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SECTION 7

CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

# 7.1 INTRODUCTION

## Child Protection Conferences are managed (convened, chaired and minuted) by the Independent Reviewing Service of the Safeguarding Business Unit on behalf of Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB).

## There are two types of Conferences regarding children who are potentially at risk of significant harm, these are Initial Child Protection Conferences and Child Protection Review Conferences.

## 7.2 DEFINITIONS AND PURPOSES

## Initial Child Protection Conferences

The Initial Child Protection Conference bring together family members, the child where appropriate, and those professionals most involved with the child and family, usually following Section 47 enquiries. Its purpose is:

* To bring together and analyse in an inter-agency setting the information which has been obtained about the child’s development needs, and the parents’ or carers’ capacity to respond to these needs, to ensure the child’s safety and promote the child’s health and development; within the context of their wider family and environment.
* To consider the evidence presented to the Conference and taking into account the child’s present situation, information about his or her family history and present and past family functioning, make judgements about the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm in the future and decide whether the child is at continuing risk or likely to suffer significant harm.

and

* To decide what future action is needed to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, including the child becoming the subject of a Child Protection Plan, what the planned developmental outcomes are for the child and how best to intervene to achieve these.

Child Protection Review Conferences

The purpose is:

* To review whether the child is at continuing risk or likely to suffer significant harm and their health and development progress against planned outcomes set out in the Child Protection Plan;
* To ensure that the child continues to be safeguarded from harm; and,
* To consider whether the Child Protection Plan should continue in place or should be changed.

7.3 CRITERIA FOR INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE

An Initial Child Protection Conference will be convened if any of the following criteria are met:

* when it is likely that the child’s situation may meet the defined criteria for a Child Protection Plan;
* when it is proposed that any child who has previously been subject to a Child Protection Plan and is in the care of the County Council should return home and it is likely that the child’s situation may meet the defined criteria for a Child Protection Plan; or
* when a child subject to Care proceedings but not subject to a Child Protection Plan is returned home by a Court and it is likely that the child’s situation may meet the defined criteria for a Plan; or
* when a Review Conference which was not quorate has proposed that the child no longer needs a Child Protection Plan and any member of the initial Child Protection Conference disagrees with this proposal; or
* on the addition of a child to the household where abuse/neglect has occurred; or
* when an adult who is considered to present a risk or potential risk of harm to children either by virtue of their offending history or has regular contact with a child or on the commission of offences against children by a member of the household (see Appendix 5).

Young people may place themselves in dangerous circumstances e.g. consenting to sexual relationships, drug use, etc. Where there is a likelihood that parents have encouraged or failed to prevent these behaviours, this is likely to be a trigger for an Initial Conference. Where there is no evidence that parents have encouraged or failed to prevent these behaviours, it may still trigger an initial Conference. Each case should be considered on its merits and legal advice should be sought when necessary.

The decision to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference will be made by the Children’s Operations Manager. If the Operations Manager considers that there is benefit to the child in convening a Conference which would enable protective measures to be put in place and that the threshold for convening a Conference is met, i.e. they are placing themselves at risk of significant harm because they are beyond parental control, then a Conference should be convened.

In the event of any disagreement between agencies concerning the convening of an Initial Conference, which cannot be resolved, the WSCB escalation process should be followed.

In certain circumstances the above criteria for holding a Conference may be met, but a decision not to convene a Conference is required. Such a decision should only be taken after consultation with the relevant Service Manager.

# 7.4 PRE-BIRTH CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES/RISK TO UNBORN CHILDREN

Where Section 47 enquiries give rise to concern that an unborn child may be at risk of significant harm, Children’s Services may need to convene an initial Child Protection Conference prior to the child’s birth. Such a Conference should have the same status, and proceed in the same way as other initial Child Protection Conferences, including the sharing of information about the parents’ or carers’ capacity to ensure when born the child’s safety and promote the child’s health and development, decisions about registration, and the immediate protection of the child at birth.

Any Child Protection Plan for an unborn child will seek to ensure the health and welfare of the mother.

**7.5 TIMING**

The timing of an initial Child Protection 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 of the child’s needs and circumstances. At the same time, cases where children are continuing to or are likely to suffer significant harm should not be allowed to drift. Consequently, all Initial Child Protection Conferences should take place within 15 working days of the Strategy Discussion that agreed to progress the Section 47 enquiries to an Initial Conference.

**7.6 ATTENDANCE**

Those attending Conferences should be there because they have a significant contribution to make, arising from professional expertise, knowledge of the child and family or both. The Children's Operations Manager should consider whether to seek advice from, or have present, a medical professional such as a designated doctor who can present the medical information to be evaluated from a sound evidence base. 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 is needed to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare and to make realistic and workable proposals for taking that action forward.

The following professionals will normally be invited to initial Child Protection Conferences:-

* the child, or his or her representative
* family members (including the wider family);
* Children's Services staff who have undertaken an assessment of the child and family;
* foster carers (current or former);
* professionals involved with the child (e.g. health visitor, midwife, school nurse, children’s guardian*,* paediatrician, education staff, early years staff, the G.P.);
* professionals involved with the parents (e.g. family support services, adult mental health services, probation, the G.P.);
* those involved in enquiries (e.g. the Police);
* Local Authority legal services (child care);
* any involved voluntary organisations;
* a representative of the armed services, in cases where there is a Service connection;
* professionals with experience in the particular type of harm suffered by the child or in the child's particular condition, for example, a disability or long-term illness.

The Independent Reviewing Service will invite the above as identified by the investigating Social Worker to the Initial Child Protection Conference.

# 7.7 THE LOCAL AUTHORITY SOLICITOR

* Local Authority Solicitors are to be consulted by the responsible Children’s Team before Initial Child Protection Conferences and where there are grounds for bringing forward the Review Conference, to determine whether a solicitor needs to be present;
* The Local Authority Solicitor’s role is to offer advice to the Conference on any legal issues which may arise, but not to be a full participant in the Conference;
* The Local Authority Solicitor should not address substantive questions about the matter under consideration directly to parents;
* Questions directed to other participants in the Conference will normally be limited to prompting an expansion or clarification of information/evidence already given;
* Legal advice to the Local Authority on their agency role in care planning and on initiating/pursuing Court proceedings should be given outside the Conference. However, where the Conference is considering making a recommendation to the Local Authority that Care proceedings or other Court action should be taken, the Local Authority Solicitor may give a view to the Conference as to whether the evidence would support this. All such advice given to the Conference will be to WSCB constituent members only;
* Local Authority Solicitors will provide advice to Conferences, as appropriate, regarding the decision as to whether the criteria for a Child Protection Plan is met or not.
* In some circumstances, the legal advice provided to Conference should be independent from the legal advice provided directly to Children’s Services. There is provision within legal services to provide independent legal advice to IROs and to Conference.

# 7.8 INVOLVING PARENTS

Before a Conference is held, the purpose of a Conference, who will attend and the way in which it will operate will always be explained to the parents/carers by the lead Social Worker. They should be provided with a copy of the WSCB Leaflet “Child Protection Conference: A Guide for Parents and Carers” as part of the convening process.

Parents/carers and those with parental responsibility should be involved as fully as possible in the Child Protection process. They should be invited to attend Child Protection Conferences and will only be excluded in exceptional circumstances (see 7.12).

Where a decision has been made that a parent/carer and those with parental responsibility should be invited to the Initial Conference, they will be formally invited by the Independent Reviewing Service, advised of the agencies who have been invited to attend, and invited to meet the Chairperson prior to the start of the Conference.

Children/parents/carers or other relatives may wish to be accompanied by a friend or supporter. That person may be a solicitor and their role will be clarified by the Chair immediately prior to the meeting.

This person should be allowed to assist the child, parents/carers or other relatives to express their views and with the Chair’s permission should be allowed to speak on their behalf. A friend, supporter or solicitor should only be excluded if the Chair considers in a particular case that such attendance would make the Conference unnecessarily confrontational.

Supporters will not be expected to be an active participant in the Conference, nor will they receive copies of written material distributed after the Conference.

Supporters may seek clarification of information given by a Conference member through the Chair. However, they will not be allowed to question Conference members directly. Supporters will not be in a position to act as advocates for parents, but they may present the parental view to the meeting if parents are unable to do this themselves. This will be negotiated with the Chair prior to the meeting taking place.

Supporters can only be allowed to attend with parents, not as observers or advocates in the absence or exclusion of parents.

**7.9 YOUNG PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION**

It is the policy of WSCB that wherever possible children or young people wishing to attend Conference should be able to do so.

Separate guidance on the participation of young people in the whole Child Protection process is attached at Appendix 3.

# 7.10 PARTICIPATION OF OTHER PEOPLE

## Observers

* In an attempt to keep the numbers in attendance as low as possible and to be sensitive to family members, only one observer or student will be allowed to attend any Child Protection Conference. It is the responsibility of the professional requesting their attendance to seek the permission of the Chair prior to the Conference. The views of the Child/Young Person/Parent will be sought and will inform the decision.

**Solicitors representing Parents and Children**

* When parents’ and children’s solicitors attend Conferences, their role at the Conference should be outlined by the Chair. This might include, for example, clarifying whether or not solicitors can ask questions or raise points on their clients’ behalf. The Chair should offer to meet parents, children (as appropriate) and solicitors immediately before the Conference and any queries over the role of solicitors should be dealt with at that stage.
* Only in circumstances where the parent is detained in prison or psychiatric care would a solicitor attend in the absence of parents to represent the parents’/carers’ views.

**Children’s Guardian**

* Where a children’s Guardian has been appointed in relation to pending Court Proceedings, he/she should be invited to attend the Conference.

**Interpreters**

* Interpreters must be used in all investigations where there is a member of the subject family who does not clearly understand English. Children/neighbours/friends should never be asked to interpret. Interpreters invited to Conferences must be fully briefed by the Children’s Planning & Performance Section prior to the Conference.
* Interpreters do not attend as parents’ supporters and must only be present in the open part of the Conference.
* Should the child meet the criteria for a Child Protection Plan, the interpreter should be fully briefed about it and expectations placed upon the parents so that they can explain it to them as necessary.

# 7.11 PREPARATION

## It is the Social Worker’s responsibility to adequately prepare parents, persons with parental responsibility and young people for their participation in the Conference. This includes a description of the process and sharing the Social Worker’s report before the day of the Conference or making any special arrangements as may be necessary.

In circumstances where it is inappropriate for both child and parent to be present at the Conference at the same time, the Chair should work out arrangements to enable all parties to participate as fully as possible. If, for example, the child does not wish to disclose information in front of his/her parents, then it may be appropriate for the parents and their representative(s) to withdraw from the Conference. This situation may also arise between parents and it will be for the Chair to determine appropriate mechanisms to enable the participation of those concerned. In all cases, exclusion needs to be justified.

## 7.12 EXCLUSION CRITERIA

## If the Chair decides to implement the grounds for full exclusion, after discussion with the Service Manager prior to the Conference, these will be confirmed in writing.

## If partial exclusion takes place during the Conference, this will be discussed with the parent/carer/child at the time and recorded in the minutes.

## Parents/carers and those with parental responsibility may be excluded fully or partially if one or more of the following apply:-

* there is evidence that they may suddenly disrupt the Conference;
* there is evidence that a child or another significant member of the family and/or a professional may be subject to violence or intimidation as a result of participation;
* where it is suspected that they may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs;
* where they are known to be suffering from a mental illness which impairs their capacity to participate at the Conference;
* where the parent/carer is the alleged perpetrator and has not yet been interviewed by the police;
* where bail conditions imposed by the court restrict a parent/carers attendance;
* where legal advice is being given by the Local Authority’s solicitor, the parent/carer, their supporter and child will be excluded whilst this information is given;
* where information regarding a third party is being disclosed which does not directly relate to the parent/carer;
* where attendance would prejudice the safety of the child, e.g. where information shared could further victimise the child or increase their vulnerability to future abuse;
* the child/young person needs to attend separately in order to avoid prejudicing their welfare.

The possibility that a parent/carer may be prosecuted for an offence against a child is not in itself a reason for exclusion although in these circumstances the Chair of the Conference will take advice from the Police about any implications arising from an alleged perpetrators attendance. If criminal proceedings have been instigated, the view of the Crown Prosecution Service should be taken into account.

In circumstances where a parent/carer and/or those with parental responsibility have been excluded, it is the responsibility of the Social Worker to ensure that their wishes, feelings and views about the situation are made available to the Conference.

# Exclusion criteria can also be applied to another professional meeting (such as core groups) if necessary.

# 7.13 CONVENING

Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences will be convened by the Independent Reviewing Service.

Once a date, time and venue have been negotiated by the child’s Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Service, written invitations to the Conference will be sent to parents and agency representatives within 3 days of the request.

The Social Worker and the Independent Reviewing Service will jointly decide:

* membership of the Conference in accordance with Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board guidelines;
* date and time of Conference;
* venue of Conference;
* participation of parents and people with parental responsibility;
* participation of young people in the Conference process as in Warwickshire's Safeguarding Children Board guidelines.

It is WSCB policy that parents and persons with parental responsibility attend Conferences unless it is prejudicial to the child’s best interests. In the case of parents, etc. with mobility difficulties, the timing and venue of the Conference should take this into account.

Whenever the parents or persons with parental responsibility or the children concerned are not attending, the Social Worker must seek their views and present them to the Conference.

The Children’s Operations Manager has responsibility for ensuring that the responsible Children's Operational Team will be appropriately represented at the Conference. This will be at Practice Leader or above status.

The Independent Reviewing Service administers the convening of the Conference.

As appropriate the Independent Reviewing Service will notify or invite relevant personnel to the Conference, within 3 days of a receiving all relevant information from the Social Worker requesting the Conference.

# 7.14 QUORACY

All agencies should ensure that the highest priority is given to attendance at initial and review Child Protection Conferences.

When an agency is unable to attend, a discussion should take place with the Chair of Conference to agree how the agency information and views will be represented in Conference. Apologies should be made and a written report should be submitted to the Chair of the Conference and lead Social Worker prior to the meeting.

This report should include details of involvement with the child and family, information about the child’s developmental needs and the parents’ capacity to meet those needs within their family and environmental context. The report should include consideration of the impact that the current and past family functioning and history are having on the parents’ capacity to meet the child’s identified needs. It should also cover the professionals’ role in the Child Protection Plan and a professional view about the current risks to the child.

Conferences should normally take place only when “quorate”, that is when representatives of at least two professional groups or agencies who have had direct contact with the child, in addition to Local Authority Children's Services are present.

However at the Chair’s discretion a non-quorate Conference may proceed in exceptional circumstances.

The Chair will take into account:

* whether a further delay will place the Conference outside the procedural timescales;
* information available to the Conference via written reports from those not in attendance;
* whether the Conference has previously been abandoned for non-quoracy;
* whether there is a likelihood of more attendees at a further Conference;
* the degree of complexity of the issues as they present from the information available on the day;
* the impact upon the child/family of a postponement.

When a non-quorate Review Conference takes place, the decision regarding discontinuing the Child Protection Plan will be identified by the Chair as a provisional one.

The Chair will contact the agencies invited but not represented seeking their views in writing within 14 days from receipt of the Minutes of the meeting.

The final decision regarding discontinuing the Child Protection Plan will be confirmed by the Chair in writing to all relevant agencies, and to parents within 28 days of the minutes being distributed.

In the event of a disagreement with the provisional decision on discontinuing the Child Protection Plan, from any agency representative, the Chair will consider the need for the Review Conference to be reconvened.

# 7.15 CHAIRING AND MINUTING

All Warwickshire Conferences will be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer from the Independent Reviewing Service of the Safeguarding Business Unit, accountable to the Strategic Director of the People Group on behalf of Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board.

All Conferences will have a dedicated minute taker.

Any individual/agency seeking amendment to the contents of the minutes must put their suggested changes in writing to the Chair of the Conference within ten working days from receipt of the minutes.

The minutes of the Conference will be distributed to all attendees and those agencies giving apologies, subject to one copy per operational unit, within three weeks. The copy of the minutes for parents will be sent to the Social Worker to go through with parents.

This is in addition to sharing the main decisions within one working day of the Conference, including where appropriate, details of the category of abuse or neglect, the name of the keyworker and Core Group membership.

Any contributed reports must not be copied or issued without the express permission of the contributor.

Copies of Child Protection Conference minutes must be held by the receiving agencies in a manner which ensures confidentiality. Agencies need to determine who it is appropriate to be given access to such records. Normally this should be restricted to relevant staff, their line manager and any personnel who have a role in the Child Protection Plan.

Where an Agency has an open file policy, Child Protection Conference minutes must be filed in the Closed or Confidential section or restricted access section and should not be disclosed to any party without the consent of the Children's Planning & Performance Section.

Child Protection Conference minutes are the property of the WSCB, and must not be distributed or reproduced in whole, or in part, by any agency, without the permission of the Independent Reviewing Service’s Manager/Chairperson. However, in cases of criminal proceedings, the Police may reveal the existence of the notes to the Crown Prosecution Service in accordance with the Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act 1996 and within civil proceedings the conference minutes may be disclosed.

Reports shared within the Conference are the property of the author agency and must not be distributed or reproduced without that agency’s consent. They will be referred to within the Conference minutes as appropriate.

Solicitors, other family members and observers will not receive a copy of the minutes unless they have a key role in the Child Protection Plan and the meeting agrees it appropriate.

Where a parent/carer/child has been fully excluded from the Conference, the decision on what information they should receive, will be taken by the Chairperson in consultation with other Conference members.

Where a parent /carer/child’s attendance has been partial, they will receive the Conference minutes for that part of the Conference for which they were present and any further information that the Chair and Conference agree is to be provided to them.

Subsequent requests by professionals who do not have a legal or direct role in the case, for access to the minutes, should be referred to the Independent Reviewing Service.

The destruction of Child Protection Conference minutes should be governed by each agency’s policy in this regard.

# 7.16 RESPONSIBILITY OF CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

All participants are responsible for:

* Giving attendance at Conferences high priority;
* Respecting the dignity and individuality of other Conference members, actively listening to and having respect for the views of others;
* Ensuring that their contribution is non-discriminatory;
* Preparing and presenting their information, distinguishing between fact and opinion;
* Contributing to the assessment and discussion of risk;
* Being clear about their role in the Child Protection Plan and the resources which they are able to commit;
* Informing the Investigating/lead Social Worker **and/or** the Independent Reviewing Service if they are unable to attend the Conference;
* Providing a written report to the Conference if unable to attend, outlining their observations of the child and the care they are receiving, and their opinion on the risk to the child on the basis of information which is available to them.

If unable to attend at short notice a verbal report should be given to the Independent Reviewing Service prior to the Conference.

Professionals attending the Conference should bring with them details of their involvement with the child and family; information concerning their knowledge of the child’s health and development; an assessment of the capacity of the parents to safeguard the child and promote the child’s health and development and a risk analysis. It is good practice for contributors to provide a written report to the Conference.

# 7.17 CONFERENCE PROCESS

The Social Worker will prepare a report to Conference and fax or e-mail a copy to the Independent Reviewing Service at least 48 hours before the meeting. The Social Worker should bring sufficient copies of the report for all Conference members.

The Independent Reviewing Service will record the minutes of the Conference in the appropriate format.

Following an introduction by the Chair outlining the Conference process the agenda for initial Conferences will be followed. Conferences have four clear sections:

* Information Sharing;
* Analysis of Risk Using Warwickshire Risk Assessment Model;
* Decision on whether the child should be subject to a Child Protection Plan;
* Formulation of Protection Plan.

At the end of each section of the Conference the chair will summarise the contributions people have made.

Parents and children attending should be made aware before the Conference begins, if there is to be a section of the Conference when they will be excluded, and at what point it will take place.

Any section of a Conference where parents are excluded is to be minuted separately.

Written contributions to the Conference should be in the form of a report as specified in each agency’s internal procedures.

Reports to the Conference remain confidential to those attending the Conference.

# 7.18 DECISION MAKING

Initial Conferences should consider the following question when determining whether a child should be subject to a Child Protection Plan:

* Has the child suffered significant harm and is the child at risk of continuing to suffer harm in the future?

The criteria and requirements for the child to be made the subject of a Child Protection Plan as detailed in this section and must be satisfied.

Conference participants should base their judgements on all available evidence obtained through existing records, the Social Work Assessment and the fuller Section 47 enquiries.

The Chair will than attempt to obtain a consensus from the agencies about whether or not the child should be made subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Where there is no consensus decision, the Chair should identify the predominant view. It is not appropriate to take a vote as all attendees do not have the same stake in the proceedings. In these circumstances the Chair will give weight to each contributed viewpoint and in the light of these views will determine whether a Child Protection Plan is required.

The Chair should ensure that any dissent from the decision is adequately noted and minuted.

Where the Conference is essentially split down the middle and no predominant view is identifiable, the Chair will need to make a decision based on whether the criteria is met for the child to be made the subject of a Child Protection Plan. The Chair will identify to the Conference why this decision is being made. Any dissenting view should again be noted and minuted.

Where an agency representative is not satisfied in only having their dissenting view minuted, the matter may be submitted to the Chair of WSCB.

Children should be recorded as having been abused or neglected under one or more categories of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect according to a decision by the Chair of the Child Protection Conference. These categories help indicate the nature of the current concerns.

**7.19 OUTCOMES OF CONFERENCE**

Specific tasks for the Conference include the following:-

* appointing a lead Social Worker;
* identifying the membership 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 children, parents (including all those with parental responsibility) and wider family members should be involved in the planning and implementation process, and the support, advice and advocacy available to them;
* establishing timescales for meetings of the Core Group, production of a Child Protection Plan, and for Child Protection Review Conference;
* identifying in outline what further Social Work Assessments and specialist assessments of the child and family are required to make sound judgements on how best to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare and agree timescales;
* outlining the Child Protection Plan, especially identifying what needs to change in order to safeguard the child;
* considering the need for a contingency plan if circumstances change quickly;
* clarifying the different purpose and remit of the initial Conference, the Core Group, and the Child Protection Review Conference;
* clarifying the progress to date of the Social Work Assessment and any risk or specialist assessments and establishing the timescales for their completion. This will include commissioning the required contributions from each agency involved.

The Outline Child Protection Plan should:

* identify the factors associated with the risk of the child suffering significant harm and ways in which the child can be protected through an interagency plan based on assessment findings;
* establish short term and longer term aims and objectives that are clearly linked to reducing the risk of harm to the child and promoting the child’s welfare;
* be clear about who will have responsibility for what actions - including actions by family members within what specified timescales; and
* outline ways of monitoring and evaluating the progress of the plan;
* The Chairperson will summarise and, where possible, synthesise the views of all agencies to produce an outline Child Protection plan. Where it is not possible to reach consensus about the content of the plan the process for making these decisions will be recommended by Conference, but ultimately if the protection plan includes consideration to accommodate the child or commence legal proceedings, responsibility rests with the Operations Manager of the relevant Children's Team;
* It may be appropriate to use Warwickshire’s escalation process if any agency remains unhappy with the outcome (Appendix ?)

The Initial Conference should agree a date for the first Child Protection Review Conference, and under what circumstances it might be necessary to convene a Review Conference before that date.

At each Review Conference a date for the next meeting will be set and will be recorded in the minutes.

If the parents have not participated in the Conference, they may wish to attend an end of Conference meeting with the Social Worker and Chair of the Conference to discuss the outcome. A brief note of this meeting will be added to the minutes by the Chairperson.

**7.20 MINUTES**

The written record of the Conference is a crucial working document for all relevant professionals and the family. It should include the essential facts of the case; a summary of discussion at the Conference, which accurately reflects contributions made; all decisions reached, with information outlining the reasons for decisions; and a translation of decisions into an outline or revised Child Protection Plan enabling everyone to be clear about their tasks.

It is the Chair’s responsibility to ensure the Conference is minuted. The minutes will, as far as is practically possible, adhere to a standard formula and will have a confidentiality statement at the beginning. If the Conference is satisfied that abuse did not take place and that the child does not required to be subject to a Child Protection Plan the Conference will determine whether a brief minute should be prepared and/or a very limited circulation of the full minutes should be instituted.

Agencies must give careful attention to the secure storage of Conference minutes and are reminded of the very strict bounds of confidentiality stated at the beginning of the minutes and that Child Protection Conference minutes are not for open access.

After approval and signing by the Chairperson, the minutes will be distributed in line with the convening contact points on the assumption of one Service copy for each operational unit plus the appropriate Children's Operations Manager. This is to maintain the strictest confidentiality of the information; additional copies may not be made without the permission of the agency contact point.

The record is confidential and should not be passed by professionals to third parties without the consent of either the Conference Chair or the key worker. However, in cases of criminal proceedings, the police may reveal the existence of the notes to the Crown Prosecution Service in accordance with the Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act 1996 and may also be disclosed in criminal proceedings in Child Protection Conference minutes, and other records associated with the registration process, should be retained by the recipient agencies and professionals in accordance with their record retention policies.

The date of the first Core Group meeting will be set by the Initial Child Protection Conference and will be recorded in the minutes by the Chair.

**7.21 ROLE OF THE CHAIRPERSON**

The Chairperson is a member of the Independent Reviewing Service and is independent of operational or line management responsibilities for cases. The Chairperson is responsible for:

* meeting the child and family members in advance, to ensure that they understand the purpose of the Conference and what will happen;
* setting out the purpose of the Conference to all present, determining the agenda and emphasising the confidential nature of the occasion;
* enabling all those present and their absent contributors, to make their full contribution to discussion and decision making whilst maintaining a clear focus on the welfare of the child and the decisions which need to be taken;
* ensuring that the Conference takes the decisions required of it, in an informed, systematic and explicit way, basing judgements on an objective look at the evidence presented.
* to be responsible for raising any difficulties with regard to the operations of core groups with the lead or designated person in the agency or agencies concerned.
* being accountable to the Strategic Director of the People Group for the conduct of Conferences.

**7.22 ROLE OF THE LEAD SOCIAL WORKER**

* To fulfil the statutory responsibilities of his/her agency and in particular ensure they see the child at least once a month, speak to the child and ensure their views are recorded, consulting with a Practice Leader or Children’s Operations Manager in the event of their not being able to see the child.
* To be responsible for making sure that the outline Child Protection Plan is developed into a more detailed inter-agency plan;
* To act as a lead worker for inter-agency work in respect of the child;
* To facilitate communication between the agencies involved;
* To co-ordinate inter-agency contributions;
* To ensure a comprehensive social, medical and developmental assessment of the child;
* To ensure the Child Protection Plan is formally reviewed at a minimum of six-monthly intervals;
* To ensure that the Review Conference addresses problem areas identified in the assessment;
* To ensure that information related to the Child Protection Plan is accurate and up to date;
* To attend and inform the Initial or Review Conference about the views of the child;
* To be responsible for ensuring that the child is informed about the Review Conference’s decision. They should also explain and agree the Child Protection Plan with the child and give them a copy of the Plan in a manner which is in accordance with their age and understanding;
* To provide written confirmation of the inter-agency plan for the parents and those with parental responsibility for the child;
* To carry out CRB checks and a risk assessment on any new adult entering the household;
* To ensure the child is seen alone (or if not, to record the reasons why).

**7.23 ROLE OF CORE GROUP**

When it has been established that there is a need for an inter-agency Child Protection Plan, the Core Group of professionals who will formulate and implement the plan are identified at the Conference. Parents and carers are members of the core group.

Under the leadership of the lead Social Worker, the Core Group will formulate, record, implement and review the Child Protection Plan.

The first Core Group will meet within ten working days of the Initial Conference. Where this proves impossible, the reasons for the delay must be recorded in the Initial Conference Minutes along with the date, venue and time of the first meeting.

The purpose of this first meeting is to:

* Agree the arrangements that will ensure the effective functioning of the core group throughout the duration of the child protection plan.
* Formulate the detailed Child Protection Plan based on the outline Child Protection Plan.
* Ensure agreement is reached on what steps need to be taken by whom to complete the social work assessment within the agreed timescales.

**See Appendix 25 Agenda and guidance for the first core group meeting**.

Parents should be clear about the causes of concern which resulted in the child being subject to a Child Protection Plan, what needs to change, and about what is expected of them as part of the plan for safeguarding the child. All parties should be clear about the respective roles and responsibilities of family members and different agencies in implementing the plan.

Thereafter, the Core Group should meet sufficiently regularly to consider the outcome of the Social Work Assessment, update the chronology, facilitate working together, monitor actions and outcomes against the child protection plan, and make any necessary changes as circumstances change.

Lead Social Workers should send a copy of the detailed Child Protection Plan to the Chair of the Conference.

Each member of the Core Group has a responsibility to work closely with the key worker, attend meetings which are required for the development and monitoring of the plan, bring information to update the chronology, and fulfil the roles and responsibilities outlined in the plan.

The Core Group has a responsibility to make agreed changes/amendments to the plan as required; however, when significant changes are being considered e.g. unsupervised access with abusing parent, these decisions can only be made at a full Review Conference.

There should be a record of the Core Group meetings which will include updated chronological information and the conclusions of their discussions, and the handwritten version should be sent straight away to any Core Group member unable to attend the meeting. All copies of documentation completed in respect of Core Groups should be sent as a matter of routine to the relevant Conference chair.

# 7.24 THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

The Child Protection Plan should be based on the findings from the assessment and follow the dimensions relating to the child's developmental needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors and drawing on knowledge about effective interventions. It should set out what work needs to be done, why, when and by whom. The plan should:

* describe the identified developmental needs of the child, and what therapeutic services are required;
* include specific, achievable, child-focused outcomes intended to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child;
* include realistic strategies and specific actions to achieve the planned outcomes;
* include a contingency plan to be followed if circumstances change significantly and require prompt action;
* clearly identify roles and responsibilities of professionals and family members, including the nature and frequency of contact by professionals with children and family members;
* lay down points at which progress will be reviewed, and the means by which progress will be judged; and
* set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of those professionals with routine contact with the child, for example, health visitors, GP's and teachers, as well as those professionals providing specialist or targeted support to the child and family.

The Child Protection Plan should take into consideration the wishes and feelings of the child, and the views of the parents, insofar as they are consistent with the child's welfare. The lead Social Worker should make every effort to ensure that the children and parents have a clear understanding of the planned outcomes, that they accept the plan and are willing to work to it. The plan should be constructed with the family in their preferred language and they should receive a written copy in this language. If family members' preferences are not accepted about how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, the reasons for this should be explained. Families should be told about their right to complain and make representations, and how to do so.

# 7.25 REVIEW CONFERENCES

The first Child Protection Review Conference will be held within three months of the initial Child Protection Conference, and further reviews should be held at intervals of not more than 6 months for as long as the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan. Membership should include those most involved with the child and family in the same way as at initial Child Protection Conferences and the same WSCB protocols for establishing a quorum apply.

The Review Conference will be brought forward from the previously agreed date when new information becomes available which would warrant a significant change to the child protection plan, i.e.:

* further incidents of abusive behaviour which increase the risks to the child;
* significant changes in the child/family circumstances;
* other changes which have significant implications for the Child Protection Plan;
* where the Core Group is unable to implement the Child Protection Plan.

The purpose of the Child Protection Review Conference is to:

* review the safety, health and development of the child against intended outcomes set out in the Child Protection Plan;
* ensure that the child continues adequately to be safeguarded;
* consider whether the Child Protection Plan should continue in place or should be changed
* consider the outcome of the Social Work Assessment.

The Review Conference requires as much preparation, commitment and management as the initial Child Protection Conference. Every Review Conference should consider explicitly whether the child continues to be at risk of significant harm, and continues to need safeguarding through adherence to a formal Child Protection Plan. The same WSCB decision-making procedure should be used to reach a judgement on a Child Protection Plan as is used at the Initial Child Protection Conference.

The same WSCB policy on decision making should be used to reach a judgement about de-registration as is used in the Initial Conference in respect of registration.

The Core Group has collective responsibility for providing reports to Review Conferences which provide an overview of work undertaken by the family members and professionals and evaluate the impact of the child's welfare against the planned outcomes set out in the Child Protection Plan. The reports should be sent to the Chair of the Conference and shared with parents and other involved parties in the same way described for Initial Conferences.

The quoracy policy applies to Review Conferences. Where a Review Conference is not quorate it can only make a recommendation to discontinue the Plan and this should then be confirmed with initial Conference members as described in Section 7.14 - Quoracy.

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. Until it is confirmed in writing to the parents and agencies involved that a Child Protection Plan is no longer required, the Plan remains active.

**7.26 DISCONTINUING THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN**

The question of discontinuing the Child Protection Plan will be considered at every Child Protection Review Conference and the Plan may be discontinued if:

* it is judged that the child is no longer at continuing risk of significant harm requiring a Child Protection Plan (e.g. the risk of harm has been reduced by action taken through the Child Protection Plan; the child and family’s circumstances have changed; or re-assessment of the child and family indicates that a Child Protection Plan is not necessary). Under these circumstances, only a Child Protection Review Conference can decide that a Child Protection Plan is no longer necessary;
* the child and family have moved permanently to another local authority area. In such cases, the receiving authority should convene a Child Protection Conference within 15 working days of being notified of the move, only after which event may discontinuing the Child Protection Plan take place in respect of the original authority’s Child Protection Plan;
* the child is the subject of a Court Order;
* the child has reached 18 years of age, has died or has permanently left the UK.

When a child is no longer the subject of a Child Protection Plan notification should be sent, as a minimum, to all those agencies’ representatives who were invited to attend the initial Child Protection Conference which led to registration.

The decision to discontinue the Child Protection Plan will only occur following a Child Protection Conference except in the following circumstances:

* The child and family have moved permanently to another area and a receiving in conference takes place in the other local authority
* The child has died
* The child has left the country
* The child has moved permanently to another authority who accept responsibility for the case but reach a view that a conference is not necessary as all safeguarding concerns have been resolved e.g via legal proceedings
* Where the review conference has recommended dispensing with a plan once a private law order is made.

In all of the above circumstances the original conference members will receive

a notification of the proposal to end the plan and the basis of this decision

The decision will be identified as provisional one and agencies will be given 14 days from receipt of the minutes to raise any queries or concerns.

A child who is no longer the subject of a Child Protection Plan may require additional support and services and discontinuing the Child Protection Plan should never lead to the automatic withdrawal of help. The lead Social Worker should discuss with the parents and the child what service might be wanted and required ,based upon the re-assessment of the needs of the child and the family.

**7.27 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN WHO ARE SUBJECT TO A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN**

At every child protection conference, the WSCB policy on looked after children who are subject to a child protection plan (dual status) and its application to the current case will be discussed.

**Children who become looked after on an order.**

Where a child who is subject to a child protection plan becomes looked after under an interim care order or full care order, the child protection plan will cease and the planning for the child will continue under the care planning process. Agencies will be informed of this in writing. This will include, those agencies who were invited to the original conference, the most recent review and the core group

**Children who become looked after under s20 of the Children Act 1989.**

Where a child who is subject to a child protection plan becomes looked after under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 consideration will be given by the Operations Manager in Childrens Services and the Independent Reviewing Officer as to whether the child protection plan needs to continue.

In making the decision the Operations Manager and the Independent Reviewing Officer will consider whether the parental agreement to accommodation reduces the risk of harm to the child to the extent that the criteria for a child protection plan is no longer met and any residual risks (including the risk that consent to accommodation might be withdrawn) can be managed through the statutory child looked after review process. This must be recorded as a key decision by the Operations Manager.

In circumstances in which the Operations Manager and the Independent Reviewing Officer feel that the child protection plan needs to continue, the child protection and statutory review processes will both continue. The rationale for this must be clearly recorded as a key decision.

**Management of residual child protection concerns**.

Where the child protection plans ends for a looked after child and it is felt that there are residual child protection concerns, Family and Professional Meetings which include all relevant professionals involved in the care and protection of the child, will be held at four weekly intervals for the first 3 months following the ending of the child protection plan and at six weekly intervals until there is sufficient evidence that the risks have been reduced. A copy of the record of the notes of the meeting should be sent to all invitees and placed on the child’s record.’

**Notification and objections.**

Those agencies who were invited to the original conference, the most recent review and the core group will receive a notification of the proposal to end the plan which specifies how any residual risks and actions are to be addressed within the care plan.

Agencies will be given 14 days notification of the date the plan will end. In the event of an objection to discontinuing the Child Protection Plan, from any agency representative, the Chair will consider the need for a Review Conference.