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## Working together with Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership

### INITIAL & CHILD PROTECTION REVIEW CONFERENCES

#### Introduction

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#) (WT, 2018) sets out the legislative requirements and expectations on individual services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and should be read in conjunction with this policy. Two key principles of effective safeguarding arrangements are:

- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
- For services to be effective they need to be based upon a robust assessment of the child or young person's needs and their views should be central to any intervention. There should be a consistent focus upon how interventions impact upon the child or young person and outcomes should be clearly measured and evidenced.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 states:

*“Everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe...In order that organisations, agencies and practitioners collaborate effectively, it is vital that everyone working with children and families, including those who work with parents/carers, understands the role they should play and the role of other practitioners. They should be aware of, and comply with, the published arrangements set out by the local safeguarding partners (P, 11)”.*

Links to other relevant policies and processes are located within the appendix.

The first review child protection conference must take place within **3 months** of the date of the initial child protection conference and thereafter at maximum intervals of **6 months**, unless, the child's needs require an earlier conference to be convened.

These are statutory timescales which **must** be adhered to.

## Preparing for an Initial & Review Child Protection Conference

Within **24 hours** of the decision to convene an initial child protection conference the social worker must complete the notification for an initial child protection conference form which confirms the family details and invitees to the conference. Children's social care business support staff will then follow the business processes in relation to arranging and minuting child protection conferences.

### In preparation the social worker must also:

- Be a qualified and experienced social worker and is appointed as the Lead Professional (key worker)
- Advise parents / carers/ the child as soon as is practically possible about the details of the forthcoming conference; assist them in preparing for the conference and establish how their involvement might be best achieved - A learning styles questionnaire is a useful tool to establish how the parent receives information which is conducive to their learning needs.
- Consider the role of an 'absent parent' in the child protection process
- Parents should be advised of their right to bring a friend/advocate or supporter.
- Speak with the child/ren about the purpose of the conference and explore with them how they wish to be involved (in a way that is appropriate to their age and understanding). Care should always be taken, before any discussion with the child, to ensure that they know they will be safe. The involvement of children in the conference process requires particular sensitivity and planning. For example, some children may not understand what has been happening to them and may, therefore, find it difficult to understand why a conference is needed; others may be very clear about what has happened to them, but may not have been able to talk to a trusted adult or may not have been listened to; and some are likely to have suffered emotional abuse. This means that the child's wishes/feelings should be closely ascertained, and the social worker should support and advise the child:
  - of their right to attend the conference;
  - in the event they wish to attend the conference they can (if they wish) bring a friend/advocate or supporter;
  - they can (where appropriate) inform the conference of their wishes and feelings in writing; or
  - they can have someone (and this could be the social worker or another person) represent their views at the conference.

For review child protection conferences the social worker must follow the business process for invites **10 working days** before the next conference.

## Information leaflets to be provided to the family

The SSCB website hosts a number of leaflets which practitioners can share with family as soon as the decision to proceed to initial child protection conference has been confirmed. In seeking to work in a transparent and inclusive way, it is important the parents / carers and children have full information from the outset about the child protection process. Leaflets can be accessed in the appendix.

## Who should be invited to the Initial/Review Child Protection Conference?

**All children over the age of 12 years will be invited to attend the conference;** unless there is prior discussion between the social worker and Independent conference chair whereby it is confirmed it would not be in the child's best interest to attend. Children's social care will inform children over the age of 5 years of their right to access advocacy services.

All involved professionals should attend, when invited, the conference and take part in the decision making (P, 51WT 2018).

The list below (not exhaustive) is an example of those who can be invited to a child protection conference. The social worker with their manager must also consider whether any professionals with specialist knowledge should be invited to participate.

- Independent conference chair
- Team manager
- Mother / Father
- Child (over 12 years)
- Social worker
- Police
- School
- Nursery
- Probation
- GP
- Education welfare
- Named nurse for child protection Named midwife for safeguarding children
- School nurse
- Health visitor
- Named nurse mental health
- Children's Guardian (CAFCASS)

If an invited professional is unable to attend the initial or review conference, the professional/their agency must still provide a report as per the requirements set out on page 12.

All professionals attending a child protection conference (initial or review) must be fully prepared to participate in the meeting and provide an evidenced based view regarding the requirement for child protection planning. Where someone attends on behalf of a colleague they must have a good knowledge and understanding of the child/young person/family and be prepared to fully participate in the meeting.

All agencies should ensure their staff has completed the SSCB interagency training to equip them in fully understanding their roles and responsibilities in relation to child protection planning including the role of the core group. Details of the training can be accessed in the appendix.

## The Initial/Review Child Protection Conference

**Initial child protection conferences (ICPC's)** are convened by children's social care on behalf of Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) in accordance with these procedures.

The timing of the initial child protection conference should always depend on the urgency of the case and respond to the needs of the child and the nature and severity of the harm they may be facing.

An initial child protection conference brings together family members (and the child where appropriate), with supporters, advocates and professionals most involved with the child and family to make decisions about the child's future safety, health and development. The conference should analyse, in an interagency setting, all relevant information and plan how best to promote and safeguard the welfare of the child. It is the responsibility of the conference to make recommendations on how organisations and agencies work together to safeguard the child in the future (P, 47, WT 2018).

Whilst the initial conference is central to local safeguarding procedures, it is not the forum for identifying whether a particular person has abused a child or young person. This is a matter for the criminal courts. In cases where emergency measures are required to protect a child, these must be taken without delay.

Child protection conferences which are convened for children who are already subject to a child protection plan are known as **Child Protection Review Conferences (CPRC)**.

Procedures and decision making for child protection review conferences is the same as those for an initial child protection conference.

The purpose of a CPRC is to review whether a child is continuing to suffer, or is likely to suffer, significant harm and review developmental progress against child protection plan outcomes. Furthermore, the review conference must also determine whether child protection planning should continue or be changed (P, 51, WT 2018).

The ICPC and CPRC should determine when and in what situations the child will be seen by the lead professional (the social worker), both alone and with other family members present (including

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a requirement for unannounced visits to be made in the family home). **NB. The minimum standard whereby the child is seen and spoken to by the social worker should be regarded as a minimum of three weeks; however, the decision relating to the frequency will be made within the conference.**

## Contingency Planning

Contingency planning is a plan designed to take account of a possible future event or circumstance and this process should always begin during the assessment stage of any intervention. It is a critical aspect of the planning for all children and it is also important that links are made to specifically known risk taking behaviours (i.e. risks which can be anticipated) of either adults or children when developing contingency plans.

Contingency planning can range from convening a family group conference through to presentation at a Legal Gateway meeting (this is a legal meeting held by the Local Authority consisting of the social worker / team manager, county manager and Local Authority solicitor who decides if legal intervention is required to safeguard the child).

Contingency planning is not exclusive to the assessment stage and should also be considered during the multi-agency child protection conference by all agencies and when required recommendations must be made in order to address any immediate risk identified. The following are provided as examples where conference recommendations must include contingency plans:

- A parent is the victim of domestic abuse and their partner poses a risk to them and the child (ren) what would be the safety plan today / tomorrow?
- A child regularly goes missing what actions should carers/professionals take?
- A parent has frequent alcohol misuse relapses which tend to trigger violent episodes, what is the safety plan and agreed plan for care of the children should this arise?

## Pre Birth Child Protection Conferences

If the child social work assessment identifies an unborn child may be at risk of significant harm, Children's social care must convene an initial child protection conference between **30** and **32** weeks gestation or as soon as possible thereafter. This is to allow as much time as possible for planning support for the family. **NB. This timescale is currently subject to review.**

Consideration should also be given to the possibility of a premature birth and the need for appropriate planning. The same process will be followed as with any other child protection conference, including decisions appropriate health personnel. For example, midwifery services should be invited to attend in all cases. See appendix for further details.

## Roles and Responsibilities of those involved in Child Protection Conferences

### Social workers with their managers must:

- Convene, attend and present information using the **worries**, **positives** and **changes** required about the reason for the conference, their understanding of the child's needs,

parental capacity, family and environmental context (which should include any reference to cultural identity<sup>1</sup>) and evidence how the child has been abused or neglected and its impact on their health and development;

- Analyse the information to enable informed decisions about what action is necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child who is the subject of the conference;
- Prepare a robust child social work assessment which includes multi-agency contributions for conference which sets out and analyses what is known about the child and family and the local authority's recommendation;
- Share the conference report with the child and family beforehand (2 working days for ICPC and 5 working days for CPRC) and also the independent conference chair.

Before the conference discuss with the independent conference chair, the background history and whether any steps are required to protect professional staff from intimidation either in the conference or after it, perhaps via police or legal action and initiate this action if necessary. The social worker should also discuss the need for exclusion time if required.

For child protection review conferences social workers with their managers should also decide whether to initiate family court proceedings (all the children in the household should be considered, even if concerns are only expressed about one child) if the child is considered to be suffering significant harm (P,49, 51 WT 2018).

## Independent conference chairs must:

- Be accountable to the Director of Children's Services. Where possible the same person should chair subsequent child protection reviews;
- Be a practitioner, independent of operational and/or line management responsibilities for the case;
- Be available to the social worker/team manager for professional discussions about the impending conference. The independent conference chair cannot refuse a request from children's social care or indeed any agency to convene an initial child protection conference;
- Prepare for the meeting in advance by discussing the case with the social worker, read written reports and identify the roles of advocates and supporters as appropriate;
- Meet the child and parents in advance to ensure they understand the purpose and the process including possible outcomes of the conference;

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<sup>1</sup> [The Wood Report: Review of the role and functions of Local Safeguarding Children Boards March 2016](#) stressed how important it was for adults to be alert to the sensitivity of many issues facing young people, in particular cultural awareness of a young person's religion, language, community and background.

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- Establish with the parents if they are bringing an advocate / observer or legal representative to the conference;
- Ensure all conference members have access to a copy of the SSCB agenda for initial and review conferences and ensure members follow the agreed agenda and format of the meeting;
- Ensure conference members understand the confidentiality of the information that is shared;
- Ensure conference members enable all conference participants and absent contributors, to make their full contribution to discussion and decision making;
- Ensure conference members understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to determining whether the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm; and therefore, whether the child should be made the subject of a child protection plan, according to the category of abuse that is being described.
- Ensure advocates/observers and legal representatives are made aware of the way in which the conference will be conducted, including the contributions the advocate/observer/legal representative may make.
- Complete the quality assurance process as per the requirements of the resolution policy.

(WT, P, 47, 2018).

## Other Professionals including: Advocates, Observers and Legal Representatives

### All involved professionals/agencies should;

- Contribute to the information their agency provides ahead of the conference, setting out the nature of the agency's involvement with the child and family;
- Prepare a report for every conference which sets out your agency's **worries, positives, changes** the family are required to make using the individual agency template for reports to child protection conferences;
- Attend the conference and take part in decision making when invited;
- Work together to safeguard the child from harm in the future, taking timely, effective action according to the plan agreed. Monitor the effectiveness of these arrangements;
- Fully co-operate in sharing information without delay, as required by children's social care, to facilitate evaluation of risk to the child/young person. Agencies will share key information in an open and honest manner with professionals and the family throughout the assessment. Further guidance in relation to information sharing is contained in the appendix.

- Always work in an open and honest manner with the family and be aware of the importance and significance of sharing any vital information/concerns during meetings when parents are present;
- Take full responsibility and adhere to the requirements of the child protection plan.

(WT, P, 48, 51, 2018)

## Advocates

- Advocates actively contribute on the individual's behalf in providing information to the conference. An advocate may be anyone whom a parent or child elects to represent their views explicitly in the conference. It may be a private individual, a member of a particular organisation or a professional person including a legal representative.
- The advocate will attend the conference with the child, subject to the child's consent. The advocate will not be present for any part of the conference where information is presented which will not be made available to the child.

## Observers

- An individual may be permitted to observe part or all of a conference with the advance permission of the independent chair. In considering such requests, the chair may consult individual members of the conference beforehand. Prior consultation must also take place with relevant family members.
- Observers will usually comprise of members of academic institutions or professional groups in accordance with training or staff development programmes. This may extend to local authority managers in monitoring and evaluating conference standards. In these circumstances, professional observers will normally be limited to one person.

## Legal Representatives

- Children's social care can access legal advice from their legal representatives at any stage during their involvement with the child and their family; therefore, attendance by children's social care's legal representatives will only be exceptional circumstances
- In the event a children's social care legal representative attends a conference their role will be to:
  - ❖ Fully comply with the Law Society guidance: Attendance of Solicitors at Child Protection Conferences 1997
  - ❖ Offer expert advice to the conference on any legal issues which arise, but not to be full participant in the conference
  - ❖ Not address substantive questions about any matters under consideration directly to parents. Legal advice to children's social care on their agency role

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in care planning and on initiating or pursuing court proceedings should be given outside of the conference. However, if the conference is considering making a recommendation to children's social care that care proceedings or other court action should be taken, the local authority legal representatives can give a view to the conference as to whether the evidence would support such a step being taken.

## McKenzie friend

- A McKenzie friend assists a **litigant in person** in a court of law in England and Wales. This person does not need to be legally qualified. The crucial point is that litigants in person are entitled to have assistance, lay or professional, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

## Reports to Initial and Child Protection Review Conferences

### Children's Social Care

The Child's Social Work Assessment (CSWA) will remain the primary assessment presented to the initial and review conference.

The child's voice must be central to the assessment and must underpin all future planning for the child. Subject to the child's age and understanding advocacy should also be offered to the child.

An eco-map and a genogram must be completed for every assessment. During the assessment and prior to the initial child protection conference the social worker should explore family group conferencing with the family and confirm at this stage who the family's support networks are. This is in order for children's social care to have a clear sense of what support networks and protective factors there are within the family. It is also essential that permanency is considered at the earliest opportunity.

In the analysis section of the assessment a clear indication of the following must be included in **every CSWA** presented to the initial or review conference:

- **What are the concerns?**
- **What are the positives?**
- **What changes are required?**
- What is your professional view about the need for child protection planning and under what category, if children's social care is recommending a child protection plan?

The analysis must also include a summary of the child's daily lived experience in their current circumstances i.e. what does life look like for this child living in this household today?

### The social worker must also:

- Ensure the report clearly distinguishes factual information and evidence gathered through direct observation of the child and family, from allegation and professional opinion. Information which is provided second or third hand should be made clear;
- Provide the parents and child with a copy of the report, at least **two working days** before the date of the initial conference, ensuring sufficient time is given to explaining and

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discussing the contents of the report with them. The report should be provided in the preferred language(s) of the child and family members. This should occur in all but exceptional circumstances. It is **NOT** appropriate for the social worker to post the report to the family, and there is no instance where this would be considered acceptable practice. For review conferences the report should be shared with the parents and child at least **five working days** before the child protection review conference.

## Agencies

All invited agencies must produce a report for the conference which provides details of their agency's involvement with the child and family. Reports must provide an overview of work undertaken by family members and professionals and evaluate the impact on the child's welfare against the planned outcomes set out in the child protection plan. Agency reports must also include a summary paragraph setting out the **worries, positives**, and what **changes** they believe are required by the family based on the information they hold at that time.

It is the individual agency's responsibility to share their reports to the initial or review conference with the family **two working days** (for initial) and **five working days** (for review) before the conference. The only exception to this will be when the agency has agreed in conjunction with the independent conference chair and/or police whether the report can and should be shared with the parents. For example, the information may be legally privileged. Those agencies seeking agreement not to share their report with parents or who are seeking a period of exclusion in conference must endeavour to telephone the independent conference chair **two working days** before the conference to discuss the request in more detail. This discussion should not be held on the morning of the actual conference.

In the case of reconstituted families' consideration needs to be given by the conference chair before the conference regarding what information can be shared with those parents / carers in attendance. For example, two different fathers for one sibling group and one father may not want the other father to know his personal information. In such circumstances the independent conference chair will need to consider how this will be managed within the conference. This may include the fathers being provided with separate times to attend the conference.

## Quoracy

A minimum of three SSCB agencies that have contributed to the section 47 enquiry processes should be invited and should attend the conference. WT 2018 states, "all involved professionals should attend the conference and take part in decision making when invited (P, 46).

Representatives from different health care provider services may be considered to have separate agency function in this regard.

Initial child protection conferences must have appropriate representation in two critical aspects of their function:

- In considering background information, including historical concerns.
- In analysing and managing future risks to the child in terms of significant harm on the basis

of professional expertise in safeguarding children's welfare.

In the event that a quorum has not been achieved, the independent conference chair should determine whether the conference is in possession of sufficient information about risk to enable the conference to properly proceed. If there is insufficient information then the conference will not be held and must be reconvened within **7 working days** of the date of the original initial child protection conference to allow for sufficient information to be gathered unless the child's needs require an earlier conference.

## **Exclusion of the child, their parents, family members or advocates from part or all of a Child Protection Conference**

Any decision to exclude a child, parent, family member and/or an advocate from a child protection conference should be seen as exceptional and the decision rests with the independent conference chair. Exclusion time should always be considered on a case by case basis.

It is the responsibility of other agency personnel to advise the chair at least **two days** in advance of the conference when exclusion criteria might need to be considered.

In determining whether a period of exclusion may be required, the independent conference chair will give due consideration to the following:

- Are members of the conference able to provide necessary information without fear of threat or intimidation;
- Is there third-party information? This means checks that have been completed on people who are not present at conference i.e. grandparents, aunts, uncles and have therefore not given permission for their information to be shared at the conference by the police. If social workers have sought written consent from that person before the conference and explained what information will be shared and with whom then this information can be shared in the conference, thus avoiding the need for exclusion time.
- There is a live criminal investigation
- There is MARAC information and the perpetrator is in attendance at conference (and / or will receive a copy of the minutes), because they will not know they have been discussed at MARAC only the victim is informed.
- DVDS: Domestic Violence Disclosure Service requests as the applicant may not be linked to the family discussed at conference or either party may not be aware that the request has been made.
- To avoid disruption to the conference, e.g. by alcohol or substance misuse, or an actual threat of physical violence to a conference member. This can include any disruptions which may undermine the proper conduct of the meeting;
- Allow the independent conference chair / children's social care to receive legal advice.

If an individual is excluded from the conference or is unwilling or unable to attend, they should be enabled to communicate their views by alternative means. This may extend to the contribution of an advocate, if approved as appropriate, by the independent conference chair.

In the event of exclusion being applied in advance of the conference, the independent conference chair will:

- Have the decision and the grounds for excluding an individual for part or all of the conference clearly recorded in the minutes of the conference;
- Ensure that the social worker communicates the decision and grounds for excluding an individual from part or all of the conference, to that individual, at the earliest opportunity;
- Agree the extent of documentary information that can be shared with the excluded individual in advance of, or following the conclusion of the initial child protection conference.

In very rare circumstances the independent conference chair may be required to make a decision to exclude an individual during the course of the conference. This may be as a consequence of disruptive or abusive behaviour towards other participants of the conference. Where this is the case the independent conference chair should give the individual a **single** warning that their behaviour is unacceptable and that if such behaviour continues they will be excluded.

If the behaviour persists then the independent conference chair should ensure the individual is escorted from the premises where the conference is taking place.

Where concerns exist that an individual who has been excluded poses a risk to the child, another family member, or a professional participating in the conference every effort should be taken to ensure their safety. In exceptional circumstances this may include seeking assistance from the police.

If in the event the parent / child's advocate does not adhere to common protocols where their continued involvement is seen to undermine the proper conduct of the conference, the ultimate sanction of exclusion rests with the independent conference chair in accordance with the above criteria.

**N.B. Exclusion from Conference** - Participants will not receive minutes regarding any part of the conference from which they were excluded. It is the responsibility of the independent conference chair to ensure redacted conference minutes are prepared, and these have been approved, signed and dated by them prior to being circulated, **within 10 working days** of the conference; the minutes should not be passed or copied to third parties without the consent of the independent conference chair. Recipient agencies should retain conference minutes in accordance with their record retention policies.

In cases of criminal proceedings, the police may reveal the existence of the minutes to the CPS in accordance with the Criminal Procedures and Investigation Act 1996.

## Decision making at Initial & Review Child Protection Conferences

The criteria and process for deciding whether a child needs to become or remain subject to a child protection plan is the same for initial and review child protection conferences. This is a multi-agency decision and the independent conference chair will only provide their view regarding the need for child protection planning in the event there is an even split in the agencies views.

Any decisions made at conference should:

- Ensure the welfare of the child is paramount;
- Promote anti-oppressive practice;
- Give due regard to relevant legislation and statutory guidance;
- Give due regard to the child's developmental needs, in relation to parenting capacity and wider family and environmental issues;
- Consider the implications of the information presented to the child.

There is no expectation an agency will automatically support the views of the lead agency and you should be prepared to share your views within the conference. Concerns regarding decision(s) made at conference should be raised as and when they happen and not after the meeting has ended. Escalation processes are in place to support professionals who disagree with another professional's decision. To understand what to do in these circumstances please refer to escalation policy located in the appendix section.

If the decision of the conference is that the child is likely to suffer significant harm in the future, the child will require inter-agency help and intervention to be delivered through a formal child protection plan. Where a child protection plan is required the conference will consider the **changes** section of the conference model in conjunction with the identified **worries** in order to develop the SMART outline child protection plan. It is also important for the conference to identify contingency planning in the event a child continues to suffer significant harm. Consideration should also be given to the requirement for more specialist assessments.

It is the responsibility of the Independent conference chair to:

- Determine the **single** category of abuse (physical, emotional, sexual or neglect) which represents the primary presenting concerns raised during the information sharing phase of the conference, if agencies cannot achieve a consensus regarding the category to be attributed;
- Identify the lead professional<sup>2</sup> (previously known as the key worker) and explain their role and responsibilities. **No child should be the subject of a child protection plan without**

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<sup>2</sup> Where a child is the subject of a Child protection plan the Lead Professional **MUST** be a qualified social worker.

## **a named lead professional;**

- Confirm core group membership (to include professionals and family members) explaining its function and responsibility.
- Confirm the date of the first core group (**within 10 working days of the initial conference**) and confirm the date for the first review child protection conference **within 3 months**.
- Consider the need for an application for criminal injuries compensation, where appropriate; and agree the circulation of the conference minutes.

The decision to continue or discontinue with a child protection plan remains a multi-agency decision made at conference. The independent conference chair can only have a 'casting vote' if there is an equal split decision. If the conference chair disagrees with the decision making then they will use their skill, knowledge and expertise to ascertain a full understanding and insight into each agencies view. If the chair remains in disagreement with the overall decision, the majority decision must be upheld and the conference chairs concerns will be captured in the summary section of the minutes.

## **The Child is to be made subject to a Child Protection Plan**

In determining whether the child should be the subject of a child protection plan, the conference members should be directed by the independent conference chair to consider the following questions:

- Has the child suffered significant harm?
- Is the child likely to suffer significant harm in the future?

The test for likelihood of suffering harm in the future should be that either:

- The child can be shown to have suffered ill-treatment or impairment of health or development as a result of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect, and professional judgement is that further ill-treatment or impairment is likely; or
- Professional judgement, substantiated by the findings of enquiries in this individual case or by research evidence, is that the child is likely to suffer ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development as a result of physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect.

There are no absolute criteria for judging what constitutes significant harm; however, consideration may be given to:

- The degree and extent of physical harm;
- The duration and frequency of abuse and neglect;
- The extent of premeditation, degree of threat and coercion etc.

These elements are usually associated with more severe effects on the child and with greater difficulty in overcoming the impact of harm.

If there is continuing risk of significant harm, the necessary help and intervention that is required in safeguarding the child will be delivered through the formal child protection plan. A core group is then developed to implement and review the child protection plan in between the child protection conferences to ensure the child is kept safe.

## The Child Protection Plan & Role of the Core Group

The aim of the child protection plan is to:

- Ensure the child is safe from harm and prevent him or her from suffering further harm;
- Promote the child's health and development;
- Support the family and wider family members to safeguard and promote the welfare of their child, provided it is in the best interests of the child.

(P, 49, 50 WT 2018)

The child protection plan should also take into account:

- The wishes and feelings of the child; and
- The views of parents (in so far as they are consistent with the child's welfare). An explanation should be recorded in the core group minutes if the family member's preferences are not accepted about how to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

## Core Groups

All core groups should be convened in accordance the requirements set out in Working Together 2018 and children's social care will be responsible for completing a comprehensive record of the meeting and will circulate the minutes and updated child protection plan to the family and all involved agencies **within 10 working days** of the meeting.

The first meeting of the core group will take place **within ten working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference and then at 6 weekly intervals thereafter**. The purpose of this first meeting is to compile a "first" detailed child protection plan that seeks to:

- Identify early outcome-based objectives in progressing the child social work assessment and in compiling "first" detailed child protection plan;
- Identify resource implications of meeting these objectives;
- Decide what further steps need to be taken, by whom and by when;
- Ensure appropriate safeguarding of the child(ren) concerned;

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- Progress the child social work assessment and detail of the plan within agreed timescales.

Agencies should take account of these critical first steps in putting the detail of the child protection plan in place and of the resource implications in co-ordinating the work of the core group. For children's social care this will require team managers to:

- Chair the initial meeting of the core group (only);
- Ensure a summarised record of core group meetings is maintained; and Review the progress of the case via formal supervisory processes
- and ensure the necessary arrangements are in place in accordance with agreed outcome-based objectives.

The core group **MUST** meet at **six-weekly** intervals (or more frequently if appropriate) in order to facilitate proper collaboration, monitor actions and outcomes against the detailed child protection plan, and make necessary changes as circumstances may require.

Specific tasks of the core group also include:

- Maintaining an up to date detailed child protection plan. The plan should identify the names of the personnel involved and ideally be signed by them as the basis of a written agreement of work to be undertaken, and within stated timescales;
- Maintaining a summarised record of its meetings that is confined to:
  - ❖ attendance
  - ❖ decisions made
  - ❖ individual actions
  - ❖ date(s) of next meeting(s)
- Operating the individually allotted tasks contained in the plan, including more detailed assessments, where these have been recommended by conference;
- Having collective responsibility for producing reports to subsequent reviews, presenting the detail of the current child protection plan at the commencement of each review and for making recommendations about the continuing need for a child to remain the subject of a child protection plan;
- Identifying any need to convene an early child protection review or a further child protection conference where the criteria may apply.

All professionals working with the family must ensure they communicate all relevant information during and between meetings with each other; this will include any changes in circumstances i.e. changes of professional and/or any new additional concerns or positive improvements



Written and verbal communication from all professionals should meet their agencies recording policy requirements or practice standards. Information shared or recorded should clearly differentiate between what is fact and what is opinion.

Whilst the social worker is the lead professional and is responsible for providing copies of the core group minutes and updated child protection plan to all members, each agency has a responsibility to contact children's social care at the time, if core group meetings are not being held in accordance with the required timescales and/or core group minutes and child protection plans are not being distributed in a timely manner.

## **The Child is not to be made subject to a Child Protection Plan.**

In these circumstances the child (ren) may still require services to promote their health and/or development. Using the **worries**, **positives** and **changes** required conversation; the conference together with the family, should consider the child's needs and what further help would assist the family in responding to them. A decision should be made with the family (i.e. with consent) as to whether it is necessary to continue with and complete the child social work assessment, and what work is required to complete this assessment. Where the child/ ren's needs are complex, continued inter-agency working will be required. The conference should establish an outline child in need plan which should then be reviewed in accordance with the timescales for child in need planning.

## **Discontinuing the Child Protection Plan**

The child protection review conference is the only forum whereby a decision regarding the need for child protection planning can be made. The decision to discontinue the plan is primarily made when it is judged the child is no longer suffering or likely to suffer, significant harm; and therefore a child protection plan is no longer required to ensure the child's welfare is safeguarded. In these circumstances, the decision to discontinue the plan must be based on all actions of the child protection plan being completed; the successful implementation of the child protection plan; an inter-agency review of assessed needs, and the recommendation of the core group and other contributing agencies, bearing in mind that unanimity may not be required. Dissenting views **MUST** be recorded in the minutes, with a clear explanation being given as to why the agency considers the child to be continuing to suffer, or likely to suffer, significant harm. The rationale for actions not being completing must also be captured in the minutes of the conference. Once again, the majority view with form the overall decision making.

The child protection plan should also discontinue in the following circumstances:

- The child and family have moved permanently to another local authority area. In such circumstances the lead social worker is responsible for immediately notifying Specialist Safeguarding Development Manager (Staffordshire) and the receiving authority that a child subject to a child protection plan has moved to their area. The receiving authority should convene a child protection conference **within 15 working days** of being notified of the move where the move is believed to be permanent. The Staffordshire child protection plan can only be discontinued following a 'receiving in' conference being held. The decision to convene an in-coming or 'receiving in' conference is made by Specialist Safeguarding Development Manager (Staffordshire)

- The child has reached 18 years of age – to end the child protection plan, the local authority should hold a child protection review before the child's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday;
- The child has died – in this instance a Critical Child Incident Notification should be triggered by the Families First Strategic Lead for Specialist Safeguarding Delivery to the SSCB Manager and to the appropriate regulatory body (Ofsted); or
- The child has permanently left the UK; where a child has permanently left the UK and it is the view of the child protection review conference the child continues to suffer, or be likely to suffer, significant harm, the local authority should take appropriate measures to ensure every effort is made to locate the child and to share information as required with UK agencies and oversees child protection services (as required) to ensure the child's safety.

The discontinuation of a plan, however, should not necessarily coincide with a withdrawal of support and services. The conference should make recommendations for continuing support and services, in line with the Staffordshire's Thresholds Framework<sup>3</sup> and should consider whether such support should be provided under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, or whether a multi-disciplinary 'team around the child/family' meeting should be established via the local support team.

Where further support is required under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, the agencies represented on the core group should be responsible for developing, implementing and reviewing a child in need plan for the child and family.

In the event that children's social care ceases to have involvement with the child and their family who require ongoing services, the role of lead professional should transfer to another professional who has regular and ongoing contact with them.

All children and young people who are the subject of a child protection plan will be reviewed in line with the statutory reviewing arrangement timescales and full consideration and oversight given at each child protection conference around the progress of the children protection plan in meeting their needs and outcomes. In these circumstances discontinuation of the plan should be considered even if the decision is for the child to remain subject to a plan for a shorter period.

No Child in Need Plan can be closed unless a multi-agency review of the plan has been completed and there is a multi-agency consensus the plan should end. Agencies should always consider if there is a need for an early help assessment at this stage. In the event there is a disagreement about the decision to end the plan, the plan should not be closed and agencies should follow the escalation process.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.staffscb.org.uk/professionals/thresholds/>

Further guidance regarding the step up / step down process are located in the appendix.

## Communication between agencies

A reoccurring theme in a number of Serious Case Reviews has identified poor communication between agencies as a concern; therefore, the following seeks to address this for all involved agencies (including the lead agency):

- If you have requested a response from an agency and have not received a response within the required timescale, you should telephone the professional or agency direct to discuss this without delay. You should also evoke the SSCB escalation policy if you have been unable to resolve this during the telephone conversation.
- All agencies should be aware of the roles and responsibilities of each of the key statutory agencies which are located on the SSCB webpage.
- Dissemination of information in a timely way is essential in safeguarding children and young people. Therefore, to avoid unnecessary delay, information should be shared electronically via a secure e mail address. It is your agencies responsibility to ensure the agency you are contacting has a secure email address before distributing any information or documents. Electronic information should not be shared if there is no secure email address.

## Child Protection Minutes & Administrative Process

The timescales and processes are as follows:

The independent conference chair will:

- Complete the decision and recommendations of the conference within 1 working day
- Quality assure the minutes of the conference, prior to distribution
- Ensure the minutes are authorised, signed and dated prior to distribution in accordance with agreed timescales

The Minute Taker will:

- Be suitably trained to record an accurate and succinct account of the conference (initial, review conference and dual process meetings)
- Ensure the decision and recommendations of the conference are distributed to all relevant parties within 1 working day
- Complete and distribute the minutes of the conference to all relevant parties within **10 working days**
- Complete subsequent amendments **within 28 working days** of the conference

- Complete the notification process to relevant health and education authorities when children are made subject to or who are no longer subject to a child protection plan
- Ensure there is explicit and bold reference to the confidential status of the exclusion minutes

## Retention of Records

The record of the decision and recommendations of child protection conferences including the minutes should be retained by recipient agencies and professionals in accordance with their own record retention policies.

## Children looked after by the Local Authority –Dual Process

Those children who are subject to child protection planning and who then become looked after should ideally only be subject to one set of planning. Usually the Looked After Statutory Care Plan Review is sufficient to ensure all of the child's needs are considered in addition to any risks they may be exposed to. However, there may be occasions when a child needs to remain subject to a child protection plan even though they are 'looked after' i.e. those who are subject to Section 20.

The initial Looked After Statutory Care Plan Review meeting should always be combined with a review child protection conference, which is considered as a 'dual process' meeting.

The dual process conference agenda located in the appendix section should be used for all dual process meetings and the whole meeting should be fully minuted by a minute taker. One set of minutes will be produced from the meeting; however there remains a requirement to complete one set of decision and recommendations for the child protection element and one set of decisions and actions for the looked after review.

The first part of the meeting will consider significant events since the last conference for example, in the review period, the Local Authority have obtained an interim care order and the child is now placed in a regulated placement. Or the family have given informed consent for Section 20. Once a decision has been reached regarding the need for further child protection planning, those who would not usually attend a looked after statutory care plan review will leave the meeting and then the independent conference chair will begin the discussion about the child's looked after status and consider the current care plan.

It is important to remember that only key people in the child's life should attend the looked after statutory care plan review. This should not be a multi-agency professionals meeting. Therefore, it is anticipated only the chair, child, the social worker, their current carer and their parents will attend the second part of the meeting to discuss the care plan.

## Reports for dual process meeting

The allocated social worker must follow the business process for dual process meetings which is contained on the Families First intranet.

Timescales for sharing the reports are the same as reports presented to initial and review

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conferences cited above. This also applies in respect of agency reports to review child protection conference.

When the dual process meeting confirms that dual planning will continue, then all subsequent meetings will continue as dual process and the timescales for these meetings will follow the statutory timescales for looked after statutory care plan review meetings.

## **Children subject to another local authority's Child Protection Plan who are moving to Staffordshire on a permanent basis.**

In the event that children's social care is notified of an impending (or actual) permanent move, the child's name will be placed on Staffordshire's temporary list of children subject to a child protection plan database.

It is the responsibility of the originating authority to ensure all other agencies working with a child subject to a child protection plan are notified that the child has moved to another area. It is the responsibility of each agency in the originating authority to notify their counterparts in the receiving area that the child has moved to their area and to transfer relevant documentation as soon as possible. Where a child of school age has moved to another area and not registered for a school place, then it will be the responsibility of the receiving authority to treat that child as if they are missing from education and to seek to ensure that their parents or carers register the child for a school place as soon as possible.

The responsible other local authority may then make a request for a receiving in conference if the move is deemed to be permanent and that the family have secured accommodation in their own right. If a receiving in conference is being requested the responsible other local authority are then requested to send by HQ Business Support: -

- Chronology
- Latest conference report, decision, recommendations and the minutes
- Copy of the most recent child protection plan
- Latest core group meeting minutes
- Also advise whether the child/ren have been registered with health and education in the Staffordshire area.
- Also advise whether they are involved in any private law proceedings or PLO (Public Law Outline) process

The specialist safeguarding manager will then review the above documents in order to establish whether the request from the other local authority is appropriate. The timescale for the specialist safeguarding manager to review the requested information and documentation is 5 working days.

If the other responsible local authority does not provide the requested documentation or information, then this will delay the progress of the receiving in conference request being reviewed.

Where the responsible other local authority has been providing or funding services for the children, they should continue to do so for the period of time originally envisaged by the child protection plan. Where the originating authority is funding the housing costs of the family, they should continue to do so until such point as the family are able to claim benefits or pay for the housing costs themselves. For families receiving financial support because they have no recourse to public funds, the financial support should continue to be provided by the originating authority until such time as the family's immigration status is resolved although all other responsibilities for services under S17 or S47 will transfer to the receiving authority.

The only reasons why case responsibility for children subject to a child protection plan should not transfer from the responsible other local authority to the receiving authority are:

- If the child is looked after by the responsible other local authority or the subject of a statutory order to the responsible other local authority;
- If the child has been temporarily placed by the responsible other local authority in the area for the purposes of assessment, treatment (psychological or medical) or education, with or without their parents and will be returning to the other local authority;
- If the child has been remanded into custody or received a custodial sentence;
- If the child is temporarily living with relatives or friends in the area but will be returning to the care of a parent in the originating area. (If the child is "placed with" the relative or friend by the originating authority, they the originating authority will be responsible for the assessment and approval of the relative or friend as required by the fostering regulations)
- If the child and their family have been placed in temporary accommodation in the receiving authority for a specified period of time, which is less than 3 months, after which they will be located elsewhere.

Where the responsible other local authority is dealing with a child through the Public Law Outline, a Legal Gateway meeting has agreed that the threshold has been met but proceedings have not been initiated pending further assessments, then case responsibility should remain with that responsible local authority until such time the risks have reduced that is felt that the threshold for the Public Law Outline no longer exists or the risks have escalated to the point that an application to court needs to be made to initiate care proceedings.

Even if the originating authority is not transferring case responsibility for the reasons listed above, they should still notify the receiving authority that the child has moved into their area. The receiving authority will place the child/ren on their temporary child protection plan list and notify the responsible other local authority and health that they are children resident in their area subject to a child protection plan with another local authority.

- If a receiving in conference is agreed then this will be convened within 15 working days of that decision being made, not from the date the child/ren move into Staffordshire's area in accordance with local arrangements for conducting child protection conferences.
- Timescales for all subsequent review child protection conferences will follow the same timescales immediately following an ICPC. For example, the next conference will be within 3 months of the date of the receiving in conference and then 6 month thereafter.
- When a receiving in conference is agreed the responsible other local authority will be required to send to Staffordshire a list of the conference invite notifications and Staffordshire will then be responsible for sending the conference invite notifications out.
- The responsible other local authority will be required to complete an updated receiving in conference report and ensure this is shared with parents/carers 2 working days prior to the conference. This should include updates from all new involved professionals / agencies in the Staffordshire area.
- The responsible other local authority will be required to ensure the allocated social worker attends the receiving in conference. In the absence of the allocated social worker being available to attend; then the person in attendance must have a good knowledge and understanding of the child/young person/family and be prepared to fully participate in the meeting.
- Formal transfer of the child protection plan to Staffordshire does not take place until the receiving in conference. Until such time the responsible other local authority is responsible for ongoing completion of statutory visits and core group meetings to ensure the child protection plan is being progressed. The receiving in conference will decide whether the child/ren should remain subject of a child protection plan and the content of that plan.
- Following the transfer child protection conference, the originating authority should end their child protection plan and notify relevant agencies accordingly.

## **Children subject to a Child Protection with another local authority and assistance with safe and well visits requested from Staffordshire.**

Staffordshire will offer assistance with safe and well visits on behalf of another local authority when children are subject to a child protection plan providing the distance is in excess of 50 miles.

Staffordshire ask that the other local authority provide up to date child protection documentation and also for the allocated social worker to liaise with the social worker in Staffordshire prior to any visit taking place to ensure the visit is well informed and any concerns/risks are known.

## **Child who is the Subject of a Child Protection Plan in Staffordshire; who moves to another local authority on a permanent basis.**

As soon as it becomes apparent that a Staffordshire child is moving permanently to another local

authority area, it is the responsibility of the team manager/ allocated social worker to ensure that:

- The Staffordshire Child Protection Plan Database Administrator is notified to [safeguardingHQ@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingHQ@staffordshire.gov.uk) inbox including child's name, dob, address they have moved from and address that they have moved to, category of abuse and reason for the move and advise that this is considered to be a permanent move.
- The Staffordshire Child Protection Database Administrator will liaise directly with the other local authority counterpart to advise that a Staffordshire child has moved into their area and request that they are placed on their temporary list of children subject to a child protection plan. They will also update Staffordshire's database to reflect this.
- This will be followed up formally in writing by HQ Child Protection Database Administrator following advice from the specialist safeguarding manager.
- The allocated social worker is responsible for informing all involved agencies of the move to another local authority.

If a receiving in conference is required as the move is considered to be permanent, Staffordshire are not involved in any PLO Process or Private Law proceedings then the allocated social worker is required to send to [safeguardingHQ@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingHQ@staffordshire.gov.uk) inbox the following:

- Chronology
- Latest conference report, decision, recommendations and the minutes
- Copy of the most recent child protection plan
- Latest core group meeting minutes
- Also advise whether the child/ren have been registered with Health and Education in the Staffordshire area.
- Also advise whether they are involved in any Private Law Proceedings or PLO (Public Law Outline) process.

The other local authority will then review this documentation and consider whether Staffordshire's request is deemed to be appropriate. Staffordshire will maintain case responsibility until a receiving in conference has been convened and must ensure the completion of the child protection statutory visits and core group meetings. Staffordshire can request signposting information from the other local authority in order to make appropriate referrals to services in their area.

If a receiving in conference is requested written notification from Staffordshire will be sent to the other local authority by HQ Child Protection Database Administrator following advice from the specialist safeguarding manager.

If the other local authority agrees to convene a receiving in conference then the allocated social worker in Staffordshire is required: -



- To provide a conference invite list to the other local authority in order that they can send out the conference invite notifications
- To provide an updated receiving in conference report, including information from involved professionals within the new area they have moved to and ensure the report has been shared with parents/carers prior to the conference.
- Attend the receiving in conference, which is when formal transfer to the other local authority takes place. If the allocated social worker is unable to attend, then Staffordshire will ensure whoever attends on behalf of the local authority they will have a good knowledge and understanding of the child/young person/family and be prepared to fully participate in the meeting.

Following the receiving in conference the specialist safeguarding manager will request an update regarding the outcome of conference and advise HQ Child Protection Database Administrator to send out the relevant written notification letters to the other local authority, Health and the Police. They will also ensure that the database is updated with the outcome of the receiving in conference in the other area.

## **Children subject to a Child Protection Plan in Staffordshire and assistance with safe and well visits requested from the other local authority.**

If Staffordshire wish to request assistance from the other local authority in relation to safe and well visits on their behalf, then written notification to the other local authority will be sent to by HQ Child Protection Database Administrator following advice from the specialist safeguarding manager.

If the other local authority agrees to assist with visits that the allocated social worker in Staffordshire is expected to provide the other local authority with a copy of the latest child protection conference report and child protection plan, and then liaise with the social worker in the other local authority prior to any visit taking to ensure that the visit is well informed, and any concerns/risks are known.

The allocated social worker in Staffordshire should then request a copy of the outcome of the visit completed by the other local authority for file and make arrangements for any further visits in required. Staffordshire should not expect the other local authority to undertake all of the statutory visiting requirements, Staffordshire have an ongoing responsibility to visit despite residing temporary/visiting in another local authority.

## **Children subject to Child Protection Plan who move on a temporary basis**

Children who are subject to child protection plans and whose family frequently move address, are sometimes considered to be among the most vulnerable amongst this population of children. Therefore, children who move to other local authority areas should arguably attract the highest priority in giving due consideration to safeguarding their welfare.

Temporary 'subject of a child protection plan' status is an established organisational arrangement for monitoring the movements of children between individual local authority areas.

- A child who is the subject of a plan in another local authority and who moves into Staffordshire.

When children's social care is notified of a temporary move, the child's name will be placed on Staffordshire's temporary list of children subject to a child protection plan database and the specialist safeguarding manager will advise the administrator to send written notification of this to the other local authority.

If the temporary move is considered to be as part of an ongoing arrangement i.e. regular contact with family then Staffordshire will request a copy of the most recent conference report and child protection plan for information to be recorded on file in the event of any Emergency Duty Service (EDS) involvement. The specialist safeguarding manager will also advise the administrator to send written notification letters to Health and the Police, especially if they are the subject to any court orders.

- A child who is the subject of a child protection plan in Staffordshire who moves into the jurisdiction of another local authority.

When Staffordshire's HQ Child Protection database administrator is informed by the allocated social worker that the child/family has moved address or intends to move, they will liaise directly with their counterpart in the other local authority to request that their name is placed on their temporary list of children subject to a child protection plan and written notification of this will be sent following advice from the specialist safeguarding manager.

If the temporary move is considered to be as part of an ongoing arrangement i.e. regular contact with family then Staffordshire should send a copy of the recent conference report and child protection plan for information to be recorded on their files in there is any EDS involvement in the other local authority. The specialist safeguarding manager will also advise the administrator to send written notification letters to Health and the Police, especially if they are the subject to any court orders.

## Complaints and escalation

As agencies working with children, young people and families you need to know what to do when they are worried professionals are not working well together and, as a result, a child/young person is not making good enough progress or is at risk.

Effective working together depends on resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies, and a belief in a genuine partnership and joint working to safeguard children. Problem resolution is an integral part of professional cooperation and joint working to safeguard children. Professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion.

Every agency should have their own procedures in place for how to deal with concerns within their own setting. On those occasions where concerns need to be raised with another agency, workers should ensure this happens as soon as possible and that discussions are clearly recorded. If the matter cannot be resolved with the worker from the other agency, then this will be progressed to their line manager.

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On these occasions please refer to the SSCB escalation policy.

**NB:** This Escalation Policy does not apply to disputes in respect of the outcome of a child protection conference. A separate process applies in those circumstances.

## Appealing the decision of a Child Protection Conference

In recognising its commitment to achieving better outcomes for children and young people, and to involving young people and their families in decisions affecting them, Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board acknowledges the rights of individuals to make representation and to challenge decisions.

This extends to decisions made in child protection conferences, including that of making a child the subject of a child protection plan, that are effectively inter-agency decisions made upon the outcome of inter- agency processes.

Details regarding the criteria & process are contained in the appendix.

## Appendix

### Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

#### Section 47 Enquiries: Section 3C - Undertaking Assessments and Investigations Pre Birth Child Protection Conferences

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## Business Processes for Child Protection Conferences:

Families First Staff please refer to the intranet: policies and procedures: safeguarding

## The Initial & Review Conference Agenda:



Initial and Review  
Conference Agenda.docx

## Dual Process Agenda:



Dual Process  
Agenda.docx

## Early Help/ Child in Need / Step Up & Step Down:

<http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Staffordshire-Early-Help-Strategy/Staffordshire-Early-Help-Strategy.aspx>

<https://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Procedures/Section-One/Section-One-Docs/Section-1E-SSCB-Threshold-document.pdf>

## Appeals / Complaints & Professional Disagreements

[Appealing and or complaining about the outcome of a child protection conference.docx](#)



Appealing and or  
complaining about the

[Section 7B Escalation policy](#)

<http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Procedures/Section-Seven/Section-7-Appeals-Professional-Disagreements.aspx>

## Managing and Providing Information about a Child: Strategic Arrangements on Behalf of Children Subject of Child Protection Plans



Managing and  
Providing Information

## Advocacy

<http://www.nyas.net>

## SSCB Training

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<https://www.staffscb.org.uk/Training/Course-Information/Course-Information.aspx>

**Information Leaflets for families when you are worried that professionals are not working well together:**

<https://www.staffscb.org.uk/Professionals/Publications/Parents-and-Carers-Documentation/Child-Protection-Conferences-Information-for-Parents-and-Carers-March-2017.pdf>

**Learning styles questionnaire**



Learning Style  
Indicators.docx

## References

Weld, N. (2008) in Calder, M. Contemporary Risk Assessment in Safeguarding Children. Russell House Publishing. Dorset.

The Wood Report: Review of the role and function of Local Safeguarding Children Boards 2016