



MIDDLESBROUGH
Safeguarding Children Board
www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/MSCB/Safeguarding

Core Standards for
Child Protection Conferences

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Introduction

Agencies in Middlesbrough responsible for the delivery of children's services, both in the statutory and voluntary sectors are committed to achieving the best outcomes for all children and young people, through the establishment of standards of safeguarding practice. For the purpose of this document the focus is on those children and young people, who are subject to the Child Protection Process due to abuse and neglect.

In view of the complexity of the cases, it is essential to have defined standards with specific and measurable indicators, to monitor the progress towards this objective.

The standards outlined in this document are in relation to the roles and responsibilities of those practitioners who are involved in the Child Protection Conference Process. The aim of the standards is to assist practitioners to work together to safeguard and promote children's welfare.

These standards are based upon government legislation and localised policy and procedures which all partner agencies adhere to. The MSCB has a responsibility for the development, performance and quality assurance of these standards.

Standard 1: Continuously, regularly and independently review the progress of a child/young person and quality of overall care to ensure that her/his needs are being adequately met.

The Independent Reviewing Officer has responsibility to:

- Chair all Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences giving all participants the chance to participate, share and consider all relevant information relating to the child/ren's well being.
- Ensure conferences are not cancelled or rearranged unless in exceptional circumstances such as family are unavailable or urgent Court processes deny social work attendance. All cancellations should be in consultation with the Social Work/manager and Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Ensure the reason for cancellation is clearly recorded and shared with professionals.
- Ensure that professionals inform family members of any cancellations.
- Ensure that conferences start on time and aim for them to last no longer than 1-½ hours. However some conferences may take longer depending on circumstances.
- Ensure that the minutes accurately record decisions made, along with the development of a protection plan to promote the safeguarding of the child.
- Cancel conferences where reports are not received from the main statutory agencies by 2pm the day prior to the conference.
- Ensure that if any party does not wish the information that they have provided to be shared with all involved that clear, valid reasons are given and recorded as to why the information should be restricted.

Conference Administrators will:

- Provide a minute taking service for all initial and review child protection Conferences.
- Convene conferences and send out invites.
- Send invites for Initial Child Protection Conference and 10 day Review Conferences after baby's birth to be circulated to professionals at least 5 days prior to the Conference..
- Prior to conference ensure reports to be collated in folders for allocation to family members on arrival
- Provide notifications to all participants and relevant agencies within 1 day of the conference as to the outcome.
- Complete and distribute the ICPC protection plan and minutes within 10 working days and within 20 working days following a Review Conference.

Children's Social Workers should:

- Ensure that the conference convening sheet for initials/reviews are completed with all relevant professionals/family members/carers for attendance and forwarded to the Review and Development Unit within 1 day from strategy for initials and within 2 weeks of the due date of the review conference.
- Consider whether support for family is required such as: interpreter, advocate and ensure their attendance at conference.
- Consult with Chair where specific arrangements are required for family members, ie exclusions through injunctions or violent relationships or when there is a need for an interpreter, advocate required to attend.
- In particularly complex cases consult with Chair to determine whether a pre meeting should be held to enable smooth running of the conference.
- Where necessary, reviews should be brought forward to address changes in the child's circumstances, this should always be discussed with the IRO beforehand.
- Ensure that they or other professionals have informed family/carers of the decision to cancel the conference due to reports not being received by the Chair before 2pm the previous day.
- Advise parents/carers on their rights to invite a solicitor, advocate or friend as a supporter.

All professionals should:

- Provide a written report to the Review and Development Unit by 2pm the day before initial/review conference. If reports are not received by the recommended time of 2pm the conference will be stood down.
- Ensure initial report outlines the reason for conference, child protection processes to date, concerns and strengths and each agencies plan to

promote the safeguarding of the child/ren, e.g. as described in working together.

- Ensure the review report comments on the progress of the previous plan and evaluate the impact on the child's welfare.
- Share reports with parents/families 3 days before the conference to allow for their comments to be incorporated into the report prior to the Chair receiving it.
- Attend the conference prior to commencement to ensure a timely start.
- Arrive on time as once the conference is underway, all late arrivals may be refused access
- Be prepared to contribute to discussions and decision making and promote solution focus, creative thinking and questioning.
- Abide by the code of conduct in relation to being respectful to all participants' contributions, wishes and views.
- Take into account cultural and diversity issues of all participants.
- Adhere to the confidentiality statements and disclaimer
- Discuss with the chair well in advance of the conference any requests for observers to attend the conference

Standard 2: Clear plans are made for children and young people, which are rigorously recorded and acted upon.

The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- Ensure that the plan takes into account the child's culture, diet, disability, personal care needs, language and spiritual/religious needs, how these can be practically met and that any shortfalls are being addressed within the child's timescales.
- Ensure that when a plan for a child is made it is outcome focussed based on the child/ren's needs
- Identify how the actions will be achieved, by when and by whom.
- Robustly challenge the plan should it not meet the needs of the Child/young person by making recommendations and ensuring that these are clearly recorded in the minutes and fed back to the relevant Team Manager.
- Ensure that dates are set for Core Groups and to challenge where Core Groups are not taking place within the required timescale or where there is a lack of attendance by key professionals.
- Ensure family consultation documents are completed
- Where problems are identified in relation to a child's case, the IRO will in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or social work manager. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the IRO should consider taking formal action through the Dispute Resolution Process.

Case conference administrators should:

- Ensure when a decision is made for a Child Protection Plan to end they create a child in need plan on ICS and distribute to all conference participants within 10 days

Children's Social Workers should;

- Discuss any concerns they may have regarding the plan should they feel it does not meet the needs of the child/young person and discuss what action needs to be undertaken.
- Undertake work with the child/young person and family in accordance with the child protection plan.
- Inform the IRO of any significant changes to the child/young person's life that indicate the need for an earlier review.

All professionals should:

- Consider and make recommendations on how individual agencies, professional's and the family should work together to ensure that the child/young person will be safeguarded from harm in the future.
- Contribute to the provision of services from their own agency to formulate a plan according to the child/family need.
- Consider a referral for a Family Group Conference and where necessary undertake specialist assessments to inform the review of the plan.
- Contribute to the Conference in a meaningful way and give an informed opinion about whether the child should be subject to a Child Protection Plan.
- Ensure that all planning and reviewing promotes continuity and minimises the number of changes for a child/young person.

Standard 3: Children and Young People where appropriate, to fully participate in the conference process and their views sought to promote positive outcomes for them.**The Independent Reviewing Officer should**

- Be available to meet with the child/young person prior to the conference where appropriate.
- Ensure the child is fully prepared to participate, has a clear understanding as to all professionals in attendance and give support and guidance throughout the meeting
- Where a child/young person is attending their Conference, facilitate participation of the child/young person and ensure their views are recorded
- Ensure that the child/young person is not exposed to information that may be age inappropriate or distressing.

Children's Social Workers should:

- Explain the child protection processes appropriate to the child's age and understanding.
- Where a child/young person has a disability ensure that specific needs of that child/young person are taken into account to enable them to participate in the conference.

- Ensure that where the child's attendance is neither desired by him/her nor appropriate, that the child's wishes and feelings have been ascertained.
- Ensure that the child understands the role of an advocate and his/her entitlement to one
- Where a child/young person's first language is not English ensure a professionally accredited translator is present

NYAS; Child/Young Person's participation in conference.

- Children and young people to be offered services from NYAS in line with Middlesbrough Policy, Seeking the Voice of the Child in Child Protection Processes.

All professionals should:

- Ensure that where appropriate the child/young person's views are considered and acknowledged.
- Where it is not in the child/young person's best interests to action a request specified by the child/young person ensure that the reasons for this are shared openly with the child/young person and recorded.
- Where a child/young person's first language is not English and an accredited translator is present at the conference, time is allowed for translation throughout the conference.
- Ensure that children and young people are fully aware and have an understanding as to the need for a disclaimer regarding confidentiality.

Standard 4: Parents/carers to fully participate in the conference process and their views sought to promote positive outcomes for children

The Independent Reviewing Officer should

- Meet with parents/carers prior to conference to inform them of the conference process and expectations, including breaches of confidentiality disclaimers.
- Ensure parent/carer's are fully prepared to participate, have a clear understanding as to all professionals in attendance and offer support and guidance throughout the meeting
- Where a parent/carer is attending the Conference, facilitate participation and ensure they are given time to express their views and these are clearly recorded
- Provide guidance in relation to appropriate people to invite to the conference and with regards to any safety issues, such as perpetrators of domestic violence who may be invited to attend.
- Ensure that where there are issues of domestic violence the conference is split to allow safety for the alleged victim.
- Ensure that meetings have been arranged at a time that, as far as is reasonably possible, convenient for family.
- Where a parent/carer has a learning disability, or a mental health issue clarify whether the social worker has identified the appropriate support for the conference/review taking place and whether consideration has been given to the need for an advocate.

- Where a parent/carer's first language is not English, identify whether reports have been provided to the parent/carer in sufficient time to allow for translation and that a professional accredited translator is present at the Review.

Children's Social Workers should:

- Explain the requirements and decision making processes around safeguarding
- Identify the appropriate support required where a parent/carer has a learning disability, or a mental health issue with consideration given to the need for an advocate.
- Share the report with a parent/carer when their first language is not English, in sufficient time to allow for translation
- Arrange for a professional accredited translator to be present at the conference, if appropriate
- Gain the views of relevant family members not in attendance so that the conference is fully informed of their views and wishes

All professionals should:

- Ensure that time is allowed for interpretation throughout the conference when a translator is in attendance.
- Ensure that all those involved in the care of the child/young person have been consulted and have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully.
- Ensure that throughout the conference families are treated sensitively and with respect by all those in attendance.

Standard 5: Partnership is promoted between those responsible for a child or young person i.e. between carers, social workers, families, and others involved in the child/young person's life.

The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- Ensure that all planning and reviewing promotes the safeguarding and welfare of the child and is inclusive of all agencies.

Children's Social Workers should:

- Ensure that all the relevant professionals who have a significant contribution to make, are invited and able to attend the conference as well as those who are likely to be involved in future work with the child/young person and family.
- Discuss with the conference chair in advance whether any steps are required to protect professional staff from intimidation and initiate any agreed action if necessary.
- Co-ordinate the core group and ensure a lead professional is available to chair in the Social Workers absence.
- Ensure that the child protection plan is updated at every core group and progress and actions clearly recorded and distributed within 5 days of the meeting.

- Liaise with all professionals providing services to the child/young person and family to keep up to date with progress and ensure each professional is aware of the roles and responsibilities of each agency in ensuring the plan is taken forward.

All professionals should:

- Where there is more than one professional from the same agency, where possible, one person should be identified to represent the agency's views in respect of a Child Protection Plan.
- Ensure that they can deliver on any relevant commitments within the child protection plan, within the designated timescales, or if this is not possible that these commitments are renegotiated.
- When they are invited, but are unable to attend the conference submit a written report.
- Take care to distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion.
- Ensure that a colleague standing in for them at conference must have knowledge of the current situation and is in a position to give their agencies opinion on decision making and services they can provide.
- Be aware that the information shared in relation to conferences in writing or verbal form is confidential and may refer to others e.g. third parties. The information to remain confidential and will not be shared with anyone else in any form, including any form of copying or being placed on networking sites such as Face book and Twitter. Any breach of this confidentiality may result in prosecution.

Solicitors/Legal advisors should:

- Ensure that they have seen their client prior to the conference, where appropriate. This should not affect the starting time of the conference or take up time during the conference unless in exceptional circumstances where new information comes to light.
- If they wish to attend without their client the chair will consult with the conference members as to whether they have any objection.
- Only attend conferences in exceptional circumstances without their client, ie when their client is in hospital, prison or excluded due to behaviour which may pose a risk to others and this has been agreed by Chair prior to conference.

Standard 6: Commitment to avoiding drift and delay ensuring that there is positive and timely planning for children/young people.

The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- In consultation with the Service Manager, give permission to postpone Conferences out of statutory timescale,
- Identify whether the decisions and outstanding issues highlighted at each conference have been acted upon within the agreed timescales.
- Identify whether Children's Social Care statutory visits to

children/young people subject to a Child Protection Plan have been made within timescale.

- Where timescales have not been achieved in relation to decisions, recommendations or frequency of Statutory visits, the IRO will initiate the Dispute Resolution Process or bring the issue to the attention of senior managers within the individual organisations
- Ensure that where a child remains subject to a Child Protection Plan at the 3rd review conference refer to scrutiny panel.

Children's Social Workers should:

- Ensure that a child protection conference is convened, within 15 working days of the strategy discussion.
- Notify the chair of any barriers that have prevented the implementation of the protection plan, this should also be highlighted in the social work report.
- Discuss any failure to achieve timescales for decisions, recommendations or frequency of Children's Social Care statutory visits with the relevant chair.
- Seek legal advice if families persist in non engagement with the protection plan.

All professionals should:

- Contribute to the assessment process.
- Inform core group members of any changes in the family's circumstances.
- Provide an overview of work undertaken with the family and evaluate the impact on the child's welfare against the planned outcomes set out in the child protection plan.
- Challenge professionals in circumstances where drift and delay is evident from the agency. If no satisfactory resolution, professionals to discuss with IRO.

Standard 7: Confidential and sensitive information is discussed and appropriately shared to ensure the safety of family and professionals.

Police/Probation should:

- Ensure a discussion is held with the Chair/Social worker to establish what information can be shared with participants of the conference.*

All Professionals should;

- Agree not to share information with family members if to do so may place a child at risk of significant harm until action is taken to safeguard the child/ren.
- Where consent is refused consider whether information needs to be shared for the protection of the child/young person and if so take the necessary steps with the relevant agency/legal services

* For RAD purposes only, adhere to Protocol for Sharing Police Information