

7 The Child Protection Conference System

7.1 Initial Child Protection Conferences

7.1.1 Purpose

The initial Child Protection Conference brings together family members, the child where appropriate, and those professionals most involved with the child and family. The conference follows Child Protection enquiries made under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989. Its purpose is:

- a) to bring together and analyse in an inter-agency setting the information which has been obtained about the child's developmental needs, and the parents' or caregivers' capacity to respond to these needs to ensure the child's safety and promote the child's health and development within the context of their wider family and environment
- b) to consider the information presented to the conference, make judgments about the likelihood of a child suffering future significant harm and
- c) to decide what future action is needed to safeguard the child and promote her/his welfare, how that action will be taken forward, and with what intended outcomes

7.1.2 Criteria for Convening a Child Protection Conference

A Child Protection Conference should be convened in the following circumstances:

- a) following Section 47 enquiries, assessment has indicated that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm and that a Child Protection Plan is necessary
- b) when it is considered that there is risk of significant harm to an expected child and a Child Protection Plan needs to be in place before birth
- c) on the birth of a child into a household where there is already a child on the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan
- d) where a child is living in a household where a person who poses a risk or potential risk to children lives or frequently visits, following Section 47 enquiries
- e) when a child on another list/register of children subject to a Child Protection Plan moves into the area
- f) where child to child abuse is suspected following Section 47 enquiries and an assessment that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm and that a Child Protection Plan is necessary in respect of

the alleged victim; or in respect of the alleged abuser, who might also be a victim.

7.1.3 Timing

The timing of an initial Child Protection Conference will depend on the urgency of the case and on the time needed to obtain relevant information about the child and family. If the conference is to reach well-informed decisions based on evidence, it should take place following adequate preparation and assessment. At the same time, in cases where children are at risk of significant harm there should not be drift. Consequently, **all initial conferences should take place within 15 working days of the strategy discussion/meeting, or the last strategy/discussion meeting if more than one has been held.**

In relation to unborn children a Child Protection Conference should be held no later than the 32nd week of pregnancy.

Where a child on another list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan moves into the area permanently, the conference should take place within **15 working days** of the receiving local authority being notified of the permanent move.

Any departure from **15 working days** should only be in consultation with the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit and should not jeopardise the protection needs of a child.

7.1.4 Pre-Birth Conferences

Where Section 47 enquiries give rise to concern that an expected child may be at future risk of significant harm, Children's Social Care should convene an initial Child Protection Conference prior to the child's birth. Such a conference should have the same status, and proceed in the same way as other initial conferences, including whether the unborn child needs a pre-birth assessment completing, and a Child Protection Plan at birth. The involvement of the midwifery services is vital in these cases, together with relevant information from the parents' GP. Social Workers should ensure that hospital midwives have a copy of the expected baby's birth plan and Child Protection Plan.

Pre-birth conferences should agree when pre-birth planning meetings will be held and which professionals should attend these meetings.

7.1.5 Attendance at Child Protection Conferences

Those attending conferences should be there because they have a significant contribution to make, arising from professional expertise, knowledge of the child or family, or services they can offer in the future.

There should be sufficient information and expertise available, through personal representation and written reports, to enable the conference to make an informed decision about what action is needed to safeguard the child and promote her/his welfare, and to make realistic and workable proposals for taking that action forward. However, a conference that is larger than it needs to be can inhibit discussion and intimidate the child and family members.

Children's Social Care staff convening conferences should consider which of the following may have a contribution to make:

- a) the child, or his or her representative
- b) family members (including the wider family)
- c) Children's Social Care staff who have undertaken an assessment of the child and family
- d) foster carers (current or former)
- e) residential care staff
- f) professionals involved with the child (eg Health Visitor, Midwife, School Nurse, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Paediatrician, GP, NHS Direct, Early Years staff, Teacher, Education Welfare Officer, Youth Worker, Youth Offending Team, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)
- g) professionals involved with the parents (eg family support services, adult mental health services, probation, GP, NHS Direct, Substance/Alcohol and Domestic Abuse Services)
- h) professionals with expertise in the particular type of harm suffered by the child or the child's particular condition, for example, a disability or long term illness
- i) those involved in enquiries/investigations (eg the Police)
- j) local authority Legal Services
- k) housing services staff
- l) voluntary organisations, eg Substance/Alcohol Misuse Services, Domestic Abuse Services and
- m) a representative of the Armed Services, in cases where there is an Armed Service connection.

An observer, for example, a student, a new worker or trainee may accompany a professional colleague who is attending a Child Protection Conference where the experience is felt to be relevant. However, prior agreement must be sought from the Chair of the conference and from the parents/main caregiver.

7.1.6 Quoracy

At every initial Child Protection Conference there should be attendance by Children's Social Care staff and at least two other professional groups or agencies that have had direct contact with the child who is the subject of the conference. In cases where a child has had contact with three agencies but one or more are not represented, the Chair should make a decision about whether the contact is relevant. If it is, the conference should be postponed until a representative can attend. In cases where a child has not had relevant contact with three agencies (ie Children's Social Care and two others), the decision to proceed or not rests with the Conference Chair. If the conference is not to proceed, the Chair will indicate what additional action needs to be taken and by whom to ensure the child is safeguarded in the interim period.

7.1.7 Involving the Child

The purpose and processes of a conference should always be explained to a child of sufficient age and understanding, as should the purpose of the list/register of children with a Child Protection Plan. If a child has had assistance with communication in the course of the Police investigation/Child Protection enquiries, it may be helpful to provide the same assistance with this explanation.

Children who are the subject of a Child Protection Conference have the right to attend if they so wish. They should attend all or part of the meeting if:

- they are of sufficient age and understanding, are able to express their wishes and feelings, and want to attend and
- their attendance would not cause them distress or further abuse and
- their attendance would not increase the risk to their welfare.

Although a child may have the cognitive ability to attend, they may not have the emotional strength to do so and it will be for the Social Worker to assess this.

Having made a judgement that the child is to attend the meeting, the Social Worker should brief the Chair well in advance of the meeting, so that the process of the meeting can be tailored as far as possible to the child's needs.

A child has the right to express their views and may welcome the opportunity to do so. The Social Worker should actively seek the best way for a child to do this, and a conference can expect this to have been done.

The Social Worker should consider whether the child needs assistance in contacting a supporter or advocate. A copy of the leaflet 'Information for Parents, Carers and Young People about Child Protection Conferences' should be given to a child or young person and their advocate/supporter.

If the conference is considering more than one child, care should be taken to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. It may not be appropriate for one child of a family to hear information about another.

If there is likely to be a criminal prosecution, or a conflict of interests with their parents/caregivers, consideration should be given to any implications for the way in which the child participates in the conference. Consideration needs to be given to how the child may come into contact with possible perpetrators, or where there could be questions about evidence that the child may later give in Court being affected by information heard at the conference.

Agencies may hold relevant information about parents/caregivers that parents/caregivers would not wish the child to have. Discussion with the Chair prior to the conference should clarify how this information should be shared and with which conference participants.

Whenever children attend a Child Protection Conference, the Chair should meet them beforehand to ensure they understand what will be happening and how and when they will be able to contribute.

If the child does not want to attend the meeting, the Social Worker should actively seek alternative means for them to express their views. An advocate might speak for them. The child might wish to write their views down and have them read out. The child might record their views on tape to be played to the meeting. The child might wish to pass on their views in person to the Chair of the conference.

7.1.8 Involving Family Members

Family members who will normally be invited to attend a Child Protection Conference are:

- any person with parental responsibility
- fathers who do not have parental responsibility but who are actively involved with the child
- others who have day to day care of the child
- the partner of a parent/caregiver and
- other family members in exceptional circumstances, where the Chair agrees that their attendance would be in the best interests of the child.

Where a parent has had no significant contact with their children and is unlikely to have future involvement, a decision needs to be made about their attendance. In some circumstances a decision may be made not to inform them that the conference is being held. Advice may be sought from the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit.

The Children's Social Care Team Manager is responsible for ensuring that the Social Worker, as a matter of routine, addresses the following issues with parents/main caregivers:

- a) agree a convenient time and date for the conference, giving reasonable consideration to their wishes, working hours, religious needs, etc
- b) clarify with the parent who is caring for the child whether involving an absent parent would compromise their safety or that of the child. It may be that there has been domestic abuse in the past. In such circumstances, a reasonable decision should be made and recorded in each case, bearing in mind the child's best interests. If the attendance of several family members creates a conflict of interests, the Chair should seek to plan the meeting in such a way that all family members' interests may be expressed. It may well not be possible for all relevant family members to be present for the whole meeting
- c) explain the purpose and structure of the conference and who else has been invited
- d) explain the decision-making powers of the conference and the implications of any decisions/recommendations made
- e) have Children's Social Care report provided to them and explained at least two days prior to the conference
- f) explain the purpose of the list/register of children with a Child Protection Plan. Parents/main caregivers should

- also be given a copy of the leaflet 'Information for Parents, Carers and Young People about Child Protection Conferences'
- g) explain that parents/main caregivers may bring a supporter or advocate to the meeting. Parents/main caregivers should be given a copy of the leaflet 'Choosing someone to go to the Child Protection Conference with you', and their advocate/supporter should be given a copy of the leaflet 'Helping someone attend a Child Protection Conference'. Please see Rotherham Safeguarding Children Board website.
 - h) where the parents/caregivers preferred language is not English, consideration should be given to the engagement of a professional interpreter. This is because the issues to be discussed at the conference are complex and may involve technical language that may inhibit participation. The interpreter should not attend the conference as the parents/caregivers' supporter, but as interpreter for the conference. Consideration will need to be given to the timing of the conference, as it is likely to last longer than the usual conference
 - i) where parents/caregivers use British Sign Language, the Social Worker should make arrangements for a signer to attend the conference
 - j) parents/caregivers may have young children to care for. The Social Worker should ensure that young family members are appropriately cared for at the time of the conference so that parents/caregivers are able to give their full attention to the business of the meeting
 - k) the Social Worker may need to give consideration to financial assistance to enable family members to attend.

The Chair should meet family members before the conference to ensure they understand what will happen. S/he should also explain to family members how and when they can contribute to the meeting.

7.1.9 Exclusions

Decisions about excluding anyone from a Child Protection Conference rest with the Chair. All invited professionals should consider the following exclusion criteria in relation to family members and notify the Chair of concerns well in advance of the meeting where:

- there is a history of violence or threats that may endanger any conference member. This may be

particularly relevant where there is evidence of domestic abuse

- proper consideration of the issues is likely to be impeded by the actions and behaviour or presence of the parent/caregiver
- the case requires detailed consideration of the child's allegation and/or evidence and the parent/caregiver is the alleged abuser.

The possibility that a parent may be prosecuted for an offence against a child is not in itself a reason for exclusion, although in these circumstances the Chair should take advice from the Police about any implications arising from the alleged perpetrator's attendance. If criminal proceedings have already been implemented, the view of the Crown Prosecution Service should be taken into account.

Where there is a decision to exclude a parent/caregiver from the whole conference, s/he should be notified of the exclusion and the reason for it, in writing. The Chair should also indicate the exclusion at the meeting, provide the reason for it, and ensure it is minuted.

During a Child Protection Conference, a Chair may exclude family members where it has been agreed in advance that a professional has confidential information to share and also whilst the conference considers legal proceedings or legal advice.

Where the Chair has decided a family member who would normally be invited should be excluded from the conference, consideration should be given as to how or whether any relevant views/information from that individual will be provided. Consideration should also be given to whether the excluded individual should receive any part of the minutes of that conference.

7.1.10 Providing Professional Information to a Child Protection Conference

7.1.10.1 Reports

Every invited professional has a responsibility to attend and give all relevant information to the Child Protection Conference by submitting a written report, with sufficient copies, to the Rotherham **Safeguarding Children Unit at least two days in advance and by giving a verbal report.** This should include:

- a) a chronology of significant events and agency and professional contact with the child and family
- b) information on the child's developmental progress and current needs
- c) information about the capacity, including strengths, of the parents/caregivers and other family members to safeguard the child and promote his/her health and development, within their wider family and environmental context and
- d) an analysis of the implications of the information obtained for the child's future safety and meeting of his or her developmental needs.

The written report format is the responsibility of individual agencies but should be standardised within agencies to ensure that appropriate standards are met.

Please see Appendix 9 on Rotherham Safeguarding Children Board website for information on format of reports.

7.1.10.2 Reports from Children's Social Care

Children's Social Care should provide the conference with a written report that summarises and analyses the information obtained in the course of the initial assessment and the core assessment undertaken under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (in as far as it has been completed within the available time period) and information in existing records relating to the child and family.

Where decisions are being made about more than one child in a family, there should be a report prepared on each child.

The report for a Child Protection Conference should be consistent with the information set out in the initial Child Protection Conference report.²⁰ The core assessment is the means by which a Section 47 enquiry is carried out. Although a core assessment will have been commenced it is unlikely it will have been completed in time for the conference, given the

²⁰ Department of Health, 2002

35 working day period that such assessments can take.

In addition to points a) to d) above, the Social Care report should include:

- a professional opinion as to whether the threshold of significant harm has been met for each child
- the expressed views, wishes and feelings of the child, parents, and other family members
- a proposed plan that takes account of the needs of each child

Professionals should always consider whether it is appropriate and safe to disclose full family details in their reports, including details of address. This is particularly important in cases of domestic abuse, and where a child is placed away from home.

Where it is not possible for an invited professional or their delegate to attend or for them to submit a written report they should contact the Chair of the conference in advance to give their information.

A professional may hold relevant third party information where authority to pass that information on is restricted, for example by code of practice or by request. In this case they should discuss with the Chair prior to the conference if or how this information can be shared with the meeting. See Section 3: Sharing Confidential Information for further information.

If the Chair is unclear about sharing the information legal advice should be sought.

All those providing information should take care to distinguish between fact, observation, hearsay, allegation and opinion.

All who attend the conference should be able to easily understand the reports. They should be available in the preferred language of the parents/caregivers or adapted to meet individual communication needs (eg Braille).

Copies of all written reports should be provided to the family at least two days in advance of the conference. It is acknowledged that the urgency of some conferences may prevent this. In these cases, the professional concerned should make every effort to discuss with family members the likely content of the report.

In exceptional circumstances and where agreed in advance with the chair, it may not be appropriate to share confidential information with the family prior to the conference.

7.2 The Role of the Conference Chair

It is considered good practice wherever possible that the same person should chair the initial and subsequent Review Conferences in respect of a specific child.

7.2.1 General Duties

The Chair, acting on behalf of the LSCB, should:

- a) ensure that the conference remains focused on the child and that the child's interests transcend those of the parents/caregivers where there is conflict
- b) manage the business of the conference, provide procedural guidance, facilitate information sharing and discussion between all conference members, including ensuring that the conference is not used as an opportunity to cross-examine parents or children and that full consideration is given to all participants
- c) ensure the agenda is adhered to and clear decisions and recommendations are reached which are consistent with the Child Protection Procedures
- d) help to identify gaps in knowledge about the child and family and assist in clarifying the roles and tasks of Core Group members
- e) ensure that the conference is assisted in addressing equalities issues.

7.2.2 Meeting with Family Members

The Chair should meet the parents/main caregiver, the child, and their supporters/advocates, before the conference is due to begin. The conference should begin at the arranged time, so sufficient time should be allowed beforehand for this meeting. The Social Worker should ensure that arrangements are made for family members to arrive in good time. The Chair should:

- a) explain the agenda and purpose of the meeting to the parents/caregivers
- b) remind the parents/main caregiver and child of the exclusion criteria
- c) clarify with them why they are invited, ie
 - the conference will be discussing them
 - it is important that they hear the information about the risk to the child
 - it is important the conference hears their views on what is reported
 - it is important they know how and why decisions are made
 - they need to be involved in planning
- d) be clear about whether parents/main caregiver/child have read relevant reports
- e) answer any questions they may have about the meeting
- f) reaffirm that they should be able to give their views about whether or not their child requires a Child Protection Plan, but may not take part in making the decision
- g) explain the role of the minute-taker, that minutes will be provided to them of the parts of the meeting they attend, and make available pen and paper where required and
- h) explain the confidential nature of the meeting

7.2.3 Agenda

The Chair is responsible for ensuring a conference agenda is followed which includes the following:

- a statement of the type of and reason for the conference, drawing attention to the confidential nature of the information shared and the need to ensure that no off-the-record comments are made
- introductions, names, positions and connections with the case. The Chair should ensure that all those present have a role to play
- the Chair should go through the agenda of the meeting and give an indication of how individuals should participate
- ensuring reports submitted are read by participants, including parents/main caregivers, child and their advocates or supporters
- giving a chronological factual account of the reasons for referral, subsequent Section 47 enquiries/Police

investigation, the core assessment to date and the outcomes

- each professional should be given the opportunity to share their knowledge of the family, and the Chair should ensure that they are not interrupted. Opportunities should be provided for questions and clarification of facts
- the views of parents/main caregivers and children should be sought, directly or via their advocates
- the Chair should briefly summarise the main points of the discussion, both positive and negative, and then move the meeting on to consider an assessment of risk and a plan to meet the child's needs
- the Chair should outline the criteria for the need for a Child Protection Plan and offer guidance to the conference (see Section 7.9)
- the conference should make a decision about the need for a Child Protection Plan
- if the child's name is placed on the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan, the Chair should assist the conference to develop an outline Child Protection Plan
- if the child's name is not placed on the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan, the conference should consider whether the core assessment is completed, or what further assessment is needed, and ensure arrangements are in place to consider with the family what further help and support can be offered to them

7.2.4 Confidential Section

Where a professional has agreed in advance with the Chair the need for a confidential section, parents/main caregivers/children and their supporters or advocates should be asked to leave the conference where necessary. This allows disclosure of third party and sensitive information that may have implications for an ongoing Child Protection investigation.

7.2.5 Making Decisions and Recommendations

Responsibility for professional judgements on the need for a Protection Plan rest with all professionals involved. The Chair's role is to raise issues, ask questions and give procedural guidance that will facilitate a consensus being reached between agencies, which are in the interests of the child and in accordance with these procedures.

In exceptional circumstances where a consensus cannot be reached, the Chair may be responsible for ensuring that decisions and recommendations are made which, in the opinion of the Chair, most clearly reflect the interests of the child, and these procedures. The Chair may:

- a) decide to place the child's name on the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan where, in his/her opinion, the criteria are met, or decide not to do so. The Chair should minute the basis for this decision, and
- b) invite agencies to recommend a Protection Plan, or
- c) adjourn the conference giving guidance on issues which need to be investigated and considered further, and
- d) agree a date for the re-convened conference.

Opportunities should be given for members of the conference to dissent from the decision made by the Chair, and this will be recorded in the minutes.

In exceptional circumstances, for example, if insufficient information is available, an initial Case Conference decision may need to be deferred/the meeting adjourned. In such cases a safe plan for the child should be put in place in the interim period, until the re-convened Case Conference is held.

7.3 Making a Decision about a Child being placed on the List/Register of Children who have a Child Protection Plan

The conference should consider:

Is the child at continuing risk of significant harm?

The test should be that either:

- the child can be shown to have suffered ill-treatment or impairment of health or development as a result of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect, and professional judgement is that further ill-treatment or impairment are likely, or
- professional judgement, substantiated by the findings of enquiries in this individual case or by research evidence, is that the child is likely to suffer ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development as a result of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect

Every professional present should ensure that they develop a view in the course of the meeting about whether a Child Protection Plan is required. This view should be based on an analysis of the information provided to the meeting.

If a decision is taken that the child is **not at continuing** risk of significant harm, and therefore placing the child's name on the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan is not appropriate, a Child in Need Plan should be considered, informed by the core assessment.

Where appropriate an outline Child in Need Plan should be drawn up, with a specifically recommending which agencies should review the more detailed Child in Need Plan at regular intervals, but no less frequent than every six months.

If a decision is taken that the child **is at continuing** risk of significant harm and hence in need of a Child Protection Plan and their name placing on the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan, the Chair should determine which category (one or more) of abuse is applicable. The category used (ie physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect, in accordance with Section 2 of these procedures) will indicate to those consulting the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan the primary presenting concerns at the time the decision was made.

7.4 The Outline Child Protection Plan

It is the responsibility of the conference to consider and make recommendations on how agencies, professionals and the family should work together to ensure that the child is safeguarded from future significant harm. This should enable both professionals and the family to understand exactly what is expected of them, and what they can expect of others.

Specific tasks include the following:

- a) appointing a key worker (the lead professional) who should be a qualified, suitably experienced Social Worker and an employee of Children's Social Care
- b) identifying membership of a Core Group of professionals and family members who should develop the plan as a detailed working tool and implement it
- c) establishing how children, parents and caregivers and wider family members should be involved in the planning and implementation process, and the support, advice and advocacy available to them
- d) establishing timescales for meetings of the Core Group, production of a Child Protection Plan, and for Child Protection review meetings
- e) identifying in outline what further core and specialist assessments of the child and family are required to make sound judgements on how best to safeguard the child and promote his/her welfare

- f) outlining the Child Protection Plan, identifying what needs to change in order to achieve the planned short and long term outcomes to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child
- g) ensuring a contingency plan is in place if agreed actions are not completed and/or circumstances change, for example if a caregiver fails to achieve what has been agreed, if a Court application is not successful or if a parent removes the child from a place of safety
- h) clarifying the different purpose and remit of the initial conference, the Core Group and the Child Protection Review Conference
- i) being clear about who should have responsibility for what actions, including those by family members, within what specified timescales they should be carried out, and identifying which professional is responsible for checking that the required changes have taken place
- j) outlining ways of monitoring and evaluating progress against the planned outcomes set out in the plan and
- k) agreeing a date for the first Child Protection review, and under what circumstances it might be necessary to convene the conference before that date.

7.5 Action following the Initial Child Protection Conference

7.5.1 Talking to parents/main caregivers/children about decisions and recommendations

It should be the responsibility of the key worker to discuss the outcomes of the conference with the parents/main caregivers, and the child as appropriate, as soon as possible. The purpose is to ensure that they:

- a) understand the decisions that have been made and the implications of these
- b) are aware of the purpose of the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan
- c) understand their role and rights in any future work and
- d) are aware of their rights regarding the complaints procedure.

The key worker should provide the parents/main caregivers, and the child where appropriate, with written information about the decisions and recommendations of the conference, in the language and form that meets their communication needs, as soon as possible. This may well be in addition to the minutes of the meeting.

Where parents have had no significant contact with their children, and are unlikely to have future involvement, a decision must be made about whether or not to notify them of

the outcome of the conference. Consideration should be given according to what is in the child's best interests.

7.6 Minutes of the Child Protection Conference

All Child Protection Conferences, both initial and review, should have a dedicated minute-taker to take notes and produce minutes of the meeting. The written record of the conference is a crucial working document for all relevant professionals and the family.

The decision of the conference and, where appropriate, details of the category of abuse, the name of the key worker who is also the lead professional and the Core Group membership, should be recorded in a manner that is consistent with the initial Child Protection Case Conference report and circulated to all those invited to the conference within **one working day**.

The minutes should include:

- the essential facts of the case
- a summary of the discussion which accurately reflects the contributions made;
- all decisions and recommendations made, with reasons
- and an outline or revised Child Protection Plan, enabling everyone to be clear about their tasks.

A copy should be sent as soon as possible to all those who attended or who were invited to attend, including family members.

The confidential section of any minutes should not be available to family members.

The Chair should always consider whether it is appropriate and safe to disclose full family details in the minutes, including details of address; this is particularly important in cases of domestic abuse, and where a child is placed away from home.

In addition, a copy should be sent by the person responsible for the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan, to the child's GP, the School Child Protection Officer, and the Designated Nurse for Child Protection.

The minutes are confidential and should not be passed by professionals to third parties, without either the consent of either the Chair or the key worker. However, in criminal proceedings the Police may be obliged to reveal their existence to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in accordance with the Criminal Procedure and Investigation Act 1999, and in other proceedings concerning children the Court may order their disclosure

Each agency should retain the conference minutes within the child's file and ensure that they are destroyed in due course in line with the agency's retention and destruction policies.

7.7 The Role of the Key Worker

When a conference decides that a child's name should be placed on the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan, Children's Social Care should take lead responsibility for the case and designate a qualified and experienced member of its social work staff to be the key worker. Each child referred to the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan should have a key worker.

The key worker is responsible for:

- making sure that the outline Child Protection Plan is developed into a more detailed inter-agency plan
- co-ordinating the core assessment of the child and family
- securing contributions from Core Group members and others as necessary, and complete the core assessment record
- acting as lead worker for the inter-agency work with the child and family
- co-ordinating the contribution of family members and other agencies to planning the actions that need to be taken, putting the Child Protection Plan, into effect and reviewing progress against the outcomes set out in the Plan

The key worker should see the child alone on a regular basis, at least every 14 working days, to ascertain his/her wishes and feelings, and keep him/her updated.

It is good practice to make unannounced visits as part of the overall Child Protection planning. Parents should be made aware of this part of the Plan.

7.8 The Core Group

The Core Group is responsible for developing the Child Protection Plan as a detailed working tool and implementing it, within the outline plan agreed at the conference.

Membership should include:

- the key worker
- the child if appropriate
- family members
- and professionals or foster carers who have direct contact with the family

Although the key worker has the lead role, all members of the Core Group are jointly responsible for the formulation and implementation of the Child Protection Plan, refining the Plan as needed, and monitoring progress against specified objectives in the Plan.

Where children do not attend they should be informed of the discussions of the Core Group and any decisions as appropriate.

Core Groups are an important forum for working with parents, wider family members, and children of sufficient age and understanding. It can often be difficult for parents to agree to a Child Protection Plan within the confines of a formal conference. Their agreement may be forged later when details of the Plan are worked out in the Core Group. Sometimes there may be conflicts of interest between family members who have a relevant interest in the work of the Core Group.

The child's best interests should always take precedence over the interests of other family members.

The first meeting of the Core Group should take place within **10 working days** of the initial Child Protection Conference. The purpose of this first meeting is to agree the detail of the Child Protection Plan and decide what steps need to be taken by whom to complete the core assessment on time. Thereafter, Core Groups should meet at least monthly, to facilitate working together, monitor actions and outcomes against the Child Protection Plan, and make any necessary changes as circumstances change.

When a Core Group meeting is not scheduled to take place within a month of the previous meeting, the reason for this should be recorded in the notes of the previous meeting, and this note should be counter-signed by the key worker's manager, to authorise the delay.

There should be a written note recording action agreed at Core Group meetings and decisions taken. The Child Protection Plan should be updated as necessary.

The key worker is responsible for acting as lead professional for the inter-agency work with the family. However, **all professionals have a responsibility to contribute to chairing and recording Core Group meeting notes.**

7.9 The Child Protection Plan

The Child Protection Plan should set out what work needs to be done, why, when and by whom, to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. The Plan should:

- a) clearly define the risks that led to the need for a Child Protection Plan
- b) clearly identify the strengths and protective factors within the family situation
- c) describe the identified needs of the child, any specialist assessments needed, and what therapeutic services are required
- d) include specific, achievable, child-focused objectives intended to safeguard the child and promote his/her welfare
- e) include realistic strategies and specific actions to achieve the objectives
- f) include a contingency plan to be followed if circumstances change significantly and require prompt action
- g) clearly identify roles and responsibilities of professionals and family members, including the nature and frequency of contact by professionals with children and family members;
- h) lay down points at which progress should be reviewed, and the means by which progress should be judged
- i) set out clearly the roles and responsibilities of those professionals with routine contact with the child eg Health Visitors, GPs and teachers, as well as any specialist or targeted support to the child and family, with timescales.

Plans about how to intervene, including what services to offer, should be based on evidence about what is likely to achieve the best outcomes for the child. A number of aspects of intervention should be considered in the light of evidence from assessment of the child's health and developmental needs, the parents/main caregivers' capacity to respond appropriately to the child's needs, and the wider family circumstances.

Intervention may have a number of inter-related components, including:

- action to make a child safe
- action to help promote a child's health and development
- action to help a parent/caregiver in safeguarding a child and promoting his/her welfare
- therapy for an abused child
- support or therapy for a perpetrator of abuse

The Child Protection Plan must take into consideration the wishes and feelings of the child, and the views of the parents/main caregiver, insofar as these are consistent with the child's welfare.

The key worker should make every effort to ensure that the child and parents/main caregiver have a clear understanding of the objectives of the Plan, that they accept it and are willing to work to it.

The Plan should be constructed with the family in their first language. If family members' preferences are not accepted about how best to safeguard the child, the reasons for this should be explained. Families should be told about their right to complain and make representations, and how to do so.

A written Child Protection Plan should be produced, agreed, and distributed to all members of the Core Group, and the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit. All members of the Core Group have equal ownership of, and responsibility for, the Child Protection Plan and should co-operate to achieve its aims.

At the initial Core Group meeting, members of the Core Group should clarify, and record expectations regarding their contribution to the core assessment.

The key worker should ensure that members of the Core Group receive a copy of the completed core assessment.

7.9.1 Core Assessment for Children who have a Child Protection Plan

Within **35 working days** from the date of the initial strategy discussion/meeting, the Social Worker and Core Group should have completed a core assessment in respect of every child who has a Child Protection Plan. This must be consistent with the guidance contained in the 'Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families'.²¹

Delay in completing specialist assessments should not prevent drawing together the core assessment findings at this point. This analysis of the child's needs should underpin the Child Protection Plan. The completed core assessment should be discussed in the Core Group.

Any changes to the Child Protection Plan should be discussed and agreed with the Core Group. Where a significant change is required urgently in order to safeguard the child, action should be taken as required. However the key worker should inform the Core Group by telephone as soon as possible and reconvene the Core Group.

7.10 Child Protection Review Conferences

7.10.1 Timescale

The first Review Conference should be held within **3 months** of the initial conference, and further reviews should be held at

²¹ Department of Health et al 2000

not more than **6 month** intervals. This is to ensure that momentum is maintained in the process of safeguarding the children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

In the case of a pre-birth conference the first review must be held within **3 months** of the child's birth.

7.10.2 Purpose

The purpose of the Review Conference is:

- to review the safety, health and development of the child against intended outcomes set out in the Child Protection Plan
- to ensure that the child continues to be adequately safeguarded and
- to consider whether the Child Protection Plan should continue in place or should be changed

The review requires as much preparation, commitment and management as the initial conference. Members of the Core Group have responsibility to produce reports for the Child Protection Review which provides an overview of the work undertaken by family members and professionals, and an evaluation of the impact on the child's welfare against the planned outcomes set out in the Child Protection Plan.

Every review should consider explicitly whether the child continues to be at risk of significant harm, and hence continues to need safeguarding through adherence to a formal Child Protection Plan. If not, then the child's name may be removed from the list/register of children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

However, it would not be good practice to seek de-registration at the first Review Conference, except in exceptional circumstances, eg a Court Order is in place, or there is clear evidence that a perpetrator has left the family home.

The effectiveness of Core Group working should be monitored by the Review Conference. Professionals have responsibility in the interim to bring any problems with joint working to the attention of their respective managers, who will make every effort to resolve them.

7.10.3 Quoracy

Normally, a Review Conference may only proceed when representatives from Children's Social Care and at least two

other agencies or professional groups who have had direct contact with the subject are present. In exceptional cases, where a child has not had relevant contact with three agencies (eg Children's Social Care and two others), the Chair can decide that this minimum quorum may be breached.

7.11 Removing Children's Names from the List/Register of Children who have a Child Protection Plan

A child's name may be removed from the list/register of children with a Child Protection Plan if:

- a) it is judged that a child is no longer at continuing risk of harm requiring safeguarding by means of a Child Protection Plan (eg the risk of harm has been reduced by action taken through the Child Protection Plan, for example, where an application for an interim Care Order has been successful; or the child and family's circumstances have changed). Under these circumstances, only a Child Protection Review Conference can decide that inclusion on the list of children subject to a Child Protection Plan is no longer necessary
- b) the child and family have moved permanently to another local authority area. In such cases, the receiving local authority should convene a Child Protection Conference within **15 working days** of being notified of the move. Only after this conference in the new authority has been held, should the original local authority discontinue the Child Protection Plan
- c) the child has reached the age of 18 years, has died or has permanently left the UK.

Non-co-operation with the Child Protection Plan is **not** a valid reason for removal of a child's name from the list/register. In these circumstances, further advice should be sought, for example from the local authority legal department, and/or the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit. A Protocol for Working with Un-Co-Operative Families is available on Rotherham Safeguarding Children Board website.

When a child's name is removed from the list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan, notification should be sent, as a minimum, to all those agencies' representatives who were invited to attend the initial Conference.

A child who no longer requires a Child Protection Plan may still be in need of additional support and services. Discontinuation of a Child Protection Plan should never lead to the automatic withdrawal of help. A Child in Need Plan may still be required. This should be discussed at the Review Conference with the parents/main caregivers and the child. The Review Conference should outline a Child in Need Plan, with a specific recommendation regarding the

agencies reviewing that plan at regular intervals, but no less frequent than every six months.

7.12 Action following a Review Conference

It is the key worker's responsibility to ensure that parents/main caregivers and children understand the outcomes of the Review Conference and any subsequent plans.

7.13 Child Protection Conferences where the Child is Looked After by the Local Authority

In general the names of children who are Looked After should not require a Child Protection Plan unless particular circumstances apply. This is because the needs of these children are monitored and assessed via the Statutory Review System, and also because they have been removed from a setting that might place them at continuing risk of significant harm.

However, there will always be circumstances where it remains appropriate to convene an initial Child Protection Conference on a child who is Looked After, in response to a Section 47 Child Protection enquiry. This may include children who are not subject to a Court Order.

7.14 Children already on the List/Register of Children who have a Child Protection Plan who are subsequently Looked After by the Local Authority

In such circumstances, the Child Protection Review Conference should agree that the child no longer requires a Child Protection Plan, as there is no continuing risk of significant harm. Exceptions to this are likely to be in relation to unsupervised contact between the child and the alleged abuser, where a decision has already been made to rehabilitate, or in the case of children subject to an order, where the local authority is unable to exercise parental responsibility.

7.15 Children who are Looked After and have a Child Protection Plan

In circumstances where a child who is Looked After is also the subject of a Child Protection Review Conference, the overriding principle must be that the review systems are integrated and carefully monitored, in a way that promotes a child centred and not a bureaucratic approach. It is important to link the timing of a Child Protection Review Conference with a Statutory Child Care Review to ensure that information from the conference is brought to the review meeting and informs the overall care planning process.

7.16 Change of Circumstances of a Child who has a Child Protection Plan

Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit should be informed of any changes in the circumstances of children who have a Child Protection Plan. This information must be kept up to date. Any professional worker who becomes aware of a change of circumstances of a child who has a Child Protection Plan should inform the key worker, who should immediately inform Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit. Confirmation should be provided in writing to the Unit.

The key worker is responsible for immediately informing Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit of the following changes of circumstances:

- allocation of new key worker
- change of address of family
- changes of family circumstances, including new household members
- family moving out of authority area, including in a temporary capacity eg holiday
- change of caregiver for child, including in a temporary capacity – name and address of new caregiver must be provided
- birth of a new child who is to be added to the list/register when born
- change of legal status – including child becoming Looked After
- any subsequent moves while in care

7.17 Children who have a Child Protection Plan moving out of Local Authority

A professional who becomes aware that a child who has a Child Protection Plan has moved out of the authority, either on a temporary or permanent basis, should notify the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit immediately. Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit will take responsibility for:

- contacting the Safeguarding Unit or equivalent, in the local authority to which the child has moved in order to provide details of the child, family, reasons for the Child Protection Plan, key worker, legal status, and other relevant information
- providing the Safeguarding Unit in the area to which the child has moved with written confirmation of the above information and copies of both initial and Review Conference minutes.

It is the responsibility of the key worker and his/her team manager to:

- liaise with Children's Social Care in the area to which the child has moved, in order to provide relevant information and reports, eg Core Assessment and Child Protection Plan. A formal Plan must be agreed to ensure the safety of the child with the roles and responsibilities of both Children's Social Care clearly outlined
- inform Core Group members within the home authority in order that they can inform their counterpart in the area to which the child has moved.

An initial Child Protection Conference should be held in the local authority area to which the child has moved within **15 working days** of the new authority being notified. This should be attended by the key worker or team manager from the originating authority and other members of the Core Group, who should ensure that all appropriate information is provided to the conference. The outcome should be notified in writing to the Safeguarding Children Unit of the previous authority. Only on receipt of this written information should the originating local authority discontinue its Child Protection Plan.

When the child stays on a regular basis or moves temporarily to live with another caregiver in another local authority area, it is the responsibility of the key worker to inform Children's Social Care in the host authority of these arrangements. The Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit should formally inform its counterpart in that area that this child has a Child Protection Plan.

7.18 Children who have a Child Protection Plan moving into the Local Authority

Any professional or agency becoming aware of a child who has a Child Protection Plan moving into the Rotherham Authority area should immediately notify Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit, who should contact their counterparts in the previous authority and request documentation. They should also ensure that the previous authority has made a referral to the relevant, receiving Children's Social Care team.

The new Children's Social Care team should commence a Section 47 enquiry/core assessment. This should involve liaising with the

appropriate Children's Social Care in the previous local authority, requesting documentation and determining a plan that will adequately safeguard the child, identifying the responsibilities of both Children's Social Care within this. A child should not be left without a key worker.

In most circumstances the previous local authority should retain case accountability until the transfer-in conference. However, there will be circumstances where it is agreed that case accountability is transferred to the new authority. In such cases, accountability will only be transferred and accepted when it has been agreed in writing.

Where a child who has a Child Protection Plan moves into an area permanently, the conference should take place within **15 working days** of the receiving local authority being notified of the move. Any departure from **15 working days** should be in consultation with the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit, and should not jeopardise the welfare of the child.

The child's name should immediately be placed temporarily on the receiving authority's list/register of children who have a Child Protection Plan pending a transfer-in conference.

The key worker and other relevant Core Group members from the previous local authority should be invited to the transfer-in conference.

Following the transfer-in conference within the authority, Rotherham Safeguarding Children Unit should inform, in writing, counterparts in the previous authority of the decisions made by conference.