

Professionals' Meeting Guidance

Introduction

The Isle of Wight Children's Services support children and families being involved in and having their views represented in multi-agency meetings. The involvement of parents and/or children in multi-agency meetings can be helpful in that it brings the child more clearly to mind. Accuracy of information and facts can also be checked and clarity in respect of the parent and child's views can be obtained.

In addition to routine planning meetings, core groups, conferences and reviews, there are occasions when it is not appropriate to involve children and/or families in multi-agency meetings. These meetings are known as professionals' meetings.

Where professionals' meetings take place, they should be focused on outcomes for the child and family and form part of a continuous process of assessment, planning, implementation and review across all levels of need, including early help. Professionals' meetings facilitate the quality assurance of a child and families' circumstances. This allows for the effective sharing of information and professional curiosity in order to reach a shared understanding of what can be complex issues. This may, in turn, lead to staff being able to challenge and support families more effectively (especially where there is perceived disguised compliance, hostility and/or resistance).

It is important to recognise that professionals' meetings should supplement and not replace existing the good practice of engaging children and their family members in assessment and planning.

Purpose

A multi-agency professionals' meeting is a tool to support practitioners and managers who have a genuine desire to work openly with families, but who may need the opportunity to talk with other professionals without the child or their family being present.

A professionals' meeting may be important where there is uncertainty amongst professionals about the necessary steps to safeguard the welfare of a child; or where, for example, there is a concern that the family is undermining attempts to understand and/or respond to potential risks to children in the family.

Professionals' meetings can also facilitate respectful challenge between professionals openly and effectively to resolve professional differences. (See [Working Together to Resolve Professional Differences \[escalation and resolution\]](#)). Practitioners should be encouraged to give or receive professional challenge in a constructive, strengths-based and positive way. Successful joint working is reliant upon resolving differences effectively, and a genuine belief in a partnership approach to safeguarding children. Professionals' meetings may be helpful where professional differences arise that are impacting on effective work with the family, or where professionals need an opportunity to reflect on the plans for working with a family when progress is not being made.

Information Sharing and Consent

It is recommended that [legal obligation and public task](#) (as defined in the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)) are relied on as the primary basis for processing information to establish whether or not there is a need to safeguard a child. This means that, whilst families will be informed when personal data is being shared or processed, their consent is not required. The significance of this change is that it is not recommended that practitioners seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child. This applies whether such sharing is undertaken in the context of a multi-agency professionals' meeting or otherwise.

It is expected that professionals will inform parents and or carers and the child where appropriate, that information is being shared for these purposes and to seek to work cooperatively with them, unless this increases risk of harm for the child/ren or an adult. Agencies should also ensure that parents or carers are aware that information is shared, processed and stored for these purposes.

It is also necessary for agencies to apply the principles as set out in government guidance on information sharing, for further details see [Information sharing Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers.](#)

Scope

A multi-agency professionals' meeting can take one of several forms, but only some are covered by this guidance, and this is not an exhaustive list.

What is covered:

- A professional planning meeting.
- A meeting to resolve professional differences regarding the management of a case with respect to a child or young person.

What is NOT covered:

- A child protection Strategy Discussion (Children's Social Care, Police, Health, and others, as required).
- An Initial or Review Child Protection Conference.
- A Looked After Children Review.
- Professional advice and management meetings where the child or family name is not shared.

Criteria for convening a multi-agency professionals' meeting

This type of meeting would not be intended as a routine element in practice, since wherever possible professionals should aim to work in partnership with children and families, but could be considered in the following situations:

- An agency or agencies working with a family need to share information to clarify a concern or address difficulties in working with a family and to involve the family would inhibit discussion.
- To resolve concerns within the professional group, such as understanding of the degree of risk, meaning given to information, the approach and priority actions and the reasonable expectations of other professionals.

- An agency or group of professionals feels that the work with a child and their family is not resulting in improved outcomes for the child or to resolve differences regarding an agency's response to a referral request, or concern raised regarding a child.
- The family or child's needs cannot be met from within the agency's own resources and the need or concern remains unresolved.
- Sharing of information by phone or email is not considered adequate to facilitate discussion and decision-making.
- When there are concerns about Fabricated or Induced Illness or perplexing presentation and there is a need to clarify the nature and extent of the health concerns.

Where multi-agency reflective supervision would be helpful to enable professionals to have the time and space to collectively reflect on the multi agency response to a child and their family, that they are working with. Reflective supervision can provide an additional layer of opportunity to support practitioners explore practice issues from a multi-agency perspective. This can include:

- Where there is disagreement about the direction of the child's plan or progress. Coming together in a safe professional space provides the opportunity to reflect on different perspectives, share information and consider any assumptions. This works to ensure the team share a clear and agreed understanding of necessary next steps.
- When professionals feel that they are 'stuck' in considering what actions should be taken, or lack of progress with uncertainty about next steps.
- When there is a need to consider why the planned actions for charge are not being achieved and professional reflection is needed to help to make sense of the reasons why and the response required.

This process does not replace single agency Supervision processes, or decision making and is distinct from those occasions where there is a requirement for escalation of concerns through relevant line management systems; it is an opportunity for shared support and learning for the team around the family.

Who can call a Multi-Agency Professionals' Meeting?

If a professional considers that there is a need for a meeting that is covered by the above criteria, they should discuss the rationale with their relevant designated safeguarding lead and / or their line manager.

The designated safeguarding lead and / or their line manager, if they agree, should authorise the meeting. In the case of an internal disagreement about the need for a professionals' meeting then this should be escalated according to that agency's policy. In the case of an external disagreement or concern about the lack of engagement from any invited party, the Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (HIPS) Working Together to Resolve Professional Differences procedure should be considered to ensure that a positive resolution can be reached.

Chairing the multi-agency meeting

The Chair should be experienced in chairing meetings of a similar type and must ensure that the meeting focuses on the needs of the child. The Chair should have knowledge of the multi-agency Child Protection procedures.

Administration and Recording

The convening agency is responsible for initiating the meeting and should ensure that arrangements are in place to ensure the minutes of the meeting and agreed actions are distributed to all attendees and where appropriate the family. The minutes should capture the main areas of need and the action plan developed to address them.

Where there is an existing plan for the child /family, this should be reviewed and updated accordingly.

Each meeting should end with agreed actions to address the needs and concerns that have been raised. These actions should be:

- Specific – target a specific area for improvement.
- Measurable – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.
- Assignable – specify who will do it.
- Realistic – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.
- Time-related – specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

Where these relate to the child or family they should be discussed with the family. The meeting should agree dates of further meetings to review and ensure the progress on tasks and outcomes.

Attendance

The meeting needs to bring together all those who can provide relevant information about the child and family. After the meeting, a member of the meeting should be appointed to inform the child and family of the outcome.

Venue

The venue should be the most convenient and comfortable place to meet for a confidential discussion or via virtual methods. Confidentiality must be ensured by members attending virtually.

Permissions / Family Involvement / Confidentiality

The agency who is requesting the meeting should consider whether the parents and or carers should be informed of the meeting beforehand.

However, careful and considered professional judgment may need to be brought to bear on whether this is appropriate. If the parents or carers (or child where appropriate) have not been informed of the meeting, then agreement should be sought from invited agencies that the meeting will take place without the family being informed.

If the child, parents or carers, when they are informed about the meeting, raise an objection to it taking place, consideration should be given to whether concerns are enough to require a different approach (i.e. a strategy discussion)

Where the issues to be discussed relate to difficulties with engagement with the parents, then seeking permission for the meeting to take place is unlikely to yield the desired result.

Where the meeting is to discuss complex matters and to develop a more comprehensive picture of the family's circumstances it is not necessary to gain consent for the meeting to take place.

Normal rules of confidentiality apply in that only information relevant to ensuring the safeguarding and welfare of the children in the family should be shared. Any action plan developed as a result of the meeting should address how the issues discussed are then raised with the parents / carers, unless to do so would potentially place the children concerned at risk of further harm.

In some situations, it may be appropriate to conduct the meeting in two parts involving the relevant professionals in the first part and inviting the parents / carers to the second part of the meeting. This could be the case where the professionals disagree and airing these issues in a frank discussion would not be appropriate with the parents / carers or the child present.

Where the parents / carers have not been directly involved in the meeting, agreement needs to be reached on which professional will be expected to feedback to them on its outcome, if this is relevant.

If actions are not implemented as agreed, or they fail to meet the needs or address the concerns, a further multi-agency professionals' meeting can be requested by any professional before the agreed review date.

The following format is suggested for the multi-agency meeting:

- Date, time and venue.
- Introduction (who is in attendance and why).
- Attendance / Apologies.
- Aim of meeting (what is the issue to be addressed).
- Strengths, Needs and Risks identified by convening agency prior to meeting.
- Additional or new information shared at meeting (from all agencies).
- Other Strengths, Needs and Risks identified during the meeting.
- How to address these needs? What has already been tried?
- Plan to support the family, identifying clearly who is responsible for which actions, with timescales clearly defined.
- Has a Family meeting been considered?
- Agreement about who is to continue as Lead Practitioner, if a change is deemed appropriate.
- Date of next review (if the meeting agrees that this is required).