Professional Challenge Procedure and Guidance

September 2016
At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child or young person is safeguarded.
1. Introduction

1.1 When working in the arena of safeguarding and child protection, it is inevitable that from time to time, there will be practitioner disagreement. Whilst this is understandable and generally acceptable, it is vital that such differences do not affect the outcomes for children and young people. This procedure provides a process for resolving practitioner disagreements and ensuring there is effective challenge in the system. It also provides practitioners with advice and support to enable them to escalate concerns where disagreements are not resolved at a practitioner level.

1.2 Professional challenge is a positive activity and a sign of good professional practice and effective multi-agency working. Being professionally challenged should not be seen as a criticism of the person’s professional capabilities.

1.3 Both national and local Serious Case Reviews continue to draw attention to the importance of interagency communication and have identified an apparent reluctance to challenge interagency decision making with concerns that were not followed up with robust professional challenge which may have altered the professional response and the outcome for the child.

1.4 Disagreements can arise in a number of areas of multi-agency working such as:
   - threshold applications
   - outcomes of assessments
   - decision making; roles and responsibilities of workers
   - service provision
   - information sharing and communication in relation to practice or actions which may not effectively ensure the safety or well-being of a child or young person or his/her family

1.5 Professional challenge and critical reflection about the focus and intended outcome of intervention should include questioning and being open to professional challenge from colleagues, as well as being confident to challenge others.

1.6 Many professional challenges will be resolved on an informal basis by contact between the professional raising the challenge (or their manager) and the agency receiving the challenge and will end there.

1.7 Professional challenge is about challenging decisions, practice or actions which may not effectively ensure the safety or well-being of a child or young person or his/her family.
2. Purpose

2.1 To establish processes to ensure a culture which promotes professional challenge is embedded across all agencies.

2.2 The following stages are likely to be involved:
   - Identification of area of disagreement
   - Recognition there is a disagreement over a significant issue in relation to the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person
   - Identification of the problem
   - Possible Cause of the problem
   - What needs to be achieved in order for it to be resolved

2.3 At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child or young person is safeguarded. Any unresolved issues should be escalated with due consideration that might exist for the child. Every effort should be made to resolve the disagreement as quickly and openly as possible, within a time frame which clearly protects the child, determined on a case by case basis. Effective working together depends on resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of practitioners and agencies and a belief in a genuine partnership.
3. Procedure - How should a professional make a challenge?

**Professional Challenge Procedure**

1. Concerned professional to speak to person who made original decision to express their view and discuss the basis of the decision. Record reason why you do not agree and record reason for disagreement on case management file.

2. If the issue cannot be resolved at Stage 1 it should be raised with respective managers/Named Professional/Designated Safeguarding Lead.

3. If manager deems appropriate, arrange an interagency meeting to discuss differing views. Agreement should be reached on who should attend. A clear record of the agreed outcome and any outstanding issues should be made.

4. If the issue cannot be resolved in Stage 3 the professional raising the concern should escalate to their Head of Service who will contact the relevant agency’s Head of Service to attempt to resolve. With a decision to be reached as soon as possible ensuring interest of child taking precedent over professional stalemate.

5. If resolution cannot be found at stage 4 the relevant Head of Service for the agency raising concern should raise the issue with the Chair of Local Safeguarding Children Board who will make the ultimate decision on the next course of action.

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4. The threshold for reporting the use of professional challenge to the LSCB

4.1 The threshold for reporting professional challenge to the LSCB is when it becomes necessary to move to stage 5 above, i.e., cannot be resolved at stages 1 - 4.

4.2 To monitor the use of this procedure the following information should be provided to the LSCB Business Unit by the Named Person for the agency which raised the challenge:

- What was the challenge?
- What was done to address the challenge?
- What was the outcome of these actions?
- How was the issue resolved?
- Are the professionals involved satisfied with the outcome?
- If resolution could not be achieved was the issue referred to the LSCB?

4.3 The areas of challenge, the use of this procedure and the outcomes will be reported to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and subsequently reported to the Chief Executive of the Local Authority (as the lead agency for safeguarding children) on a six monthly basis. Statistical information about professional challenge and the use of this procedure to address professional challenges will be reported in the Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report. The procedure will be reviewed in light of feedback provided to the Local Safeguarding Children Board.


5.1 As specified in Working Together 2015 – ‘Local authority social workers are responsible for deciding what action to take and how to proceed following section 47 enquiries’.

5.2 If local authority children’s social care decides not to proceed with a child protection conference then other professionals involved with the child and family have the right to request that local authority children’s social care convene a conference, if they have serious concerns that a child’s welfare may not be adequately safeguarded. As a last resort, the LSCB should have in place a quick and straightforward means of resolving differences of opinion.

5.3 In addition to this if there are concerns that professionals are not sharing information appropriately in line with national and local guidance and not working within the LSCB procedures, professionals should challenge non-compliance. Lack of information at conference or reviews or lack of sharing with parents can impact on the child, potentially putting the child at risk, impact on parental involvement, affect the efficiency of time of all the professionals, and impact upon effective conduct of the meetings. In instances identified above professionals should follow the procedures as outlined on page 5 of this document.

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