

Resolving Practitioner Disagreements and Escalation of Concerns

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Note: The term practitioner refers to any person working within safeguarding across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland within the adult and children's workforce, whether voluntary or paid, front line staff or manager including faith groups/organisations.

1. Introduction

At no time must professional dissent detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB), The Children Act (2004) and Working Together to Safeguard Children set out expectations that people working directly with families, whether this is with the child or parent, work to multi-agency plans and processes.

Good practice includes the expectation that there is professional and constructive challenge amongst colleagues within agencies and between agencies. Where a member of staff from any agency is concerned that concerns or agreed actions regarding a child are not being addressed or acted upon in a timely and consistent manner, it is expected that the escalation procedure should be used to reach a satisfactory outcome that is in the best interests of the child.

Individual agencies are responsible for ensuring robust feedback and completion of recommendations or planned actions. Where these actions are not completed or not within timescales this should be explained at reviews and a new or alternative plan devised with timeframes.

2. Principles of Resolving Practitioner Differences

Practitioners working in the arena of safeguarding and child protection are likely to encounter practitioner disagreement from time to time. Whilst this is acceptable on occasion, it is vital that such differences do not affect the outcomes for children and young people. Practitioner disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion. This procedure, therefore, provides a process for resolving such practitioner disagreements.

Disagreements can arise in a number of areas of multi-agency working but are most likely to arise in relation to:

- Thresholds into services;
- Outcomes of assessments;
- Decision making;
- Roles and responsibilities of workers;
- Service provision;
- Information sharing and communication.

This procedure is applicable to all LSCB partner agencies. Agencies have designated safeguarding leads, whose role includes conflict resolution.

3. Process of Resolving Practitioner Differences

The following stages are likely to be involved:

- Identification of areas of agreement and disagreement;
- Recognition that there is a disagreement over a significant issue in relation to the safety and wellbeing of a child / young person;
- Identification of the problem;
- Possible cause of the problem;
- What needs to be achieved in order for it to be resolved.

The process of resolving practitioner disagreements should first involve workers consulting co-workers, to clarify their thinking and practice in the first instance.

In some voluntary, community or faith sector organisations, the senior manager may have the role of resolving disagreements. Escalation can be via telephone, face-to-face, email or a meeting. All escalation should be recorded in single agency records to ensure that the procedure is effective, transparent and for LSCB auditing purposes.

Step 1

Direct Practitioner to Practitioner Discussion

Differences of opinion or judgement should be discussed amongst frontline practitioner as soon as practicable. This includes challenge within multi-agency meetings and with respective Chairs of Meetings to attempt to achieve a shared understanding and agree a resolution, in line with the plan, or to ensure a plan is developed if needed. Care should be taken to agree a way of managing disagreements, which allows children and families to understand the issues under discussion.

Step 2

Direct Manager to Manager Discussion

If Step 1 does not resolve the issue then each practitioner should discuss the issue with their line manager or safeguarding supervisor. The line manager should review the concerns and ensure that they are justified and meet the purpose of this procedure. The line manager should then liaise with the other practitioner's line manager in an attempt to reach a resolution. Consultation with senior managers within each organisation can be used if this would be felt to assist resolution.

If Step 1 and 2 do not reach a mutually agreeable resolution then there should be an escalation to Step 3; Where Practitioner Disagreements Remain Unsolved.

A clear record should be kept at all stages, by all parties. This must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.

Timely action is paramount if there are concerns that a child or young person is at risk.

Step 3

Where practitioner differences remain unresolved

Where agreement cannot be reached at Steps 1 & 2; the matter must be referred to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Senior Officer (e.g. Head teacher or Governor/ Named Nurse/ DCI/ Senior Probation Officer/ Housing Manager) within your agency. A resolutions meeting should then be convened between the relevant parties. This should be chaired by the Designated Safeguarding Lead or Senior Officer within your agency. Where Children's

Social Care are the subject of the disagreement a resolution meeting should be convened and chaired by a Service Manager/Head of Service.

If the agency who raised the initial concern remains unsatisfied, that agency's Designated Safeguarding Lead/Senior Officer should refer the matter to the LSCB Step 4 of this procedure.

In circumstances where a professional / agency believes that a child is at risk of Significant Harm, then the escalation must be made on the same working day.

Step 4

On receipt of the concerns the LSCB will formally log the information. The LSCB Manager should determine a course of action, if all steps to resolve the matter have failed and/or discussions raise a policy issue. This should include reporting the matter to the LSCB Independent Chair, who would then consider the merit of convening a Chief Officer Resolutions Meeting to resolve the disagreement.

The outcome of any discussions at this stage will be fed back to your own agency's Designated Safeguarding Lead/Senior Officer.

4. Following Resolution

When the matter is satisfactorily resolved in relation to the particular child or young person, any learning identified that is relevant for multiagency working should be sent to the LSCB office to inform learning. Where the learning identified is pertinent to a single agency then that agency should take this forward within their agency.

To avoid similar practitioner disagreements arising again, amendments may be required to protocol and procedures.

It may also be helpful for individuals to debrief following some disagreements, in order to promote continuing good working relationships. Consultation with your safeguarding supervisor may assist with this process.

Appendix 1 Flowchart: Resolving Practitioner Disagreements and Escalation of Concerns

Where a practitioner believes that a child is at risk of Significant Harm, then, the escalation must be made on the same working day.

At all stages actions/decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel involved



