



Oldham Child Protection Chair Role and Responsibilities Protocol

1 Introduction

The role and effectiveness of the Chair of Child Protection Conferences in Oldham has been identified by Ofsted as an area for improvement as part of the Focused Visit in October 2020. This includes the quality of oversight and challenge provided by the Chair to all partners, including Oldham Council.

Oldham Safeguarding Partnership has made a commitment to work to the Greater Manchester Safeguarding Procedures wherever this is possible. This document provides clarity on our expectations of the Child Protection Conference Chair and the management of Conferences.

The responsibilities of the Child Protection Chair and Conference are laid down in the Children Act 1989 and 2004 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

2 The Role of the Chair

The Child Protection Chair is an authoritative, knowledgeable, and independent individual whose role is to work constructively with all partner agencies and parents and carers in the best interests of the child(ren).

The Chair must ensure that the voice of the child is heard and that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration

The Chair has a responsibility to ensure that the meeting is well organised and conducted in a professional manner. 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 are an accurate reflection of the meeting.

The Chair should work with the Partnership to reach a decision based upon an analysis of the evidence presented and professional opinion about whether a child should be placed or remain on a Plan. Wherever possible the Chair should seek Partnership agreement about the best way to ensure that the likelihood of significant harm is reduced based on the analysis of risk and thresholds. Where this cannot be achieved, or where the Chair is not in agreement that the decision reached is in the best interests of the child, the Chair will make the final decision.

Once in place it is the role of the Child Protection Chair to monitor the progress of the Child Protection Plan and the multi-agency arrangements for safeguarding the child and ensure that they are compliant with relevant statutory guidance.

Child Protection Chairs must quality assure the progress of the Child Protection Plan. It is the responsibility of the Chair to exert their authority and to challenge poor practice and drift within Plans across the Partnership.

It is not the role of the Chair to provide case management, supervise the social worker or devise the safety plan. The Chair should review safety planning, however, to ensure that it reflects the current concerns and needs of the child and that actions are timely, balanced against risk and safety, that they are achievable, and that contingency planning is in place.

The Chair also has a role to quality assure the relationship and interactions with the child and their family. However, this should not undermine or replace the relationship between the social worker and the child or their family or undermine the functioning and relationships in the core group.

The Chair should remain vigilant concerning the commitment and contribution of partner agencies to the Conference and delivery of the Plan and in keeping the child(ren) safe. Where there is concern that cannot be resolved within the Conference this should be dealt with as part of the Escalation Process.

Where a concern is raised by the parent or carer, the Chair should provide support to resolve the issue within Conference or through a follow up meeting. Where absolutely necessary families should be supported to make a Complaint using the relevant agencies Complaints Procedure. Where the issue cannot be resolved, consideration should be given to reconvening a Child Protection Review Conference.

3 Decision Making at Conference

The Conference Chair must ensure that the decision about the need for a Child Protection Plan takes account of the evidence and professional opinion of all agencies represented at the conference and any written contributions that have been submitted. This should include the views of parents/carers on the concerns, risks and future plans.

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, possible risks and the child's needs.

Where the Chair, based on all the available evidence and information provided and having jointly assessed the risk of significant harm, does not agree with the majority of opinion, they can make a decision which they believe most appropriate to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

Parents and carers should remain within the Conference for the decision and if there is information that cannot be shared in the meeting, for example relating to a criminal investigation, this should be circulated to professionals in advance.

The Conference Chair may also override the recommendation of the Core Group and practitioners present at the Conference to end the Plan where the Chair identifies that the Child Protection Plan has not been completed and there is insufficient evidence that risk has been reduced to a level that a Child Protection Plan is no longer required. This should be clearly recorded within the minutes and the Chair should consider whether an escalation is required due to concerns regarding the lack of progress made and the level of risk.

4 Dissent

The Greater Manchester Safeguarding Procedure *Resolving Professional Differences Policy* addresses the Conference Chair's responsibilities where there is dissent at the Child Protection Conference.

If an agency does not agree with a decision or recommendation made at a Conference, their 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 individual(s) the opportunity to explain their reasons for dissent.

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 action is 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 Greater Manchester Safeguarding Procedures *Resolving Professional Differences Policy*.

In the event that the issue is not resolved the matter should be raised with the Chair of the OSCP via the Board Business Manager, who will determine the appropriate course of action.

Where parents / carers disagree with the conference decision, the Chair must discuss their concerns with them and explain their rights to challenge.

Where a professional is concerned about how a Conference has been chaired, they should in the first instance contact the Head of Service, Safeguarding to discuss the issues.

It is always in the best interests of those involved, and specifically the child, for disputes to be resolved at the earliest opportunity. At no time must professional disagreement undermine the safeguarding of a child.

5 Conclusion

This Protocol has been approved by the OSCP Policy Subgroup and uploaded to the Greater Manchester Safeguarding Procedures site.

It will be reviewed on a regular basis by the Policy Subgroup.