



**BOLTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
PARTNERSHIP
SUPPORTING BEST PRACTICE IN CHILD
PROTECTION**

ONE VISION

In Bolton We Want to Give All Our Children the Best Possible Start in Life, So That They Have Every Chance to Succeed, Be Safe and Be Happy

Introduction

In Bolton we have a clear vision for our children, that each and every one of them has the 'best possible start in life, so that they have every chance to succeed, be safe and be happy'. While some children and their families may require more support than others, fundamentally this aspiration is for all. We recognise that for those children who are most at risk of harm from abuse and neglect, we not only need clear and effective child protection processes in place, but also clear expectations as to how practitioners will individually and collectively work together to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

The best local safeguarding arrangements are developed from a shared vision, shared values and clear ambition to deliver the very best practice to children at risk of harm. Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership have adopted and developed the key principles below to achieve this aim. These principles have provided the foundation for us to develop this best practice guidance.

The principles are: -

- A culture of continuous development, improvement, and learning
- Effective, ambitious child-focussed leadership within and across partners
- Agencies understand their respective roles and thresholds
- Wide and active engagement in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Good systems for information sharing which practitioners are confident and knowledgeable about
- High support and high challenge within the multi-agency system

Implementing our practice principles will lead to improved outcomes for children as:

- Early help is being used effectively to coordinate preventative responses to help meet children's needs
- Children and their families tell us that they are able to access services at the right time from the right person and in the right place
- Children tell us they have been able to develop trust with their key workers
- Parents/carers tell us practitioners have listened and helped them
- Children tell us that they have been listened to and involved in their care and service improvement
- Practitioners tell us they are confident in local processes and understand what is out there to support children and families
- More children will remain in the care of their family unit and will not need to be supported by statutory services
- Multi-agency audit highlights that outcomes for children are being met, that there is high quality practice, a good understanding of thresholds and that people are aware of different roles and responsibilities across the partnership

This guidance puts in place an agreed set of expectations for our work with children and families who are subject to Child Protection Conference processes. The standards not only identify what and when key actions need to be taken but also 'how' in practice this can be achieved. We have broken the standards down into the following core areas, but appreciate there will be some overlap: -

- Effective Partnership Working
- Engaging and Supporting Children and their Families
- Effective Strategy Discussions
- Effective Conferences
- Effective Planning
- Effective Core Groups
- Managing and Supervising in Child Protection

The experiences of children, families, front line practitioners, service managers and leaders across our multi-agency partnership have fully informed and shaped these standards, and we would like to express our thanks to them for making the time to share these with us.

Children want us to: -

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 identified through their research a number of key asks from children. These have been adapted locally as outlined below and should underpin our work across the safeguarding continuum, but especially where there are child protection concerns: -

- Make sure we are informed and involved from the outset
- Notice when things are troubling us
- Give support to us, don't just focus on the adults in our families
- Create stable, trusting relationships with us
- Hear us, understand and take action; tell us what is happening, why, how and when
- Help us put forward our views and experiences and have a meaningful voice
- Keep us safe in a way that meets our unique needs, our lived experience and our culture
- Don't ignore us; we are experts in our lives

All practitioners, whether working directly or indirectly with a child should be able to demonstrate how they meet these expectations.

Effective Partnership Working

Working Together to Safeguard Children requires that: -

- The police, integrated care boards and the local authority are under a duty to make arrangements to work together, and with other partners locally, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area
- Partners have individual duties when carrying out their functions under section 11 of the Children Act 2004
- Respond to the needs and interests of children and families and not the other way around
- Effective safeguarding is achieved by every individual and agency playing their full part
- Everyone who comes into contact with children has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action
- Practitioners working in universal and specialist services have a responsibility to identify the symptoms and triggers of abuse and neglect, to share that information and provide children with the help they need
- Clear criteria amongst all organisations and agencies working with children and families for taking action and providing help across this full continuum
- Effective information sharing between practitioners and local organisations is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe

Our Core Principles expect: -

- Wide and active engagement in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Good systems for information sharing which practitioners are confident and knowledgeable about
- High support and high challenge within the multi-agency system

Delivering in Practice looks like: -

- Developing and maintaining trusted relationships with others and ensuring time to reflect and assess together
- Effective and open communication across the multi-agency group
- Having and using a consistent set of policies and processes
- Recognising and reflecting on successful outcomes as well as offering respectful challenge when needed
- Appreciating different perspectives in the multi-agency team, taking time to discuss and learn from each other's expertise, drawing on the knowledge and experience of the partnership team
- Follow up on your commitments and where this is not possible making other aware
- Creating opportunities to enable different ideas, hypotheses and strategies to be heard from all partners
- Being flexible, adaptable and working to the strengths of the multi-agency team
- Working together to create a holistic understanding of the child's lived experiences for all; establishing an information baseline from which all practitioners can work

Engaging and Supporting Children and their Families

Working Together to Safeguard Children requires that: -

- All those working with children should see and speak to the child: listen to what they say, take their views seriously and work with them and their families collaboratively when deciding how to support their needs
- Everyone understands the protective and risk factors the child is facing
- Effective safeguarding is achieved by putting children at the centre of the system

Our Core Principles expect: -

- Wide and active engagement in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Effective, ambitious child-focussed leadership within and across partners

Delivering in Practice looks like: -

- Despite the challenging circumstances it remains important to develop relationships with children and their families; being open, genuine, transparent and honest can support this
- It is essential to name your worries and concerns; there should be no surprises in the conference but it is also equally important to recognise strengths, when things go well and why
- Maintaining consistency of the practitioners helping a child and their family; if a change of practitioner is taking place, then make sure the child and family know when it will happen, who will be the new practitioner and wherever possible an introductory meeting/handover takes place
- Think and reflect on what the barriers to engaging a child or their family may be; use supervision or peer support to understand what may be at the root of any reluctance or resistance. If it is a young person, avoid falling into the mindset of 'they won't engage with me' to challenge yourself by reflecting 'why am I unable to engage with this young person, what might I need to change'
- The conference chair will meet the child and parents in advance to ensure they understand the purpose and the process of the conference; before this the chair should confirm with the social worker how best to engage the child in the conference, including facilitating their attendance
- Share reports/written information with the child (where appropriate) and family before any meetings; children and families may have a number of reports to consider and it is essential that practitioners co-ordinate sharing their information
- The child (where age appropriate) and family should be encouraged to confirm the accuracy of the information and share their views of the content, including their views of the help and support that will make a difference to them
- Encourage children and their families to share their views throughout meetings, not just at set points; regularly seek them out to check understanding and encourage their perspectives
- The conference should establish how the child, their parents (including all those with parental responsibility) and wider family members should be involved in the ongoing assessment, planning and implementation process, and the support, advice and advocacy available to them
- A trusted person should be identified for each child who is subject to conference

- If you say you are going to do something and make a commitment to a child or their family then do it!
- Regular, genuine 'check-ins' to see how a child or their family members are doing, but not focusing on any particular agenda
- If a child or parent is getting in touch, then get back to them in a timely way; equally if you are meeting them at a certain time, be there on time
- Use language that makes sense to the child and their family; don't assume that everyone can read or understand English; reflect on how communication needs can be met
- Be curious and ask about the relationships within the family; be curious about a family's culture and what that means to them – don't make assumptions
- Play to the strengths of the multi-agency group, if a child or family has a strong, positive relationship with a particular practitioner then consider how best this can support others to develop something similar – this might be joint assessment sessions, joint home visits etc.
- REMEMBER being involved in child protection can feel very disempowering and oppressive for children and their families; think about how you can redress this balance

Effective Strategy Discussions

Working Together to Safeguard Children requires that: -

- Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm a strategy discussion should be held
- Local authority children's social care should convene a strategy discussion to consider the child's welfare and plan rapid future action if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm
- A local authority social worker, health practitioner and a police representative should, as a minimum, be involved in the strategy discussion
- All Practitioners should be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their organisation and agencies
- The strategy discussion should be used to: -
 - Share available information
 - Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation
 - Decide whether enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 must be undertaken
- The strategy discussion should agree one of the following outcomes and follow-up with the necessary action: -
 - No further Local Authority children's social care involvement at this stage, but other services may be required, including co-ordinated early help
 - Decision to complete assessment under section 17 of Children Act 1989
 - Decision to initiate section 47 enquiries
- Child protection conference is convened within **fifteen working days** of the strategy discussion at which section 47 enquiries were initiated

Our Core Principles expect: -

- Agencies understand their respective roles and thresholds
- Wide and active engagement in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Good systems for information sharing which practitioners are knowledgeable about and confident to apply

Delivering in Practice looks like: -

- A strategy discussion should be held within **one working day** of the decision that there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm
- Strategy discussions are valuable opportunities to share information and develop a multi-agency response to ensure children are safeguarded appropriately and in a timely manner; the discussion should agree what further information is needed, how it will be obtained, by whom and how it will be shared and recorded
- Strategy discussions should be held in person or via Teams and only in exceptional circumstances should they be held via telephone discussions
- Strategy discussions can be held at any point in a child's journey, including children who are newly referred for statutory help, those children who have an allocated social worker and/or looked after

- A strategy discussion must be held following the death of a child where there are safeguarding concerns and there are surviving siblings or other identified children who are deemed to be vulnerable
- Strategy discussions must be chaired by a suitably experienced social worker, social work deputy manager or manager; they take responsibility for the accuracy of the information recorded and ensuring minutes are sent to all Practitioners and relevant others within **two working days** of the strategy discussion
- The rationale for actions and decisions taken in strategy discussions is based on a clear analysis of harm to each child, which takes account of their family history, culture and relationships
- Practitioners at the strategy discussion must develop SMART actions and agree the outcomes from these; timescales for action will be proportionate to the risk of harm to each child and relevant actions will be allocated to agencies
- All practitioners at the strategy discussion should be clear how and when they feedback on the progress and outcomes from their actions; where new information is identified the lead social worker should be informed, consideration given to any further action needed and the information used to inform the child protection enquiry
- Where the strategy discussion initiates child protection enquiries an Initial Child Protection Conference should be arranged
- Where the strategy discussion identifies concerns that a practitioner who works with children may have caused harm, there is consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and where required a timely LADO referral is made
- If Local Authority children's social care decides not to proceed with a child protection conference following the outcome of the strategy discussion and child protection enquiries then other practitioners involved with the child and family have the right to request that a conference be convened if they have serious concerns that a child's welfare may not be adequately safeguarded; this should be progressed via agency designated safeguarding leads and the Team Manager Independent Reviewing & Conferencing Team

Effective Child Protection Conferences

Working Together to Safeguard Children requires that: -

- All practitioners have a good understanding of both the harms and strengths being experienced by the child
- The Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) should be held within **15 working days** of the strategy discussion at which section 47 enquiries were initiated
- The first Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) is held within three months, with further conferences being held at least every six months until the child protection plan ends
- The information gathered for conferences is analysed and informs decision-making about the type and level of harm being experienced by the child currently and the likely harm that may be experienced in the future
- The ICPC is responsible for: -
 - identifying membership of the core group of practitioners and family members who will develop and implement the child protection plan
 - establishing timescales for meetings of the core group, production of a child protection plan and for child protection review meetings
 - agreeing an outline child protection plan, with clear actions and timescales, including a clear sense of how much improvement is needed, by when, so that success can be judged clearly
- The RCPC is responsible for: -
 - Reviewing whether the child is continuing to suffer or is likely to suffer significant harm and review developmental progress against child protection plan outcomes
 - Consider whether the child protection plan should continue or should be changed

Our Core Principles expect: -

- Agencies understand their respective roles and thresholds
- Wide and active engagement in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Good systems for information sharing which practitioners are knowledgeable about and confident to apply

Delivering in Practice looks like: -

- All Practitioners provide relevant information on the agreed report template and submit **2 working days before** the ICPC and RCPC to the child protection unit
- Where concerns relate to an unborn child, the ICPC should be held **at least 20 weeks** prior to the estimated delivery date
- Practitioners reflect and analyse the information they are providing to conference; each organisation will hold a range of information about the child and their family and when preparing this for a conference it is essential that information shared is proportionate and relevant to the worries you have for the child and their family
- Attendance at meetings is a priority and practitioners are well prepared – it is good practice to block preparation and follow-up time in your calendar/diary to prepare for the conference and follow-up your actions within the child protection plan

- Practitioners sharing their reports with children and relevant family members in advance of the meeting offering insight and challenge to emerging hypothesis and assumptions
- If the conference decides the need for a child protection plan, the conference chair will ask the social worker and each partner agency to recommend the category
- The decisions of the conference, category of plan, lead social worker and core group membership will be circulated to Practitioners **within 1 working day** of the ICPC conference
- The minutes will be circulated **within 15 working days** of the conference
- The conference should agree a date for the first child protection review conference and under what circumstances it might be necessary to reconvene the conference before that date
- Communication and information sharing not only takes place in conferences but 'in-between' to maintain relationships and keep focus on individual children
- Maintaining and achieving timescales and following process is important but be mindful of not being driven solely by 'tick box' activity at the expense of child focused practice
- No system can fully eliminate harm; to manage harm, social workers and other practitioners should make decisions with the best interests of the child in mind, informed by the evidence available and underpinned by knowledge of child development, parental capacity and motivation to make the changes needed
- In general a Child Protection Plan should not be discontinued at the first Review Conference. The plan can be discontinued in exceptional circumstances where there is clear evidence that the risk of significant harm has been reduced.
- Where the Chair, based on all the available evidence and information provided and having jointly assessed the risk of significant harm, does not agree with the majority recommendation, they can make a decision which they believe most appropriate to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. This will be in exceptional circumstances and the decision will be reviewed by Head Of Service (Conference & Review & Partnerships)
- The Chair may also override the recommendation of the core group and practitioners present at the conference to end the plan where the Chair identifies that the Child Protection Plan has not been effective and there is insufficient evidence that risks have been reduced. This should be clearly recorded within the minutes and the Chair should consider whether an escalation is required due to the lack of progress made.
- If it is agreed risks have been reduced and a Child Protection Plan is no longer needed, the Conference Chair will devise a Child in Need/Early Help plan based on information from the most recent core group. They will require consent from parents/carers and record the date of any upcoming meetings.
- When a Child subject to a Child Protection Plan becomes Looked After, the Child Protection Plan, the Child Protection plan will end without a Review Conference being convened. A letter will be sent to all practitioners involved advising of the change. The letter will advise what action practitioners can take if they object.

Effective Child Protection Planning

Working Together to Safeguard Children requires that: -

- Ensure the child is safe from harm and prevent them from suffering further harm
- Promote the child's health and development
- Support the family and wider family members to safeguard and promote the welfare of their child, provided it is in the best interests of the child
- Where a child has other assessments or plans, it is important that these are co-ordinated so that the child does not become lost between the different organisational procedures
- Monitor and record the impact of any services delivered to the child and family and review the help being delivered; the plan should be reviewed regularly to analyse whether sufficient progress has been made to meet the child's needs and the level of risk faced by the child. The test should be whether any improvements in adult behaviour are sufficient and sustained.
- All partners contribute to the development of any plan as appropriate and provide services as specified in the plan for the child
- Known transition points for the child should be planned for in advance, including where children are likely to transition between child and adult services

Our Core Principles expect: -

- Agencies understand their respective roles and thresholds
- Wide and active engagement in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Good systems for information sharing which practitioners are knowledgeable about and confident to apply
- High support and high challenge within the multi-agency system

Delivering in Practice looks like: -

- The plan should clearly state the risks and worries for each child and that everyone working with the plan should be in agreement about these
- The plan should be free of jargon, use plain, accessible language and make sense to everyone involved
- Children should be encouraged to input into the plan and they should have regular updates on what is happening from their trusted person
- The child protection plan should establish clear outcomes against which progress to keep the child safe will be evaluated
- The plan should set out what services are to be delivered, and what actions are to be undertaken, by whom and for what purpose; contingencies should be agreed including where access to a service may be delayed, a child is not taken by a parent etc.
- Where needed break the plan down into manageable chunks to keep it achievable for children and their families
- When the help and support within the plan is not progressing it is important that there is time given to reflect on why this is and re-evaluate openly and honestly what is needed to ensure the child's safety
- Where the plan relates to more than one child in a family, the unique risks and worries for each individual child within the family should be included

- Each element of the plan should be reviewed regularly by core group members within the core group; this will provide evidence of the impact and effectiveness of the planned help and support in meeting the agreed outcomes for each child
- When actions and goals are achieved these should be celebrated and recognised within the plan
- Where the child protection plan is reviewed and revised, a copy should be circulated to core group members **within 2 working days**
- Keep information flowing to ensure the plan can be updated regularly and not solely at the core group
- Always read over the plan to sense check and challenge yourself as to whether it is Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant and Timely (SMART); look out for actions that may overlap, contradict each other, bring unintended risk, overwhelm or aren't co-ordinated
- Don't be afraid to offer respectful challenge if the plan isn't 'good enough'; all core group members are equally responsible for the effectiveness of the child protection plan
- Child Protection Chairs have a responsibility to challenge and escalate if actions are not being taken or the plan is not meeting the needs of the child/young person
- At the core group prior to the review conference members should make a judgement as to whether the threshold for significant harm continues to be met; this will be evidenced by the progress made against the agreed actions and the outcomes achieved. If the recommendation is for the child protection plan to be discontinued, core group members should agree what further actions are needed and who will lead these; this should form the basis for step-down help and support

Effective Child Protection Core Groups

Working Together to Safeguard Children requires that: -

- Review the impact of services delivered as agreed in the plan
- Meet within 10 working days from the initial child protection conference if the child is the subject of a child protection plan
- Further develop the outline child protection plan, based on assessment findings, and set out what needs to change, by how much, and by when in order for the child to be safe and have their needs met
- Decide what steps need to be taken, and by whom, to complete the in-depth assessment to inform decisions about the child's safety and welfare
- Implement the child protection plan and take joint responsibility for carrying out the agreed tasks, monitoring progress and outcomes, and refining the plan as needed

Our Core Principles expect: -

- Agencies understand their respective roles and thresholds
- Wide and active engagement in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Good systems for information sharing which practitioners are knowledgeable about and confident to apply
- High support and high challenge within the multi-agency system

Delivering in Practice looks like: -

- The core group should meet at **least every 6 weeks**; the first core group should be held within **10 working days** prior to any review conference
- The core group will develop the child protection plan with the child and their family and regularly review its impact and effectiveness at each core group meeting
- The detailed child protection plan will set out what work needs to be done, why, when and by whom and what the measures are used to indicate the impact of the plan on improved outcomes for the child; the core group should offer scrutiny as to how agencies are individually and collectively offering help and support within the plan
- The core group should amend the plan as and when required to ensure that outcomes are achieved and the child is safe as a result of help and support being delivered
- Minutes of the core group meeting will be taken and circulated to all members of the core group and uploaded on the electronic social care record **within 5 working days**; **any** member of the core group can take the minutes
- All core group members will prioritise attendance and be responsible for providing written progress reports to each core group meeting whether they attend or not
- If an agreed action from the conference cannot be implemented by a core group member, they must contact the child protection conference chair to explain why this is the case
- Where the core group is recommending the end of a child protection plan, this should be supported with evidence that risk to the child has been effectively managed and reduced; the core group should also agree what actions are needed to maintain and sustain positive change and who will lead these
- Where needed core group members should seek supervision from their agency to reflect on their roles and responsibilities within the core group
- Any concerns about agency attendance must be raised with the core group member first by the lead professional. If concerns persist or the concern is about the lead professional, the matter should be escalated and challenge offered using the partnership escalation procedure

Managing and Supervising in Child Protection

Working Together to Safeguard Children requires that: -

- Supervision should support practitioners to reflect critically on the impact of their decisions on the child and their family

Our Core Principles expect: -

- A culture of continuous development, improvement and learning
- High support and high challenge within the multi-agency system

Delivering in Practice looks like: -

- Managers and supervisors provide meaningful safeguarding supervision and appraisal that takes account of practitioner strengths, improvement areas and invests in practitioner's professional development
- Promote timely access to supervisions and reflection and where needed recoding relevant information from supervision on the child's record
- Maximise opportunities for practitioner development, ensuring attendance at mandatory training, and participation in other agreed professional development as identified
- Managers and supervisors lead by example and cultivate a culture that is mutually supportive, draws on the practice strengths of all practitioners and embeds a culture of safeguarding being everyone's responsibility
- Managers and supervisors provide good lines of communication, ensuring that important partnership policy and procedures are shared, understood, integrated and acted upon within their organisation
- Managers and supervisors monitor the quality of their organisations contribution to child protection processes through regularly audit and/or other scrutiny activity, taking steps to offer support and challenge where needed both internally and to the wider system
- Managers identify opportunities to bring about improvements in practice, and support staff in delivering those improvements