operational or line management responsibility.

The Chair will possess a good understanding and professional knowledge of child protection, children's welfare and development and be knowledgeable about diversity and committed to anti discriminatory and non oppressive practice. The Chair will have been trained in chairing child protection conferences and have appropriate skills in chairing which encourages constructive participation and drawing to clear conclusion the views and judgements of conference members.

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2.11 **Exclusion Criteria**

A decision to exclude parents/carers or other family members from all or part of a Conference will be exceptional. The decision will be made by the Chair based on the following criteria and the reasons recorded in the Conference minutes: -

2.11.1 *Parental Behaviour:*

Strong risk of violence or intimidation of the child or anybody else at or after the conference, based on past or current actual or threatened actions or attitudes.

Where bail conditions preclude attendance. (The chair should take advice from the police and crown prosecution service prior to making this decision.)

Attendance at Conference under the influence of drugs or alcohol which affects their ability to participate.

Disruptive behaviour at the Conference which prevents Conference completing its tasks.

2.11.2 *Conflicting Interests:*

Where a young person wishes to attend without one or both parents/carers' presence – this will usually mean partial attendance by the young person and parent/carer separately.

Where parents are unable/unwilling with good reason to attend together – either the person with parental responsibility and/or actual care of the child will be given priority to attend throughout, or partial attendance by both separately will be arranged by the Chair.

2.11.3 *Information which would impact on child protection if shared with parents*

Where information cannot be disclosed to parents without impacting on either an ongoing police investigation or the child's safety and best interests.

2.11.4 *Request from a Professional*

Any professional can request exclusion of a parent/carer from the Conference. The request must be made to the Chairperson at the earliest opportunity. The Chairperson should discuss the request with the relevant agency manager before coming to a decision whether to exclude. The Chairperson's decision is final and the parent/carer will be informed of the decision and given the opportunity to discuss it further with the Chairperson.

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If under any of the criteria listed above, the parent is excluded, they have the right to discuss this with the Chair, who should ensure that their views are presented to conference via the social worker. The reason for the exclusion should be noted in the minutes.

2.12 Decision making process at the initial child protection conference.

The only decision that can be made at the initial child protection conference is whether to:

- Place a child’s name on the Child Protection Register
- Place an unborn child’s name on the Child Protection Register at birth.

This decision will be based on the views of all professional groups/agencies represented at the Conference, and also take account of any written contributions that have been made. This decision will be based on the response to the question:

‘Is the child at continuing risk of harm?’

The child is at continuing risk of significant harm if either:

- The child can be shown to have suffered ill treatment or impairment of health or development as a result of neglect, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and professional judgement is that further ill-treatment or impairment are likely, **or**
- Professional judgement, substantiated by the findings of the enquiries in this individual case or by research evidence is that the child is likely to suffer ill treatment or the impairment of health or development as a result of neglect, physical, emotional or sexual abuse.

All professionals attending conference must be aware that they are part of the decision making process and cannot abdicate their responsibility.

Where the decision is not unanimous, any dissent from the majority view should be recorded in the Conference minutes.

2.12.1 Professional groups rather than individuals will be able to give a view on registration; *the definition of professional groups is set out in Appendix 1*

2.12.2 Where Conference cannot reach a consensus the majority view will be accepted. Where the conference remains equally split, the Chair will make the decision about registration. The minutes will reflect the difference of view expressed at the conference including any concerns of the Chair regarding the appropriateness of the decision.

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2.13 Decision making about the category of abuse

The Chair will decide under which category of abuse the child’s name should be registered; this decision will reflect the views of Conference members. The category should reflect the **primary** presenting concerns at the time of registration. Gwent Local Safeguarding Children Boards, following recent local research on Newport child protection register, accepts that multiple categories of registration are not helpful in identifying primary presenting concerns. Conferences are therefore required to be focussed and identify a primary category and if necessary a secondary category, i.e.

- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect.

2.14 Core Group

2.14.1 The Initial Child Protection Conference will identify a core group of professionals who are responsible for developing the recommendations of the Initial Child Protection Conference into a detailed protection plan and implementing it. Membership should include the social worker, the child if appropriate, (and /or advocate) family members and professionals and foster carers who will have direct contact with the family.

2.14.2 The first Core Group meeting will be held within 10 working days of the Initial Conference and subsequently, at least monthly, but no more than 6 weekly intervals, for the duration of the child’s registration.

2.14.3 All members of the core group are jointly responsible for preparing and implementing the child protection plan.

2.15 The Outline Child Protection Plan

The Outline Child Protection Plan should set out what work needs to be done, why, when and by whom and should be developed into a detailed plan at the first core group meeting.

The plan should:

- Agree the risks of significant harm to the child and the way in which an inter-agency plan can protect the child (identifying clearly roles and responsibilities of professionals and family members/carers, including the nature and frequency of contact by professionals with children and family members/carers).
- The shorter and longer term planned outcomes to be achieved, clearly linking them to reducing the risks of harm to the child and promoting the child’s welfare.

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- Specify who will have responsibility for what actions, within what specified timescales (including completion of core assessment).
- Decide arrangements to monitor and evaluate the progress against the plan.
- Identify the professionals who will monitor the child's progress, development and safety and how (including the need for any therapeutic services).
- The outline child protection plan must take into consideration the wishes and feelings of the child and the views of the parents in so far as this is consistent with the child's welfare.

2.16 **Core Assessment**

2.16.1 The timescale for completion of the Core Assessment is 35 working days. A Core Assessment is deemed to have commenced at the point that an Initial Assessment ended or a strategy discussion decided to initiate Section 47 enquiries.

2.16.2 Where a child is not registered, but meets the criteria for a Core Assessment as a 'child in need' then, provided that the parents wish an assessment to continue, this too should take place within the same timescale.

2.16.3 For those children who are the subject of a protection plan, the Core Assessment should be carried out in accordance with the recommendations Of the Initial Child Protection Conference and developed by the Core Group. It should be consistent with guidance in the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families. It should build on information obtained in the course of initial assessment and the fuller Section 47 enquiries.

3. **Review Child Protection Conference**

3.1 A Review Child Protection Conference must be held within 3 months of the child's registration on the Child Protection Register and subsequently at not more than 6 monthly intervals.

Conferences can be held more frequently if circumstances warrant this.

3.1.1 The procedures outlined in respect of Initial Conferences with regard to:

- attendance;
- involvement of parents, families, children;
- exclusion;
- decision making;

equally apply to Review Conferences.

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3.2 **Purpose**

3.2.1 The Review Conference is required to:

- Review the safety, health and development of the child against the planned outcomes set out in the Child Protection Plan;
- Consider the information and conclusions of the core assessment;
- Consider how successfully the current plan has improved the original perceived outcomes, whether the child protection plan is still required and if so whether changes to the plan need to be made;
- Ensure that the welfare of the child continues to be adequately safeguarded;
- Consider whether inter-agency co-ordination is functioning effectively;
- Consider whether the membership of the core group is appropriate;
- Consider whether the child’s name should remain or be removed from the child protection register or the category of registration changed.

3.2.2 Every review should consider explicitly whether the child continues to be at risk of significant harm and hence, needs safeguarding via a formal Child Protection Plan. Conference participants should base their judgements on whether:

- The risk of harm has been reduced by action taken through the child protection plan
- The child and family’s circumstances have changed
- The core assessment of the child and family indicates that a child protection plan is not necessary

3.2.3 All agencies have a responsibility to request that a Review Conference be brought forward if they feel that a child is not being adequately safeguarded within the Child Protection Plan.

On receipt of such a request, Children’s Services will arrange for an early Review Conference to be convened.

3.3 **De-registration**

A child’s name may be removed from the Register if:

- It is judged that the child is no longer at continuing risk of significant harm requiring safeguarding by means of a Child Protection Plan [i.e. the criteria in 3.2.2 has been satisfied)
Under these circumstances, only a Review Child Protection Conference can decide that registration is no longer necessary.
- The child and family have moved permanently to another Local Authority area.

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- The child has reached 18 years of age, has died or has permanently left the UK.

4. **Complaints and Representations Procedures**

4.1 Parents/carers, and children where of an age and understanding, have the right to complain against:

- The registration decision, including the category
- A decision not to register or to de-register
- The process of the Conference, in terms of adherence to procedures.

The procedure should not cover:

- Complaints in relation to the contents of the minutes, which will be dealt with by the conference chair
- Complaints or representations relating to services that are delivered by individual agencies as a result of conference decisions
- Complaints about an individual professional.

These complaints will be dealt with under the internal complaints procedures of the relevant agency.

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APPENXDIX 1

QUORUM FOR ATTENDANCE AT CONFERENCES; DECISION MAKING ABOUT REGISTRATION

IDENTIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL GROUPS

The following groups within agencies will be considered as separate in terms of meetings being quorate, and in registration decisions:

Children & Family Services

- Child Care Teams (includes Family Support, Aftercare, Fostering & Adoption Teams)
- Adult Services Team
- Nursery

Health Services

- Health Visitor/Clinical Nurse Specialist
- School Health Nurse/ Clinical Nurse Specialist
- Midwife/Manager
- GP
- Consultant (separate in each area of specialism)
- Psychological Services
- Psychiatric Service

Education

- Primary School
- Secondary School
- Educational Psychology Service
- Education Welfare Service

Each other agency (e.g. Police, Probation, Housing, NSPCC Project, Substance Misuse Service, YOS, Sure start) will constitute a single attendance/voice in decision making.

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