



Core Practice Standards for Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children in Sunderland through Child Protection Conferences

October 2014 (updated July 2015)

Introduction

Agencies in Sunderland responsible for the delivery of Children's Services, both in the statutory and voluntary sectors are committed to achieving the best outcomes for all children and young people in Sunderland, through the establishment of citywide standards of safeguarding practice and an ethos of continuous improvement in safeguarding performance and service delivery.

For the purpose of this document the focus is on some of the most vulnerable children and young people, those who are subject to a Child Protection Plan.

In order to monitor the progress towards this objective, it is essential to have defined standards with specific and measurable indicators.

The standards outlined in this document are in relation to the roles and responsibilities of those practitioners who are involved in the Child Protection Conference Process. The aim of the standards is to assist practitioners to work together to safeguard and promote children's welfare.

These standards should be read in conjunction with SSCB policies and procedures together with each agencies own policies, procedures and practice guidance.

These standards are fundamentally based upon and embrace:

- Sunderland's Plan for Children and Young People 2010-2025
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015
- What to do if you're worried a child is being abused 2015
- The Children Act 2004
- The Adoption Act 2004
- National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services, Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000
- Liberating the NHS: No decision about me, without me (Department of Health)

These standards have been developed from work by the SSCB Child Protection User Group and the Children's Independent Reviewing Officer Team.

Guiding Principles

PURPOSE

1. A Conference is a way of analysing and managing risk NOT providing services
2. Chairs will facilitate and guide Child Protection Conferences to ensure robust information sharing and risk and needs analysis and sound child protection planning and monitoring and reviewing of those plans

PLANNING

3. Families will be left in no doubt what they need to change, what the plan is to achieve change, how the change will be measured and what will happen if this change is not achieved and how they will be helped to achieve that change

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND REVIEWING PROGRESS OF THE PLAN

4. Conference Chairs will quality assure progress of the Child Protection Plan between child protection conferences and improved outcomes for the child

Standard 1: Child Protection Conferences will be held within Timescales

- 1.1 The **Operations Manager** will ensure that the Social Worker requests a Conference at an early stage to ensure that the Initial Child Protection Conference takes place within 15 working days of the first strategy meeting for the child or children
- 1.2 The **Children's Independent Reviewing Team Manager** and **Administrative support** will ensure that a Child Protection Chair and Conference Room are allocated as soon as possible to agreed Conference requests to remain within timescales
- 1.3 **The Conference Chair** will ensure that the first Child Protection Review Conference is planned to take place within three months of the Initial Child Protection Conference and that subsequent reviews are held at intervals of not more than six months for as long as the child remains the subject of a Child Protection Plan
- 1.4 The **Children's Independent Reviewing Team Manager** will report to the Head of Safeguarding and Head of Integrated Commissioning on a monthly basis about the timeliness of Child Protection Conferences including an analysis of why any meetings are held out of timescale

Standard 2: Appropriate invitations and thorough preparation promote partnership working and enhance the quality of assessment and planning for children at Conferences

The Conference Chair will:

- 2.1 Quality assure Conference invitations and provide guidance to the Social Worker in relation to ensure that the right people attend each Conference, for example if there are potential risks with regard to perpetrators of domestic violence who may be invited to attend, or if there is a history of threats and/or violence to professionals
- 2.2 Ensure that where there are concerns about the risk of domestic violence, attendance at the Conference is split to ensure the safety of the child, alleged victim, other family members and professionals
- 2.3 Prepare well for the Conference reading Conference reports and relevant records in advance of the Child Protection Conference and raising alerts about missing reports
- 2.4 Be available to meet with the family prior to the Conference
- 2.5 Discuss with the Social Worker in advance of the conference, the need for any support and advocacy for parents or carers with additional needs, for example, a learning disability or a potential lack of capacity. This is to ensure that reports and plans are made available in advance and explained, and appropriate support and advocacy put in place where necessary

- 2.6 Where a parent/carer's first language is not English, the Conference Chair will establish whether reports have been translated and confirm that a professional accredited translator will be present at the Review. Ensure that time is allowed for interpretation throughout the Conference
- 2.7 Ensure that all those involved in the care of the child/young person have been consulted and have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully. This should include gaining the views of those not in attendance at the actual Conference from the Social Worker and/or other professionals so that the Conference is properly informed
- 2.8 Where there is more than one professional from the same agency, where possible, one person should be identified to represent the agency's views in respect of a Child Protection Plan

The Social Worker and Operational Manager will:

- 2.9 Ensure in consultation with the Chair that meetings have been arranged at a time and venue that, as far as is reasonably possible, are convenient for all participants
- 2.10 Ensure that all the relevant professionals who have a significant contribution to make, are invited and able to attend the Conference as well as those who are likely to be involved in future work with the child/young person and family
- 2.11 Once a date is set ensure that request for invitations for all those attending are sent to the minute taking service the next working day, with all the up to date details including full names and addresses.
- 2.12 Ensure that the parents are invited and helped to participate. Family members should be given the Social Workers report in advance (at least 24 hours prior to an Initial Conference and at least 5 working days prior to a Review Conference) and the contents and the Conference process explained.
- 2.13 Where appropriate discuss with the Conference Chair in advance whether it may be necessary to exclude one or more family members, or others from all or part of the Conference
- 2.14 Where a parent is excluded, unable or unwilling to attend a Conference, ensure that they are enabled to communicate their views to the Conference by another means
- 2.15 Remind the family of their opportunity to meet the Conference Chair prior to the Conference
- 2.16 Ensure that where necessary an interpreter is present at the Conference
- 2.17 Social Workers should ensure carers/parents solicitors have the opportunity to discuss the report prior to the Conference in order to avoid any delay to the start of the meeting

- 2.18 Consult with all those involved in the care of the child/young person. This should include those not in attendance at the actual meeting, so that the Conference is properly informed

All Professionals will:

- 2.19 Ensure their reports are available and shared beforehand with the Chair and parents. Family members should be given a copy of their report in advance (at least 24 hours prior to an Initial Conference and at least 5 working days prior to a Review Conference) and the contents explained
- 2.20 Where a parent/carer's first language is not English ensure that their report has been provided and the contents explained, to the parent/carer one week prior to the Conference to allow for interpreting
- 2.21 Where a parent/carer has a learning disability ensure that the parent/carer has received their report 7 days prior to the Conference taking place and that the contents of the report has been explained
- 2.22 Where a parent/carer has a learning disability professionals will consider the need to share the report via an advocate in advance of the Conference
- 2.23 Discuss with the Conference Chair in advance whether any steps are required to protect professional staff from intimidation and initiate any agreed action if necessary
- 2.24 Professionals and agencies invited to any Conference but unable to attend the Conference must submit a written report
- 2.25 Discuss with the Conference Chair well in advance of a Conference any requests for observers to attend the Conference

Solicitors/Legal Advisors will:

- 2.26 Ensure that they have seen their client prior to the Conference. This includes Solicitors for the Local Authority. This should not affect the starting time of the Conference or take up time during the Conference unless in exceptional circumstances where new information comes to light

Standard 3: Children and Young People's views, wishes and feelings are always sought as part of the Conference process and they participate in the Conference meeting where appropriate.

The Conference Chair will:

- 3.1 The consulting Chair will discuss with the Social Worker or Operational Manager the appropriateness of the child/young person attending Conference when an Initial Child Protection Conference is agreed - '**Nothing about me, without me**'

- 3.2 All children/young people 10 years and older are to be invited to Conference, unless a clear rationale for them not attending is shared by the Social Worker and agreed by the Chair, a record of which is recorded within case notes by the Social Worker
- 3.3 Be available to meet with the child/young person prior to the Conference where appropriate
- 3.4 Facilitate participation where a child/young person is attending their Conference and ensure their views are recorded. Ensure that, where appropriate, the child/young person's views are considered and acknowledged, using the "*My Conference Pack*"
- 3.5 Ensure that the child/young person is not exposed to information that may be age inappropriate or distressing. There may be a need for a supporting adult to be available for the young person
- 3.6 Ensure that where it is not in the child/young person's best interests to action a request from the child/young person, the reasons for this are shared openly with the child/young person and recorded
- 3.7 Where a child/young person's first language is not English ensure a professionally accredited translator is present at the Conference and that time is allowed for translation throughout the Conference
- 3.8 Where a child/young person has a disability ensure that the specific needs of that child/young person are taken into account to enable them to participate in the Conference
- 3.9 Ensure that the child/young person's wishes and feelings have been ascertained where the child/young person does not wish to attend or it is not appropriate for them to attend.
- 3.10 Ensure that the child/young person understands the role of an advocate and his/her entitlement to one

Children's Social Care Operational Managers and Social Workers will:

- 3.11 Record the agreed outcome of the discussion with the Chair about the appropriateness of the child/young person attending Conference when an Initial Child Protection Conference is agreed. 'Nothing about me, without me' (Kings Fund 2011)
- 3.12 Explain to a child/young person of sufficient age and understanding the purpose of a Conference, establish how they wish to express their views and where appropriate share the Conference reports in advance
- 3.13 Ensure the child/young person's views are sought and clearly recorded, using the "*My Conference Pack*" as appropriate

- 3.14 Make arrangements for the Conference Chair to meet with the child/young person attending their Conference prior to the meeting
- 3.15 Where the child/young person's attendance is neither desired by him/her nor appropriate, ascertain what his/her wishes and feelings are and make these known to the Conference, using the "*My Conference Pack*"
- 3.16 Where it is not in the child/young person's best interests to action a request specified by the child/young person, share the reasons for this openly with the child/young person and ensure that they are recorded on the child's record
- 3.17 Ensure that an interpreter is present at the Conference where a child/young person's first language is not English
- 3.18 Ensure, in conjunction with the Chair, that the specific needs of a child/young person who has a disability are taken into account to enable them to participate in the Conference

All professionals will:

- 3.19 Consult with and involve the child/young person in a way appropriate to their age and understanding in the preparation of their reports and at the Conference
- 3.20 Ensure all the attendees have the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way and their contribution recorded
- 3.21 Consider all the child's needs including health and education

Standard 4: Child Protection Conferences will be conducted in accordance with SSCB procedures to promote safe planning and positive outcomes for children

The Conference Chair will:

- 4.1 Ensure that Conferences are inclusive and that family members are treated sensitively and with respect by all those in attendance
- 4.2 Confirm quoracy and ensure that Conferences are cancelled or rearranged only in exceptional circumstances and in consultation with the Social Worker/Operational Manager and the Independent Reviewing Team Manager and the Social Worker will clearly record the reason on CCM and share this with professionals and family members
- 4.3 Adjourn ('stand down') a Conference if in his or her judgement there is a lack of representation or information which would mean the Conference is unable to reach informed decisions or recommendations. Examples might include; lack of Social Worker attendance or report, non-availability of assessment reports, or key reports not being made available within timescales

- 4.4 Where a Conference is 'stood down' the Conference Chair must put in place a bridging Child Protection Plan, including any urgent action needed to safeguard the child/young person, and reconvene the Conference at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.5 Inform the Independent Reviewing Team Manager of any Conference which does not go ahead
- 4.6 Ensure all items of the agenda are covered in the meeting
- 4.7 Ensure that the minutes accurately record decisions made, along with further actions required, by whom and within specified timescales
- 4.8 Ensure that the Birth Arrangements Form has been completed at the end of a Pre-Birth Conference with the agreement of all involved. Any amendments can be made at the first Core Group meeting and then updated as necessary
- 4.9 Ensure that the decisions and recommendations of the Conference are clearly recorded in writing and distributed within 24 hours to all those who attended or sent apologies to the meeting

The Administration Team will:

- 4.10 Send out invitations, and allocate minute takers who will produce Child Protection Plans producing recommendations and minutes and distribute them within the required timescales
- 4.11 Distribute the agenda to all attendees at the meeting
- 4.12 Distribute the criteria for a Child Protection Plan and where necessary the removal from a Child Protection Plan to all attendees
- 4.13 Distribute a Child Protection Plan within one working day of the meeting
- 4.14 Complete minutes and distribute a copy including the agreed Child Protection Plan within 14 working days

Children's Social Care Operational Managers and Social Worker will:

- 4.15 Ensure the child/young person's views are sought and clearly recorded, using the "*My Conference Pack*" as appropriate
- 4.16 When it is a Pre-Birth Conference, the Social Worker will complete the Birth Arrangements Form as far as possible in advance of the Initial Child Protection Conference and then fully complete the document as part of the meeting. It is the responsibility of the Conference Chair to ensure that the Birth Arrangements Form has been completed at the end of a Pre-Birth Conference with the agreement of all involved. The Social Worker will make any amendments necessary at the first Core Group meeting and then update the Birth Arrangements Form as necessary. The Birth Arrangements Form must be distributed with the completed Child Protection Plan within 10 working days of the First Core Group meeting

All Professionals will:

- 4.17 Discuss with the Conference Chair well in advance of a Conference any requests for observers to attend the Conference
- 4.18 Contribute to the Conference, using professional judgement to make an informed opinion to whether the child/young person should be made or remain subject to a Child Protection Plan
- 4.19 Consider all the child's needs including health and education
- 4.20 Provide a report, or contribute to their agency's written report in advance of the Conference, at least 48 hours before an Initial and 5 days before a Review Conference which sets out the nature of involvement with the family. All reports (except confidential Police reports) should be shared with parents/families at least 48 hours prior to the Conference and include their views
- 4.21 Professionals and agencies invited to any Conference but are unable to attend the Conference must submit a written report
- 4.22 Ensure the child/young person's views are sought and clearly recorded, using the "My Conference Packs" as appropriate
- 4.23 Attend the Conference 15 minutes early to read reports in advance of the meeting
- 4.24 When it is a Pre-Birth Conference, contribute to the completion of the Birth Arrangements Form at the meeting
- 4.25 All professionals must leave the Conference with the agreed Birth Arrangements Form or robust arrangements agreed regarding secure e-mail transmission. A copy of the Birth Arrangements Form will be forwarded to the GP and agreement must be reached at the Conference as to who will do this
- 4.26 All professionals should take a full and active part in decision making
- 4.27 Any professional concerned about the decision or the Child Protection Plan for the child/young person should make their views known at the meeting, attempt to resolve the issues at the time and then escalate their concerns through the Resolving Professional Differences procedure as necessary (http://sunderlandscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_resol_pro_diff.html).

Standard 5: Develop clear timely plans for children and young people which are implemented to safeguard children and promote positive outcomes

The Conference Chair will:

- 5.1 Ensure all attendees are aware of the criteria for a Child Protection Plan

- 5.2 Guide the Conference to draw up a Child Protection Plan with SMART recommendations which are outcome focussed, identify how the actions will be achieved, by whom and by when
- 5.3 Ensure that a Child in Need Plan or a Team around the Family Plan is formulated and a Lead Professional is named where a decision is made that a Child Protection Plan is not necessary or should end
- 5.4 Ensure that the parents or carers have a full and clear understanding about what they need to do to bring about change.
- 5.5 Ensure that any Plan takes account of the child's culture, health needs (including diet, disability and personal care needs), language and spiritual/religious needs, how these can be practically met and that any shortfalls are being addressed within the child's timescales
- 5.6 Ensure that the decisions and recommendations of the Conference are clearly recorded in writing and distributed within 24 hours
- 5.7 When it is a Pre-Birth Conference the Birth Arrangements Form must be completed as far as possible by the Social Worker and brought to the Initial Child Protection Conference and then fully completed as part of the meeting. It is the responsibility of the Conference Chair to ensure that the Birth Arrangements Form has been completed at the end of the Initial Child Protection Conference with the agreement of all involved. (Any amendments can be made at the first Core Group meeting and then updated as necessary. The Birth Arrangements Form must be distributed with the completed Child Protection Plan within 10 working days ie before the First Core Group meeting
- 5.8 To ensure that dates are set for Core Groups and to challenge where Core Groups are not taking place within the required timescale or where there is a lack of attendance by key professionals
- 5.9 Ensure that any significant changes to the child/young person's life are reflected in the Review of the child's plan and action taken if required, including following up significant actions where necessary
- 5.10 Where problems are identified in relation to a child's plan, the Conference Chair will in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the professional or their line manager. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the Conference Chair should consider taking formal action through the Resolving Professional Differences Process (http://sunderlandscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_resol_pro_diff.html).

Children's Social Care Operational Managers and Social Workers will:

- 5.11 Ensure the Child Protection Plan is based on the findings of the assessment and follows the dimensions relating to a child's developmental needs, parenting capacity, and family and environmental factors

- 5.12 Provide their report to the Chair of the Conference ahead of the scheduled Review Conference, at least 7 days in advance
- 5.13 Submit a clear and comprehensive report based on factual information with in-depth analysis and a clear Child Protection Plan. This should include dates the child has been seen and if the child was seen alone by the Social Worker
- 5.14 Share their report with the family/carers and professionals at least 24 hours (Initial), 5 days (Review) beforehand
- 5.15 Ensure that a plan is formulated and recommendations made with clear timescales. Where a decision is made for a Child Protection Plan to end ensure that a Child in Need Plan is put in place if required to ensure continuing support and intervention
- 5.16 Where a decision is made for a Child Protection Plan to end and where Children's Social Care are not going to remain involved, ensure that support is continued through Team around the Family/Strengthening Families and a Lead Professional identified
- 5.17 Ensure that the Plan is meeting the needs of the child/young person and identify any changes that are required in the light of information presented at the Conference
- 5.18 Inform the Conference Chair of any significant changes to the child/young person's life or any obstacles to progressing the Plan that indicate the need for an earlier review

All Professionals will:

- 5.19 Consider and make recommendations on how agencies, professionals and the family should work together to ensure that the child/young person will be safeguarded from harm in the future
- 5.20 Ensure that they can deliver on any relevant commitments within the Child Protection Plan within the designated timescales or if this is not possible that these commitments are renegotiated
- 5.21 Undertake work with the child/young person and family and provide services according to the agreed plan and where necessary undertake specialist assessments to inform the review of the plan
- 5.21 Ensure that reports are available to child, parents and the Conference Chair in advance of the Review Conference

Standard 6: Efficient implementation and reviewing of the Child Protection Plan leads to improved parenting and outcomes for the child or alternative action is taken to safeguard the child

The Conference Chair will:

- 6.1 Refer to issues that led to the Child Protection Plan in each Child Protection Review Conference
- 6.2 Consider how far the Plan is meeting the needs of the child/young person and identify any changes that are required in the light of information presented at the Conference
- 6.3 Identify whether the decisions and outstanding issues highlighted at each Conference have been acted upon within the agreed timescales
- 6.4 Robustly challenge any delays in implementing the Plan or any inaction in safeguarding the child and ensuring that these are clearly recorded in the minutes and fed back to the relevant Operational Manager
- 6.5 To ensure that dates are set for Core Groups and to challenge where Core Groups are not taking place within the required timescale or where there is a lack of attendance by key professionals
- 6.6 Ensure that any significant changes to the child/young person's life are reflected in the Review of the child's Plan and action taken if required, including following up significant actions where necessary
- 6.7 Record any actions taken or discussions held in between Reviews on the child's electronic record

Children's Social Care Operational Managers and Social Workers will:

- 6.8 Oversee the completion of the agreed Assessments by the Core Group within the agreed assessment timescales. Focus particularly on those areas highlighted by the Initial Child Protection Conference as requiring further exploration and understanding
- 6.9 Analyse the findings of the assessment:
 - to provide an understanding of the child/young person's needs and parenting capacity to respond appropriately to these needs within their family context and
 - to inform planning, the objectives of the plan and the nature of service provision

- 6.10 Liaise with all professionals providing services to the child/young person and family to keep up-to-date with progress and ensure each professional is aware of what the others are achieving as part of progressing the agreed plan
- 6.11 Ensure that the Child Protection Plan is updated at every Core Group, and progress and actions clearly recorded and distributed within 5 days
- 6.12 Bring information from all sources together into a systematic chronology. Bring to the Conference Chair's attention, for resolution at the Conference, any contradictory information
- 6.13 Where there are concerns regarding any changes in circumstances, convene an urgent Core Group to consider any necessary alterations to the plan
- 6.14 Discuss with the Conference Chair whether Reviews should be brought forward to address changes in the child's circumstances
- 6.15 Identify in their report whether the decisions and outstanding issues highlighted at each Conference have been acted upon within the agreed timescales
- 6.16 Confirm whether statutory visits to children/young people subject to a Child Protection Plan have been made within timescale

Core Group Members will:

- 6.17 Attend Core Groups and take responsibility for contributing to the development and implementation of the Child Protection Plan
- 6.18 Ensure that, wherever possible, the child/young person and relevant family members are involved in the drawing up of the plan
- 6.19 Keep the Social Worker up-to-date with progress and any changes in family circumstances which may affect the plan
- 6.20 Contribute to the work of the Core Group and ensure a Lead Professional is available to Chair in the Social Worker's absence. If no Social Worker is in attendance this is not a Core Group but an information sharing meeting in the absence of the Lead Social Worker
- 6.21 Any professional concerned about the Plan for the child/young person should attempt to resolve this with the Lead Social Worker and Core Group. If this is not possible, they will escalate their concerns through the Resolving Professional Differences procedure (http://sunderlandscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_resol_pro_diff.html).

All Professionals will:

- 6.22 Ensure that they can deliver on any relevant commitments within the Child Protection Plan within the designated timescales or if this is not possible that these commitments are renegotiated
- 6.23 Professionals and agencies invited to any Conference but are unable to attend the Conference must submit a written report.
- 6.24 Provide in advance a written report to the Conference which is shared with the family prior to the Conference at least 7 days prior to a Review Conference
- 6.25 When providing a report for the Child Protection Review Conference, outline the previous plan and the progress made and evaluate the impact on the child's welfare against the objectives set out in the Child Protection Plan
- 6.26 Take care to distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion
- 6.27 Contribute to the on-going assessment and implementation of the Child Protection Plan
- 6.28 Inform the Social Worker of any changes in the family's circumstances
- 6.29 Provide an overview of work undertaken with the family and evaluate the impact on the child's welfare against the planned outcomes set out in the Child Protection Plan
- 6.30 Discuss any failure to achieve progress on agreed actions within timescales with the Conference Chair

Standard 7: Confidential and sensitive information is discussed and appropriately shared to ensure the safety of children, family members and professionals.

The Conference Chair will:

- 7.1 Confirm in advance of the Conference with Police, Probation Service and any other professionals what information can be shared with the participants of the Conference and how
- 7.2 Ensure relevant information regarding children and adults, including alleged offenders, is provided and considered
- 7.3 Ensure that there is a confidential section where necessary for full information sharing and/or to ensure the safety of family members and professionals
- 7.4 Establish that consent has been given for information sharing and where consent is refused, consider what information needs to be shared for the protection of the child/young person and if so take the necessary steps in consultation with the Police

- 7.5 Ensure that if any party does not wish the information that they have provided to be shared with all involved that clear, valid reasons are given and recorded as to why the information should be restricted.
- 7.6 Agree with the Police Officer attending the Conference or submitting apologies how the Police information shared will be recorded in the minutes

All Professionals should:

- 7.7 Give clear, valid reasons as to why any information should be withheld from family members at the Conference and should be included in a confidential section of the report. The Conference Chair will then decide how this information will be presented at the Conference
- 7.8 Provide information about any relevant alleged offences during Section 47 Enquiries and prior to a Conference