



CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES – SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN UNIT

Decision to Place in Secure Accommodation on Welfare Grounds

Consultation

At the point that it is determined that a placement in secure accommodation on welfare grounds may be required, and throughout the subsequent process of identification, planning and placement, the social worker must consult and take account of the views of a range of people. To aide this process Surrey County Council holds an “At Risk of Secure” meeting. This meeting acts as an important check and balance in this area of complex decision making and also ensures that the planning is legally compliant whilst also hearing and responding to the voice of the child and their family in devising the plan.

This procedure is not relevant to circumstances where urgent approval is being sought to safeguard a child or young person.

The At Risk of Secure meeting should be chaired by the Assistant Director and should involve the following people:

- a. The child;
- b. The child's parents and those with Parental Responsibility;
- c. Anyone who is not a parent but has been caring for the child;
- d. Other members of the child's family who are significant to the child;
- e. The child's social worker
- f. The child's school and/or the Education Service;
- g. The Designated Youth Offending Manager if the child is known to them or Police;
- h. The child's Independent Visitor or advocate if appointed;
- i. Independent Reviewing Officers.
- j. A representative of the Placement Team
- k. Local Authority Solicitor

I. Family Services representative where the child was known.

There are a range of circumstances which At Risk of Secure Meetings may be considered helpful in shaping the safety plan for a child or young person who presents as at risk. Concerns may be raised by a social worker; residential worker; police officer; Independent Reviewing Officer, Child Protection Chair or the child's parent or carer. An At Risk of Secure Meeting can assist in planning where workers, managers or family members feel "stuck" and previous steps to keep the child safe have been exhausted and not resulted in the risk to the child or young person being reduced.

Any concerns raised for the safety of a child or young person where they are believed to be a risk to themselves or others and they are absconding from where they live, should be taken very seriously. Each concern raised should be formally discussed and recorded in supervision.

An At Risk of Secure Meeting is an important meeting which could potentially be disclosed to the Court. More importantly this is a key document where decisions are made about a child's or young person's safety and planning. Learning from Serious Case Reviews and other types of reviews often highlight that it is difficult retrospectively to pin point where key decisions are made. Therefore, formal notes need to be made of this meeting and these need to be stored on the child's record under "documents".

The steps required to request an At Risk of Secure Meeting are shown below:

Figure 1: How to request an At Risk of Secure Meeting

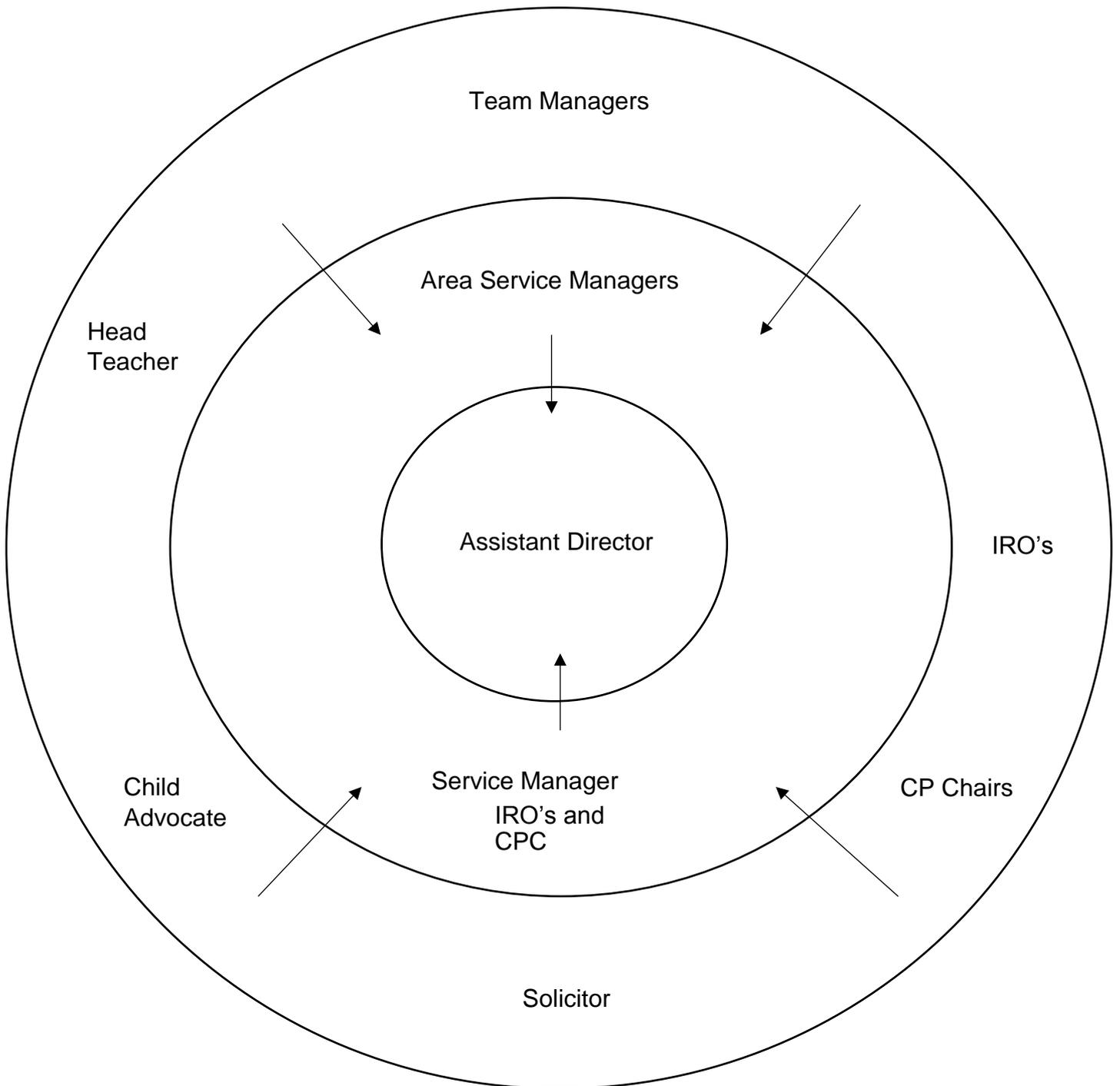
Figure 1:



Any formal requests for an At Risk of Secure Meeting need to come from the relevant Assistant Director as shown in the Figure below:

Figure 2:

Hierarchy wheel for seeking an At Risk of Secure Meeting (AROS)



2.2 Recommendations

To seek the approval at the At Risk of Secure meeting, the child's social worker must prepare a written report with the following information:

- The child's name, address, date of birth, ethnicity, school and names of those with Parental Responsibility;
- The grounds/concerns/criteria/aims of the proposed secure placement;
- The evidence that the criteria are met;
- What alternatives have been tried/considered and the outcomes;
- The view of the child and the parents;
- Case chronology;
- The comments of the Head of Service.

The At Risk of Secure meeting will follow the agenda items as set out below (Set agenda shown in Appendix 2):

1. What are the current risks?
2. What is the voice of the children and their carers/family?
3. What alternatives have been comprehensively considered and rejected?
4. Does the child or young person meet the legal Criteria for secure placements as set out Appendix 1?
5. What are the clear aims and objectives of such a placement?
6. What will the step down plan be once the aims of the placement have been achieved?
7. What is the contingency plan if a secure placement is not agreed or available?

The outcomes of the At Risk of Secure Meeting:

There are 4 potential outcomes from an At Risk of Secure Meeting that the Panel can recommend:

1. The child does not require a Secure placement and can remain in the care of his or her parents with a robust safety plan, supported by the actions of the multi agency group of professionals.
2. The child does not require a Secure placement and can remain in the care of his or her carers or in their residential placement with a robust safety plan, supported by the multi agency group of professionals supporting the family.
3. The child requires an immediate 24 hours secure placement and agreement is required from the Director of Children Services
4. The child requires a secure placement to secure their safety and this needs to happen imminently via an application to the Court.

Where there is a decision to proceed to placing a child or young person in a secure setting the Assistant Director will seek agreement with regards the next steps from the Director and will ensure that this decision is recorded in the child's records in "Case notes". The social worker will be responsible for ensuring the minutes of the meeting are uploaded in "Documents".

3. Children aged under 13 years old

In relation to a child under 13, the approval of the Secretary of State will also be required. After the approval of the Director has been obtained, a written request should immediately be sent to the Secretary of State and the outcome clearly recorded on the child's record.

Some initial information will be taken over the phone, such as the name and date of birth of the child concerned, and written documentation will be requested. This should be submitted without delay, where possible, by e-mail or by fax.

This written documentation will include the following:

- A full written history/chronology of the child and whether the child is with the local authority or absent;

- A view of the likelihood that a Court would find that the criteria for restriction of liberty are satisfied and an indication of when the local authority is intending to go to Court to obtain a Secure Accommodation Order;
- An explanation of why secure accommodation is the only appropriate method of dealing with the child and whether a bed in secure accommodation has been arranged;
- An indication of the alternatives to secure accommodation that have been considered and why these have been rejected;
- The aims and objectives of the secure placement;
- A copy of a contemporary Care Plan which includes a prospective exit strategy from secure accommodation; and
- A written agreement - signed by the Designated Manager - to seek the Secretary of State's approval.

The Department for Education will discuss this information with appropriate inspectors at the Regulatory Authority, who will make a recommendation as to whether the Secretary of State's approval should be given. The Department for Education will then consider and advise the local authority of the Secretary of State's decision.

Local authorities should ensure that, in order to expedite early decisions, applications for the Secretary of State's approval are made during office hours. However, where in exceptional circumstances this is not possible, the local authority should telephone the Out of Hours Duty Officer at the Department for Education.

This procedure is not designed in emergency situations where permission is being sought to place a child or young person in secure for 72 hours with the agreement of the Executive Director.

Appendix 1 – The Welfare Criteria

Section 25 of the Children Act 1989 sets out the 'welfare' criteria which must be met before a Child in Care may be placed in secure accommodation.

The 'welfare' criteria are that:

- The child has a history of absconding and is likely to abscond from any other description of accommodation; and
- If the child absconds, (s)he is likely to suffer Significant Harm; or
- If the child is kept in any other description of accommodation (s)he is likely to injure her/himself or others.

Appendix 2 - At Risk of Secure Meeting Agenda

Date:

Child/Young Person

Attendees:

1. What are the current risks?
 2. What are we worried about?
 3. What is the voice of the children and their carers/family?
 4. What alternatives have been comprehensively considered and rejected?
 5. Does the child or young person meet the legal Criteria for secure placements as set out Appendix 1?
 6. What are the clear the aims and objectives of such a placement.
 7. What will the step down plan be once the aims of the placement once the aims have been achieved?
 8. What is the contingency plan if a secure placement is not agreed or available?
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