

Core Standards for Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children in Newcastle through Child Protection Case Conferences

Revised December 2010



Introduction

Agencies in Newcastle responsible for the delivery of children's services, both in the statutory and voluntary sectors are committed to achieving the best outcomes for all children and young people in Newcastle, through the establishment of citywide standards of safeguarding practice and an ethos of continuous improvement in safeguarding performance and service delivery.

For the purpose of this document the focus is on some of the most vulnerable children and young people, those who are subject to a Child Protection Plan.

In order to monitor the progress towards this objective, it is essential to have defined standards with specific and measurable indicators.

The standards outlined in this document are in relation to the roles and responsibilities of those practitioners who are involved in the Child Protection Conference Process. The aim of the standards is to assist practitioners to work together to safeguard and promote children's welfare.

These standards should be read in conjunction with NSCB policies and procedures together with each agencies own policies, procedures and practice guidance.

These standards are fundamentally based upon and embrace: -

- Newcastle's Plan for Children and Young People 2009/10
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010
- What to do if you're worried a child is being abused 2006
- The Children Act 2004
- The Adoption Act 2004
- National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services, Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000
- Independent Reviewing Officer Regulations - 2004

The Children's Safeguarding Standards Unit together with representatives from Health, Education, Children's Social Care and the Police has been central to the development of these standards and will have an ongoing role in monitoring and reviewing them.

Standard 1: Continuously, regularly and independently review the progress of a child/young person and quality of overall care to ensure that her/his needs are being adequately met.

1.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- 1.1.1 Chair all child protection case conferences.
- 1.1.2 Conferences should not be cancelled or rearranged unless in exceptional circumstances and should be done in consultation with the Social Work/manager and manager of the Independent reviewing Team. The reason should then be clearly recorded on care first and shared with professionals and family members by the social worker.
- 1.1.3 Ensure that conferences start on time and aim for them to last no longer than 1-½ hours. However some conferences may take longer depending on circumstances.
- 1.1.4 Ensure that the minutes accurately record decisions made, along with further actions required, by whom and within specified timescales.
- 1.1.5 Refer to issues that led to the Child Protection Plan in all Child Protection Review Conferences.

1.2 The minute takers should:

- 1.2.1 Provide a minute taking service for all child protection case conferences, this will involve sending out invites, collation and distribution of reports, as well as producing recommendations and minutes and distributing them.
- 1.2.2 Distribute the decisions/recommendations within 24 hours of the conference.
- 1.2.3 Complete and distribute minutes within 20-25 days.

1.3 Children's Social Care Manager's and Social Worker should:

- 1.3.1 Ensure that the first child protection review conference is convened to take place within three months of the initial child protection conference and that subsequent reviews are convened at intervals of not more than six months for as long as the child remains the subject of a child protection plan. Where necessary, reviews should be brought forward to address changes in the child's circumstances, this should always be discussed with the IRO beforehand.

1.4 All professionals should:

- 1.4.1 Provide a report, or contribute to their agency's written report in advance of the conference, 48 hours (initial) 3 days (review) , which sets out the nature of involvement with the family. All reports (except confidential police reports) should be shared with parents/families 3 days before the conference.
- 1.4.2 When providing a report for the review conference, outline the previous plan and the progress made and evaluate the impact on the child's welfare against the objectives set out in the child protection plan.
- 1.4.3 Where invited, be committed to attending the conference on time.
- 1.4.4 Take a full and active part in decision making.

Standard 2: Clear plans are made for children and young people, which are rigorously recorded and acted upon.

2.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- 2.1.1 Have sight of the child protection report, at least 48 hours (initial) and 3 days (review).
- 2.1.2 Ensure that a child protection plan is formulated and recommendations made with clear timescales. Where a decision is made for the Child Protection Plan to end ensure that a Complex Needs Plan or a Team Around the Child Plan is formulated and a Lead Professional is named.
- 2.1.3 Ensure that when a plan for a child is made it is outcome focussed, identifies how the actions will be achieved, by when and by whom.
- 2.1.4 Evaluate the extent to which the plan is meeting the needs of the child/young person and identify any changes that are required in the light of information presented at the conference.
- 2.1.5 Robustly challenge the plan should it not meet the needs of the child/young person by making recommendations and ensuring that these are clearly recorded in the minutes and fed back to the relevant Team Manager.
- 2.1.6 Ensure that the decisions and recommendations of the conference are clearly recorded in writing and distributed within 24 hours .The birth Plan should be distributed within 24 hours. Minutes to be distributed within 25 working days.

- 2.1.7 To ensure that dates are set for Core Groups and to challenge where Core Groups are not taking place within the required timescale or where there is a lack of attendance by key professionals.
- 2.1.8 Ensure that any significant changes to the child/young person's life are followed through in the review of the child's plan and action taken if required, including following up significant actions where necessary.
- 2.1.9 Discuss any concerns the IRO may have with the plan with the Social worker/Manager should they feel it does not meet the needs of the child/young person and discuss what action needs to be undertaken.
- 2.1.10 Record any actions taken or discussions held in between reviews on the child's record.
- 2.1.11 Where problems are identified in relation to a child's case, the IRO will in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or social work manager. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the IRO should consider taking formal action through the dispute resolution process.

2.2 Children's Social Care Managers and Social Workers should:

- 2.2.1 Provide their report to the Chair of the Conference ahead of the scheduled Conference, at least 48 hours (initial) 3 days (review).
- 2.2.2 Submit a clear and comprehensive report based on factual information with in depth analysis and a clear child protection plan, including dates the child has been seen if the child was seen alone by the social worker.
- 2.2.3 Share their report with the family/carers and professionals at least 48 hours (initial) , 3 days (review) or 5 days (decision making) beforehand.
- 2.2.4 Ensure that a plan is formulated and recommendations made with clear timescales. Where a decision is made for a Child Protection Plan to end ensure that a Complex Needs Plan is put in place.
- 2.2.5 Where a decision is made for a Child Protection Plan to end and where Children's Social Care are not going to remain involved, ensure that a Child in Need Plan is put in place and a lead professional identified under the CAF framework.
- 2.2.6 Ensure that the plan is meeting the needs of the child/young person and identify any changes that are required in the light of information presented at the conference.

- 2.2.7 Discuss any concerns the IRO may raise regarding the plan should they feel it does not meet the needs of the child/young person and discuss what action needs to be undertaken.
- 2.2.8 Undertake work with the child/young person and family in accordance with the child protection plan.
- 2.2.9 Inform the IRO of any significant changes to the child/young person's life that indicate the need for an earlier review.
- 2.2.10 Ensure that all key professionals reports are seen by the IRO beforehand.

2.3 All professionals should:

- 2.3.1 Consider and make recommendations on how agencies, professional's and the family should work together to ensure that the child/young person will be safeguarded from harm in the future.
- 2.3.2 Provide services according to the agreed plan and where necessary undertake specialist assessments to inform the review of the plan.

Standard 3: All those responsible for children's care consider all aspects of their lives.

3.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- 3.1.1 Ensure all items of the agenda are covered in the meeting.
- 3.1.2 Ensure all attendees are aware of the criteria for a Child Protection Plan.
- 3.1.3 Ensure all the attendees have the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way and their contribution recorded.
- 3.1.4 Consider all the child's needs including health and education.
- 3.1.5 Ensure the parents have a full and clear understanding about what they need to do to bring about change.
- 3.1.6 Ensure the child/young person's views are sought and clearly recorded.
- 3.1.7 Ensure that the plan takes into account of the child's culture (including diet, disability and personal care needs) language and spiritual/religious needs, how these can be practically met and that any shortfalls are being addressed within the child's timescales.

3.2 The minute takers should:

- 3.2.1 Distribute the agenda to all attendees.
- 3.2.2 Distribute the criteria for a Child Protection Plan and where necessary the removal from a Child Protection Plan to all attendees.

3.3 Children's Social Care Managers and Social Worker should:

- 3.3.1 Ensure the child protection plan is based on the findings of the assessment and follows the dimensions relating to a child's developmental needs, parenting capacity, and family and environmental factors.

3.4 All professionals should:

- 3.4.1 Contribute to the Conference in a meaningful way and give an informed opinion about whether the child should be subject to a Child Protection Plan.
- 3.4.2 Consider all the child's needs including health and education.

Standard 4: Children and Young People's views are sought and used to influence service delivery.

4.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- 4.1.1 Be available to meet with the child/young person prior to the Conference where appropriate.
- 4.1.2 Where a child/young person is attending their Conference, facilitate participation of the child/young person and ensure their views are recorded. Ensure that where appropriate the child/young person's views are considered and acknowledged.
- 4.1.3 Ensure that the child/young person is not exposed to information that may be age inappropriate or distressing.
- 4.1.4 Where it is not in the child/young person's best interests to action a request specified by the child/young person ensure that the reasons for this are shared openly with the child/young person and recorded.
- 4.1.5 Where a child/young person's first language is not English ensure a professionally accredited translator is present at the conference and that time is allowed for translation throughout the conference.

- 4.1.6 Where a child/young person has a disability ensure that specific needs of that child/young person are taken into account to enable them to participate in the conference.
- 4.1.7 Ensure that where the child's attendance is neither desired by him/her nor appropriate that the child's wishes and feelings have been ascertained.
- 4.1.8 Ensure that the child understands the role of an advocate and his/her entitlement to one

4.2 Children's Social Care Managers and Social Workers should:

- 4.2.1 Where a child is of sufficient age and understanding, explain the purpose of a conference, how they wish to express their views and where appropriate share the conference reports in advance.
- 4.2.2 Where a child is attending the conference, make arrangements for the conference chair to meet with the child/young person prior to the conference.
- 4.2.3 Where the child's attendance is neither desired by him/her nor appropriate, ascertain what his/her wishes and feelings are and make these known to the conference.
- 4.2.4 Where it is not in the child/young person's best interests to action a request specified by the child/young person, share the reasons for this openly with the child/young person and ensure they are recorded.
- 4.2.5 Where a child/young person's first language is not English, ensure that a translator is present at the conference.
- 4.2.6 Where a child/young person has a disability, in conjunction with the Chair ensure that the specific needs of that child/young person are taken into account to enable them to participate in the conference.

4.3 All professionals should:

- 4.3.1 Involve the child/young person in a way appropriate to their age and understanding.

Standard 5: Partnership is promoted between those responsible for a child or young person i.e. between carers, social workers, families, and others involved in the child/young person's life.

5.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- 5.1.1 Provide guidance in relation to appropriate people to invite to the conference and with regards to any safety issues, such as perpetrators of domestic violence who may be invited to attend.
- 5.1.2 Ensure that where there are issues of domestic violence the conference is split to allow safety for the alleged victim.
- 5.1.3 Ensure that meetings have been arranged at a time and venue that, as far as is reasonably possible, are convenient for all participants.
- 5.1.4. Be available to meet with the family prior to the Conference.
- 5.1.5 Where a parent/carer has a learning disability, identify whether the parent/carer has received the reports 7 days prior to the conference/review taking place.
- 5.1.6 Where a parent/carer has a learning disability, or a mental health issue identify whether consideration has been given to the need for an advocate and make sure this is followed up.
- 5.1.7 Where a parent/carer's first language is not English, identify whether reports have been provided to the parent/carer 7 days prior to the conference to allow for translation and that a professional accredited translator is present at the Review. Ensure that time is allowed for interpretation throughout the conference.
- 5.1.8 Ensure that all those involved in the care of the child/young person have been consulted and have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully. This should include gaining the views of those not in attendance at the actual conference from the Social Worker /professional so that the conference is properly informed
- 5.1.9 Ensure that throughout the conference families are treated sensitively and with respect by all those in attendance.
- 5.1.10 Ensure that if any party does not wish the information that they have provided to be shared with all involved that clear, valid reasons are given and recorded as to why the information should be restricted. Ensure that at each meeting consideration is given to providing copies of the minutes to those persons who have sent their apologies.

5.2 Children's Social Care Managers and Social workers should:

- 5.2.1 Ensure that all the relevant professionals who have a significant contribution to make, are invited and able to attend the conference as well as those who are likely to be involved in future work with the child/young person and family. Where there is more than one professional from the same agency, where possible, one person should be identified to represent the agency's views in respect of a Child Protection Plan.
- 5.2.2 Once a date is set ensure that request for invites for all those attending are sent to the minute taking service at the CSSU the next working day, with all the up to date details including full names and addresses
- 5.2.3 Social Worker should ensure all reports are available and photocopied beforehand.
- 5.2.4 Ensure that the parents are invited and helped to participate. Family members should be given the social workers report in advance (48 hours prior to an Initial Conference and at least 3 days prior to a Review Conference) and the contents and the conference process explained
- 5.2.5 Where appropriate discuss with the conference chair in advance whether it may be necessary to exclude one or more family members, or others from all or part of the conference.
- 5.2.6 Where a parent is excluded, or unable or unwilling to attend a conference, ensure that they are enabled to communicate their views to the conference by another means.
- 5.2.7 Discuss with the conference chair in advance whether any steps are required to protect professional staff from intimidation and initiate any agreed action if necessary.
- 5.2.8 Remind the family of their opportunity to meet the chair prior to the conference.
- 5.2.9 Where a parent/carer has a learning disability ensure that the parent/carer has received their report 7 days prior to the conference taking place and that the contents of the report has been explained.
- 5.2.10 Where a parent/carer has a learning disability consider the need to share the report via an advocate in advance of the meeting.
- 5.2.11 Where a parent/carer's first language is not English the Social Worker will ensure that their report has been provided and the contents explained, to the parent/carer one week prior to the conference to allow for interpreting and ensure that a interpreter is present at the Review.

- 5.2.12 Consult with all those involved in the care of the child/young person. This should include those not in attendance at the actual meeting, so that the conference is properly informed.
- 5.2.13 To co-ordinate the core group and ensure a lead professional is available to chair in the Social Workers absence.
- 5.2.14 Ensure that the child protection plan is updated at every core group , and progress and actions clearly recorded and distributed within 5 days.
- 5.2.15 Social Workers should ensure carers/parents solicitors have the opportunity to discuss the report prior to the conference in order to avoid any delay to the start of the meeting.
- 5.2.16 Liaise with all professionals providing services to the child/young person and family to keep up to date with progress and ensure each professional is aware of what the others are achieving as part of taking forward the agreed plan.

5.3 Core group members should:

- 5.3.1 Have the first core group within 10 working days of the initial child protection case conference and thereafter one every 4-6 weeks to complete the core assessment which will inform the child protection plan.
- 5.3.2 Take responsibility, as a group, for developing and implementing the child protection plan.
- 5.3.3 Ensure that, wherever possible, the child or young person and relevant family members are involved in the drawing up of the plan.
- 5.3.4 Keep the Social Worker up to date with progress and any changes which may affect the plan.
- 5.3.5 Provide a single collective report for subsequent child protection review conferences on the progress of the plan.

5.4 Solicitors/Legal advisors should:

- 5.4.1 Ensure that they have seen their client prior to the conference. This includes Solicitors for the Local Authority. This should not affect the starting time of the conference or take up time during the conference unless in exceptional circumstances where new information comes to light.

5.4.2 If solicitors should wish to attend without their client the chair will consult with the conference members as to whether they have any objection.

5.5 All professionals should:

5.5.1 Discuss with the chair well in advance of the conference any requests for observers to attend the conference

5.5.2 Give clear, valid reasons as to why any information should be withheld from family members at the conference and should be included in a confidential section of the report. The chair will then decide how this information will be presented at the conference.

5.5.3 Ensure that they can deliver on any relevant commitments within the child protection plan, within the designated timescales, or if this is not possible that these commitments are renegotiated.

5.5.4 Professionals and agencies who are invited, but are unable to attend the conference must submit a written report.

5.5.5 Provide in advance a written report to the conference which is shared with the family prior to the conference (48 hours prior to an Initial and at least 3 days prior to a Review Conference).

5.5.6 Social Workers, the IRO and other professionals should ensure that the venue is suitably prepared in terms of seating, refreshments and any other necessities and to consider any risk assessment.

5.5.7 Take care to distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion.

Standard 6: To promote continuity and stability in the lives of children/young people.

6.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

6.1.1 Ensure that all planning and reviewing promotes safeguarding and the welfare of the child.

6.1.2 Ensure that contact with birth family is promoted where appropriate, to provide a continuity of relationships and a sense of identity. Contact arrangements will be discussed at each conference. If there are any issues which cannot be resolved at the time, a date will be arranged to hold a Core Group meeting to give them consideration.

6.1.3 Give consideration to referral for a Family Group Conference.

6.2 Children's Social Care Managers and Social Workers should:

6.2.1 Ensure that all planning and reviewing promotes continuity and minimises the number of changes for a child/young person.

6.2.2 A child/young person's contact with their birth family will be promoted, when appropriate, to provide continuity of relationships and a sense of identity. Contact arrangements will be discussed at each Conference. If there are any issues which cannot be resolved at the time, a date will be arranged to hold a core group meeting to give them consideration.

Standard 7: Commitment to avoiding drift and ensuring that there is positive and timely planning for children/young people.
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7.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

7.1.1 In consultation with the Head of Service, give permission to postpone Conferences out of statutory timescale only in exceptional circumstances.

7.1.2 Identify whether the decisions and outstanding issues highlighted at each conference have been acted upon within the agreed timescales.

7.1.3 Identify whether Children's Social Care statutory visits to children/young people subject to a Child Protection Plan have been made within timescale.

7.1.4 Where timescales have not been achieved in relation to decisions, recommendations or frequency of Statutory visits discuss with the relevant Social Worker. Any persistent failure will be brought to the attention of the Team Manager.

7.1.5 Ensure that where a child remains subject to a Child Protection Plan by the 4th review conference (21 months) a Designated Child Protection Review Conference is held.

7.1.6 Following a Designated Child Protection Review Conference where a child remains the subject of a Child Protection Plan provide a briefing note for Service Managers, outlining reasons why the child remains the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

7.2 Children's Social Care Managers and Social Workers should:

- 7.2.1 Ensure that a child protection conference is convened, within 15 working days of the strategy discussion.
- 7.2.2 Bring information from all sources together into a systematic chronology. Bring to the chair's attention, for resolution at the conference, any contradictory information.
- 7.2.3 Where there are concerns regarding any changes in circumstances convene an urgent core group to consider any necessary alterations to the plan.
- 7.3.3 Identify in their report whether the decisions and outstanding issues highlighted at each conference have been acted upon within the agreed timescales.
- 7.3.4 Oversee the completion of the core assessment by the core group within a maximum of 35 working days. Focus particularly on those areas highlighted by the child protection conference as requiring further exploration and understanding.
- 7.3.5 Analyse the findings of the assessment to provide an understanding of the child's needs and parenting capacity to respond appropriately to these needs within their family context and inform planning, the objectives of the plan and the nature of service provision.
- 7.3.6 Identify whether statutory visits to children/young people subject to a Child Protection Plan have been made within timescale.
- 7.3.7 Discuss any failure to achieve timescales for decisions, recommendations or frequency of Children's Social Care statutory visits with the relevant chair.
- 7.3.8 Following a Designated Child Protection Review if the child remains the subject of a Child Protection Plan, seek legal advice to ensure that children are not being left for indefinite periods in families where there are chronic and enduring difficulties.

7.4 All professionals should:

- 7.4.1 Contribute to the core assessment.
- 7.4.2 Inform the social worker of any changes in the family's circumstances.
- 7.4.3 Provide an overview of work undertaken with the family and evaluate the impact on the child's welfare against the planned outcomes set out in the child protection plan.

Standard 8: Commitment to working together in partnership to ensure that relevant information is shared and that appropriate action is taken to minimise the risk posed by alleged offenders to children/young people and vulnerable adults.

8.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer should:

- 8.1.1 Ensure relevant information regarding alleged offenders is provided where appropriate.
- 8.1.2 Ensure relevant information regarding alleged offenders is taken into account in the assessment process and procedures followed.
- 8.1.3 Agree with the police officer attending the conference how the police information shared will be recorded in the minutes.

8.2 Children's Social Care Managers and Social Worker should:

- 8.2.1 Obtain information regarding any relevant alleged offences
- 8.2.2 In conjunction with the police identify what information will be shared with the child/young person and family on the basis that the information is not shared if to do so may place a child at risk of significant harm or jeopardise police investigations.
- 8.2.3 Where the decision is made to share information the appropriate consent is sought.
- 8.2.4 Where consent is refused consider whether information needs to be shared for the protection of the child/young person and if so take the necessary steps in consultation with the police.

8.3 All professionals should:

- 8.3.1 Provide information prior to the conference on any relevant alleged offences.