

City of York Safeguarding Children Board

Child Protection Conferences and Reviews

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Initial Child Protection Conferences

Purpose

To bring together and analyse, in an inter-agency setting, all relevant information and plan how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. It is the responsibility of the conference to make recommendations on how agencies work together to safeguard the child in future.

Conference tasks include:

- appointing a lead statutory body (either local authority children's social care or NSPCC) and a lead social worker, who should be a qualified, experienced social worker and an employee of the lead statutory body;
- identifying membership of the core group of professionals and family members who will develop and implement the child protection plan;
- establishing timescales for meetings of the core group, production of a child protection plan and for child protection review meetings; and
- agreeing an outline child protection plan, with clear actions and timescales, including a clear sense of how much improvement is needed, by when, so that success can be judged clearly.

Specific roles for the social worker and their manager

- convene, attend and present information about the reason for the conference, their understanding of the child's needs, parental capacity and family and environmental context and evidence of how the child has been abused or neglected and its impact on their health and development;
- analyse the information to enable informed decisions about what action is necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child who is the subject of the conference;
- share the conference information with the child and family beforehand (where appropriate);
- prepare a report for the conference on the child and family which sets out and analyses what is known about the child and family and the local authority's recommendation; and record conference decisions and recommendations and ensure action follows.

All agencies

Should work together to safeguard the child from harm in the future, taking timely, effective action according to the plan agreed.

Convening an initial conference

The Service Manager is responsible for making the decision to convene a child protection conference. The reasons for calling it (or not calling a conference following completion of a S47 enquiry) must be recorded within the child or young person's case notes.

A request for an initial conference from any involved professional, which is supported by a senior manager/ named or designated professional in their agency, should normally be agreed. If Children's Social Care does not agree, a meeting to discuss this should be held as a matter of urgency. The meeting should involve the responsible Head of Service, or their representative, from Children's Social Care.

Criteria for Convening an Initial Child Protection Conference

An Initial Child Protection Conference is to be held where, following the Strategy Meeting and Section 47 child protection enquiries, the agencies most involved judge that a child may continue to suffer, or to be at risk of suffering, significant harm. This includes:

- Where a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm caused by any person with whom the child lives or has significant contact;
- Where a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm due to failure on the part of the parent/carer to provide adequate protection;
- Where there are mounting concerns for a child and it is believed the child needs a Child Protection Plan;
- Where there is an unborn baby for whom a Child Protection Plan needs to be made (this applies whether or not Children's Social Care intend to seek a Court Order on the birth of the child);
- Where a person who is likely to pose a risk to the child has joined or is planning to join the family or has significant contact;
- When an Emergency Protection Order has been obtained;
- Where a child, subject to a court order, is to be placed with a parent/carer and agencies consider this will put the child at risk of significant harm;

- Where an application for a court order has been refused and the child is considered to be at risk of significant harm in the care of their parents/carers;
- When a child who is subject to a Child Protection Plan in another area moves to live in York;
- Where a Child Protection Plan was not made/ discontinued, due to an agreed long-term plan to protect the child but there has been a significant change to this plan;
- Where a child has died as a result of the parenting or care received and there are other children in the household.

Timing of an initial child protection conference

All Initial Child Protection Conferences should take place within **15 working days of:**

- the strategy meeting/discussion or the last meeting/strategy discussion if (in exceptional cases) it has been necessary to hold more than one; or
- Notification by another authority that a child subject to a child protection plan has moved into York.

The timing of an Initial Child Protection Conference depends on the urgency of the case and the time required obtaining relevant information. If the Conference is to reach well informed decisions based on evidence, it should take place following adequate preparation and assessment of the child's needs and circumstances.

Where a child has been subject to an Emergency Protection Order the Conference should be held in time to agree next steps prior to the end of the Emergency Protection Order.

Looked after children and Child Protection Conferences

Where a child has temporarily become looked after by Children's Social Care, this is not a reason to decide that there is no need to hold an Initial Child Protection Conference or to decide that the child does not need a Child Protection Plan. The child looked-after system does not replace or supersede the child protection system. However, where looked after arrangements are long term then situations of 'double protection' should be avoided.

Membership of Child Protection Conferences

If a strategy meeting has decided that an Initial Child Protection Conference is needed and for whatever reason the meeting is not quorate information must be heard and a plan put in place that will protect the child until such time as a full meeting can be arranged.

Those attending conferences should be there because they have a significant contribution to make either because of their professional expertise or their knowledge of the child or family.

There should be sufficient information and expertise available, through personal representation and written reports, to enable the Conference to make an informed decision about what action is necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

A Conference should be no larger than it needs to be as this can inhibit discussion and intimidate the child and family members.

The Social Worker and their manager should draw up a list of professionals to invite and this list should be agreed with the Chairperson. Membership is likely to include:

- The child or their representative;
- Parents and those with parental responsibility;
- Foster carers;
- Residential care staff;
- Children's Social Care staff who have been involved in an assessment of the family;
- Professionals involved with the child (e.g., health visitor, school nurse, paediatrician, GP, school staff, early years staff, education welfare officers);
- Professionals involved with the parents and family members;
- Professionals with expertise in the particular type of harm suffered by the child or the child's particular condition (e.g., a disability or long term illness);
- Those involved in investigations (e.g., police)

Additional invitations to conference should be provided to all professionals with a need to know or who have a contribution to the task involved. These may include:

- The child's guardian where there are current court proceedings;
- Local authority legal services;
- Professionals involved with the parents or other family members (for example adult mental health services, probation, GP, Family support services);
- Midwifery services where the conference concerns an unborn or new born child;
- Probation or the Youth Justice Service;

- Local authority housing services;
- Domestic abuse advisors;
- Alcohol and substance misuse services;
- A representative of the armed services where there is a service connection;
- A supporter/advocate for the child and/or their parents.

Solicitors must comply with the Law Society guidance Attendance of Solicitors at Child Protection Conferences, 1997

Observers/ Others

A professional who wishes to observe a Conference may only attend with the agreement of the Chairperson, the child (where of sufficient age and understanding to give permission), those with parental responsibility. Agreement for observers to attend a Conference should be obtained prior to the day of the meeting by contacting the chairperson.

Babies and young children should not normally be permitted to enter the conference room as this will cause distraction from the meeting. Parents should be assisted to make arrangements for their care where necessary.

Quorate Conferences

As a minimum there should be attendance by Children's Social Care and at least two other professional groups or agencies that have had direct contact with the child subject to the Conference.

In exceptional cases, where there are insufficient professionals involved, this minimum quorum may be breached (e.g. a Conference for a young person over 16 years, for an unborn child or an infant).

The Chairperson will decide whether or not to hold a conference where quorum is not met. The Chairperson may also decide to reconvene the conference if it becomes apparent in the course of the meeting that there is insufficient information. This information must then be recorded within the child/young person's case notes.

Involving children and family members

Family attendance at a conference must be carefully planned. It may not always be possible to involve all family members throughout the conference. The conference should be planned so that the welfare of the child always remains paramount.

Involving parents

All persons with parental responsibility and carers must normally be invited to conferences.

The Social Worker must assist their involvement by making sure before the conference that they have sufficient information and support to make a meaningful contribution. This includes consideration of child care and travel arrangements to enable attendance.

The Social Worker must explain to parents/carers the purpose of the meeting, who will attend and the way in which it will operate. They must explain the LSCB complaints process as well as the social care process. Written information should be supplied.

Those for whom English is not a first language must be offered and provided with an interpreter, if required. A family member should not act as an interpreter of spoken or signed language.

Provision should be made to ensure that visually or hearing impaired or otherwise disabled parents/carers are enabled to participate.

If parents/carers feel unable to attend the conference, alternative means should be provided for them to communicate with the Chairperson. Consideration should be given to the use of an advocate, independent person or the Social Worker to give the parent's view within the Conference. Consideration should also be given to parents/carers giving their views through a letter, audio tape or any other suitable means.

Immediately prior to the conference, the Chairperson should meet with any family members to ensure they understand the process. This may, where the potential for conflict exists, involve separate meetings, in separate rooms with the different parties.

Involving parental supporters

The right to bring a friend, supporter or advocate must be explained. Parents must also be informed that they may bring a Solicitor as a supporter to the Conference. The role of the supporter is to enable the parent/carer to put her/his point of view, not to take an adversarial position or cross-examine participants.

Involving children

The 'voice of the child', including the very young child, is of crucial importance to Child Protection Conferences in conveying their experience, wishes and feelings. The child, subject to her/his level of understanding, must be given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the Conference.

The responsible Social Worker must ensure the child has a clear explanation of the Conference and, where possible, potential provision of an advocate or support person. For older children, written information should be provided.

In considering whether it would be in the child's interest to attend the Conference, account should be taken of the following:

- Each child's case will be assessed on its merits taking into account the understanding the child has of the situation vis a vis their age and development;
- Whether the child has expressed an explicit or implicit wish to be involved;
- The parents' views about the child's proposed presence;
- Whether, overall, it appears to be of benefit to the child to attend;
- A declared wish not to attend a Conference must be respected.

If a child is not attending the conference it is the responsibility of the Social Worker to let the conference know what the child wishes to convey.

Direct involvement of a child in a conference

The social worker should help prepare the child when they are to attend their conference. This should include whether the child wishes to be present with their parent (or supporter where available) when meeting the Chairperson of the conference.

The Chairperson of the conference should be advised of the above by the Social Worker and told whether the child has any special needs. This should be in good time for the conference.

The Chairperson will decide the extent of the attendance of the child within the Conference, taking into account confidentiality issues in relation to parents and/or siblings.

Exclusion of family members from a conference

There may be circumstances where it is necessary to exclude one or more family members in full or in part to ensure that professionals and other family members can share information in a safe and non-threatening environment.

Factors for consideration include:

- Indications that the parent's presence may seriously prejudice the welfare of the child;

- Evidence that a parent/carer's behaviour may interfere seriously with the work of the conference. This includes violence, threats, racist or other forms of discriminatory or oppressive behaviour or by being in an unfit state, e.g. through drug or alcohol consumption or an acute mental health difficulty;
- A child requests that the parent/person with parental responsibility or carer is not present while s/he is present;
- The presence of parents would prevent a participant from making her/his proper contribution;
- The need for members to receive confidential information that would otherwise be unavailable, such as legal advice or information about a criminal investigation;
- Conflict between different family members who may not be able to attend at the same time, e.g. in situations of domestic violence;
- Any conflict of interest between the child and parent/carer.

Where a worker from any agency believes a parent should be excluded, representation must be made to the Chairperson, as soon as possible. The agency concerned must indicate which of the above grounds is believed to be met and the information or evidence to support this.

Any exclusion period should be for the minimum duration necessary and must be clearly noted in the conference records.

It may become clear in the course of a conference, that its effectiveness will be seriously impaired by the presence of the parent/s. In these circumstances, the chairperson may ask them to leave. This will be recorded on the child's social work case notes.

Where a parent is on bail, or subject to an active Police investigation, it is the responsibility of the Chairperson to ensure that the Police can fully present their information and views whilst at the same time allowing the parents to participate as fully as circumstances allow.

If, prior to the conference, the Chairperson has decided to exclude a parent, this must be communicated in writing with information on how s/he may make their views known, how s/he will be told the outcome of the conference and about the complaints procedure.

In each case of exclusion the Chairperson will decide what written information from the conference is to be made available to the person excluded.

On occasions it may be appropriate to share medical information about the child or another member of the household on a confidential basis. Family members who should not be party to this information should be excluded for this part of the meeting.

The absence of parents and/or children

If parents and/or children do not wish to attend the conference they must be provided with full opportunities to contribute their views. This can involve agreeing that a conference member can express views on their behalf, writing a letter or making a tape for the meeting or arranging for an advocate to attend on their behalf.

Child Protection Conferences and domestic abuse

When domestic violence is known, or believed, to be an issue, particular care must be taken in arranging Child Protection Conferences and other meetings. All staff should be aware that the safety of the child and the non-abusing parent might be at risk before, during and after a Conference.

The Conference should proceed on the basis that the victim and the perpetrator each have separate time within the meeting. It will be for the Conference Chairperson to decide, taking into account the views of the victim, whether any part of the Conference can proceed on the basis of both parties being present at the same time.

Consultation with and/or invitation to any specialist representative, for example, a Domestic Violence Coordinator is highly recommended.

Consideration should be given as to whether it is in the interests of the child and non-abusing parent/carer to allow a parent or carer, who is a perpetrator of abuse, to attend the Conference.

In a situation of domestic abuse, the parent who is not the perpetrator of abuse must be seen alone by Conference members for at least part of the Conference. The parent/partner who is the perpetrator must also be given the opportunity to be seen alone.

If the perpetrator is to attend, there is to be safety planning to ensure that the Conference does not provide an opportunity for further intimidation or abuse, for example, by the provision of information which may lead to further abuse. It may be necessary to be selective about which Conference papers and information a perpetrator of abuse is given.

The business of the Conference should include issues of safe contact arrangements for the child, bearing in mind that perpetrators of abuse may use contact with children to perpetrate further violence.

Any Child Protection Plan should take full account of the issue of domestic violence along with all the other welfare and safety issues which may apply. The Child Protection Plan should be based on inter-agency action to support the child and the non-abusing carer, to keep them safe and to manage the behaviour of the perpetrator. It should not rely

primarily on unrealistic expectations that the adult victim of abuse can control the behaviour of the perpetrator.

Information for the Conference

All reports should distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion. Where information is provided from another source this should be made clear.

Information from Children's Social Care

Reports from Children's Social Care and agencies in contact with the family should be provided to parents and to the child where the child is of sufficient age and understanding, at least two working days in advance of the Conference. This is to enable any factual inaccuracies to be identified, amended and areas of disagreement noted.

Reports and sufficient copies should be made available to the Conference Chairperson as soon as possible and always be at least two working days of the Conference.

The Social Worker should provide an Initial Child Protection Conference Report (DOH 2002). The report should include the outcome of the Section 47 Enquiry report and additional information arising from the In-depth assessment (as far as it has been completed to that stage). There should be a report on each child. Each report should include:

- A chronology of significant events and agency and professional contact with the family, incorporating relevant historical information;
- Information on the child's current and past state of developmental needs;
- Information on the capacity of the parents and other family members to ensure the child is safe from harm and to respond to the child's developmental needs, within their wider family and environmental context;
- Information about how the children's needs have been and are currently being met;
- Views, wishes and feelings of the child, parents and other significant family members;
- An analysis of the implications of the information obtained for the child's future safety and meeting of his or her developmental needs;
- A proposed plan for future safeguarding of the child and promotion of their welfare.

Information from other agencies

Reports from other agencies should detail their involvement with the child and family, including:

- Their knowledge of the child's developmental needs;
- The capacity of parents to meet the needs of their child within their family;
- The wider family context;
- Any area of concern;
- Any other information they consider relevant;
- Any recommendations they wish to make in relation to future safeguarding of the child and promotion of their welfare.

It should be noted that all reports will be distributed with the record of the Conference to agencies involved and to the parents. Exceptionally certain reports or part of reports may not be circulated.

Reports should be received by the Administrative Coordinators in Children's Social Care **three days** before the Initial Child Protection Conference and Review Child Protection Conferences. **Failure to provide a report three days prior to the Conference may result in the Conference being postponed.**

If any professional has a particular problem in relation to sharing information with one or more family members, they should discuss this with their Named Person or the Chair of the Conference. Such issues should be brought to attention as far in advance of the Conference as possible.

In all reports, when information is provided from another source, i.e. it is second or third hand, this should be made clear.

Chairing the Conference: The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

All Child Protection Conferences will be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This person will be a suitably trained and registered social work professional. The IRO should have the seniority of a Service Manager within Children's Social Care and must be independent of the case management.

Wherever possible the same person should also chair subsequent conferences for the child.

The responsibilities of the Chairperson include:

- Meeting the child and family members in advance of the conference;
- Setting out the purpose, tasks and process of the Conference to all present and determining the agenda. Ensuring that confidentiality is stressed;
- Enabling all those present (and absent contributors) to make their full contribution to discussion and decision-making;
- Ensuring, as far as possible, that the voice of the child/ren is heard;
- Ensuring that the Conference takes the decisions required in an informed, systematic and explicit way;
- Ensuring that LSCB principles are reflected in all aspects of the Conference;
- Summarising the discussion and ensuring an assessment of risk for each child is undertaken;
- Ensuring that the needs of the family are identified;
- Deciding the category of abuse if it is decided that a Child Protection Plan is required;
- Ensuring the formulation of an effective Child Protection Plan;
- Informing the local authority children's data systems of the outcome of the Conference.

Structure of the Conference

Child Protection Conferences and reviews in York are based around the following structure:

- The Chairperson will meet with the parents/ child before the review to clarify Conference Reports and the process;
- Professionals will be expected to read all relevant reports during the time provided at the beginning of the conference
- The Chairperson provides a brief explanation of the purpose of the meeting, introducing all participants, noting apologies and summarising the reason the conference is being held ;
- Professionals will be invited to contribute any additional information including any developments since the reports were written;
- Professionals will be asked to give their opinion of risk to the child based on the information they have read and heard and to decide whether the child should

become subject to a child protection plan (Initial Conferences) or remain subject to a plan (Child Protection Conference Reviews)

- The Conference, including the parents, will formulate an outline child protection plan (Initial Conference) or review the child protection plan (Child Protection Conference Reviews).

Aim of the Child Protection Plan

The aim of the child protection plan is to:

- ensure the child is safe from harm and prevent him or her from suffering further harm;
- promote the child's health and development; and
- support the family and wider family members to safeguard and promote the welfare of their child, provided it is in the best interests of the child.

Criteria for a Child Protection Plan

After consideration of the information available and discussion, the Conference should decide whether the child should be the subject of a Child Protection Plan by asking the following question: 'is the child at risk of suffering significant harm?'

The test should be that either:

- The child can be shown to have suffered ill-treatment or impairment of health or development as a result of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect, and professional judgment is that further ill-treatment or impairment are likely or;
- Professional judgment, substantiated by the findings of 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 physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect.

Conference participants should base their judgments on:

- All the available evidence obtained through the Section 47 enquiries and assessment;
- The views of all agencies represented at the Conference, and also take into account any written contributions that have been made and any views expressed by family members.

If a decision is taken that the child is at continuing risk of significant harm the Chairperson should determine (following discussion with conference members) which category or categories of abuse or neglect the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering (physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect).

Only one category should be used in accordance with DfE guidance and only in very exceptional circumstances should more than one be used. All multiple categorisations must be audited by the IRO Manager.

Where consensus cannot be reached, the chair will decide whether or not the child will become subject of a Child Protection Plan, giving the reasons for the decision. These should be clearly recorded on the conference record.

The Outline Child Protection Plan

Where it is decided that a child is at continuing risk of significant harm, the Conference is to formulate an outline Child Protection Plan as outlined in the section below.

In formulating the Child Protection Plan, the Conference must consider and make recommendations on how agencies, professionals and the family should work together to ensure that the child will be safeguarded from harm in the future. It is important that the family and professionals understand exactly what is expected of them, also that services are provided to give the child and family the best chance of achieving the required changes.

The overall aim of a Child Protection Plan is to:

- Ensure the child is safe and prevent him or her from suffering further harm;
- Promote the child's health and development;
- Provided it is in the best interests of the child, support the family and wider family members to safeguard and promote the welfare of their child.

The Child Protection Plan should:

- Identify the key worker who should be a qualified, experienced social worker from Children's Social Care;
- Identify the members of a Core Group of professionals and family members who will develop and implement the Child Protection Plan as a detailed working tool establishing how the child, their parents (including all those with parental responsibility) and wider family members should be involved in the ongoing assessment, planning and implementation process, and the support, advice and advocacy available to them;

- Identify the outcomes that should be achieved, i.e., the ways in which the child is to be protected based on the current findings from the assessment and information held from any previous involvement with the child and family;
- Identify what needs to change in order to achieve the planned outcomes to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child;
- Show short-term and longer-term aims and objectives that are clearly linked to reducing the likelihood of harm to the child and promoting the child's welfare, including contact with family members;
- Outline what further action is required to complete an in-depth assessment, and what other specialist assessments of the child and family are required to make sound judgments on how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, basing these on the 'five outcomes';
- Outline ways of monitoring and evaluating progress against the planned outcomes set out in the plan;
- Include a contingency plan if agreed objectives and actions are not completed and/or circumstances change. E.g. if a caregiver fails to achieve what has been agreed, a court application is not successful or a parent removes the child from a place of safety;
- Clarify who will have responsibility for what actions – including actions by family members, specifying timescales;
- Be clear about which professional is responsible for checking that the required changes have taken place, and what action will be taken, by whom, when they have not;
- Show the date of the first child protection review Conference, and under what circumstances it might be necessary to convene the Conference before that date;
- Show the date by which the Core Group is to have its first meeting (within 10 working days of the Conference).

Key to these considerations is what is in the child's best interests, informed by the child's wishes and feelings.

Decision not to make a Child Protection Plan

If a decision is taken that a child does not need to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan, the Conference, together with the family, should consider the child's needs and what

further help would assist the family in responding to them. Subject to the family's views and consent, it may be appropriate to continue with and complete an in-depth assessment to help determine what support might best help promote the child's welfare.

Where the child's needs are complex, inter-agency working will continue to be important. Where appropriate, a child in need plan should be drawn up and reviewed at regular intervals, on a multi-agency basis. Conference may wish to recommend how often the multi-agency meetings should take place.

Dissent from a conference decision

In all cases, the conference minutes should record clearly where there is dissent from a conference decision and the reasons why there is this disagreement.

CYSCB Child Protection Procedures outlines the actions to be taken if appropriate where there is dissent from a conference decision.

Pre-Birth Protection Conference

A Pre-birth Child Protection Conference is an Initial Child Protection Conference concerning an unborn child. It carries the same status and conveys the same purpose as an Initial Child Protection Conference (LSCB Procedures, Section 9: Unborn child further outlines referral and planning)

This Conference should be **held by the 30th week of pregnancy**.

It is essential that midwifery services are represented at the Conference. The LSCB Manager should be informed of any deviation from this.

The report from the Social Worker should include the findings from the pre-birth assessment, the conclusions and recommendations for future action.

If it is decided that the unborn baby will be at risk of significant harm when born, a Child Protection Plan must be made. Any intention to seek a Court Order in respect of the baby at birth would form part of the Child Protection Plan.

If it is decided that the unborn baby should be the subject of a Child Protection Plan, the Plan must be explicit about the actions to be undertaken, and by whom, immediately following the baby's birth in order to ensure the baby's protection until the Review Conference. Where the plan is for the removal of the baby after its birth from its parents, Children's Social Care should convene a separate planning meeting to detail the steps that need to be taken to ensure the infants safety at the time.

Points to be included are:

- Identification of the Core Group members, including Key Worker, Co-worker, Midwifery Services, Health Visitor, parent(s) and others as necessary;
- Specifications regarding any continuing assessment in terms of what has to be done and by whom;
- Support services required, including the period mother is in hospital;
- Consideration of an immediate return to Conference if the Core Group believe this is necessary
- Contingency arrangements if the Child Protection Plan does not progress as expected;
- That legal advice should be sought where necessary;
- That the Hospital is to have contact details of the Key Worker/Team Manager;
- That the Hospital is to inform children's social care when the baby is born;
- The expectation that the parent(s) will follow medical advice regarding discharge of the baby from hospital;
- Specific action required to ensure the protection of the child in the period between birth and the Review Conference, including the time the baby is in hospital;
- The name of any identified person who should not have contact with the baby;
- A statement to say whether the baby should go home with parent(s) or not;
- Where the plan is that the baby should not go home with the parent(s) the action to be taken should there be any attempt to remove the baby from the hospital, including consideration of Police Protection or Emergency Protection Order;
- Where the baby is not to go home with the parent(s), the contact arrangements and whether this is to be supervised and by whom;
- Where appropriate, details of alternative carers;
- That a copy of the Protection Plan and Conference minutes are to be sent to the Named Nurse for Child Protection and the Emergency Duty Team;
- That if the baby is transferred or placed in a different hospital, a copy of the Child Protection Plan is to be sent immediately to the new venue.

The Pre-birth Conference must set a date for the Child Protection Review Conference. Note that where, exceptionally, the Pre-birth Conference decides to wait longer than 15 working days after the birth, as given below, there should be a statement in the notes of the Pre-birth Conference as to why this was agreed.

Where a Pre Birth Child Protection Conference is held and the decision is made that the baby should not be made the subject of a Child Protection Plan but it is considered that the child will be in need, the Conference should make recommendations in respect of support for the baby and family.

Review Conference following Pre-birth Conference

The Child Protection Review Conference should be held within 15 working days after the birth of the baby, or within three months of the Pre-birth Conference, whichever is the soonest.

Administrative arrangements for Child Protection Conferences

A written copy of the outline Child Protection Plan should be made available to parents and professionals **within one working day**.

The child should be given a copy of the Child Protection Plan written at a level appropriate to his or her age and understanding.

A record of the Conference will be sent to all those invited to the Conference and to others at the discretion of the Chairperson. The record will be sent **within 15 working days** of the Conference.

The record is confidential and should not be passed by professionals to third parties without consent of the Chairperson.

Complaints from families about a conference

Complaints made about the process of the Child Protection Conference should be made in line with the CYSCB Complaints Procedure.

Avoiding 'double protection'

There are situations where children who are subject to a child protection plan become either Section 20 accommodated (voluntarily accommodated) or the subject of a legal order through care proceedings, e.g. an interim care order. They are therefore 'doubly protected' in that they are subject to both a care plan through the court process and subject to a child protection plan.

In the circumstances outlined above, where there is no foreseeable plan for the child to return home, a Review Conference should be convened to consider discontinuing the protection plan.

Where the protection plan has been discontinued and the child returns home, or it is planned they will return home, Children's Social Care must either:

- Convene a multi-agency meeting to share information and plan future care, or;
- Convene a strategy meeting if there are concerns that the child returning home may be suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm.

Transfer Child Protection Conferences

Transfer Child Protection Conferences are required to be held within **15 working days** of a child subject to a Child Protection Plan moving to live in York on a permanent basis.

Core Groups

The Role of the Core Group

The Core Group should:

- meet within 10 working days from the initial child protection conference if the child is the subject of a child protection plan;
- develop the outline child protection plan, based on assessment findings, and set out what needs to change, by how much, and by when in order for the child to be safe and have their needs met;
- decide what steps need to be taken, and by whom, to complete the in-depth assessment to inform decisions about the child's safety and welfare; and
- implement the child protection plan and take joint responsibility for carrying out the agreed tasks, monitoring progress and outcomes, and refining the plan as needed.
- When and in what situations the child will be seen by the child's Social Worker, both alone and with other family members or caregivers present

The Core Group does not have a remit to change the Child Protection Plan, nor responsibility for key decisions. These should be made by Child Protection Conferences.

Membership of the Core Group should include the key worker, who leads the Core Group, the child if appropriate, family members, and professionals or foster carers who will have direct contact with the family.

Core Groups are an important forum for working with parents, wider family members, and children of sufficient age and understanding. It can often be difficult for parents to agree to a Child Protection Plan within the confines of a formal Conference, however, their agreement may be gained when details of the plan are worked out in the Core Group.

Sometimes there may be conflicts of interest between family members who have a relevant interest in the work of the Core Group. The child's best interests should always take precedence over the interests of other family members.

The first meeting of the Core Group should take place within ten working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference. Thereafter, Core Groups should meet sufficiently regularly to facilitate working together, at a minimum once every six weeks, to monitor actions and outcomes against the Child Protection Plan, and to make any necessary alterations to their refinements as circumstances change.

The assessment should include an analysis of the child's developmental needs and the parents' capacity to respond to those needs, including parents' capacity to ensure that the child is safe from harm. It may be necessary to commission specialist assessments (e.g. from child and adolescent mental health services) that it may not be possible to complete within this time period. This should not delay the drawing together of the In-depth assessment findings at this point.

The analysis of the child's needs should provide evidence on which to base judgments and decisions on how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child and support parents in achieving this aim. Decisions based on analysis of the child's developmental needs should be used to further develop the Child Protection Plan.

Core Groups should also be informed when any new referral is received for the child or for a member of their family. In some cases a new referral may require the Core Group to reconvene to consider the information or the child's review conference to be brought forward.

Specific roles of the social worker and their manager

- be the lead professional for inter-agency work with the child and family, coordinating the contribution of family members and professionals into putting the child protection plan into effect;
- develop the outline child protection plan into a more detailed inter-agency plan and circulate to relevant professionals (and family where appropriate);

- undertake direct work with the child and family in accordance with the child protection plan, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings and the views of the parents in so far as they are consistent with the child's welfare;
- complete the child's and family's in-depth assessment, securing contributions from core group members and others as necessary;
- explain the plan to the child in a manner which is in accordance with their age and understanding and agree the plan with the child;
- coordinate reviews of progress against the planned outcomes set out in the plan, updating as required. The first review should be held within 3 months of the initial conference and further reviews at intervals of no more than 6 months for as long as the child remains subject of a child protection plan;
- record decisions and actions agreed at core group meetings as well as the written views of those who were not able to attend, and follow up those actions to ensure they take place. The child protection plan should be updated as necessary; and
- lead core group activity.

The Child Protection Review Conference

Purpose

To review whether the child is continuing to suffer, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, and review developmental progress against child protection plan outcomes. To consider whether the child protection plan should continue or should be changed.

Unless otherwise specified, the same approach is to be taken as with Initial Child Protection Conferences in relation to:

- Professional involvement (except that the Police will not attend unless they have specific information to share);
- Provision of Information (except that reports are to be shared with family and made available to the Chair three days prior to the Conference).

Timescale for Review Child Protection Conference

The first Child Protection Review Conference is to be held within three months of the Initial Child Protection Conference, and further reviews should be held at intervals of not more than six months, for as long as the child remains the subject of a Child Protection Plan. This is to ensure that momentum is maintained in the process of safeguarding and promoting

the welfare of the child. Where necessary, reviews should be brought forward to address changes in the child's circumstances.

Purpose of Review Child Protection Conference

- The purpose of the child protection review is to:
- Review the safety, health and development of the child against planned outcomes set out in the Child Protection Plan;
- Review each of the set objectives within the Child Protection Plan;
- Ensure that the child continues to be safeguarded from harm;
- Consider whether the Child Protection Plan should continue in place or should be changed.

A Review Child Protection Conference must always start with the background and reason for the existence of the Child Protection Plan.

The reviewing of the child's progress and the effectiveness of interventions are critical to achieving the best possible outcomes for the child. The child's wishes and feelings should be sought and taken into account during the reviewing process. The review requires as much preparation, commitment and management as the Initial Child Protection Conference. Every Review should consider explicitly whether the child continues to be at risk of significant harm, and hence continues to require safeguarding from harm through adherence to a formal Child Protection Plan. If not, then the child should no longer be the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

Children in need of protection for two years or more

When a child subject to a Child Protection Plan is approaching the third review child protection conference they are likely to have been in the child protection process for about fifteen months. At this point advice must be sought from the relevant Head of Service and if necessary legal services as to the way forward. If change has not taken place by this time, other ways of dealing with the situation must be discussed.

The Role of the Key Worker

The key worker is responsible for leading the work of the Core Group. S/he should complete an in-depth assessment, securing contributions from core group members and others as necessary.

The key worker is also responsible for acting as the lead professional for the inter-agency work with the child and family. S/he should co-ordinate the contribution of family members and other agencies to planning the actions that need to be taken, putting the Child Protection Plan into effect and reviewing progress against the planned outcomes set out in the plan.

The frequency of contact will be stipulated in the Child Protection Plan but must never exceed intervals of more than 4 weeks. This must include seeing the child alone or a baby when awake at least every 4 weeks between each Child Protection Conference

Agency Reports to Review Child Protection Conferences

Reports should be received by the Administrative Coordinators in Children's Social Care three before the all Conferences.

At all times any information and/or documents/reports should be held and recorded within the child/young person's case notes by Children's Social Care.

Discontinuing the Child Protection Plan

A child should no longer be the subject of a child protection plan if:

- it is judged that the child is no longer continuing to, or is likely to, suffer significant harm and therefore no longer requires safeguarding by means of a child protection plan;
- the child and family have moved permanently to another local authority area. In such cases, the receiving local authority should convene a child protection conference within 15 working days of being notified of the move. Only after this event may the original local authority discontinue its child protection plan; or
- the child has reached 18 years of age (to end the child protection plan, the local authority should have a review around the child's birthday and this should be planned in advance), has died or has permanently left the United Kingdom.

Although discontinuation should be considered at every Child Protection Review, it would not normally be expected that a Plan would be discontinued at the first Review Conference where neglect or emotional abuse were the reasons for the child having a Plan. This is because it is likely to be too early to tell whether sufficient change has taken place and whether there is a sound basis on which to believe that this change will be maintained.

Conference members should guard against discontinuing a Plan due to a recent improvement in the child's home circumstances. The plan should not be discontinued at

the first review conference unless there are overriding reasons to do so. In this event all first review de-registrations must be audited by the IRO Manager.

The decision must be based on a careful and thorough analysis of current and future risk, underpinned by the In-depth assessment and any other specialist assessment which shows clearly that there is a sound basis on which to believe that the improved circumstances will be maintained.

Where a child's current safety is due to temporary arrangements, for example the child is in foster care or being cared for within their extended family, this alone is not sufficient reason to discontinue a Child Protection Plan. In such a circumstance, there must also be a completed in-depth assessment, available in writing to the Conference and a long-term plan which ensures continuing safety and which is agreed by Conference. An example is where Children's Social Care intends to seek a Care Order with a plan for the child to remain with a carer who is not the parent.

Where discontinuation of a Child Protection Plan depends on seeking an order at Court, the Review Conference must make a contingency recommendation in the event that the order is not granted, for example, that there will be a further Initial Child Protection Conference. It should be noted that the existence of either pre court action under the Public Law Outline or court proceedings is not a substitute for a Child Protection Plan.

Where it is decided to discontinue the Child Protection Plan, the Conference and the child/family should consider what continuing support services are necessary and make recommendations in respect of these. There should never be an automatic withdrawal of help.

Children's Social Care should make clear the minimum period they will continue to provide services for the child and family, with the agreement of the family. Where Children's Social Care subsequently considers the case should be closed, there should be inter-agency liaison with other professionals involved. All professionals involved with the child's case should be informed of closure by Children's Social Care prior to closing the case.

Social workers and their managers should:

- notify, as a minimum, all agency representatives who were invited to attend the initial child protection conference that led to the plan; and
- consider whether support services are still required and discuss with the child and family what might be needed, based on a re-assessment of the child's needs.

Flow chart: What happens after the child protection conference, including the review?



