



# **North Wales Safeguarding Children's Board**

## **Practice Guide**

### **Decision Making at Child Protection Conferences**

*Version 2 Oct 2020*

## **1.0. Introduction**

- 1.1. This practice guide provides information for practitioners attending Child Protection Conferences and the expectations placed upon them.
- 1.2. It provides advice and guidance in relation to decision-making in Child Protection Conferences.
- 1.3. This practice guide advises on the process for representations to be made should professional or families attending conference wish to either raise concerns or make a formal complaint.
- 1.4. This practice guide should be read in conjunction with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.

## **2.0. The Process of Decision making at Child Protection Conferences**

- 2.1. Following presentation and discussion of written and verbal reports, and contribution from the family, the Chair of the conference will summarise the information. The role of the Chair includes putting the facts that have been presented in a context which can be informed by research, and clarifying the risk factors that arise from the information. The Chair will then ask whether conference members feel this is an accurate summary, before proceeding.
- 2.2. Conference members will then be asked to present their view of the risks, strengths and needs based on all the information shared in conference.
- 2.3. Each agency representative will then be asked for their decision about whether each child is at continuing risk of significant harm and therefore whether they need a Care and Support Protection Plan and therefore whether their name should be placed on the Child Protection Register.
- 2.4. All professionals attending conference must be aware that they are part of the decision making process and cannot abdicate their responsibility. They are each responsible for voicing their own professional opinion.
- 2.5. The decision should reflect the consensus view of the conference. ***Wherever possible conference members should aim for a consensus view about whether or not each child is at continuing risk of significant harm.***
- 2.6. Where consensus cannot be achieved, the Chair should attempt to seek resolution e.g. by re-summarising the issues and facilitating further discussion.
- 2.7. Only where there are irresolvable differences of opinion should the decision making revert to a voting situation, with the nominated or lead person from each agency being asked to vote on registration. ***Voting as such should be avoided where possible.***
- 2.8. Voting should be based on agencies and/or professional groupings not individuals, listed below in Part 2. The Chair should clearly identify the relevant professional groupings within agencies for the purposes of voting. The senior

staff present at the conference from each agency should assist in this process and ensure that professional groupings are kept to a minimum. This may necessitate a short break in the conference to facilitate. Each agency should have arrangements in place to ensure consistency in this process.

- 2.9. The aim is to reach a majority decision. The agencies that have dissented from the majority view will be listed in the written record of the conference.
- 2.10. If the vote is split 50/50, the Chair will have the casting vote as to whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm and in need of a Care and Support Protection Plan and therefore whether their name should be placed on the Child Protection Register.
- 2.11. If the Chair believes the decision places the child at risk s/he must indicate this in the conference and include their concerns in their Summary. Immediately after conference, they must escalate their concern to the senior manager responsible for child protection.
- 2.12. The Chair also has the option to address any professional differences, as do any of the conference members, where they feel that a child is not being adequately protected. In fact, all professionals have a duty to follow up continuing concerns. (Please refer to the Protocol for Resolving Professional Differences)

***Following the decision of the Conference, it is vital that all members of conference discuss and contribute to any proposed Care and Support Protection Plan to address the identified risks.***

### **3.0. Professional Groupings**

- 3.1. The following examples of professional groupings have been agreed by the North Wales Safeguarding Board:
  - **Children Social Services** (including all social work teams, and all services which are line managed within Children's Services e.g. fostering services),
  - **Child Health Services** (including Paediatrician, Health Visitor, School Nurse, Paediatric Nurse--acute and community, Speech Therapy, Midwifery, Specialist Nurses, Physiotherapist, Neo-Natal outreach Nurse, CAMHS, GP)
  - **Youth Justice Service**
  - **Adult Social Services** (including all social work teams, and all services which are line managed within Adult Services e.g. adult placement services, community support teams)
  - **Adult Health Services** (including Mental Health, Learning Disability Services, Midwifery, GP, Substance Misuse Services)

- **Police**; includes PPU and Divisional Officers
- **Probation services**
- **Housing**; (including tenancy support, or Housing Associations)
- **Education**; including primary school, secondary school, nursery, Education Welfare Officer
- **Early Years pre-school providers** including Flying Start (other than health visitors)
- **Voluntary groups**; including Women's Aid, Action for Children, Barnardo's, NSPCC (not advocacy), Homestart,
- Any other agency at the discretion of the Chair

*(Please note that if you are part of a multi-agency team then you will be allocated one vote according to the service you represent e.g. CMHT can sit with Adult Social Services or Health Services)*

3.2. The written record of the conference should reflect the professional groupings identified, including situations where **the Chair makes the final decision about such groupings, and the rationale for this decision**. The written record will also include any difference of views expressed at the conference, including any concerns raised by the Chair regarding the safety of the decision.

#### **4.0. Other Attendees**

4.1. There are also people who attend Child Protection Conferences who are not party to the decision-making. This includes:

- Parents,
- Children and young people,
- Family members or people who are there in the role of support for parents,
- Advocates for the child
- Legal representatives of the parents or young people
- Care Inspectorate Wales staff.
- CAFCASS
- Foster carers and residential carers

4.2. Parents, children, young people and family members should be asked for their views but it is the professionals who are responsible for making the final decision.

- 4.3. In accordance with the Wales Safeguarding Children Procedures, the conference will also consider whether a Care and Support Protection Plan would be more appropriate in circumstances when a Care and Support Protection Plan is not deemed to be necessary
- 4.4. All professionals and agencies invited to attend a conference will be asked to submit a report in line with the Wales Safeguarding Children Procedures. Where a professional is unable to attend the conference, s/he should still submit a report and this should include their own view of the risks to the child, based on their knowledge of the child and the family.
- 4.5. A representative of the agency will attend on their behalf to present their report. The Chair should ensure that this view forms part of the discussion at the conference, whilst bearing in mind that it was a view formed without the benefit of hearing the contributions of all the other professionals at the conference.

## **5.0. Specific Issues**

- 5.1. If there is only one School representative present and only one child in the family attends their school, they will be asked to contribute to the decision making on behalf of their agency in respect of all the children who are discussed at conference, based on the fact that they have heard all relevant information in conference.
- 5.2. In situations where there are sibling groups and there is no agreement, then each child will be considered separately with those professional groups directly involved with an individual child voting on registration for that child.
- 5.3. The Chair has responsibility for ensuring that if parents disagree with the decision or are unhappy with the conduct of the conference they are given information about the safeguarding board's appeal/complaint process and that they have the option of appealing against the decision. An independent panel will deal with complaints and they have the option of asking for the conference to be re-convened if the complaint is upheld.