



# HILLINGDON

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## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CHILD PROTECTION PROCESS**

### **1. POLICY STATEMENT ON PARTICIPATION**

It is the policy of London Borough of Hillingdon that children and young people should participate in any child protection process in which they are involved. The Local Authority has a duty to ascertain, as far as is practicable, the wishes and feelings of children and young people, and to give due consideration to them, having regard to the child or young person's age and understanding and the Local Authority's responsibility to act in the best interests of the child.

Children's Services is committed to a policy of protecting children from "significant harm" by a process that causes least distress and damage to the children involved.

### **2. DEFINITION OF PARTICIPATION**

Participation means that the child or young person is aware of, informed about and encouraged to communicate something about each child protection process that pertains to them and that could result in significant life changes being decided on their behalf.

Participation can mean personal contributions at any stage of the process, including Child Protection Case Conferences, and could take the form of letters, drawings, telephone contact or having their views being represented by others. This can include the child or young person's attendance at any meeting concerning them, whether directly contributing or not.

### **3. REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION**

- a) To achieve more effective protection for young people.
- b) To assist in achieving better and more open working relationships with families and young people.
- c) To fulfil the young person's right to be involved in and comment upon major decision-making in their lives.
- d) To participate, even partly, in decision-making meetings may provide young people with a sense of involvement and of taking control in their own lives.



# HILLINGDON

LONDON

When a young person wishes to attend a Child Protection Conference and this is assessed to be an appropriate form of participation, the following policy and guidelines should be referred to.

#### **4. POLICY STATEMENT ON CHILDREN OR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WISH TO ATTEND A CHILD PROTECTION CASE CONFERENCE**

Wherever possible, children or young people wishing to attend a Conference should be supported to do so.

It is recognised that Conferences are a formal setting where there is a wide disparity of power between young people and adults and that young people who wish to attend should be supported by their social worker during the actual Conference process and the facilitation of their contribution to the meeting.

It is recognised that, as for adults attending Conferences, that it may not be appropriate for the young person to attend the entire meeting and that reasons for their exclusion should be explained by the Child Protection Adviser both in preparation for the meeting and during the process of the meeting.

#### **5. GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION IN CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES**

At the point of convening a Child Protection Conference, discussion will take place between the Child Protection Adviser (CPA) and social worker in order to clarify:

- a) how the young person's views have been elicited throughout the child protection process thus far
- b) what form their participation will take in the Conference process in light of their age, understanding and expressed wishes

If the young person's attendance at the Conference is considered to be an appropriate form of participation, a clear plan of attendance will be agreed between the Social Worker and Child Protection Adviser which will consider the following issues :

- agreement about the form of participation planned with the young person, i.e. by providing written information, the child speaking directly to the CPA prior to conference



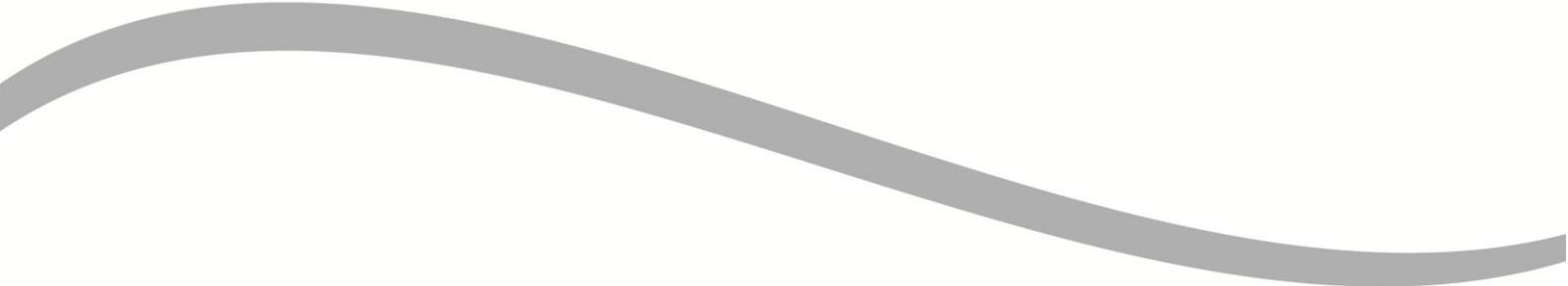
# HILLINGDON

LONDON

- consideration will need to be given to any ongoing civil or criminal proceedings and the implications for rules of evidence, etc
- for legal and practical reasons, permission for children to attend conferences should be sought from their parents
- consideration will need to be given to parental participation and any conflicts of interest which may impact on the young person's participation
- where there is a conflict of interest, the attendance of adults with parental responsibility will take precedence over that of the child. The child's involvement will preferably not be curtailed by parental veto however, and the type of involvement chosen may solve this problem in some cases
- consideration will need to be given as to whether or not a closed section will be required and how this will be explained to the young person
- any special needs arising from language, culture, disability
- that the venue is booked allowing sufficient time for pre-conference discussions between Chair and young person as well as parents
- consideration should be given to the impact on the child of the formality of the Conference environment and any that appropriate adjustments made
- confirmation that the Social Worker will provide and explain all appropriate paperwork and information required to the young person

Any disputes will be resolved at Service Manager or Head of Service level.

## **6. ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

- assess the most appropriate form of the child's participation.
  - make contact with the Child Protection Adviser in sufficient time prior to Conference to adequately plan for the child's participation
  - provide all required paperwork and information in sufficient time to allow adequate preparation;
  - discuss with parents about the young person's involvement and how best this can be supported
  - discuss with parents about their participation and how this may impact on the young person's involvement.
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# HILLINGDON

LONDON

- present a young person's point of view as agreed by them in speech, written, drawn or other form, whether the young person chooses to be present or not.

## **7. ROLE OF THE CHILD PROTECTION ADVISER**

Where the Child Protection Advisor, who chairs the meeting, becomes aware that a young person wishes to attend a Conference, in consultation with the Social Worker concerned, they will ensure other attendees are advised.

Chairs will consult with the Social Worker and following this the young person about the proposed plan of attendance and to reiterate to the young person that their views will be clearly heard. However, these will be considered alongside other views in reaching any decision.

Chairs will consult with parents, if attending, in order to positively facilitate the proposed plan for the young person's attendance.

Chairs will deliver an opening statement which will advise Conference of the need for attendees to be mindful of their responsibilities in avoiding questioning the young person in a manner which would subject them to evidential enquiry or to hear, read or give new evidential facts. Chairpersons are responsible for facilitating introductions for young people, ensuring that language is appropriate and managing the process in a way that is not oppressive to the young person.

The Chair will be available following Conference to further advise the young person of the outcomes of the Conference if they so wish.

Additionally the Child Protection Adviser will:

- ensure that all appropriate information has been supplied;
- ensure the young person understands that information;
- help them explore how they wish their views to be expressed and/or represented;
- explore their concerns and anxieties;
- debrief the young person after the meeting;
- discuss with the young person their rights to be heard but that their view will be one of many



# HILLINGDON

LONDON

- assist and encourage the young person, if present, to express their views directly to Conference members in their chosen way.
- advise and facilitate the understanding of the young person regarding the Conference procedure, verbal or written content, or process as necessary.