

CONFERENCE CHAIR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The issue of decision making, overriding recommendations and dissent has been raised in a number of forums including the OFSTED inspection in early 2018. This issue has been considered further alongside the updated Escalation Procedure and submitted to the Board.

The following information is in keeping with the GM Safeguarding Procedures however provides further guidance and clarity regarding the role of the Conference Chair and the expectations placed upon them in respect of decision making and managing dissent.

DECISION MAKING AT CONFERENCE

The Conference Chair will determine whether the child should be subject to a child protection plan by exploring whether the child suffered significant harm and / or the child is likely to suffer significant harm. Where the child is at continuing risk of Significant Harm, they will require inter-agency help and intervention through a Child Protection Plan.

The Conference Chair must ensure that the decision about the need for a Child Protection Plan takes account of the views of all agencies represented at the conference and any written contributions that have been submitted.

This discussion will normally take place with the parents/carers present. The decision is taken by those attending the conference and does not include the child, parents, carers and supports although they may be asked to comment on the strengths, concerns, risks, future plans and protection.

Where there is no consensus, the decision will normally be made by a simple majority however where a majority decision cannot be reached, the Conference Chair will make the decision.

Where there is a disagreement regarding the threshold for significant harm being met or not being met, the Conference Chair will attempt to facilitate the Conference to reach a consensus by drawing the conference members' attention to the threshold and considering this in the light of the information which has been shared and the child's needs.

The Conference Chair must ensure that all members of the conference are clear about the conclusions reached, the decision taken and recommendations made, and that the conference minutes accurately reflect the discussions, the decision and, where relevant, the reasons for the Conference Chair exercising his or her decision-making powers.

The Conference Chair may also override the recommendation of the Core Group and practitioners present at the Conference in respect of the child becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan or being removed from a Child Protection Plan, where the Chair identifies that:

Becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan

- Information shared at the Conference does not meet the threshold criteria of significant harm.

Recommendation to remove a child from a Child Protection Plan

- There are significant elements of the Child Protection Plan which remain incomplete
- There is incomplete evidence that the underlying risk factors have been addressed effectively to evidence positive impact on the outcomes for the child/ren.
- The information presented to the Children Protection Review Conference does not support the recommendation to de-plan for example it is of poor quality or does not evidence the required changes identified within the Child Protection Plan
- The Head of Service has not indicated their agreement where the child is to be de-planned at first review

Where the Chair overrides the recommendation to plan or de-plan, this should be clearly recorded within the minutes and the Chair should consider whether an escalation is required with regard to the quality of work undertaken, assessment, reports etc.

DISSENT

The Greater Manchester Safeguarding Procedure - Resolving Professional Differences / Escalation Policy addresses the Conference Chair's responsibilities where there is dissent at the Child Protection Conference. It states 'if a Child Protection Conference Chair is unable to achieve a consensus as to the need for a Child Protection Plan, they will make a decision and note any dissenting views. This will include the situation where there is no majority view and where the Conference Chair exercises their decision making powers'.

If an agency does not agree with a decision or recommendation made at a conference, the dissent will be recorded in the minutes of the conference.

The agency or individual who dissents from the Chair's decision must determine whether they wish to further challenge the outcome. The Conference Chair should ensure that they allow the practitioner the opportunity to explain their dissent and what they intend to do about it.

If the professional raising the dissent believes that the decision places the child at further risk of significant harm it is expected that they would formally raise the matter with their line manager and/or Designated or Named Professional in their agency. This matter should be discussed with the Head of the Safeguarding Unit, who will consider what further actions are required and will offer consultation and advice on cases and intervene to help resolve issues where appropriate.

Where the issue is not resolved, the agency may consider taking action under the GM Safeguarding Procedures – Resolving Professional Differences / Escalation Policy.

In the event that the issue is not resolved as outlined above, or the discussions raise policy issues, the matter should be raised with the Chair of the RBSCB via the Board Business Manager, who will determine the appropriate course of action.

Where parents / carers disagree with the conference decision, the Chair must further discuss their concerns and explain their rights to challenge (see the Complaints about Child Protection Conference Procedures at the following link: [Complaints About Child Protection Conferences Procedure](#)).

At no time must professional disagreement undermine the safeguarding of a child.

Dissent may also arise within the Child Protection Conference in respect of a professional's decisions, actions or lack of in the implementation of a Child Protection Plan including Participation in Core Group Meetings. This may be raised by a colleague or partner agency attending the Conference but may also be raised by a parent or carer. This should be dealt with as part of the Escalation Process as outlined in Chapter 2.5 and where the matter is raised by the Parent or Carer, the Chair would support the further exploration of the concerns via the Escalation Process. Input may be required by line or senior managers, designated or named professionals however where the issue cannot be resolved, consideration should be given to reconvening a Child Protection Review Conference.