**South Gloucestershire Practice Standards & Guidance for Child Protection Conferences – Guidance for Social Work Teams and Conference Chairs**

**This guidance should be followed by child protection chairs and social workers once a decision has been made that a child protection conference is required**

**Throughout the planning process it will be important to keep the core principles of Signs of Safety at the heart of the work:**

* **Working relationships are paramount**: to enable honest and respectful discussions of concerns and worries. Research shows that, irrespective of the type of intervention, professionals see better outcomes when they have a shared understanding with the family of what needs to change, agreement on what they are aiming to achieve and the family feel an affective bond with the worker.
* **Thinking critically**: to minimise error, a culture of shared reflective practice and a willingness to admit you may be wrong is needed. Risk assessment is a core task and requires constant balancing of the strengths and dangers in a family to avoid the common practice problems of drifting into an overly negative or positive view of the family.
* **Based on everyday experience**: assessment and safety planning is grounded in the everyday lived experience of the child.

South Gloucestershire use the Signs of Safety approach to child protection conferences – information is available to professionals, parents and carers and children and young people about this approach on the safeguarding board website and on Tri.X. (Attach Link)

Please also refer to ***‘How we chair initial child protection conferences’, and ‘How we chair review child protection conferences’,*** documents which set out how conferences are chaired in South Gloucestershire.

**Quality Standards for Child protection Chairs**

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| **Action** | | **Timescale** | **What does good look like?** |
|  | The Child Protection Conference team should be alerted to the need for an ICPC as soon as the outcome of the S47 investigation concludes that one is needed. The strategy discussion that agreed S47 is the date from which the 15 day timescale starts. The need for an ICPC aims to be communicated to the QARU by **day 5** of the S47.  A chair will be allocated by the QARU within **2 days** of notification  The strategy meeting record should be available within **72 hours** to meet statutory timescales, however good practice will be to aim for **one day** of the strategy meeting being held. If the Chair has concerns about threshold, they will discuss them with the team manager and record the outcome of this discussion on the child’s record. However, it should only be in exceptional circumstances that an ICPC is refused without Children’s Social Care’s agreement.  ICPCs must be held within **15 working days** of the strategy discussion. Where the timescale of 15 working days is not met the chair should ensure that Mosaic should include an entry from the Operational team to explain how the child has been safeguarded and the reasons for the delay. If a late referral to the QARU results in an ICPC going out of timescale a Quality Assurance Record will be sent to the relevant Service Manager | **By day 5 maximum**  **Within 2 days**  **Within 72 hours maximum**  **15 working days** | Having minutes available will enable the Chair’s consideration of the threshold and concerns  Conferences are held within required timescale without delay |
|  | The social worker should liaise with **the chair** and reach agreement on the following:   * Relevant professionals & family members to be invited to the conference * Discuss what would help family members participate fully in the process, such as interpreters, seating arrangements, clarifying if all family members can be present at the same time (this may be particularly important where domestic violence/abuse is a feature between parents), visual aids or any other aspect that may prevent them being fully involved or able to contribute. * Any special arrangements for the conference- e.g. confidential information * Whether the child/young person should be invited - **the chair** will make the final decision on a child’s attendance. (see Criteria on child’s attendance on the SGSCB procedures). If this is agreed, they should know in advance of the conference if they will attend and whether they need an advocate. If attending, the chair should clarify with the social worker what information will be available to the child both before and during the conference. If the child is not attending, consideration should be given to an advocate attending on their behalf. Children over 10 are automatically referred to ‘Reconstruct’ the advocacy service, but they can opt out. * Issues of concern relating to the conference – for eg risks of challenging behaviour, risks from one person to another, special needs or medical issues for the family * The social worker will confirm with the chair if child care is being provided for children not attending the conference * All siblings will be considered at the initial conference even if concerns relate to only one child in the family. If conference decides only one child needs to be on a plan, that child will be the focus of future conferences.   **The chair** will confirm that they will meet the parents 20 minutes before the conference. If the child is attending, the chair needs to establish if the child can be seen together with parents in advance of the conference, or if the child would like to be seen alone/with an advocate. | **At least one week before the ICPC** | Good planning will lead to more effective conferences and good involvement of children young people and their families |
|  | The conference service will send out invitations.  The conference service will send a referral to Reconstruct Advocacy Service requesting and advocate for children 10 years and over  When inviting the parents/young person to the conference, they should be provided with the Child Protection Information for parents and carers leaflet/children & young people leaflet | **Within 1 working day** |  |
|  | **In preparation** for the ICPC, the Chair will read key documents including the strategy discussion minutes, the S47 assessment and relevant history from the Child’s record including the chronology, genogram, previous plans – particularly if the child has been subject of a child protection plan before.  The chair will also read the social workers report which should be submitted **two days before** conference. The chair will read all agency reports prior to all CP Conferences. The chair should escalate any issues of reports not being submitted in a timely manner to senior managers of the relevant organisations.  If one or other parent has been advised not to attend conference the chair will try to ensure that they meet with the absent parent in advance of the conference. | **In advance of the conference**  **Two days before conference** | Chairs will be well prepared for conferences |
|  | **The day of the conference**  The conference chair and notetaker should arrive for the conference at least **45 minutes before** the start of the conference in case of any last-minute issues, late reports to be read. Longer will be required if the child is attending and wishes to be seen alone.  The Chair meets with the parents and young person at least **20 minutes** before the Child Protection Conference. They may meet with the child and independent advocate/supporter separately from the parents if required.  The chair goes through the agenda and briefly explains the potential categories of Child Protection Plan which the child could be made subject of. (NB the child’s Social Worker should already have discussed this with the family). The Chair checks out everyone’s understanding of the Conference process and discusses any concerns they have. These discussions will be recorded by the conference chair on the minutes of the conference (child’s file) and will include parental and child’s views. | **As indicated** | Parents and young people are supported to participate and engage with the conference |
|  | Conferences should always **start on time** – unless Health and Safety issues prevent this. Conferences are highly stressful for parents (and for some professionals) and so the start should not be delayed.  Conference Chairs should refer to the Document – ***‘How we chair initial child protection conferences’*** for a clear outline of how child protection conferences will run using Signs of Safety. | **On time** | Conferences will enable the maximum engagement and participation of families |
|  | **Conference recommendations and next steps**  At the end of all the discussions about strengths and dangers, the chair will ask the social worker to present the safety plan that they have been working on with the family.  If a family safety plan hasn’t been brought to conference, next steps will always include the formulation of one. Next steps will also include the family identifying their safety network, and agree how they will be involved and communicated with and words and pictures with the child and family  The chair will ask participants to say what they can contribute to help achieve the outcomes and to commit to **clear and achievable timescales** for any tasks.  If they have already developed a family safety plan then next steps should include   1. Family will follow their family safety plan (Shared with social worker) 2. Talk about the safety network, is it strong enough? 3. Words and pictures   There will also be discussion about any other next steps e.g. mental health services, alcohol services. | **At conference** | Safety planning will have the full engagement of the family |
|  | **Scaling and Decision Making**  A safety scale should be created matched with **each** danger statement and safety goal (no more than 4 danger statements and safety goals).  The chair will ask everybody in conference to give a score and ask what they need to see for the score to move in a positive direction. | **At conference** | Scaling will assist in good decision making and family understanding about the scale of concerns |
|  | **Contingency Planning**  If necessary the chair will facilitate a discussion as to what will happen if things do not change or become worse for the child. Using terms such as seeking legal advice is not clear enough for families and professionals must explain in full why they would seek legal advice, for what purpose and the potential outcome. | **At conference** | The family are aware of this and what this would entail for them and their child. |
|  | **Conference decision**  Chair asks social worker for their recommendation for a child protection plan or child in need plan. If a Child protection plan is chosen, they will be asked under which category (neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse).  Then the chair checks the views of all the other professionals in the room. If a professional formally dissents to the majority view they will be asked to give their reason so that they are recorded in the minutes. The chair will make the final decision on the recommendation  Chair clarifies members of the core group, who will continue to develop and review the safety plan with the family.  **Chairs rationale**  Chair summarises the reasons for plan decision and records their views.    **In summary – by the end of the conference the Chair will:**   * **Finalise the Danger Statement and Safety Goals** * **Ensure there are clear outcomes recorded for the child** * **Make a clear SMART Plan** * **Identify a realistic Contingency Plan** | **At conference** | Safety Statement and Goals are clear to all by the conclusion of the conference |
|  | **Following the plan:**   * 1. The Chair will ensure that a Core Group membership is agreed   2. The date of the first Core Group is set, and is recorded in the minutes.   3. The frequency of social work visits to the child should be stipulated in the Conference by the Chair, and recorded. The level of social work visiting should be informed by the presenting level of need, but no less than every **10 working days.**   4. Core groups should then be at **6 weekly intervals.**   5. The conference chair will provide the family and children, and the team manager or social worker with feedback forms to complete in order to feed back on the conference. | **First core group within 10 days of conference, then 6 weekly**  **Social work visits no less than every 10 working days** | Follow up to conference will be rigorous and within the set intervals |
|  | **After the ICPC**  The Chair should ensure that the Conference decisions are loaded onto Mosaic system within **24 hours** and the notes are circulated within **7 working days** of the Conference. The record will be written in family friendly language.  The minutes and outline Child Protection Plan is loaded onto MOSAIC by the conference chair **within 5 days** following conference.  The chair should carry out a review of the progress of the CP Plan between review conferences. This to involve as a minimum:   * Review of Child’s Mosaic records * Discussion with social worker or manager (which could be by e mail if there are no specific concerns)   The chair should record the review onto Mosaic as a Mid-way review.  If the CP Plan is not progressing the chair should discuss with their manager if they should raise an escalation to the appropriate social work manager and should be alerted to any significant changes between review conferences. | **As indicated** | All participants can understand the record of the conference which is accurate and produced in a timely way.  Follow up to conference will be rigorous and within the set intervals |
|  | **Review Child Protection Conferences**  Review conferences should take place at the set intervals.  The chair must ensure that during the Child Protection Review Conferences, discussion about the original risks, as outlined in the Child Protection Plan takes place, ensuring there is a thorough assessment of whether those original risks are still relevant.  The social work report should be provided to the conference chair in advance of the review conference.  Following the checklist, Chairs need to ensure that the minimum visiting frequency standard of visiting by the social worker is monitored, reviewed and recorded at each Review  Core group activity in implementing and reviewing the plan should also be monitored and reviewed at each Conference.  Consideration needs to be given to what is working well with the agreed safety plan and whether it keeping the child safe, whether it has increased safety for the child and brought us nearer to the agreed safety goal.  The chair will ensure that professionals use their judgement and engage in SOS scaling tool at the end of the review conferences. | **3 months after ICPC. Subsequent conferences every 6 months.**  **At least 5 days before**  **At least every 10 working days** | Review conferences will be within set timescales and will thoroughly review progress and impact of the plan on the children’s wellbeing and safety |
|  | If the child is no longer to be subject of a child protection plan, again as above, in most circumstances further support will be required to prevent a recurrence of concerns and to secure progress. Families are not required to take up the offer of support but best practice will be to encourage families to do so.  Again, in most circumstances, the support plan is likely to be a Child in Need Plan, but in some circumstances an Early Help Plan may be appropriate (or there is an SGO support plan which will have been agreed at Court)  The drafted plan will be used as the basis of the Child in Need and a first CIN review meeting should be set at the conclusion of the review conference. In some circumstances an early help plan will be required instead, and this will be agreed at conference. | CIN /Early Help Plan offered to families for a minimum of **3 months** | Following up CP plans with a period of CIN intervention will help to ensure sustainability of the plan. |
|  | **Changes in conference dates or arrangements**  Conferences should not be delayed or postponed. This is important in respecting parents and young people, given the stress conferences bring. In exceptional circumstances, if a postponement is requested, this must be agreed with the social work service manager and the chair.  Where a child is likely to be subject to a plan beyond 2 years the case must be brought to the attention of the relevant Head of Service and the QARU manager. | **As indicated** | Conferences should not be delayed or changed  If children’s lives are not improving under a child protection conference, drift must be challenged and addressed |

**Quality Standards for Social Workers and Team Managers**

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| **Action** | | **Timescale** | **What does good look like?** |
|  | **Preparation: Before the ICPC**  The social worker should alert the Child Protection Conference team of the need for an ICPC **as soon as** the S47 investigation has concluded that a conference is required, but no later than **day 5** of the S47.  The strategy meeting record that agreed S47 was required should be available within **72 hours** to meet statutory timescales, however good practice will be to aim for **one day** of the strategy meeting being held. The meeting record does not need to be completed for the social worker to alert the QARU team about the need for conference.  The strategy meeting record should be signed off by the team manager  The social worker will ensure the child’s record and all relationships including professionals is up to date on Mosaic and send the invite list and family details to conference service by **day 5** at the maximum.  The social workers should ensure there is an up to date genogram and chronology on file.  ICPCs must be held within **15 working days** of the strategy discussion that agreed S47 was required. Where the timescale of 15 working days the social worker should record how the child has been safeguarded and the reasons for the delay. This should be signed off by the manager.  **The Social Worker prepares for the conference using the Genogram (which will be displayed on wall at initial conference), case mapping, danger statements and safety goals, safety plan, draft timeline/trajectory.** | **Day 5**  **Within 72 hours maximum**  **Day 5**  **15 working days**  **Within 15 working days of strategy discussion** | The ICPC is requested as quickly as possible to ensure they proceed within timescales. Records should be up to date.  Preparation for conference means families know the concerns and have participated in setting safety goals ahead of conference  The social worker will have worked in a clear and straightforward way with the family ahead of conference making it very clear what the concerns are and working with the family to agree danger statements and safety goals. |
|  | The **social worker** should liaise with the chair in advance of the conference and reach agreement on the following:   * Relevant professionals & family members to be invited to the conference * Discuss what would help family members participate fully in the process, such as interpreters, seating arrangements, clarifying if all family members can be present at the same time (this may be particularly important where domestic violence/abuse is a feature between parents), visual aids or any other aspect that may prevent them being fully involved or able to contribute. * Any special arrangements for the conference- e.g. confidential information * Whether the child/young person should be invited - **the chair** will make the final decision on a child’s attendance. (see Criteria on child’s attendance on the SGSCB procedures). If this is agreed, they should know in advance of the conference if they will attend and whether they need an advocate. If attending, the chair should clarify with the social worker what information will be available to the child both before and during the conference. If the child is not attending, consideration should be given to an advocate attending on their behalf. Children over 10 are automatically referred to ‘Reconstruct’ the advocacy service, but they can opt out. * Issues of concern relating to the conference – for eg risks of challenging behaviour, risks from one person to another, special needs or medical issues for the family * The Social work team should arrange child care if family are unable to do so and inform the conference chair of the arrangements. * All siblings will be considered at the initial conference even if concerns relate to only one child in the family. If conference decides only one child needs to be on a plan, that child will be the focus of future conferences. * The chair will confirm their arrangements to see parents and children prior to conference. | **At least one week before the conference** | Good planning will lead to more effective conferences and good involvement of children young people and their families |
|  | **The Social Worker’s Report**   * A chronology which includes the impact on the child of events, and clear family risks and needs details should inform the conference report in addition to mutually agreed danger statements and safety goals and scaling questions. The social worker needs to prepare these if they are not currently on file. A genogram should be prepared with the family which includes people in their support network and enlarged so it can be displayed on the wall at the Initial conference. Danger Statements and safety Goals should be supported by suggested trajectory and timelines for interventions, with suggested actions or activities that would potentially mitigate the risks. * The social work report should be written using the Signs of Safety format – (CP5) * The report should be quality assured and signed off by the social workers manager before sharing with parents * The report must then be shared with both parents/carers before the Conference, and their views added, unless there is a clearly recorded reason for not doing so. It should be recorded in observations that the report has been shared with parents). Any significant changes following sharing with parents to be shared again with team manager.   The report is sent to the Child Protection conference chair (to comply with LSCB procedures) | **At least three days before the conference.**  **At least two days before**  **To Chair two days before** | The report needs to reflect this work and must be quality assured by the team manager, shared with parents and submitted to conference chair in good time. |
|  | **The day of the conference**  Conferences should start on time and the social worker is responsible for doing all they can to ensure this can happen.  Conferences should not be cancelled without the express permission of the Social Workers Service Manager or in their absence, the QARU Manager  Social workers should meet parents on arrival at conference venue and introduce them to the chair. (The chair will meet parents at least 20 minutes before the conference)  See **‘How we chair initial child protection conferences’** for a brief outline of how conferences will run. | **As indicated** | Conferences will be respectful of families and will run on time and will be conducted to ensure parents and where relevant children & young people can participate |
|  | **Conference recommendations and the next steps**  At the end of all the discussions about strengths and dangers, the Social worker will present the safety plan that they have been working on with the family. This will cover:   * What else needs to happen to ensure this child’s safety? * Are there any other important things that we have missed in the Plan? * How has this safety plan been explained and communicated to the child/ren?   If a family safety plan hasn’t been brought to conference, next steps will always include the formulation of one. Next steps will also include the family identifying their safety network, and agree how they will be involved and communicated with and words and pictures with the child and family.  If they have already developed a safety plan:   1. Family will follow their family safety plan (Shared with social worker) 2. Talk about the safety network, is it strong enough? 3. Words and pictures   There will also be discussion about any other next steps e.g. mental health services, alcohol services. | **At conference** | The plan to address the concerns will be very clear to all by the conclusion of the conference |
|  | **Scaling and decision making**  A safety scale should be created matched with **each** danger statement and safety goal (no more than 4 danger statements and safety goals). The social worker should have talked to the family in advance of the conference about the extent of their worries. | **At conference** | Scaling will assist in good decision making and family understanding about the scale of concerns |
|  | **Contingency Planning**  The social worker should have a contingency plan to put into place if things do not change or become worse for the child. ‘Seek legal advice’ for example is not a contingency plan (although this may be required). The contingency plan should include what practical alternate arrangements will be made for the child/children should their situation deteriorate/change and they not be able to remain at home. The contingency plan should be confirmed at the conference | **In place prior to conference** | The family are aware of this and what this would entail for them and their child. Uncertainty and distress is avoided for the children if the plan does not work |
|  | **Conference decision**  Chair asks social worker for their recommendation for a child protection plan or child in need plan. They will be asked what category if a Child protection plan is chosen (neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse)  Then the chair checks the views of all the other professionals in the room.  Chair clarifies members of the core group, who will continue to develop and review the safety plan with the family. | **At conference** | Conference decisions are clear about the primary concern |
|  | **Following the plan**  Should a child protection plan not be required, a child in need plan is likely to be put in place after the child protection conference.  If on a child protection plan, the social worker is responsible for all aspects of coordination of the plan. Detailed guidance is found on the Safeguarding Children Board Website under Child Protection Plan.   * The Core group for the CP plan is agreed at ICPC. * The date for the first core group (or CIN review meeting if the child is subject to a CIN plan) should also be set at the conclusion of the conference * The frequency of social work visiting should be informed by the presenting level of need * Core groups should then be at 6 weekly intervals. * The conference chair will provide the child and family, and team manager or social worker with feedback forms and envelopes in order to provide written feedback at the end of the conference.   Social Workers should keep Child Protection Chairs aware of any key events once the child is subject of a plan. This includes any missing episodes, significant incidents, and CSE risks (including being sent any completed SERAFs). | **CIN plan should be in place for at least 6 weeks**  **First core group within 10 days of conference**  **Social work visits no less than every 10 working days** | Follow up to conference will be rigorous and within the set intervals |
|  | **Review Child Protection Conference**  The first review conference should take place no more than **3 months** after the ICPC. Subsequent conferences take place every **6 months**.  The social work report should be written and quality assured by the team manager at least **10 days** **before** the conference.  The report should be shared with parents carers/young person at **least 7 days before the review** to allow for their challenge and factual accuracy to be addressed.  The report should be finally signed off by the manager and sent to the conference chair at least **5 days before** the conference.  Review reports should include the most up to date Plan and progress made with implementing it, from the most recent Core Group meeting. The contingency plan should also be reviewed.  The report asks for analysis of what is working well and what we are worried about and any complicating factors, the progress to date and next steps. Practice guidance on tips and pitfalls in assessment can be found on Tri.X.  If the recommendation is for the ending of a child protection plan the social worker must inform the conference **service at least 10 days before the conference** so that they can ensure the relevant agencies are present, for example the police who do not attend routine review conferences, and that the conference is quorate.  If the recommendation is for the ending of a plan at the initial review i.e 3 months the social worker and team manager should seek the agreement of the service manager and include this in the report to conference.  Recommendations: This should include a recommendation of whether the child needs to continue to be subject of a child protection plan.  If the child is to be made subject of a CP plan, the first core group meeting should be set at the end of the conference. For initial conferences, the core group should be within **10 working days** of initial conference. Subsequent core groups will be 6 weekly.  If the child is no longer to be subject of child protection plan, in most circumstances further support will be required to prevent a recurrence of concerns and to secure progress.  **Families are not required to take up the offer of support but best practice will be to encourage families to do so.**  In most circumstances, the support plan is likely to be a Child in Need Plan, but in some circumstances an Early Help Plan may be more appropriate (or there is an SGO support plan which will have been agreed at Court)  The drafted plan will be used as the basis of the Child in Need (or Early Help Plan) plan and a first CIN /EH review meeting should be set at the conclusion of the review conference, which should be within **20 working days.** In some circumstances an early help plan will be required instead, and this will be agreed at conference.  If the plan is to change to a CIN or Early Help Plan and the family agree, this should be briefly formulated at the end of the conference and agreed by all agencies. | **As indicated** | Review conferences will be within set timescales and will thoroughly review progress and impact of the plan on the children’s wellbeing and safety |
|  | **Changes in conference dates or arrangements**  Conferences should not be delayed or postponed. This is important in respecting parents and young people, given the stress conferences bring. In exceptional circumstances, if a postponement is requested, this must be agreed with the social work service manager and the chair. |  | Conferences should not be delayed or changed |
|  | **Reviewing the Plan from third review conference**  Where children are subject of a CP plan beyond the 2nd review, and the professional view is there is little likelihood of them being removed from a plan at the 3rd review the case should be reviewed prior to that conference with the Team Manager in supervision and discussed at the 3rd review conference.  Where a child is likely to be subject to a plan beyond 2 years the case must be brought to the attention of the relevant Head of Service and the QARU manager. | **As indicated** | If children’s lives are not improving under a child protection conference, drift must be challenged and addressed |