

Children's Services

Standards for Chairing Child Protection Conferences

“Dorset Children Thrive because we put children at the heart of everything we do”

Purpose

These are the standards for Chairing Child Protection Conferences to be followed by Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers (QAROs).

These standards govern the preparation for and conduct of Child Protection Conferences only. For standards governing the timescales for convening Child Protection Conferences, and the escalation of safeguarding concerns, please see:

[Practice Standards for Children's Social Work](#)

[Procedure for Escalation of Child in Need and Child Protection Cases](#)

The Standards

1. **Child Protection Conferences will be organised and prepared for in a timely manner.** The QARO will aim to ensure that risk to a child is managed in a way that doesn't cause unnecessary delay and meets the statutory timeline.
 - 1.1 A QARO will be allocated to a child and their family as soon as the appropriate documents have been signed off by the Team Manager, and before the Conference invites are sent out. Where the child and family have previously been allocated to a QARO, the QA Manager will re-allocate them to the same QARO if this is appropriate and practicable.
 - 1.2 The QARO will meet with the parents up to 24 hours before the conference and during this meeting the chair will:
 - Explain the full process.
 - Discuss how the child and/or family wish to be addressed.
 - Ensure that the child and/or family have they seen and understood the reports.
 - Ask the child and/or family what they understand the meeting is about and what progress has been made from their perspective.
 - Establish who family members wish to sit beside in the conference, and where would they like the others to be seated within the pre-arranged horseshoe.

- Agree with them how communication will take place if they are frustrated and how they can be facilitated to remain in the meeting wherever possible
 - Agree how the child/young person will be included in the meeting if appropriate.
 - Take into account the child's developmental abilities, understanding and language needs. (e.g. makaton/sign language/specialist technology or images).
 - The QARO will prepare the parent to talk about their child/ren as the person who knows their child/ren best during the meeting.
- 1.3 If a Child Protection Conference is being held virtually, the QARO will always have their camera on. The family members will have agreed how they will join the meeting, to allow them to view others within the meeting and to be seen themselves. Parents will be given the option, where it's appropriate, to attend a local office to be part of the Child Protection Conference.
- 1.4 The QARO will have contact with the Social Worker before the conference to give additional support or feedback about the report and timescale for this or to discuss any complex issues associated with the forthcoming conference.
- 1.5 The QARO will read the Social Worker report, and all other professional reports at least 24 hours before the start of the conference.
- 1.6 If parents haven't received the report, at least 24 hours before a conference then the QARO should decide whether to postpone the conference to allow family members to fully participate in the meeting. This will be done in conjunction with the Escalation Policy
- 1.7 The QARO will make sure that the conference starts on time so that there is good use of the time allocated for parents to follow discussion and the decision and for the plan to be completed in a way that doesn't feel rushed for the family.
- 1.8 The QARO will already be aware of any issues between the parents or other attendees that may prevent them from attending the conference at the same time and arrange for the conference to be held in two parts if needed; for example, where there may be issues of domestic abuse.
- 2. The Child Protection Conference will be chaired and managed in a way that ensures there is full inclusion of the child and their parents.**
- 2.1 During the conference, the QARO will ensure that the family are always treated sensitively and with respect by others in attendance.
- 2.2 The QARO will follow the same outline agenda in all conferences to ensure that families experience consistency.

- 2.3 The QARO will help conference attendees to be clear at the start of the conference what can and can't be achieved at the meeting.
- 2.4 Following the introduction, the parents will be supported to describe their child, the child's likes and dislikes and their progress. The QARO will have helped the parents to prepare for this in their pre-conference meeting (see 1.2 above).
- 2.5 Any decision made at the conference will be based on a good assessment and understanding of the child's needs.
- 2.6 If the child or young person is in attendance, they will not be exposed to information about their parents that will cause them to be scared, upset or worried.
- 2.7 Where the child or young person does not attend, the QARO will ensure the child's wishes and experiences are represented in the conference through an advocate or through their social worker.
- 2.8 The QARO will facilitate the child's views being shared in an appropriate way and ensure that the focus of the meeting is on the child.
- 2.9 The QARO will ensure that the conference attendees use language that is clear and respectful and doesn't include jargon or acronyms.
- 2.10 During review Conferences, the QARO will ensure that the focus is on progress and achieving the plan.
- 2.11 The QARO will hold professionals to account and ensure that they are robustly challenged if actions are not being taken or followed through.
- 3. A clear plan will be developed during the conference, that focuses on reducing the risk to the child.**
- 3.1 The plan produced during the conference will focus on what needs to be improved for the child and will be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART).
- 3.2 The QARO will ensure that all attending understand if the plan will be a Child Protection Plan, a Child in Need Plan or an Early Help Plan.
- 3.3 All professionals attending the conference should have prior knowledge of the criteria for adopting a Child Protection Plan.
- 3.4 The QARO will work with the Social Worker to support them to include points for a plan in their report; this will help parents to understand what needs to be achieved.
- 3.5 The parents will be supported to identify what they need from professionals to facilitate the change that is needed for them and their child/ren.

- 3.6 The QARO will ensure that consideration is given to the child's extended family, and how they may be able to support the child and their parents in reducing the risk or to offer practical or emotional support to the parents, for example through a Family Group Conference.
- 3.7 The QARO will ensure that the conference is clear about how the plan will be developed and reviewed during the core group meetings or other reviews where appropriate. They will also make clear who will attend the core group meetings or Child in Need meetings.
- 3.8 There will be a clear contingency considered and included within the plan that explores the strengths within the formal and informal network.
- 3.9 The QARO will identify the best process to manage risk, when the concerns are of a Contextual Safeguarding nature, they will refer to the Dorset Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) process and a multi-agency decision will be made about these working instead of, or alongside the Child Protection Process depending on the level of risk assessed.
- 4. The QARO will ensure that following the conference parents, professionals, and young people are informed of the decisions and the plan of action.**
- 4.1 Where a parent has not attended a Child Protection Conference, they will be informed about the decision and plan from the conference within 24 hours. This communication will be part of the plan.
- 4.2 The MOSAIC alert will be updated immediately following a conference, this ensures that when services respond to a child in the community, then any vulnerabilities are flagged where needed.
- 4.3 The decision and plan agreed in the conference will be sent out within 1 working day¹ via secure email to parents and professionals, save where it has been agreed as part of the plan that an individual should not be so informed.
- 4.4 The QARO will ensure that the first review is planned within 3 months of the Initial Child Protection Conference, and that further reviews are always held within statutory timescales. Timescales for core group meetings are given in the [Standards for Children's Social Work Practice](#).
- 4.5 The QARO may decide that a full review period is not necessary if there is evidence of good progress on the plan, or the plan is not effective and the risk

¹ See [Child Protection Conferences \(proceduresonline.com\)](#) *The outline plan, signed by the conference Chair, should be sent together with the decision letter, to all those who attended or were invited to the conference, including the parents and where appropriate the child, within 1 working day of the conference.*

is increasing, and may agree early reviews in discussion with the family and other professionals.

4.6 If a Young person becomes 'looked after' by Dorset Children's Services, then the QARO will ensure that the CP plan is brought to an end through an early review or other means of notification to ensure that a child and their family only have one type of plan in place.

4.7 The minutes from all conferences will be sent out to all attendees within 20 working days. The QARO will check these minutes and ensure that confidential information is only included where appropriate.

5. The QARO will provide quality assurance for the child protection process, so that we continually improve our practice with children who are subject to a child protection plan.

5.1 In the event that there are concerns about the practice of any professional that impacts upon the progress being made for the child, then the QARO will use the Escalation Policy so that there is no delay in Child Protection.

5.2 The QARO will liaise with the social worker during the review period to establish progress and ensure that a Child Protection Plan doesn't remain in place unnecessarily (for example, where intervention escalates, and a child becomes looked after by the local authority).

5.3 The QARO will review the core group meetings and progress of the plan through those meetings prior to the review Child Protection Conference.

5.4 The QARO will monitor the completion and quality of a child's chronology on Mosaic and escalate their concerns about the impact of ongoing risk where appropriate.

5.5 The QARO will attend other professional meetings as required by the social worker/Team Manager during the course of the child protection period.