**Guidance for Professional Disagreements Resolution in Multi-Agency Working in Rutland**

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	1. **Introduction**

When working together to safeguard children and young people, there will inevitably be events that occur where professionals disagree on action taken or inaction. Whilst this is accepted, it is critical that such differences do not impact on the aims and outcomes for children and young people or detract from ensuring that the child or young person is safeguarded.

Disagreements could arise in a number of areas of multi-agency working as well as within single-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.
	1. **Principles of Professional Differences Resolution**

The safety and wellbeing of individual children and young people is the paramount consideration in any professional disagreement. Professional disputes obscuring the focus on a child or young person must be avoided.

It should be recognised that professional disagreement should not always be viewed negatively; that in some situations it may improve outcomes for children and young people and enable healthy constructive challenge and reflection. All professionals should take responsibility for their own cases, and their actions in relation to such case work to ensure their accountability.

Difficulties at practitioner level between agencies should be resolved as simply and quickly as possible. All practitioners should respect the views of others, whatever their level of experience. They should also be mindful of the difficulties that challenging more senior or experienced practitioners may present to others.

Working together effectively is dependent on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies. Working together effectively also depends on resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies, with a genuine commitment to partnership working.

Professional disputes are reduced when there is clarity about roles and responsibilities, and problems are aired and shared in networking forums.

In an attempt to resolve a dispute may result in a particular worker or agency having concerned that a child or young person may remain at risk. In such an event, it is crucial these concerns are communicated and discussed with the relevant manager in Children's Social Care.

**3. Process of Professional Differences Resolution**

The following stages are likely to be involved:

* Recognition of any disagreement concerning a specific significant issue in relation to the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person;
* Identification and discussion concerning the issue;
* Identification of the possible cause of the problem; and
* Exploration of what needs to be achieved in order that the issue can be resolved satisfactorily.

These stages are a guide and it may not be necessary to pass through each stage in turn. Some may be bypassed with agreement with relevant professionals and managers. Disputes can be resolved at any stage.

The process of identification of any professional differences should first involve workers discussing their concerns with co-workers to clarify and rationalise their thinking and practice, and to establish the desired outcome.

In some voluntary, community or faith sector organisations, the role of a senior manager, as specified in the flow chart above, may be undertaken by a member of the management committee.

The process below does not have to be followed in full. Disagreements can be resolved at any stage.

The following should be considered when resolving professional differences:

1. Initial attempts to resolve the problem should normally be made between the people who disagree, unless the child or young person is at immediate risk;
2. Both agencies should give clear reason/s for their safeguarding approach which should be put in writing, as per guidance from their line manager;
3. It should be recognised that differences in status and / or experience may affect the confidence of some workers in resolving differences, and some may need support from their managers;
4. If unresolved, the problem should be referred to the worker's own line manager or agency safeguarding lead, who will discuss the situation with their equivalent colleague in the other agency;
5. If the problem remains unresolved, the line manager or agency safeguarding lead will liaise with the relevant service Manager or refer up their agency line management structure.
6. If problem remains unresolved for other agencies, the matter should be referred to a Senior Manager in Children's Social Care;
7. 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

**Child Protection Conferences**

If a professional disagrees with a decision by Children's Social Care not to hold a Child Protection Conference they have the right to request that such a decision be overturned if they have serious concerns that the child or young person may not otherwise be adequately safeguarded.

Any such request should be made to the Service Manager for Children’s Social Care, and the decision be supported by a Senior Manager or Safeguarding Lead in the complainant agency.

Every effort should be made to resolve the matter through discussion and explanation, but, where agreement cannot be reached, a conference should be convened. Professional reasons for the final decision should be fully recorded on the child or young person's file.

**Following resolution**

When the matter is satisfactorily resolved in relation to the particular child or young person, any general principles or learning should be identified and referred to the Quality Assurance Service at Rutland County Council.

To avoid similar professional conflicts arising again, amendments may be required to protocol and procedures.

It may also be helpful for individuals to debrief following some disputes, in order to promote continuing good working relationships.

See below flowchart…

Professional Differences/Disagreement Resolution

The process below does not have to be followed in full. Disagreements can be resolved at any stage. At all stages actions/decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel

Professional disagrees with decision / response from agency concerning a child or young person, following discussion with their manager (for example does not meet threshold for referral or for strategy discussion)

**Professionals should seek advice and guidance from their safeguarding manager or equivalent within their agency.**

Is agreement cannot be reached, the issue should be escalated to the Deputy Director of Children’s Social Care for a decision to be reached

Dispute remains unresolved and professionals discuss concerns with relevant safeguarding manager

If dispute is concerning decision not to hold a Child Protection Conference, decision may be overturned if amicable decision cannot be reached

Professionals’ outcome achieved and child or young person is safeguarded

Professionals discuss concerns with relevant senior manager

Disagreement resolution achieved – change in decision

Decision remains unchanged and professional dispute remains

Professional discusses outcome with their manager and if necessary discusses concerns with safeguarding manager or equivalent within their own agency

Managers from each agency discuss outcome, concerns and next steps

Professional contacts person making the original decision to attempt to resolve the disagreement