

## Professional Standards & Quality Assurance Service

<b>Title:</b>	
<b>Practice Guidance for Strategy Discussions and Consultations with the Child Protection Chairs</b>	
<b>Date of publication:</b> 16.06.2021	<b>Responsible Manager:</b> Service Manager, Child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers' service.
<b>Date for review:</b> 30.06.2023	
<b>Electronic file location:</b> TRI-X	
<b>Associated statutory guidance and regulations:</b>	
The principle of the Child Protection and Independent Reviewing Officers are underpinned from:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Department for children, schools and families: IRO Handbook: statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children (2010), HM Government.</li> <li>2. London Child Protection Procedures (2017), 5<sup>th</sup> edition.</li> <li>3. Department for Education, Working Together to Safeguard Children – A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (July 2018), HM Government.</li> </ol>	
<b>Local documents:</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. London Borough of Bexley: Effective support for children, young people and families in Bexley (November 2019).</li> <li>2. London Borough of Bexley: Signs of safety practice framework and expectations (2018).</li> </ol>	
<b>Key Objectives (including Signs of Safety principles to apply)</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaborative leadership style that promotes practice depth, building a culture of service learning and improving outcomes for children and their families.</li> <li>2. Constructive relationships are built between practitioners, children, their families and partner agencies, recognising this is the greatest influence to helping change happen.</li> <li>3. Improving outcomes for children and their families through compassion, honouring their experiences, strengths and helping to understand their exceptions.</li> </ol>	
<b>Detailed advice:</b>	
This practice guidance has been developed to ensure that we have a consistent approach to manage our responses, when we are worried about the safety of children and young people. Our intention is to always be clear to children young people and their families about why we are involved in their lives and to make sure we respond timely to help reduce the worries we have for children and young people and to increase their safety.	

1. Department for Education, Working Together to Safeguard Children – A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (July 2018), HM Government.

## Practice Guidance for Strategy Discussions and Consultations with the Child Protection Chairs

This is good practice guidance for the **specialist social work teams**, as we want our managers and social workers to be clear when requests should be made for an initial child protection case conference. Our expectation is that all initial child protection case conferences are held, as early as possible once we have reasonable cause to believe that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

A strategy discussion can take the form of a multi-agency meeting or phone calls and it may be necessary to have more than one discussion, such as when new information is presented. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral or at any other time, including when new information is received on an already open case.

Threshold for a strategy discussion/meeting is when “there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm”. There is no absolute criteria or clear line constituting “significant harm” and it relies on professional judgement. The purpose of a strategy discussion is to decide whether S47 Child Protection threshold is met.

### How do we do this?

Our statutory guidance ‘Working Together to safeguard children 2018’ (1) tells us that the social work manager convenes the child protection case conference within 15 working days of the strategy discussion at which the child protection enquiry (Children Act 1989 section 47) was initiated.

Strategy discussions/ meetings need to take place within statutory timescales. Any delay should be explained and recorded. In cases where the child needs immediate protection, a strategy discussion/ meeting needs to be held within 1 working day, where child protection concerns are identified, a strategy discussion/ meeting needs to be held within 3 working days and for more complex cases, within a maximum of 5 working days, although sooner if the child needs protection.

1. The social work manager holds a strategy discussion/meeting.
2. On the day of the strategy discussion/meeting, the social work manager requests an initial child protection case conference date by emailing: [cpadmin@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:cpadmin@bexley.gov.uk)
3. [cpadmin@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:cpadmin@bexley.gov.uk) will respond to you within 24 hours of receiving your request with the date of the conference, requesting the social worker to complete an invitation list within 48 hours.

1. Department for Education, Working Together to Safeguard Children – A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (July 2018), HM Government.

## Bottom Lines:

- Following a strategy discussion/meeting, it is the decision of the manager whether or not a request is made for an initial child protection case conference.
- Initial child protection case conferences are to be held within 15 working days of the strategy discussion at which the child protection enquiry (Children Act 1989 section 47) was initiated, if the plan is to progress to an ICPC.
- All initial child protection case conferences are to be held on time.
- The Head of Service, (PSQA) is the only person who can make a decision for an initial child protection case conference to be held over 15 working days. This request must be in writing, containing the following information:
  - The personal identification number for the child/ren
  - The age of the child/ren
  - A maximum of 3 danger statements, which clearly outline your worries for the children.
  - A brief rationale of why the child/ren is likely to be at risk of significant harm or how they are at risk of risk of significant harm.
- The social work manager is to inform [cpadmin@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:cpadmin@bexley.gov.uk); where an initial child protection conference is no longer needed, within 5 working days of requesting the [cpadmin@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:cpadmin@bexley.gov.uk) to arrange an initial child protection case conference. The arrangements to cancel the conference can then take place.

## Consultation with Child Protection Chairs Bottom Lines:

Social workers and their managers are not obliged to have a consultation with a child protection chair, prior to convening a child protection conference. Where consultation is required, the child protection chairs will always check that danger statements have been developed with the family; that the assessment (mapping) has been developed and shared with the family and that the social worker has engaged the network to develop a safety plan.

A consultation with a child protection chair is an opportunity for a social work manager and social worker to spend time with an experienced practitioner (CP Chair) to discuss complicating factors; that may be affecting our ability to understand the experiences of children and their families. The consultation is an opportunity to explore the information you have, understand the gaps and help you to think about what the best next steps may be to work with the children and their family. As such, the CP Chair will make recommendation based on the information shared in the consultation.

A consultation is also useful to help you think about how to plan and prepare for an initial/review child protection conference (direct work, sharing reports). Thinking about how we can include children and their families is very important for us to help them understand the worries we share. It is also important for us to help children and their families understand what will happen in a child protection conference and make sure;

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that the experience is comfortable and helpful to improve experiences of children we are worried about.

## How do we do this?

1. Send a request for a consultation to: [cpamin@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:cpamin@bexley.gov.uk)
2. A child protection chair will be identified within 24 hours.
3. The child protection chair will arrange to meet with the social work manager and social worker to case map.
4. The child protection chair will record the consultation on the child's record within 48 hours in case notes, using the option: CP consultation.

## Key Facts & Bottomlines

- It is not compulsory to request consultation on cases coming to conference. The social work team could decide to request a date for an Initial Conference and this will be made available from the day a strategy meeting/discussion is held.
  - None of the CP Chairs should be approached directly for a consultation. All request has to be made via the CP Admin, for record and accountability purposes.
  - The consultation process is not platform to decide if the social work team should initiate a s.47 enquiries.
  - Therefore, where possible, before requesting consultation, a strategy meeting/discussion must have been convened.
  - All consultation must include the social worker and a manager from the team, with the CP Chairs.
  - Where possible, all cases coming to an ICPC must have family network meeting completed on them, except where this is not practically possible.
  - Conference report should be completed before conference and shared with families 48hours before conference.
  - Cases returning to conference for the second time must have the agreement and discussion with the Service Manager of the designated services.
  - The recommendation of the CP Chair following a consultation, especially if a case is not deemed ready for conference, does not mean it cannot progress to conference.
  - The social work manager is responsible for deciding whether or not the next step is for a request to be made for an initial child protection case conference or continue working on the case on a child in need plan.
  - Consultation note will be recorded within 48 hours of being held on the child's record in case notes, using the option: CP chair consultation.
  - For the purpose of professional courtesy, another CP Chair cannot be approached for another consultation, once an initial one had been done and recorded on the child's file.
  - Where needed, further discussion about progressing to an initial child protection conference or not, should be held with the team manager and service manager of each designated services.
1. Department for Education, Working Together to Safeguard Children – A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (July 2018), HM Government.