

Developing multi-agency policies, procedures, protocols or working practices

1. Introduction

The aim of this guidance document is to explain the difference between a **Policy; Strategy; Procedure; Protocol; Practice Guidance** and **Pathway** so agencies can be clear about what it is they are providing. Whilst there is a need to adhere to policy and procedure and follow protocol, adherence should not be overly rigid at the expense of exercising appropriate professional judgement to safeguard children and families.

2. Definition

Policy

A policy sets out the organisations position (i.e. its shared beliefs, organisational intentions and commitments) and is a set of ideas or plan of what we should, or would do, in a particular situation. It sets out a course of action intended to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters.

Policies are not stagnant – they can change and will never cover all eventualities, so practitioners and managers will be required to reach and record the rationale for professional judgements based on best practice with legal advice where necessary

Strategy

Strategies are about the way organisations intend to do things to help achieve a specific aim in a planned, coherent and coordinated way. They can be single agency or multi agency. Basically the strategic approach looks at:

- where we are now

- where we want to get to
- how we will get there; and
- how we will know when we have got there

A strategy would be supported by an implementation plan.

A 'strategy' should not be confused with a 'strategy meeting' which is sometimes referred to as a 'strategy discussion' and is held following an assessment which indicates that a child is or may be at risk of significant harm. The purpose of a strategy meeting is to establish whether there are grounds for a Section 47 enquiry (under the Children Act 1989).

The difference between a policy and a strategy

The key difference between a policy and a strategy is that a strategy aims to achieve specific objectives and sets out the approach that will be used to do so. Policies set out how we will respond to given situations as they arise, essentially reactive.

Procedures

Procedures describe how a policy will be put into action. Policy and Procedures are related but distinct.

Procedures are step by step instructions and should outline: Who will do what; what steps to take and which forms and documents to use.

A procedure indicates what must be done in specified circumstances and defines the limits of professional discretion.

Protocol

Procedures should be done by protocol. A protocol defines a set of operational procedures to ensure that there is a well- defined way of doing a particular task or range of tasks often informed by past experience. It is a code of precedence.

A protocol is usually a formal agreement and commitment between two or more parties on a common response to specified issues, events or circumstances e.g. information sharing.

Practice Guidance

Guidance provides information on how to act in a situation. It often refers to what is good or best practice and provides contextual information or addresses the question of 'why?' specified actions may be required. Practice guidance is not the same as statutory guidance which sets out what organisations must do to comply with the law.

Pathway

A Pathway is a way of achieving specified results or a course of action. It is often used within health organisations.