

PART 5

INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

PREPARING FOR THE CONFERENCE

Summary

Purpose

Timing

Criteria

Decision not to Proceed

Planning the Conference

Attendance

Observers

Quoracy

Involving Child and Family Members

Exclusion

Role of Advocates

MANAGING THE CONFERENCE

Responsibilities of the Chairperson

Minute-Taking

Conference Minutes

Conference Agenda

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING A CHILD BEING SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

Summary

Judging Significant Harm

Core Assessment Timescales

**A Child not made Subject of a Child Protection
Plan**

COMPLAINTS ABOUT A CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE

Summary

Criteria

Who can complain?

Process

Professional Representation

INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

Summary

Criteria - Where a child or young person has been assessed by the relevant agencies as continuing to suffer, or been at risk of suffering significant harm, children's social care should convene an initial child protection conference.

The Decision not to Proceed to an Initial Child Protection Conference

1. Relevant team managers in children's social care must consider very carefully any decision not to proceed to an initial child protection conference where it has been established that the child/young person may have suffered significant harm. This consideration hinges upon the child's exposure to continuing risk of harm. Any decision to not proceed to conference should be discussed with the Independent Chairperson and endorsed by the team manager (including decisions to cancel or postpone a conference). Details of that decision and with whom it has been agreed, should be recorded on the case record. Other agencies/professionals involved in the investigation or assessment have the right to request that children's social care convene an initial child protection conference if they have serious concerns. Any such requests which are supported by a senior manager within the agency concerned will normally be agreed.
2. Where there are differences of opinion regarding whether or not to convene an initial child protection conference, every effort should be made to resolve the differences through appropriate discussion and explanation.
3. Enduring differences of opinion are in themselves a criterion for proceeding to an initial child protection conference.
4. Any decision to cancel or postpone a Case Conference is to be taken by the Independent Chairperson (in consultation with the team manager) and communicated to all relevant personnel by the case holding social worker for the child. Any queries about such decisions should be directed to the Independent Chairperson.

Pre-Birth Conferences (see Part 12)

5. Where there is the likelihood of significant harm to an unborn child – where a core assessment under Section 47 gives rise to concern that an unborn child may be at risk of significant harm – children's social care must convene an Initial Child Protection Conference 8 weeks prior to the estimated date of delivery (EDD), or as soon as it is practicably

possible prior to the child's birth. Consideration should also be given to the possibility of a premature birth and the need for appropriate planning.

6. The same process will be followed as with any other child protection conferences, including decisions regarding appropriate health personnel eg midwifery services, should be invited to attend in all cases.

Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan in another Local Authority Moving to Staffordshire

7. An Initial (Incoming) Child Protection Conference should be arranged when a child subject to a Child Protection Plan in another LA Authority moves into the area on a permanent basis. When a child subject to a Child Protection Plan in another LA Authority moves to Staffordshire for a temporary period that LA should inform this authority so the child's details can be added to the local data base.

The Aims of an Initial Child Protection Conference

8. The aim of the conference is to enable the professionals who are most involved with the child or young person, and the family themselves, to assess the relevant information, analyse the risks and plan how to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of the child or young person concerned.
9. Whilst the Initial Child Protection Conference is central to local safeguarding procedures, it is not the forum for identifying whether a particular person has abused a child or young person. This is a matter for the Criminal Courts. In cases where emergency measures are required to protect a child, these must be taken without delay. An initial child protection conference must then be held within the appropriate timescale.
10. Conferences which are convened on behalf of children whose names are already on the child protection register are otherwise known as child protection reviews **(see Part 6)**.
11. Due regard must be given by children's social care and other agencies to the accessibility of conference venues and to ensuring standards are met in terms of health and safety etc.

Purpose of Conferences

12. 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. The purpose of the initial child protection conference is to:

- Analyse in an inter-agency setting the information which has been obtained about the child's health, development and functioning and the parents' or carer' capacity to ensure the child's safety and promote the child's health and development within the context of their wider family and environment.
- Make judgements about the likelihood of a child suffering significant harm in the future and whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm.
- Agree what future action is needed to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare, how that action will be taken forward and with what intended outcomes.
- Decide whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm and whether a child protection plan should be put in place.

Timing of Conferences

13. The timing of an initial child conference will depend on the urgency of the case and on the time needed to obtain relevant information about the child and family. If the conference is to reach well-informed decisions based on evidence, it should take place following adequate preparation and assessment. At the same time cases where children are at risk of significant harm should not be allowed to "drift". Consequently, all initial child protection conferences should take place **within 15 working days** of the last strategy discussion. (Working Together (2006) 5.81).
14. Meetings should be arranged to accommodate the optimal attendance of individuals who are required to contribute in person.

Planning the Conference

15. Following the outcome of a S47 investigation which results in an Initial Child Protection Conference being convened:

The children's social care team manager should:

16. Ensure that conferences are planned well within timescales in enabling those professionals most involved with the child and family, and the family themselves, to assess relevant information and to plan for safeguarding the child's welfare.
17. Ensure that all relevant professionals (those who have been involved in the child's life) are invited and able to attend, as well as those who are likely to be involved in future work with the child and family. In complex cases, consideration should be given to inviting a professional who has expertise in the particular type of harm suffered by the child. In all

cases, the most relevant person from each agency should be invited and due consideration given to their availability.

18. Consider whether or not to seek from, or have present, a medical professional who can present the medical information in a manner which can be understood by conference members and enable such information to be evaluated from a sound evidence base. Ideally all medical personnel involved should be present to accurately reflect their involvement.
19. Ensure the parents are invited and helped to participate. However, this should be discussed with the conference Chairperson (who may wish to discuss with police officers) whether it may be necessary to exclude one or more family members from all or part of the conference. It may not be possible for all family members to be present at the same time, and the extent and manner of involvement of family members should be informed by what is known about them.
20. Discuss with the conference Chairperson whether any steps are required to protect professional staff from intimidation either in the conference or after it, perhaps via police or legal action, and initiate this action if necessary.

The Independent Conference Chairperson should:

21. Identify a date for the meeting to be convened that takes account of the availability of the optimal number of participants, including family members. Timing should also take account of the date of the last strategy meeting.
22. Discuss with the social worker in advance aspects of the meeting that will require careful management. This may include the participation (or exceptionally the exclusion) of family members, especially children and young people and the contribution of formal and informal carers.
23. Be available for consultative advice, as appropriate, in advance of the meeting.
24. Be available to meet with parents and any other relevant parties (including advocates), at least 15 minutes prior to the commencement of the conference to explain the process and conduct of the meeting and to answer any questions.

The social worker(s) should:

25. Liaise with relevant administrative support staff well in advance in identifying:
 - individuals who are to be invited to attend
 - the availability of a suitably trained and experienced minute-taker

- a suitable venue for those participating, taking account of the minimum specification requirements of a venue
26. Advise family members as soon as is practically possible and assist them in preparing for the meeting and in establishing how their involvement might be best achieved. Parents and children should be advised of their right to bring a friend/advocate or supporter. The involvement of children for instance requires particular sensitivity and planning. Children need to be involved in a way that is appropriate to their age and understanding.
27. NB: This includes talking to them about the purpose of the conference and the means for them to express their views, as well as what they want said to whom. Some children may not understand what has been happening to them and may, therefore, find it difficult to participate in a particular way. Others may be very clear but may not have been able to talk to a trusted adult or may not have been listened to. Some are likely to have suffered emotional abuse. This means that care should be taken, before any discussions, that the child knows they are safe. The child's wishes/feelings should be closely ascertained and made known to the conference. An interpreter may need to be arranged.
28. Prepare a written report for the conference, appropriately endorsed by the Team Manager that takes account of the initial assessment and aspects of core assessments conducted under S47 of the Children Act 1989. It should also contain explicit summaries of:
- the family composition, including significant others
 - reasons for the conference
 - background information, including a chronology of significant events/agency and professional contact with the child and family
 - each aspect of Assessment Framework domains – child's developmental needs, family and environmental factors, parenting capacity
 - evidence of the risk of significant harm
 - child's/parent's/other family members expression/views, wishes and feelings
 - risk and needs analysis
 - conclusions and recommendations including an analysis of the implications of the information obtained for the child's future safety and meeting of his/her developmental needs
 - recommendations about registration
29. Where relevant, **provide the parents and child with a copy of the report within two working days of the conference**, explaining and discussing the contents of the report. As such, posting the report is not appropriate. The report should be provided in the preferred language(s) of the child and family members. This should occur in all but exceptional circumstances.

30. Distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion. Information which is provided second or third hand should be made clear.

Administrative Support Staff should:

31. Liaise with the social worker and others upon being notified of the need for a child protection conference in planning for the meeting.
32. Ensure that standard letters of invitation are despatched to those identified by the social worker, as soon as possible.
33. Identify a suitably trained minute-taker to prepare for the meeting, including identifying in advance a suitable venue and the availability of necessary materials and refreshments.
34. Liaise appropriately with the independent Chairperson in anticipating the necessary administrative arrangements in preparing for the meeting.

Other professionals attending the conference should:

35. Bring details of their involvement with the child and family, including knowledge of the child's developmental needs, and the capacity of the parents to meet these needs within the family and environmental context.
36. Prepare a written report in advance to the conference which will usually be made available to those attending. Distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion. Information which is provided second or third hand should be made clear.

Attendance

37. All relevant Safeguarding Children Board agencies that are represented in the area in which the child/young person and their family lives will be invited to the conference. Due consideration must be given to making arrangements that take account of the availability of key contributors. Letters of invitation will confirm details of time, venue and the name of the Independent Chairperson, and also include the names and dates of birth of family members and significant others. For initial conferences this should allow as much notice as possible.
38. It is the responsibility of the agency concerned to determine the most appropriate personnel to attend the meeting.
39. Attendance and apologies will be recorded.

40. There should be sufficient information both in respect of personal representation and written reports to enable the conference to make informed decisions in order to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of the child/young person concerned.

41. Conferences with too many attendees may inhibit discussion and intimidate the child and other family members.

42. Invitations will include the following

- the child (where they are of sufficient age and understanding) and/or his or her representative
- parents/carers, or others having parental responsibility for the child concerned and wider family
- other significant adults who may provide daily care, e.g. foster carers, residential care staff, respite carers (former and current)
- social workers/team manager (other LA staff) involved in the preceding assessment of the child and family
- professionals involved with the child; (health visitors, midwife [for pre-birth conferences, midwifery staff at the hospital at which the mother is “booked” should be invited] school nurse, children’s guardian, paediatrician, school staff, early years staffs, the GP, NHS direct dentist, community nurses).
- police
- probation Service
- others involved in investigations (enquiries) e.g. paediatrician
- professionals involved with the parents or other family members (e.g. family support services, adult mental health services, the GP, NHS direct)

43. Invitations may be extended to the following, where relevant from the assessment and/or prior consultation:

- wider family members
- CAMHS
- prison service establishments
- forces welfare service
- district housing authorities
- NSPCC
- voluntary Organisations
- local authority legal services (child care)
- interpreters
- Child and Family Court Advisory Service
- professionals with expertise in the particular type of harm suffered by the child or in the child’s particular condition (e.g. disability or long-term illness)
- significant others, with a direct contribution to make at the discretion of the Chairperson.

Observers

44. An individual may be permitted to observe part or all of a conference with the advance permission of the Chairperson. In considering such requests, the Chairperson may consult individual members of the conference beforehand. Prior consultation must also take place with relevant family members.
45. Observers will usually comprise of members of academic institutions or professional groups in accordance with training or staff development programmes. This may extend to local authority managers in monitoring and evaluating conference standards. In these circumstances, professional observers will normally be limited to one person.

Quoracy

46. At an initial child protection conference it is expected that all agencies contributing to the investigation, the assessment and any arrangements for the future protection of the child will attend. Whilst the minimal agency attendance necessary for a conference to properly proceed will generally be regarded as three agencies, it is otherwise the responsibility of the conference Chairperson to determine whether the conference is in possession of necessary information with which it can properly proceed.
47. Representatives from different health care provider services (or Trusts) may be considered to have separate agency function in this regard.
48. Conferences must have appropriate representation in two critical aspects of their function:
- In considering background information, including historical concerns.
 - In analysing and managing future risks to the child in terms of significant harm on the basis of professional expertise in safeguarding children's welfare.
49. In the event of a contributing agency being unable to attend, it is necessary for a written report of their involvement in the case to be submitted in advance. This should be addressed in confidence to the conference Chairperson along with apologies for non-attendance.
50. Those attending, (including family members at their own discretion) will provide a written report to the Chairperson which will form the basis for their input into the conference.

Involving Child and Family Members

51. It is primarily the role of the social worker to prepare the child and family for the conference and effective preparation will support their ability to participate.

52. However, it may not always be possible to involve all family members at all times in the conference, e.g. if one parent is the alleged abuser/if there is a high level of conflict between family members. Certain adults/children also may not wish to speak in front of one another. Exclusions are discussed below.

Exclusion

53. Decisions about parental exclusion rest with the independent Chairperson of the conference. It is the responsibility of other agency personnel to advise the Chairperson in advance when exclusion criteria might need to be considered.

54. Any decision to exclude a parent and/or an advocate from a Child Protection Conference should be seen as exceptional.

55. Circumstances in which consideration may be given to the need to exclude a parent/caregiver/advocate are (for either the whole or part of the conference).

- to enable other members to provide necessary information to conference without fear of threat or intimidation
- to receive third party information
- To avoid disruption to the conference, e.g. by alcohol or substance misuse, or an actual threat of physical violence to a conference member. This can include any disruptions which may undermine the proper conduct of the meeting
- to allow the conference Chairperson/local authority to receive legal advice
- The possibility that a parent/carer may be prosecuted for an offence against a child is not in itself a reason for exclusion, but the Chairperson should take advice from the Police about any implications arising from an alleged perpetrators attendance. Where criminal proceedings have been instigated, the view of the Crown Prosecution Service should be sought

56. If a parent/carer is excluded from the conference or is unwilling or unable to attend, they should be enabled to communicate their views by alternative means. This may extend to the contribution of an advocate, if approved as appropriate, by the Chairperson.

57. In the event of exclusion being applied, the Chairperson will additionally need to agree the extent of documentary information that is subsequently shared with the excluded parent.

The Role of Advocates

58. While the role of advocates in actively assisting children and other family members extends above and beyond attendance at child protection conferences, it is within the conference process that their role may be particularly significant. Advocates are distinct from other supporters, who may otherwise accompany family members to these meetings, in that they will actively contribute on the individual's behalf in providing information to the conference.

59. An advocate may be anyone whom a parent or child elects to represent their views explicitly in the conference. It may be a private individual, a member of a particular organisation or a professional person including a legal representative. In any event attendance should be limited to no more than one supporter and one advocate for each party. A supporter will not be permitted to make a verbal contribution, except at the discretion of the Chairperson.

60. The Chairperson should ensure that advocates are made aware of the way in which the conference will be conducted, including the contributions that the advocate may make.

61. In the event of advocates not adhering to common protocols and expectations to the point where their continued involvement is seen to undermine the proper conduct of the meeting, the ultimate sanction of excluding the advocate rests with the Chairperson in accord with the exclusion criteria.

Managing the Conference

Responsibilities of the Chairperson

62. The Chairperson must be independent of any operational or line management responsibilities for the case. S/he must have appropriate skills, experience and training in this area of work and is accountable to the Director of Children's Services for the conduct of the meeting.

63. In the interest of continuity, the same person should where possible Chairperson subsequent child protection reviews in respect of a specific child/young person.

64. The conference Chairperson should:

- Prepare for the meeting in advance by discussing the case with the social worker, receiving written reports and meet with the child/family in advance of the conference in order to:

- ensure they understand its nature and purpose
- identify the roles of advocates and supporters as appropriate
- address matters of exclusion, should they arise

65. Provide a quality control dimension for contributing agencies in maintaining standards about practice and conference processes (including meeting timescales), standards of written reports, and extending to reporting compliments as well as deficits to relevant managers as appropriate.

- Set out the purpose of the conference to all present in determining the scope of the agenda.
- Ensure conference members follow the agreed agenda and format of the meeting including an analysis of risks and needs and understand the confidentiality of the information that is shared.
- Enable all conference participants, and absent contributors, to make their full contribution to discussion and decision making.
- Clearly explain the role and purpose of the initial child protection conference, the key worker, the core group and the child protection plan.
- The Chairperson also has responsibility for ensuring that the conference makes appropriate decisions about determining whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm and therefore whether the child should be made the subject of a child protection plan, according to the category(ies) of abuse that is/are being described. Decisions made should take account of:
 - the paramountcy of the child's welfare
 - the promotion of anti-oppressive practice
 - relevant legislation
 - the child's developmental needs in relation to parenting capacity and wider family and environmental issues
 - the implications of the evidence presented to conference

66. The Chairperson should direct the minute taker in producing the scope, detail and circulation of the summarised record of the meeting, within agreed timescales, and ensure that the relevant information is subsequently added to the electronic information system.

Minute Taking

67. Children and Lifelong Learning should provide a suitably trained and experienced administrative assistant to produce a summarised record of the meeting and who will:

- Engage in a working partnership with the Chairperson in contributing to the management of the meeting.
- Take summarised notes in accord with the constituent phases of the formalised agenda, noting dissenting views of any decisions made.
- Enter relevant data, relating to the outcome of the conference, onto the Children’s Social Care electronic information system (CISS).
- Provide draft(s) of text(s) for endorsement by the Independent Chairperson within the following timescales:
 - Decisions and recommendations within one working day.
 - Complete record within ten working days of the conference.
 - Subsequent amendments within 28 days.
- Circulate copies of each of the above to contributing personnel at the discretion of the Independent Chairperson. While good practice usually determines that family members’ copies of these outcomes are handed personally to recipients, where this is not possible family members’ copies should otherwise be posted promptly via recorded delivery.

NB: Records should state, at the end of the narrative, that any discrepancies in terms of factual accuracy should be communicated to the Independent Chairperson within 10 working days of receipt of the minutes.

- Make subsequent amendments to the written record of the meeting, at the direction of the Independent Chairperson.
- Notify relevant health service and education authorities routinely when children are made the subject of, or cease to be subject to a child protection plan.

Conference Minutes

68. Conference minutes will include:

- the essential facts of the case
- a summary of the discussion at the conference, which accurately reflects contributions made; all decisions reached and reasons for those decisions, including dissenting views
- an outline child protection plan with clarity about actions to be taken, by whom, and in specific timescales.

69. The formal record of decisions and recommendations signed and dated by the Independent Chairperson, will be distributed to all relevant parties within one working day of the conference. (Working Together, 2006, 5.105).
70. The completed summarised record and appended social work report should be circulated by recorded delivery to the same personnel within 10 working days of the conference. Participants will not receive minutes regarding any part of the conference from which they were excluded.
71. Each copy of the conference minutes should make explicit and bold reference to the confidential status of the information it contains. It should not be passed or copied to third parties without the consent of the conference Chairperson. Recipient agencies should retain conference minutes in accordance with their record retention policies.
72. In cases of criminal proceedings, the police may reveal the existence of the minutes to the CPS in accordance with the Criminal Procedures and Investigation Act 1996.

Conference Agenda

Introduction to the Child Protection Conference:

- reason for conference, clarifying basic information
- status and confidential nature of the meeting which establishes a timescale that will ensure all participants can fully participate in the meeting
- individual introductions, stating relationship to the family concerned
- statement about family participation and/or exclusion if appropriate
- apologies and absences
- Child's legal status and those who have parental responsibility

Information Sharing

Consideration and clarification of written reports.

Summarised information, agency by agency, and by family members as appropriate:-

Initial Conference	Child Protection Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for conference/ initiating concern • Chronology of significant events • Progress in undertaking assessment(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active reference to the detail of the explicit child protection plan • Progress made by agencies and by family members

Discussion

- strengths and unresolved matters of concern
- further objectives, including additional assessment and/or provision of services
- child/family wishes and feelings

Risk and Needs Assessment

- child's developmental needs, including nature of attachments
- parenting capacity, including the relationship between the child's developmental presentation and parenting capacity
- family and environmental factors, including the impact of them upon parenting capacity
- the capacity for engagement between family and other professionals
- Balancing strengths and unresolved objectives
- Summary by the Chairperson.

Decisions

73. Whether the child/ren should be made the subject of a child protection plan – on the basis of whether the child/ren is/are at continuing risk of significant harm.

74. The category of harm - physical abuse

- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- neglect

75. Including the reasons given in supporting that threshold being met.

Recommendations

76. If a child/young person is felt to be at continuing risk of significant harm, inter-agency help and intervention will be delivered through a child protection plan. It is the responsibility of the conference to formulate an outline child protection plan with as much detail as possible.

77. The outline child protection plan will:

- Identify nature of risks of significant harm for the child/young person
- Establish short and long-term aims and objectives in reducing the risk of harm and in promoting the welfare of the child/young person, including contact with family members
- Identify what needs to change in order to keep the child safe
- Detail who is responsible for the actions identified within specified timescales.

78. This will extend to :

- Appointing a key worker (**no child should be subject to a child protection plan without a named key worker**) who must be a qualified and experienced social worker.
- Identifying core group membership (to include professionals and family members) who will develop the child protection plan in conjunction with the ongoing Core Assessment (Assessment Framework). This should include details of the work required to complete the Core Assessment.
- Establishing how to involve children, parents (including all those with parental responsibilities) and wider family members in the assessment and planning process and identifying what appropriate support and advocacy is available to them.

79. Establish appropriate timescales for:

- The initial Core Group meeting (**within 10 days of the conference**) which will develop the child protection plan as a detailed working tool and will decide what action needs to be taken by whom to complete the core assessment on time.
- The scheduling of the next Review conference (**within 3 months of the Initial Child Protection Conference and at 6-monthly intervals thereafter**).

80. Identify, where appropriate, the need for more specialist assessments and the necessary expertise in undertaking them.

81. Consider the need for a contingency plan if circumstances change and there is a need to take immediate action in order to protect the child.

82. NB: Initiating Care Proceedings under Part V of the Children Act 1989 rests with the Local Authority and its legal advisers.

83. Application for Criminal Injuries Compensation, where appropriate.

84. Agreeing circulation of minutes.

Criteria for Determining Whether a Child should be the Subject of a Child Protection Plan

Summary

85. The basis for making a child the subject of a child protection plan arises from the fact that a child is at continuing risk of significant harm from the (parental) care that s/he is likely to receive and that an inter-agency child protection plan is required in managing and minimising that risk.

86. The test should be that:

The child/young person can be shown to have suffered ill-treatment or impairment of health or development as a result of physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect **and** professional judgement is that further ill-treatment or impairment is likely:

Or

Professional judgement, substantiated by the findings of the particular case or by research evidence, is that the child/young person is likely to suffer ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development as a result of physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect.

Judging Significant Harm

87. There are no absolute criteria in judging what constitutes significant harm, however, consideration may be given to:

- The degree and extent of physical harm
- The duration and frequency of abuse and neglect
- The extent of premeditation, degree of threat and coercion etc.

88. These elements are usually associated with more severe effects on the child and with greater difficulty in overcoming the impact of harm.

89. If there is continuing risk of significant harm, the necessary help and intervention that is required in safeguarding the child will be delivered through the formal child protection plan.

Core Assessment Timescales – Child Subject to a Child Protection Plan

90. In these circumstances, the Core Assessment initiated as a result of section S47 enquiries should be completed within 35 working days of when the enquiries triggered the start of the core assessment (the date of the last strategy discussion).

A Child Not Made the Subject of a Child Protection Plan

91. In these circumstances the child (ren) may still require services to promote their health and/or development. The conference together with the family should thereby consider the child's needs and what further help would assist the family in responding to them. A decision should be made with the family (ie. with consent) as to whether it is necessary to continue with and complete the core assessment, and what work is required to complete this assessment. Where the

child/run's needs are complex, continued inter-agency working will be required. A Child in Need plan should be drawn up and reviewed at intervals of at least every 6 months.

92. The core assessment should still be completed within 35 working days of the strategy discussion which triggered the Sec 47 enquiries.

93. Where parental consent is not given to continue the core assessment, or where agreement is reached that the work/information needed to continue to the core assessment is already complete, a written record of the core assessment should be completed. Relevant feedback and signatures should be obtained from parents/carers and child/ren, even in cases where no further action is to be taken. The analysis should clearly record the reasons why the core assessment was deemed completed at this point, prior to being signed off by the relevant Team Manager. Copies of the completed core assessment should be forwarded to parents/carers and the child/ren.

Complaints about a Child Protection Conference

Summary

94. In recognising its commitment to achieving better outcomes for children and young people, and to involving young people and their families in decisions affecting them, Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board acknowledges the rights of individuals to make representation and to challenge decisions.

95. This extends to decisions made in child protection conferences, including that of making a child subject to a child protection plan, that are effectively inter-agency decisions made upon the outcome of inter-agency processes.

Criteria

96. The right to challenge or complain under this procedure is confined to:

- Complaints about the conduct of an individual representative of a contributing organisation during the course of a conference convened under the safeguarding children arrangements.
- The conference process itself being flawed upon the basis of information influencing the decision of the conference that is factually inaccurate.
- The outcome, in terms of the fact of and/or the category of primary concern at the time the child became subject to a child protection plan.

- Decisions made about making or maintaining a child the subject to a child protection plan being flawed upon the basis of the threshold for that decision not being met.

Who can Complain

97. Complaints in accord with the criteria above may be made by:

- anyone holding parental responsibility
- a primary carer
- a young person who is the subject of the decision and who has appropriate age and understanding (usually at least 13 years)
- a professional contributing in accord with the below detailed process

Process

98. Complaints should be made within 28 days of the conference concerned, in writing, to:

The Complaints Manager
 Staffordshire County Council Children and Lifelong Learning
 PO Box 11, Walton Building
 Martin Street
 Stafford ST16 2LH

99. Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged.

100. Complaints about the conduct of an individual member of staff will be referred directly to the agency concerned for action under that agency's own complaints procedure.

101. Complaints under any other contributing criteria should be referred promptly to the independent conference Chairperson who had taken responsibility for the conference in question.

102. Within 10 working days, the independent Chairperson should arrange to meet with the complainant(s) informally, in hearing the basis of their concern, in offering appropriate explanations – and in endeavouring to address any misunderstanding.

103. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, the matter should be referred to the Independent Chairpersons' Business Manager to be considered under stage one of the complaints process. This may involve a further meeting with the complainant in addressing the concerns and in endeavouring to reach agreements.

104. Should the complainant remain dissatisfied, or in the event of a more serious complaint, the matter will be referred to the Assistant Director for Partnerships and Service Development in children's social care. The Assistant Director will determine the most appropriate

means for investigating the complaint in greater detail. This can include the setting up of an inter-agency panel, coordinated by the Safeguarding Children Board Manager.

105. An inter-agency panel will comprise of at least three senior representatives from SSCB member agencies and including the Board Manager, in hearing the complaint. The panel will receive:

- Reports and records (minutes) of the conference(s) in question.
- Representation from the complainant in person.
- Representation from the Independent Chairperson(s) in person or in writing in considering whether the complaint is upheld and in making recommendations for consideration. These decisions should be confirmed by the Chairperson of the panel in writing and circulated to the relevant parties within five working days

106. The Assistant Director, in taking the recommendations of the panel into account, will need to determine:

- Whether the complaint is upheld.
- Whether further child protection conference/reviews should be convened (bearing in mind that only a child protection conference can make a decision about a child being subject to a child protection plan).
- Whether any further recommendations are to be made to the Safeguarding Children Board, including that a serious case review panel be established.

107. The welfare of the child has to remain paramount throughout the process. Non-compliance with a child protection plan will cause the local authority to consider all available options, in accord with the core group, in safeguarding the child's welfare.

108. There will be no further right of appeal to the Safeguarding Children Board. The outcome of the complaint will be reported back to the Complaints Manager in Children and Lifelong Learning.

Professional Representation

109. A professional member of the inter-agency network for a particular child, i.e. all invitees and recipients of conference minutes, may register concern about the decisions reached in conference or how it was otherwise conducted.

110. In these circumstances, the person concerned is able to make representation initially to the Independent Chairperson, who would

discuss the concerns accordingly. Verbal contacts should be confirmed in writing.

111. In the event of there been no immediate resolution to the concern, particularly where it is felt that the child is exposed to risk of significant harm, then further written representation should be made to the Independent Chairperson's Business Manager.

112. Enquiries will be conducted largely in accord with paragraph 103 above. In exceptional circumstances, consideration may be given to convening either:

- an early child protection review or
- a further conference.

Where in the view of the Independent Chairperson's Business Manager, the decision reached in conference may have placed the child at increased risk of significant harm.