



Centre for Professional Practice

## Guidance around Strategy Meetings & Strategy Discussions

### Definition Of Meetings And Discussions

Strategy discussions and strategy meetings are the same activity, but in different formats. Wherever possible, safeguarding activity which makes a threshold decision about the risk of significant harm and a decision about section 47 enquiry should be held as a meeting.

Strategy discussions may be held over the telephone, or as a telephone conference. They may be a series of telephone conversations.

Strategy meetings are always the best and most effective format for making decisions about safeguarding intervention.

Where, because of immediate need and risk (a child is in need of immediate protection, where they have a reported injury or where they disclose penetrative sexual abuse) a rapid strategy discussion is held, this should wherever possible be followed up with a strategy meeting to guide the enquiry and safeguarding intervention. Strategy discussions should only be used in specific circumstances.

When some types of abuse are reported (such as abuse related to Positions Of Trust & Professionals/ Volunteers; Complex and Organised Abuse, and Fabricated Induced Illness) then a Strategy Discussion is not appropriate as a format for response planning and intervention.

### **Strategy discussion**

Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm there should be a strategy discussion involving local authority children's social care (including the residential or fostering service, if the child is looked-after), the police, health and other bodies such as the referring agency. This might take the form of a multi-agency meeting or phone calls and more than one discussion may be necessary. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral or at any other time, including during the assessment process and when new information is received on an already open case.

### **Purpose**

Local authority children's social care should convene a strategy discussion to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid future action if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

### **Strategy discussion attendees**

A local authority social worker, health practitioners and a police representative should, as a minimum, be involved in the strategy discussion. Other relevant practitioners will depend on the nature of the individual case but may include:

- the practitioner or agency which made the referral
- the child's school or nursery
- any health or care services the child or family members are receiving

All attendees should be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their organisation and agencies.

### **Strategy discussion tasks:**

The discussion should be used to:

- share available information
- agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation
- decide whether enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 must be undertaken

Where there are grounds to initiate an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, decisions should be made as to:

- what further information is needed if an assessment is already underway and how it will be obtained and recorded
- what immediate and short term action is required to support the child, and who will do what by when
- whether legal action is required

The timescale for the assessment to reach a decision on next steps should be based upon the needs of the individual child, consistent with the local protocol and no longer than 45 working days from the point of referral into local authority children's social care.

The principles and parameters for the assessment of children in need at chapter 1 paragraph 40 should be followed for assessments undertaken under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

### **Social Workers should:**

Convene the strategy discussion and make sure it:

- considers the child's welfare and safety, and identifies the level of risk faced by the child
- decides what information should be shared with the child and family (on the basis that information is not shared if this may jeopardise a police investigation or place the child at risk of significant harm)
- agrees what further action is required, and who will do what by when, where an EPO is in place or the child is the subject of police powers of protection
- records agreed decisions in accordance with local recording procedures
- follows up actions to make sure what was agreed gets done

### **The Police should:**

- discuss the basis for any criminal investigation and any relevant processes that other organisations and agencies might need to know about, including the timing and methods of evidence gathering
- lead the criminal investigation (local authority children's social care have the lead for the section 47 enquires and assessment of the child's welfare) where joint enquiries take place

### **Health Practitioners Should:**

- advise about the appropriateness or otherwise of medical assessments, and explain the benefits that arise from assessing previously unmanaged health matters that may be further evidence of neglect or maltreatment
- provide and co-ordinate any specific information from relevant practitioners regarding family health, maternity health, school health mental health, domestic abuse and violence and substance misuse to assist strategy and decision making
- secure additional expert advice and support from named and/or designated professionals for more complex cases following preliminary strategy discussions
- undertake appropriate examinations or observations, and further investigations or tests, to determine how the child's health or development may be impaired

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