

Multi-agency Escalation Policy and Procedure



September 2015

1. Introduction

This policy and procedure has been developed to ensure that all agencies that are members of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in Sutton have an agreed approach to resolving significant professional differences within the partnership. It covers any strategic or operational issues that could impact on the welfare and safety of children and young people if not resolved. All agencies are responsible for communicating such concerns as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) and the Pan London Child Protection Procedures (2015). The Government¹ also recently set out an expectation that all organisations should have internal whistle blowing policies in place to protect staff from speaking up about child abuse concerns, which are integrated into training and codes of conduct. This is intended to ensure that all professionals can raise concerns about how their organisation is protecting children from the risk of abuse.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this escalation policy and procedure is to promote a culture of partnership working, whereby all agencies working with children, young people and their families feel confident, able and supported to address issues that arise when there are conflicting professional judgments. It provides a framework for escalating concerns at various stages of a process that is set out in two parts. The first part relates to strategic escalations, managed by LSCB subgroup Chairs, and the second part is a resolution process for differences in professional judgments about the response to the well-being and safety of children and young people. The issues and risks are different but follows a similar process of attempting to resolve an issue at an early stage to avoid issues becoming complex and entrenched.

3. Definition

The definition of strategic partnership issues, for the purpose of this policy and procedure, is any matter that has a serious impact on the effectiveness of the LSCB partnership. It is likely to relate to roles and responsibilities, professional standards, communication and commitment to partnership working.

The definition of professional disagreement relates to any issue that is likely or has affected the safety and welfare of a child or young person. It relates to case working and any issues that are identified through the LSCB quality assurance process e.g. case audits and an investigation of a serious incident.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/408604/2903652_RotherhamResponse_acc2.pdf

4. Key principles for effective escalation

The role of an effective LSCB is to scrutiny and challenge partnership working and escalation of matters that cause issues on the ground is an essential part of the business of the Board and its subgroups. It involves building open and honest partnership relationships where professionals feel they can raise issues; that there is a clearly established process to escalate issues, and that resolutions result in strengthened partnership working and improved outcomes for the child. This is about creating a learning and improvement culture within the LSCB partnership in Sutton which involves the following:

- Ensuring that there is clarity about roles and responsibilities through governance, policies, procedures and practice frameworks;
- Embedding a culture of organisational learning through LSCB subgroup work, training, network meetings and partnership working on the ground;
- Encouraging open and honest communication, based on mutual respect for other partners' expertise, experience and organisational restraints.

5. Process

The process for a formal resolution usually follows three stages:

1. Recognition that there is a disagreement over a significant issue, and that a formal resolution process is required under this policy and procedure through a decision at management and/or safeguarding lead level;
2. A formal resolution process (completion of a referral form, in Appendix 1) which involves defining the problem to gain clarity about the disagreement, agree the outcome to be achieved and the timescale given the specific circumstances of each case;
3. Taking new learning forward through changes to policies, procedures, systems or practices.

In some cases the resolution process can be started and completed in the same day, and in others the process takes longer but the overall principle is that every effort should be made to resolve the issue quickly. The flowchart in Appendix 1 sets out the details of the process to be followed to resolve a professional disagreement. The process for resolving strategic issues is set out in the section below.

6. Escalation relating to strategic partnership issues

There are different roles and responsibilities within the multi-agency partnership that require forms of engagement that depend on the specific circumstances of a situation. In most cases it is expected that the LSCB subgroup Chair should be notified in respect of the area of concern. It follows that concerns would organise themselves into the specific areas of LSCB business: learning and development, policy and practice, quality assurance, case review and CDOP (serious incidents or child deaths), HR matters and Multi-Agency Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Each Chair is responsible for seeking a resolution within the framework of the subgroup, and if not resolved refer matters directly to the Independent LSCB Chair. This role is defined in Working Together (2015) and the Chair has a duty to address serious concerns about children's safety and welfare directly with the Chief Executive of the Council and the political leadership.

7. Escalation relating to professional decision making

There are specific points within the multi-agency statutory referral, assessment and planning/reviewing pathway which is known to create professional disagreement in respect of decision making. There is also a range of issues that relate to professional conduct, commitment to partnership working and adherence to statutory guidance and resourcing which is known to create tensions within partnership working arrangements.

It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some workers to pursue an issue if unsupported. If professionals are unable to resolve differences within the given timescale (see flowchart), the disagreement must be addressed by a senior member of staff who will support the process until a resolution has been achieved.

a) Professional disagreement at the point of the referral

The referrer and their Manager and/or the Safeguarding Lead re-visit the referral, taking into consideration any comments that have been made by the receiving service and make any amendments necessary. If there is continuous disagreement, then professionals should attempt to resolve difference through discussion or by arranging a professionals meeting. Consideration should be given to inviting a facilitator, who is independent of the cases, with the aim of resolving difficulties at practitioner level between agencies.

b) Professional disagreement in assessment and care planning

Most day to day inter-agency differences of opinion will require a children's social care team manager to liaise with the first line manager equivalent in the relevant agencies. The first line managers may wish to seek advice from their agency's named/designated child protection adviser. If agreement cannot be reached between firstline managers within the stipulated timescale (see flowchart), the issue must be referred without delay through the line management to a senior manager.

In the health service, input may be sought directly from the designated nurse or doctor in preference to the use of line management. The professionals involved in this process must contemporaneously record each intra and multi-agency discussion that has taken place. The records must be formally approved, with the date entered on the record, and a

copy should be placed on the child's file together with any other written communication and information.

c) Professional agreement arising from a Child Protection Conference

If the Chair of a conference is unable to achieve a consensus as to registration or deregistration, a decision will be made with a note of the dissenting views. The agency or individual who dissents from the Chair's decision must determine whether to further challenge the result. In the event that the dissenting professional believes the decision reached by the Chair places a child at (further) risk of significant harm, the matter should be formally raised with the agency's designated safeguarding lead. If the designated lead concurs with the concerns of the professional, the Children's social care safeguarding manager should be informed in writing. The safeguarding manager must determine whether to uphold the decision reached by the conference Chair, or make arrangements to bring the review conference forward. If the outcome of these alternate steps fail to satisfy the concerned professional, the issue should be raised with the agency's representative on the LSCB to raise the matter directly with the Independent LSCB Chair.

If there is dissent regarding the implementation of a child protection plan, it is the responsibility of professionals in each agency to call a meeting to address the issues and/or use the escalation process depending on the individual circumstances of each case. Concern or disagreement may also relate to another professional's decision/actions or lack of decision/action in the implementation of the child protection plan. The management of the meeting, including the timing, representation by other agencies to progress the plan or specific points about professional practice.

d) LSCB referral of unresolved dispute

Where professional differences remain unresolved, the matter must be referred to the heads of service for each agency involved. Any verbal report should be followed up in writing, showing the nature of the dispute and what attempts have been made to resolve this. If the issue is not resolved at this stage, the matter should be discussed with the LSCB member for the organisation and then be referred to the Independent LSCB Chair for resolution. A referral to the Independent LSCB Chair must include a written account of the dispute, what attempts have been made to resolve the matter, an assessment of risk to the child's safety and welfare and what resolution is sought. A written response will be provided to confirm the decision by the Chair, which is the final stage of the process.

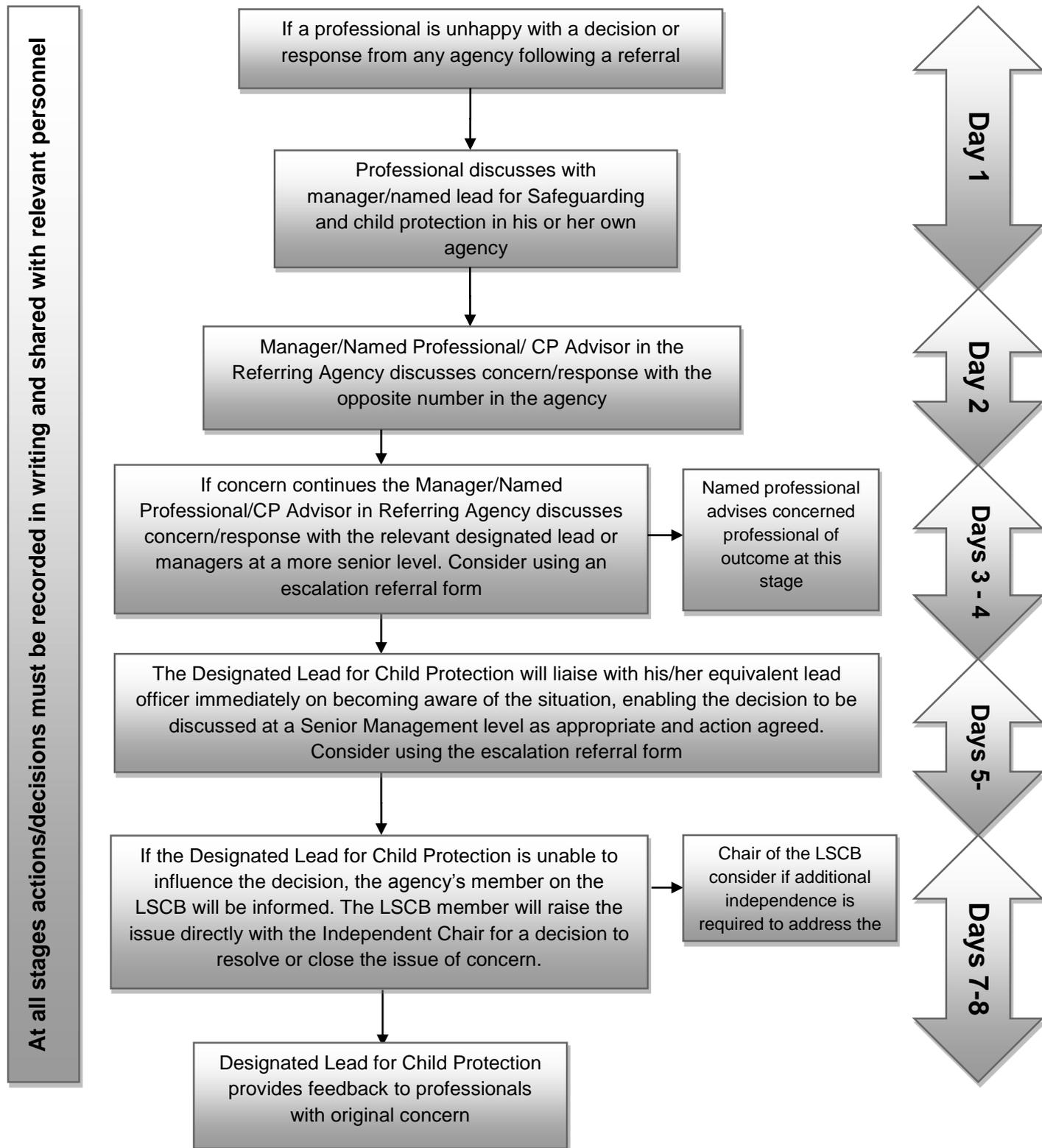
e) Learning from dispute resolutions

When the issue is resolved or closed, any issues for learning and improvement should be identified and considered by the relevant LSCB sub-group. In cases that present specific complexities, consideration should be given to seeking expert advice in respect of evidence based practice. It may also be useful for individuals to be debriefed following disputes to promote good partnership working.

f) Record keeping

A clear and accurate record should be kept at all stages, by all parties, which includes written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued and concluded. If the unresolved dispute is referred to the Independent LSCB Chair,

Appendix A: Local Safeguarding Children Board multi-agency escalation procedure for professionals re: unresolved child protection or child welfare concerns



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Should the Head of Service be contacted?	Yes	No
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Identify the following:		
Who will do what?	What will be undertaken?	By when?

Outcome achieved following completion of actions:

Name of Referrer:

Department:

Sign: _____ **Date:** _____

Safeguarding Advisor:

Sign: _____ **Date:** _____