



## **Minimum Standards for Child Protection Conferences**

These minimum quality standards have been approved by Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) Policy, Procedures and Practice Development Sub-Group and apply to all agencies represented at Child Protection Conferences.

1. Arrangements for Booking a Child Protection Case Conference
2. Timing
3. Venues
4. Invitees and Quoracy
5. Preparation for Conference
6. Reports
7. Conference
8. Inter-team Working
9. Reviewing Period
10. No Longer in Need of a Plan
11. The Child Protection Quality Assurance Function

### **1. Arrangements for Booking a Child Protection Case Conference**

When the outcome of a Section 47 Enquiry is that an Initial Child Protection Conference is required, the allocated social worker or their manager will contact the Safeguarding Unit to book a conference within 24 hours of the decision being made that a conference is required.

A phone call should be made to the Safeguarding Unit to request a conference be arranged. A Safeguarding Business Support Officer will complete a booking form. You must ensure that all relevant information is provided. This should include the full names and addresses and secure e-mail addresses where appropriate of all invitees.

### **2. Timing**

The Initial Child Protection Conference will be held within 15 working days of the last Strategy Discussion.

Pre-birth Conferences should be held no later than the 32nd week of pregnancy. Conferences should be requested 12 weeks before the Estimated Date of Delivery (EDD), and planned to take place 8 weeks before the due date.

If it is a transfer in, the conference must take place within 15 working days of the request being received.

The timing of the next Review Child Protection Conference will be set at the initial or subsequent review conference.

### **3. Venues**

Conferences will be held at locations where appropriate facilities are available. The facilities required are:

- A meeting room of a suitable size for the minimum (10) number of participants (bookable in advance);
- Access to BMBC network services for business support purposes;
- Provision of a typist/operator chair for business support use;
- At least 1 additional room where family members can meet with the conference chair before conference (bookable in advance), preferably 2 rooms with the second used for professionals.

### **4. Invitees and Quoracy**

Family members who should be invited are:

- Any person with Parental Responsibility;
- Fathers who do not have Parental Responsibility but are actively involved with the child;
- People who have day to day care of the child;
- The partner of a parent / carer;
- Other family members in exceptional circumstances where the Conference Chair agrees that their attendance would be in the best interest of the child.

Professionals attending conference should be there because they have a significant contribution to make. Attendance of observers must be agreed in advance by both the chair and family members (see **Section 7, Conference**)

In order for conference to be quorate, there should be attendance by Children's Social Care staff and at least two other professional groups or agencies.

In cases where a child has not had contact with three agencies, the conference should proceed if the relevant agencies are present.

When a conference is not quorate the decision to proceed or not rests with the Conference Chair.

Decisions about excluding anyone from a Child Protection Conference rest with the Conference Chair or the Manager for Safeguarding Services.

An advocate (who may be a solicitor) and a supporter may attend at the request of the family.

### **5. Preparation for Conference**

At least a week before the conference:

The social worker needs to liaise with the Conference Chair with regards to:

- The participation of the young person in the process;
- The attendance of supporters and family members;

- Managing conflict and exclusions;
- Any participation issues - interpreter / advocates etc.
- Any particular complexities with regard to the case.

The social worker will ensure that the parent and child/ren or young person receive the appropriate leaflets.

The social worker should ensure that parents (and young people if attending) are fully prepared with regard to the conference. They need to understand the process and expectations.

The social worker should ensure that arrangements are made for family members to arrive in good time. This will include consideration of the need for assistance with transport and childcare arrangements.

The social worker should ensure that young people who are of sufficient age and understanding are supported to attend conference, if they wish to attend, and that an advocate is identified if required.

Younger children, who are not of an age or level of understanding to participate, should not attend conference. Parents / carers must be able to give their full attention to the business of the meeting and conference is not a suitable environment for young children.

Wherever possible the same conference chair will be involved in conferences about a particular child or children. This provides continuity for all conference participants.

Young people aged between 11 and 15 will routinely be offered the option of an independent Advocate from Barnardo's to either present or support them in presenting their own views to conference. Subject to agreement, the advocate will meet with the young person prior to conference for this purpose.

## **6. Reports**

Where decisions are being made about more than one child in a family, there should be information available about each child, whether in an individual report or in a clearly distinguished section of a family report.

Agencies should ensure that the written report format adheres to the BSCB approved Minimum Quality Standards for Child Protection Reports.

When sensitive information about family background is to be shared within reports, the author must ensure that family members are aware of this and have the opportunity to discuss this with the author prior to conference.

For review conferences, copies of the Child Protection Plan must be available to the conference.

Reports from all agencies must be provided to parents and young people (if appropriate) at least two days before the conference. There will be no time allocated to sharing reports immediately before the conference. Compliance to this standard will be recorded and information about the whether agencies are meeting this requirement will form part of the audit information available to BSCB.

Reports from all agencies should be provided to the Safeguarding Unit at least two days before the conference. Compliance to this standard will be recorded and information about the whether

agencies are meeting this requirement will form part of the audit information available to BSCB. Social care reports should be authorised by a manager by 10am two working days before the conference. Compliance to this timescale will be recorded and information about whether Teams are meeting this requirement will form part of the audit information available to Service Managers. The expectation is that the manager's comments when they authorise a report demonstrate that they have read and understood the context of the recommendations.

## **7. Conference**

The Conference Chair must meet with family members before the conference is due to begin. Parents should be invited to attend 15 minutes prior to the start of conference.

Professionals should attend 15 minutes prior to the start of conference in order to read reports.

Conferences will start promptly unless the needs of the family mean that extra preparation time is required.

All newly qualified workers (within the first year of practice) should attend with their Line Manager (or a suitably qualified senior member of staff) and should have previously observed a conference.

If the allocated social worker cannot attend then the person who supervises them or a Team Manager/Assistant Team Manager/Service Manager should attend. If as a last resort a Duty Worker is asked to attend it is expected that the Duty Worker will be qualified and fully apprised of the situation.

An observer may accompany a professional who is attending a conference. However, prior agreement must be sought from the Conference Chair and from family members.

Child Protection Conferences can only be re-arranged or cancelled with the agreement of the Safeguarding Team Manager or a Service Manager. Re-arranged conferences will still take place within appropriate timescales.

Conference Chairs will work to an agreed agenda, maintain the focus on the best interests of the child, ensure all participants are treated with dignity and respect, and ensure that there are clear recommendations for action, an outline Child Protection Plan, and a date set for the Review Child Protection Conference where appropriate. An outline agenda will be available for the information of all participants and it is the role of the Conference Chair to ensure that all issues are addressed. As noted previously, the same Conference Chair will be responsible for initial and review conferences for the period of the plan wherever possible.

## **8. Inter-team Working**

If a case is to transfer, a worker from both teams should attend the conference. If the receiving team does not attend the conference both teams must attend the first Core Group.

## **9. Reviewing Period**

Decisions and recommendations will be distributed within 24 hours by secure e-mail and minutes will be distributed within 15 working days.

The allocated social worker must develop the outline Child Protection Plan into a more detailed inter-agency plan at the first core group and put the plan into effect. Core Groups will be held within the required timescales and compliance to this standard will be monitored by conference chairs.

The Conference Chair should be informed if there are any changes to the Child Protection Plan and if recommendations are not to be implemented, so that they can consider whether there is the requirement to hold an early review. A copy of any revised plan should be made available to the conference chair.

The allocated social worker is responsible for informing the Safeguarding Unit of any changes of circumstances. This includes:

- Change of worker;
- Change of address;
- New household members;
- Family moving out of the area, including temporarily, for example holidays;
- Birth of a child for whom a pre birth conference has been held;
- Any change of legal status, including becoming Looked After.

A copy of the minutes of any Public Law Outline meeting held during the currency of a Child Protection Plan should be made available to the conference chair.

Professionals identified as core group members should attend Core Group meetings as arranged and contribute to the implementation of the Child Protection Plan.

#### **10. No Longer in Need of a Plan**

In order to consider whether or not a child should remain subject to a Child Protection Plan, it is good practice for there to be an up-to-date assessment. The views of all core group members should be taken into consideration including the views of young people, the parents or main care providers.

Only in exceptional circumstances should a first review conference consider removing children from a Child Protection Plan. Examples given in procedures are: a court order is in place, or there is clear evidence that a perpetrator has left the family home.

If it is decided that a child no longer needs a Child Protection Plan, consideration must be given to whether a Child in Need Plan or other form of plan is required.

#### **11. The Child Protection Quality Assurance Function**

Conference Chairs will provide quality assurance information with regard to each conference and a compilation of this information, identifying performance issues and emerging themes, will be available to Service Managers, Heads of Service and the Assistant Director, and as required to BSCB. As a minimum and for every conference taking place, conference chairs will monitor frequency of child protection visits, core group meetings and the availability of a current Child Protection Plan.

Conference Chairs will ensure that there is constructive challenge and scrutiny of the case in order that the safety of the child is the paramount consideration. They will address any quality concerns in order to ensure that any necessary action is taken and that practice is within legal requirements and policy and procedures. This will include challenge to LSCB and other agencies.

Conference Chairs are available for discussion about safeguarding issues in respect of the cases they

chair.

Child Protection Conference chairing will be reviewed and quality assured through peer and management observation. Concerns about the chairing of any conference should be addressed to the chair in the first place, and thereafter to the Manager for Safeguarding Services. Feedback will be sought from families attending conference about a range of issues affecting the quality of their experience via a short form.