



Multi-Agency Escalation Policy

The Resolution of Inter-Agency Disagreements about Safeguarding Children

Introduction

The role of an effective partnership is to scrutinise and challenge multi-agency working and the escalation of matters that cause issues on the ground is an essential part of the business of the HSCP and its sub-groups and supports assurance that there is strong and collaborative multi-agency working and improved outcomes for the child.

Occasionally situations arise when professional within one agency feel that the actions, inaction, or decisions of another agency do not adequately safeguard a child. All professionals have a duty to act assertively and proactively to ensure that a child's welfare is paramount in all professional activity, and they must challenge each other where they are concerned that practice is placing children at risk of harm.

Effective working together depends on an open approach, clarity of roles and responsibilities and genuine, and honest, relationships between agencies. Escalation is a process of formally challenging a decision made by professionals and is a means of resolving differences which is an integral part of joint working to continue to safeguard the welfare of children and young people.

Purpose

The policy has been developed to support all agencies who are members of the Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP) to resolve significant strategic and operational professional differences that could impact on the welfare and safety of children and young people. All agencies are responsible for communicating and resolving professional disputes as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) and the Pan London Child Protection Procedures (2020).

As the policy is for use by all partners in relation to inter-agency issues, the same timescales and escalation period should apply across all agencies (*although it should be noted that the structural hierarchies may be slightly different in different organisations*). This policy has drawn on the escalation policies of high performing authorities.

The policy is not designed to replace escalation and complaint processes established within individual partner agencies.

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Definitions

Strategic partnership issues – For the purpose of the policy, the definition of strategic partnership issues, is any matter that has a serious impact on the effectiveness of the HSCP and is likely to relate to roles and responsibilities, professional standards, communication and commitment to partnership working.

Operational professional disagreement - The definition of professional disagreement relates to any issue that is likely to or has affected the safety and welfare of a child or young person. It relates to case working and any issues that are identified through the HSCP quality assurance process e.g. case audits and an investigation of a serious incident.

Resolution

Professionals should feel confident to raise concerns and be supported to address issues that arise when there are conflicting professional judgments at an early stage.

Disagreements are most likely to arise around (*this is not an exhaustive list*):

- Levels of need, thresholds and referrals
- Action or inaction by another professional
- Assessment and differences in professional analysis
- Decision making for example Child Protection Conference outcome
- Service provision
- Roles and responsibilities
- Progressing plans
- Communication and information sharing

Professional disagreement can be positive, as challenge allows for review and can develop creative ways of working. However, disagreements can impact negatively on positive working relationships and consequently on the ability to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Disagreements always require resolution and should be addressed quickly to ensure the child is protected and to avoid issues becoming complex and entrenched.

Principles

All agencies across the partnership have agreed to work in a culture of genuine partnership working and have committed to the following principles:

- The safety and wellbeing of individual children and young people is the paramount consideration in any effective challenge and escalation.
- Effective challenge is a positive action.
- Practitioners should take responsibility for their own cases and actions.
- Any disagreements between agencies should be resolved as simply and quickly as possible.
- Practitioners should respect the views of others, whatever their level of experience, the role they fulfil or agency they represent.

- Practitioners and managers should always be prepared to review decisions and plans with an open mind.

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- Working together effectively depends on resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies, with a genuine commitment to partnership working.
- Ensuring that there is clarity about roles and responsibilities through governance, policies, procedures and practice frameworks.
- Encouraging open and honest communication, based on mutual respect for other partners' expertise, experience and organisational restraints.

When any professional considers a child is at risk of imminent significant harm, they must ensure that their concerns are escalated on the same working day using established safeguarding procedures.

Process

Professionals should attempt to resolve differences through discussion within ONE WORKING WEEK or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less)

Stage 1: Professional engagement and challenge (Day 0-5 or less)

In cases where professionals consider a child to be at **imminent** risk of significant harm, concerns must be escalated to their manager/supervisor and/or safeguarding lead on the same working day.

In cases where there are concerns, but the child is not considered to be at an immediate risk of significant harm, professionals should, in the first instance, attempt to resolve differences or concerns through telephone discussion and/or by face to face meeting with the relevant practitioner/agency within 5 working days or a within a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

The person raising a concern must always record the following information and a copy of it must be kept on the records of the child subject of the concern. When the concern is escalated, this written information must be provided:

- Name of the child
- Name of practitioner and agency with whom there is a concern
- Brief description of nature of concern and action already taken to resolve the issue
- Outcome sought; any agreed outcome must be placed on the child's records.

There may be instances where disparity in perceived status or experience may inhibit the ability of some professionals to resolve the disagreement without support.

Stage 2: Involving the Line Manager (Day 5-10 or less)

If the professionals are unable to resolve the matter as outlined in stage 1, the concern must be escalated to their line manager within 24 hours and a resolution should be achieved within 5 working days or a within a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

Where concerns are escalated to a line manager, they should be discussed with their counterpart in the other agency. Respective parties must identify explicitly what the problem is and have absolute clarity about the nature of the professional challenge

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and what each professional aim to achieve. **Line managers must always consider convening a professionals meeting if necessary.**

The outcome of discussions, resolution or actions agreed must be recorded. If the concerns remain unresolved it must also be recorded and escalated to Stage 3 and the organisation safeguarding representative.

Where a child is subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP) or a Looked After Child (LAC) the Child Protection Chair or Independent Reviewing Officer must also be notified.

Stage 3: Agency Safeguarding Leads (Day 10-15 or less)

If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between the line managers as outlined in stage 2, the issue must be escalated to their Team Manager, relevant safeguarding leads or Named or Designated safeguarding lead for the agencies concerned within 24 hours.

At this stage the safeguarding leads must work together to consider a strategy to resolve the matter and will communicate the outcome to the individuals and agencies involved. This should be achieved within 5 working days or within a timescale that protects a child from harm.

Stage 4: Head of Service (and if health involvement CCG Designated Safeguarding Professional) (Day 15 – 22 or less)

If a satisfactory resolution to the concern cannot be achieved at stage 3, the safeguarding leads will escalate the matter to the Head of Service or equivalent within their agency within 2 working days or a within a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

Senior safeguarding representatives from respective organisations should review the discussions and actions take throughout stages 1 to 3 and provide clear leadership advice and guidance in order to find a solution to resolve the matter and ensure that it is clearly communicated to the professionals involved and actioned quickly. This should be achieved within 5 working days or within a timescale that protects a child from harm.

Stage 5: resolution by Hounslow Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSCP)

If it has not been possible to resolve professional differences in the steps outlined above and/or the discussion raises significant policy issues, the Head of Service or Designated Safeguarding Lead will refer the matter to the HSCP for resolution within 28 days or less, depending on urgency.

The Independent Advisor of the HSCP should be approached to Chair a meeting of the most senior managers with operational responsibility for the case or convene a conflict resolution panel within 1 month of being notified or within a timescale that is

appropriate for the issue. This meeting will review the issues at hand and provide a final opportunity for the involved agencies to ensure that there is a full understanding of the issues before the decision is finalised.

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The Chair will then report on issues arising from this process to either the appropriate sub-group, partnership board or executive meeting.

Important additional notes

Record keeping

At all stages of the process, actions and decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel, including the professional who raised the initial concern.

This must include records of any intra and inter agency discussions and actions taken and ensure that this is recorded on the child's file, together with any other written communication and information.

If the process highlights gaps in policies and procedures this must be brought to the attention of the Independent Advisor of the HSCP.

Specific circumstances

There are certain instances where the escalation policy should be over-ridden and the Director for Children's Services (DCS) and the HSCP should be made immediately aware by whoever first comes to know. These are instances of:

- Child death where safeguarding concerns are identified
- Life changing injury
- Abduction of child on CP plan or in care
- Immediate threat of judicial review; or
- Imminent threat of media attention

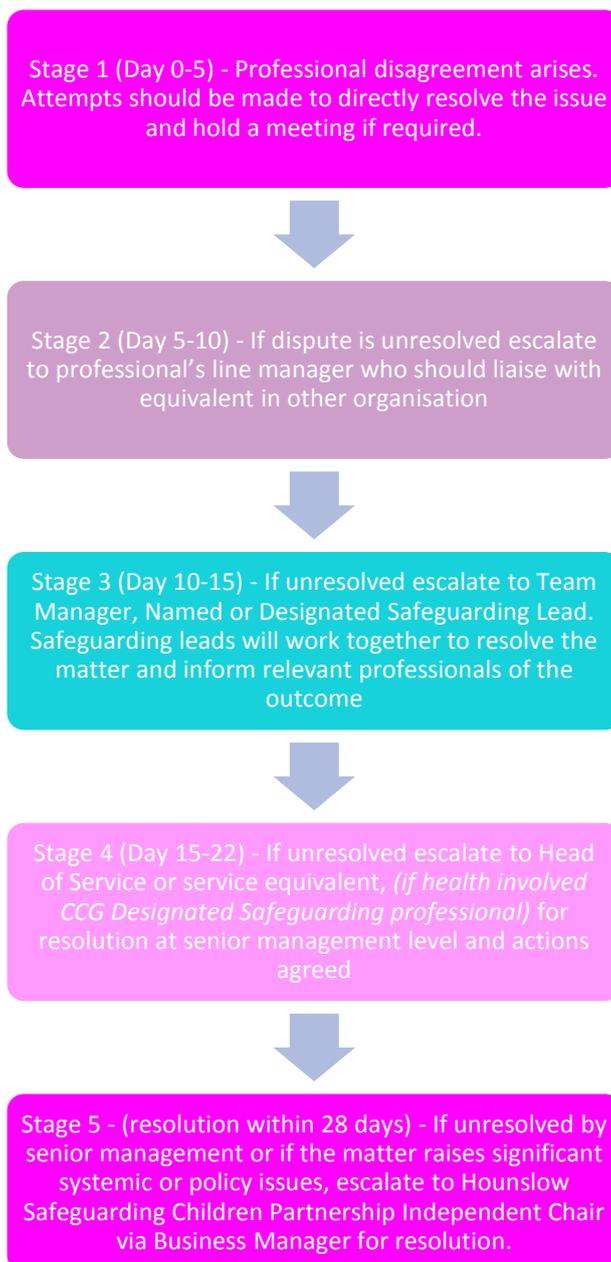
Learning from dispute resolutions

When the issue is resolved or closed, any areas of learning or identified improvement should be considered by the relevant HSCP sub-group. In cases that present specific complexities, consideration should be given to seeking expert advice in respect of evidence-based practice. It may also be useful for individuals to be debriefed following disputes to promote good partnership working.



HSCP Escalation Policy Flowchart

This timeline is the maximum time allowed. When any professional considers a child is at risk of imminent significant harm, they must ensure that their concerns are escalated on the same working day using established safeguarding procedures.



At all stages/ decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant professionals.