

Chapter Six

Initial Child Protection Conferences

6.1 Child Protection Conferences play a vital role in ensuring the safety and welfare of children. It is essential that all agencies ensure that those involved in child protection work are committed to:

- attendance at conferences
- careful preparation, including the provision of notes for conference
- sharing of information
- contributing to decision making
- following up agreed action to safeguard the child

Purpose of Initial Child Protection Conferences

6.2 The initial child protection conference brings together family members, the child where appropriate, and those professionals most involved with the child and family, or who have relevant information which could inform decision making, following section 47 enquiries or a receiving-in conference on a child newly arrived in the authority. Its purpose is to bring together and analyse in an inter-agency setting:

- the information which has been obtained about the child's health
- development and functioning, including any abuse or neglect suffered
- the parents' or carers' capacity to ensure the child's safety and promote the child's health and development
- any relevant environmental factors, including the wider family and to make judgements about the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm in future

6.3 The conference then decides what future action is needed to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare, how that action will be taken forward and with what intended outcomes. This constitutes the outline child protection plan.

Timing of Initial Child Protection Conferences

6.4 The timing of the conference in individual cases will depend on the urgency of the case and on the time needed to obtain the relevant information about the child and family. All initial conferences should take place within 15 working days of the strategy discussion at which child protection enquiries were initiated, or of the last strategy discussion if more than one has been held.

6.5 Where a child who is subject of a child protection plan (Child Protection Register (CPR)) in another authority moves permanently into the area, the initial child protection conference should take place within 15 working days of children's social care being notified of the move. Exceptions to this are discussed in Chapter 10: The Child Protection Register.

Pre-Birth Conferences

6.6 Where a core assessment under section 47 enquiries gives rise to concern that an unborn child may be at future risk of significant harm, there may be a

need to convene an initial child protection conference prior to the birth. Such a conference has the same status and proceeds in the same way as other initial child protection conferences, with the exception that:

- it will not normally be convened before the 20th week of pregnancy, but should wherever possible be held at least six weeks before the expected birth
- where the baby is to be subject of a child protection plan, this becomes effective at the birth of the child

Convening Initial Child Protection Conferences

6.7 Children's social care has the responsibility to convene child protection conferences. In order to meet the timescales set out above, the arrangements will be considered at an early stage in the section 47 enquiry.

6.8 Those professionals and agencies who are most involved with the child and family, and those who have taken part in the section 47 enquiry, have the right to request that children's social care convene a child protection conference, if they have serious concerns that a child's welfare may not otherwise be adequately safeguarded. Any such request that is supported by their senior manager or a named or designated professional should normally be agreed.

6.9 The conference will consider all the children of the household even if concerns are being expressed about one child only.

Attendance of Agencies at Child Protection Conferences (both initial and review conferences)

6.10 Key principles regarding multi-agency attendance at child protection conferences (initial and review) are:

- the quality of decisions and planning depends on the quality of information shared and evaluated within the child protection conference
- attendance facilitates full and honest information sharing and discussion. This promotes understanding and shared responsibility which is crucial to enable the child protection plan to be implemented

6.11 All agencies directly involved with the child and family, or holding information relevant to the safety or welfare of the child should be invited. The following must always be invited:

- social workers who have undertaken an assessment of the child and family
- police officers involved in investigations
- health visitors and/or school nurse
- GP for the child and parents
- school (where one or more children are of school age)
- other doctors involved in recent medical assessment or treatment of the child
- midwifery services (where the conference concerns an unborn or new born child)
- children's guardian (where there are current court proceedings)

- 6.12 Other professionals who may have a significant and relevant contribution to make include:
- professionals involved with the parents or other family members (e.g. family support services, adult mental health services, Probation, housing department and other housing services; Sure Start)
 - NSPCC or other involved voluntary organisations
 - the fostering supervising social worker or, in some instances, the foster carer(current or former)
 - professionals with expertise in the particular type of harm suffered by the child or in the child's particular condition (e.g. disability or long term illness)
 - Local Authority legal services

Chapters 9 onwards highlights additional factors to be taken into account when considering whom to invite.

- 6.13 Copy invitations will always be sent to the following to enable a check of records and for them to decide whether their attendance is appropriate or a written report should be submitted:
- Probation Service
 - Health Safeguarding Office
- 6.14 Invitations should contain sufficient information about members of the household (addresses, names and dates of birth, if available) and other significant adults to enable agencies to check their records prior to conference.
- 6.15 It is the responsibility of the social worker to draw up the list of those to be invited. Other agencies should alert the social worker to others involved with the family who may have a significant contribution to make. Wherever possible, the date and timing of the conference should be set at a time convenient for those who are key to that conference.
- 6.16 All agencies and professionals invited are expected to attend or send a representative, to contribute information and to be part of the evaluation and decision making process. Wherever possible, agencies should be represented by those with first hand knowledge of the child and family, who can commit resources, if necessary, following prior discussion with managers.
- 6.17 Agencies have a duty to share information about the child and/or family members which is relevant to the core assessment of the child's situation.
Please refer to Chapter 2 – Information Sharing - Hyperlink
- 6.18 In deciding who should attend, each agency should be mindful of the need to limit the size of the conference, to minimise the intimidating effect of large meetings on parents and children and to ensure efficiency. An observer can only attend with the prior consent of the chairperson and with the prior consent of the family.

- 6.19 Professionals attending the conference should prepare their contribution in advance, preferably summarising their involvement in a written report. Their views should normally be made known to the family in advance. Any written report should be made available to those attending, including family members. Professionals who are invited but unable to attend for unavoidable reasons should always submit a written report, which sets out the context of their involvement with the child(ren) and family and relevant information concerning:
- their involvement with the child(ren) and family
 - each child's health and development
 - the capacity of the parents to safeguard the child and promote each child's health and development
 - other family and environmental factors
- 6.20 Information should be summarised. Care should be taken to distinguish between fact, observation and opinion, to identify both strengths and concerns and to avoid jargon or overlong detail. Opinion and interpretations are important, but should be substantiated. Opinion should be included about what needs to change, and about what further supports and services should be made available to the child/family.

Quoracy (initial and review conferences)

- 6.21 The central principle is that sufficient agencies should be present to enable safe decisions to be made in the individual circumstances. There should normally be representation from children's social care and at least two other agencies or professional groups who have had direct contact with the child.
- 6.22 The chairperson will be responsible for deciding, in the best interests of the child, to proceed if the conference is not quorate. S/he will take into account:
- whether the most relevant professionals are available
 - the urgency of the need to safeguard the child
 - the importance of effective decision making based on relevant information, and
 - the importance of completing reviews within prescribed timescales
 - exceptionally, that a child has not had direct contact with three agencies
- 6.23 The absence of critical information may require postponement or planned early review and the chairperson should exercise discretion in reaching this decision.
- 6.24 Where the chairperson decides to proceed with an inquorate conference s/he should include the decision and the reason for it in the record of the conference.

Involving the Child and Family members (at both initial and review conferences)

- 6.25 The following principles which all agencies should follow in their practice underpin how children and their families are involved:
- in most circumstances the safeguarding of the child and promotion of his

or her welfare is achieved through developing a partnership with parents/carers and involved family members. This does not mean always agreeing with parents or other adult family members, but does mean striving for common agreement

- children and young people of sufficient age and understanding should be involved in decisions about their future in a way which respects their views, wishes and feelings but does not appear to leave the responsibility for decisions with the child
- the involvement of family members requires careful preparation and planning. The social worker has the prime responsibility for ensuring that this is managed in a way which best promotes partnership, without compromising the overarching principle that the best interests of the child are paramount. The social worker should advise the chairperson in advance of any issues

Involving Children/Young People in the Conference

- 6.26 In all cases, the social worker should ensure that the child's expressed views, wishes and feelings are sought during the enquiries and core assessment, and are separately presented in the social worker's report to the conference. This may be done by the social worker, or by another professional who has a closer professional relationship with the child. For a child of sufficient age and understanding, the discussion should include the purpose of the conference, who will attend and the way it will operate.
- 6.27 Subject to age and understanding, a child subject to the conference will also be given the opportunity to attend, if he/she wishes. Decisions about the attendance of a child are made on an individual basis, reflecting the particular need to ensure that the child is prepared and fully supported before, during and after the meeting.
- 6.28 For each child subject to the conference, the social worker will consider whether it is appropriate for the child to attend, based on a careful assessment of the child's best interests. The following questions are key to forming this judgement:
- is the child of sufficient age and understanding to make an informed decision about whether he/she wishes to attend?
 - will the child's presence inhibit the appropriate sharing of information?
 - what is the level of the child's vulnerability and how can this be handled?
 - is the conference likely to be too distressing or disturbing for the child?
 - is the presence of the child likely to undermine a criminal prosecution? (The police should be consulted over this.)
- 6.29 The decision about whether a child should attend will rest with the chairperson. The social worker must therefore discuss this with the chairperson at least 3 days before the conference to allow time for planning the child's participation.
- 6.30 At each subsequent conference the social worker should review whether a child of sufficient age and understanding may now be enabled to attend, as both knowledge of the child and the changing context of the conference may

make attendance less problematic.

- 6.31 Where it is decided that a child should be invited to attend, every effort should be made by the social worker to ensure that their participation is meaningful and supported. This includes:
- encouraging the involvement of a supporter/advocate for the child
 - sharing relevant parts of the social work report to the conference and clarifying any points the child disagrees with or is unhappy about
 - considering partial attendance and agreeing this with the chairperson
 - considering allowing the child a “confidential slot” and agreeing this with the chairperson
- 6.32 De-briefing the child after the conference, and ensuring that he/she has understood the process and decisions, should take place whether or not the child has attended the conference, and there should be a specific recommendation in the child protection plan on this, if a child is not present in person.
- 6.33 Where a child attends, the Chairperson should meet the child before the conference.

Involving the Parent/Carer in the conference

- 6.34 Parents and carers will normally be invited to attend the whole child protection conference; unless there is reason to believe that their presence would not be in the interests of the child or other children. ‘Parent’ may include an absent parent or a natural father who does not have parental responsibility. ‘Carer’ means a person who has regular responsibility for the care of the child(ren).
- 6.35 Prior to the meeting the social worker should explain to parents and carers the purpose of the conference, who will attend and how it will operate; and the purpose and meaning of their child becoming subject of a child protection plan.
- 6.36 Parents/carers are encouraged to bring a supporter to the conference if they so wish. This may be their solicitor. The role of the supporter is to help the parent/carers to participate in the conference. If the parent is asked to leave the meeting for any reason, the supporter will leave also. The supporter will not receive a copy of the conference record.
- 6.37 Where a solicitor acts as a supporter, he/she may represent their client’s views but the conference is not a legal forum and adversarial debate is not appropriate. In exceptional circumstances the chairperson may agree that a solicitor attends without the parent/carers.
- 6.38 Those for whom English is not a first language should be provided with the service of an interpreter. Provision should be made to ensure that blind, deaf or otherwise disabled parents/carers are enabled to participate.
- 6.39 Immediately prior to the conference the chairperson will meet the

parent/carer and ensure that he/she understands the conference process. This includes, where appropriate, advising that any admission made during the conference which may render them liable to prosecution, is not made “in confidence”.

Partial Exclusion of a Parent/Carer

- 6.40 It may not always be possible to involve all family members at the same time in the conference, for example, where parents are estranged, and a high level of conflict exists. Adults and children may not wish to speak in front of each other, and it may be appropriate to arrange for family members to attend separately for part of the conference.
- 6.41 Family members, the children’s guardian and the child’s solicitor may be asked to leave for a small part of the meeting if the conference needs to take legal advice, receive confidential information, for example about an ongoing criminal investigation or information gained through police intelligence or discuss how to manage a new piece of concerning information which has not been subject to assessment prior to the conference.
- 6.42 At times it will also not be appropriate for information from one family member to be shared in front of another, or for the child to have to speak in front of an adult. The chairperson may manage this by asking one or more family members to withdraw from the meeting whilst this takes place.
- 6.43 The chairperson should ensure that this provision is never used routinely to exclude family members or used to avoid the open and honest discussion of uncomfortable issues with the family which is necessary to enable the family to understand the nature of concerns.
- 6.44 The social worker and any other agency requesting a confidential slot should seek the advice of the chairperson in advance of the conference. The social worker has a specific responsibility to consider whether there is information to be discussed at the conference which cannot be shared in front of family members or whether there are issues about managing the involvement of the family members which the chairperson needs to take into account.
- 6.45 Where a parent/carer attends part of the conference, s/he will receive the record of that part of the conference attended. At times, information may not be shared in front of family members during the meeting but need not remain secret from them subsequently. How this will be shared subsequently should be agreed during the meeting. Legal advice is recorded by the legal advisor and a copy provided separately to the chairperson and social worker.

Exclusion Criteria for Parents/Carers

- 6.46 Exceptionally, it may be necessary to exclude one or more adult family members from a conference, in whole or part. The conference is primarily about the child and whilst the presence of the family is normally welcome,

those professionals attending must be able to share information in a safe and non-threatening environment. **Please refer to practice guidance - [Hyperlink](#)**

- 6.47 Any decision on partial or full exclusion is the responsibility of the conference chairperson. It is therefore crucial that the social worker or any other professional should advise the chairperson well in advance if exclusion is likely to be an issue. Exclusion will only be considered if one or more of the following criteria are met:
- there is a strong risk of violence or intimidation to a child or any other participant by the person during or subsequent to the conference
 - the presence of the parent/carer is likely to prevent the conference from conducting its business or will adversely affect the child's welfare
- 6.48 The possibility that a parent/carer may be prosecuted for an offence against a child is not in itself a reason for exclusion. The police should bring to the attention of the chairperson any implications arising from the attendance of an alleged perpetrator or a child who may subsequently be a witness. If criminal proceedings have been started the view of the Crown Prosecution Service should be taken into account.
- 6.49 In reaching a decision on exclusion the chairperson should act on the basis of evidence e.g. of previous or current behaviour, and should always consider whether exclusion for part of the conference will meet the concerns.
- 6.50 Exceptionally, where a parent or carer's behaviour becomes so disruptive during the conference that the meeting is no longer effective, the chairperson may decide to continue without that person present.
- 6.51 Where a parent is excluded for the whole conference, the following applies:
- the social worker should find a method of communicating the parent's views to the conference via letter, verbal report or another professional
 - the decision to exclude and reasons will be recorded in the record of the conference
 - a decision about how that person should be informed of the decisions and recommendations and what written information is provided will be made by the chairperson

Chairing the Conference

- 6.52 The conference chairperson will always be someone
- of sufficient seniority and skills to ensure inter-agency commitment to the conference and to the child protection plan
 - who is independent of operational or line management responsibilities for the case
 - accountable to the relevant Director of Children and Young People's Services
 - child protection review conferences should normally be chaired by the chairperson who chaired the initial conference. The responsibilities of the

chairperson include:

- meeting the child and family members in advance, to ensure that they understand the purpose of the conference
- setting out the purpose of the conference to all present, determining the agenda and emphasising the confidential nature of the occasion
- ensuring that the conference takes the decisions required of it in an informed, systematic and explicit way (See section below on information for the conference)
- ensuring that the decision made is in the best interests of the child(ren) (See section below on Actions and decisions for the conference)

Information for the Conference

6.53 The social worker should provide to the conference a written report which summarises and analyses the information obtained in the course of the core assessment and the Section 47 enquiries.

6.54 The social work report to the conference should include:

- the nature of concerns
- a chronology of significant events and agency and professional contact with the child and family
- information on the child's current and past state of health and development
- information on the capacity of the parents and family members to ensure the child's safety from harm and to promote the child's health and development
- information on family and environmental factors which affect the care of the child
- the expressed views, wishes and feelings of the child, parents and other family members
- analysis of the implications of the information obtained for the child's future safety, health and development and recommendations developed from this analysis

6.55 The typed report should be made available to the conference chairperson at least 24 hours prior to the conference.

6.56 Prior to the conference parents and, where relevant, children should be provided with a copy of the report, and have opportunity to read, question and discuss it with the social worker. This should be prior to the day of the conference. Exceptionally, if the social worker has to do this on the day of the conference, sufficient time must be allowed for this task before the conference is due to start.

6.57 The social worker should help children and family members in advance to think about what they want to say in the conference and how best to get their points across. Some may find it helpful to provide their own written submission, which an advisor/advocate may help to prepare.

The Decision Regarding the Need for a Child Protection Plan (CPR)

- 6.58 The conference should consider the following question when determining whether there is need for a child protection plan (CPR). **Is the child at continuing risk of significant harm?**
- 6.59 The test is either that:
- 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
- 6.60 If the child is judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm, safeguarding the child will require inter-agency help and intervention delivered through a formal child protection plan.
- 6.61 The need for a child protection plan (CPR) should be considered separately in respect of every child in the family or household.
- 6.62 The aim of the conference is to reach a consensus of opinion between the agencies involved. The chairperson should manage the meeting in such a way as to facilitate this outcome. The role of the chairperson is to:
- ensure that a clear focus is kept on the child and on the issues of safeguarding the child
 - ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child and family members are represented and taken into account
 - ensure that all those attending the conference, except observers, family members and their supporters and those attending in an advisory or information-gathering capacity (e.g. legal services, children's guardian are enabled to take part in the decision making
 - ensure that those attending base their judgements on all the available evidence, drawing attention to the criteria for making a child protection plan (CPR) and any disputed facts, and assist in the evaluation of information, including advice on the weighting to be attached to it
 - ensure that any views expressed in writing by non-attendees are brought to the attention of those present, although recognising that only those in attendance will be in a position to consider all the available information
- 6.63 If it is clear following discussion that there is a consensus about the decision, the chair should invite any views contrary to the perceived consensus, and ensure that any such view is recorded.
- 6.64 Where no clear consensus about the continuing risk of significant harm emerges during discussion the chairperson should explicitly seek views from the participants. The chairperson will use discretion in dealing with more than one representative from each agency. It will normally be appropriate to seek an agency view, although in some circumstances different

professionals from the same agency may wish to express individual views.

- 6.65 In the continued absence of a clear consensus the chairperson will reach a decision on the need for a child protection plan (CPR). This will normally reflect the weight of opinion amongst those who are most involved with the child, although the chairperson should exercise professional judgement and should be personally satisfied that the decision is in the child's best interests.
- 6.66 The chairperson must also encourage active discussion between professionals and with the family members of the proposed child protection plan, with a view to achieving a consensus about what will most effectively keep the child safe whilst supporting the family to make necessary changes. This must include advising the conference, where appropriate, on the thresholds for accommodation, and risks attached to separating children from their families as well as the risks of continuing abuse and neglect.
- 6.67 If the chairperson disagrees with the proposed action for the child protection plan, this must be explicitly voiced in the meeting. The chairperson also has a responsibility to raise, outside of the meeting, any significant concerns about the performance of any agency or the interventions with the child and family to an appropriate manager.

Disagreement with the decision or recommendations

- 6.68 Disagreements with the decision or recommendations of a conference may arise which should be recorded in the conference record. Where a participant believes that a decision or recommendation leaves a child at risk of significant harm, s/he should immediately bring this to the attention of a senior manager and/or the named or designated professional for their own agency.
- 6.69 If the senior manager and/or named or designated professional agrees that the decisions or recommendations are unsafe, it is their responsibility to raise this immediately with the relevant manager for the conference chair, who will review the case and propose a way forward in liaison with relevant operational managers. If, following this, the agency remains concerned for the safety of the child, the process should follow the process for resolving professional disagreements as set out in [Chapter 23 - Resolution of Professional Disagreements in Work Relating to the Safety of Children](#).

Category of Abuse or Neglect

- 6.70 If the decision is taken that the child is in need of a child protection plan, the chairperson will determine which category, or combination of categories, of abuse or neglect the child is at risk of suffering. The category used will indicate to those consulting the child's social care record (CPR) the primary presenting concerns at the time the child became subject of a child protection plan.
- 6.71 A child may be subject of a child protection plan as a result of one or more categories of abuse. The categories used are as defined in the Guidance

'Working Together To Safeguard Children', namely:

Physical abuse

6.72 Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness in a child.

Emotional abuse

6.73 Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional ill treatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child's emotional development. It may involve conveying to the child that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another. It may involve serious bullying causing a child to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of a child. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of ill treatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse

6.74 Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape or buggery) or non-penetrative acts. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Neglect

6.75 Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in serious impairment of the child's health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food and clothing, shelter including exclusion from home or abandonment, failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger, failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment, or the failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment. It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

6.76 The category or categories determined by the conference chairperson represents the primary presenting concern at the time the child became subject of a child protection plan, and thus indicates to anyone consulting the child's social care record the nature of current and previous concerns. This categorising also allows for the collation and analysis of information locally and nationally. The use of more than one category is reserved for those circumstances where the evidence is sufficiently strong - not where there are merely some additional concerns or early suspicions. The

category of emotional abuse should normally only be used where this is the sole or main form of abuse.

Where no Child Protection Plan is needed

6.77 If it is considered that a child protection plan is not needed but that the child is in need of help to promote his or her health or development, the conference should ensure that arrangements are made to consider with the family what further help and support might be offered. Subject to the family's views and consent, it may be appropriate to

- continue a core assessment of the child's needs, to help determine what support might best help promote the child's health and development.
- make recommendations about what support and help should be provided
- ensure continued commitment to inter-agency working, particularly where the child's needs are complex.
- Any child in need plan (family support plan) should be subject to review at intervals of not more than six months

Decision to make a Child Protection Plan (CPR): Further Tasks

6.78 Whenever a child is made subject to a child protection plan (CPR), the conference must go on to:

- appoint a key worker
- identify the core group of professionals and family members who will develop and implement the child protection plan
- set a date for the initial core group within 10 working days and for the first review conference within three months
- establish how children, parents (including all those with parental responsibility) and wider family members should be involved and the support, advice and advocacy available to them
- identify in outline what needs to be done to complete the core assessment
- identify what specialist assessment is required or is underway to further assist sound judgements on how best to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare
- set out the outline child protection plan

The Outline Child Protection Plan

6.79 The outline child protection plan defines the objectives of the detailed plan developed subsequently by the core group. Its focus is on what needs to change in order to safeguard the child and how the child is to be safeguarded meanwhile. It must therefore:

- identify the risks of significant harm
- establish short term and longer aims and objectives that clearly link to reducing the risk of harm and promoting the child's welfare
- be clear about who will have responsibility for what actions - including actions by family members - within what specified timescales
- outline ways of monitoring and evaluating progress against the plan
- consider the need for a contingency plan if agreed actions are not completed or circumstances change quickly

Complaints about a Child Protection Conference

- 6.80 Where a parent, carer or child attending a conference indicates that they are dissatisfied with the process of the conference or the decision, the chair will advise them of their right to complain and outline the process.
- 6.81 Where a parent, carer or child of sufficient age and understanding is wholly excluded from the conference, the chair must ensure that they are advised in writing of the outcome of the conference and their right to complain.
- 6.82 parents/carers should receive a letter setting out the decisions and recommendations soon after the conference. This should advise the recipient of their right to complain if they are dissatisfied with the process or do not agree with the decisions. Complaints may be about:
- the process of the conference
 - the management of the conference including a decision to exclude one or more persons from the conference
 - the decision whether the child should or should not be the subject of a child protection plan (CPR) and
 - the category of abuse/neglect
- 6.83 Where the complaints are solely about the behaviour, action, proposed action, or inaction of any individual or agency, these should be referred to the complaints procedure of the agency concerned.
- 6.84 The conference complaints procedure comprises three stages. The complaint may be dealt with to the satisfaction of the complainant at any stage; but s/he has the right to request that the matter be progressed to the next stage. While the complaint is being investigated, the decisions of the conference will stand; and the child protection plan should be pursued.

Stage One

- 6.85 The complainant may wish to discuss the matter with the chair of the conference. The matter may be resolved informally at this stage, or it may become apparent that the complaint should be directed to the complaints process of a particular agency. In either case the chair should confirm the discussion in writing, with a copy to the child's social worker and, where appropriate, to other agencies attending the conference. This informal resolution should occur within 20 working days; including any action which is agreed.

Stage Two

- 6.85 If the person wishes to continue with a formal complaint, this should normally be in writing addressed to the Child Protection Service Manager within 20 working days of the conference. The key worker should assist the complainant with the process if necessary. If the complaint is not in writing the Service Manager will ensure that the concerns are confirmed with the complainant and recorded.
- 6.87 The Child Protection Service Manager will call in the following:

- the social worker's report to the child protection conference
 - the conference decisions and recommendations
 - the record of the conference when available
 - a brief report from the chair of the conference setting out an assessment of the issues surrounding the complaint and/or the decision making and supporting reasons; and arrange, within 5 working days, for a senior professional or manager with child protection experience from an LSCB agency to carry out the necessary enquiries. This person will be known as the Investigating Officer
- 6.88 The Investigating Officer will examine the documents provided, discuss the matter with the complainant and interview attendees at the conference, where this is considered necessary. S/he will then compile a report and make a recommendation to the Service Manager, either:
- to uphold the decision of the conference; or
 - to reconvene the child protection conference for the original decision to be reconsidered in the light of the findings of the report arising from the complaint
- 6.89 Complaints about decisions made by the child protection conference are often accompanied by concerns about the behaviour of individuals, or the provision (or non-provision) of a service. These should normally be referred to the agency's own complaints procedure; but the Investigating Officer may, by agreement with that agency, listen to the concerns and make recommendations to the agency for resolution of the complaint.
- 6.90 The investigation should be completed within 20 working days. If the report is delayed the Service Manager should update the complainant on when it will be completed.
- 6.91 The Service Manager will reach a decision within 5 working days. If the complaint is about the decisions of the conference, the Service Manager will decide either to uphold the decision of the conference or to reconvene the child protection conference with a different chair. Any reconvened conference should take place within 10 working days of the decision. It should consider the original information, the findings of the Investigating Officer's report, and any subsequent developments.
- 6.92 If the complaint is about the conference process or management and it is judged as well-founded the Service Manager must provide to the complainant a full explanation of what action will be taken.
- 6.93 The child protection Service Manager will notify the conference chair and the parent, carer or child who made the complaint of the outcome. This notification will include information about Stage Three of the process. The conference chair will then notify other members of the child protection conference. A copy of the Investigating Officer's report will be sent to the complainant unless to do so would
- jeopardise the safety or welfare of the child
 - compromise an investigation or

- place anyone connected with the case at risk of violence or intimidation

Stage 3

- 6.94 Where the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the Stage Two investigation, s/he can, within 20 working days of receiving the response to Stage 2, request that the matter be considered further by a panel. The Child Protection Service Manager will convene this panel within 30 working days of the receipt of the request.
- 6.95 The Panel will comprise three members of a list of senior representatives from LSCB member agencies. The three will appoint one of their number as chair. The Panel will be serviced and meetings minuted by the committee clerk. The Child Protection Service Manager will ensure that the Panel has copies of relevant papers:
- the social worker's report to the child protection conference,
 - the conference decisions and recommendations,
 - the record of the conference,
 - the report of the conference chair,
 - the report of the investigating officer
 - a record of the Service Manager's contact with the complainant and the reasons for any decisions.
- 6.96 The Panel will consider whether the relevant inter-agency procedures have been observed correctly, and whether the decision that is being complained about follows reasonably from these. The complainant will have an opportunity to present their views to the Panel, explaining why they are dissatisfied and/or why they disagree with the original decision of the conference. The complainant will have the right to be accompanied by a relative or friend.
- 6.97 The Investigating Officer will attend the panel to present the report and answer questions on it.
- 6.98 The Service Manager, Child Protection will attend the Panel and answer questions in relation to any decisions made about the complaint.
- 6.99 The Panel will determine whether the original decision was reasonable and decide either:
- to uphold the original decision, or
 - to uphold the complaint and refer the matter to a reconvened child protection conference.
 - to uphold the complaint and propose action
- 6.100 The Panel referral to a reconvened conference may include recommendations about:
- the need for a child protection plan
 - the category of abuse/neglect to be considered
 - the composition of the conference
 - additional support to the family to be considered

- 6.101 The chair of the Panel will inform the complainant in writing of the decisions and recommendations of the Panel within 5 working days.
- 6.102 Any reconvened conference should be held within 15 working days (and may replace a planned review conference) with a different chairperson. The conference will take into account any recommendations of the Panel and reconsider whether the need for a child protection plan is established.
- 6.103 The Service Manager will ensure that any issues arising from a complaint are reported to the relevant individual or agency for consideration and action.
- 6.104 A general report on complaints received will be reported to the LSCB on a 6 monthly basis.

Other Considerations during the process of resolving a complaint

- 6.105 Where a complaint against the conference decision is outstanding at the point of the review conference, this should be chaired by someone other than the chairperson who chaired the meeting which is subject of the complaint. The review conference will consider any available information including the report of the investigating officer if available.

Administrative Arrangements and Record keeping (both initial and review conferences)

- 6.106 The relevant children's social care service takes responsibility for administering the child protection conference service.
- 6.107 Invitation letters for initial child protection conferences will be circulated as far in advance as possible. Where written notification is likely to be less than 5 working days the social worker has responsibility to inform key agencies by telephone.
- 6.108 The invitation to a review conference will normally serve as a reminder only, since these meetings are booked at the previous conference. Where agencies become involved after the date has been set, the key worker should advise the relevant person of the date. Where responsibility passes from one person to another within an agency (e.g. on transfer of the child from one school to another) the agency should alert the successor to key dates. Where, in exceptional circumstances, the date of the review conference has to be changed, every effort should be made to give as much advance notice to family members and agencies as possible.
- 6.109 Child protection conferences are normally held at social work offices, but consideration should be given to other suitable venues where this may be more convenient to agencies or family members. Administrative staff produce the written record of the meeting. The conference chairperson is responsible for the content of the record.
- 6.111 The record of the conference is a crucial working document. It should

include:

- the essential facts of the case
- a summary of discussion which reflects the contributions made
- all decisions reached with information outlining the reasons for decisions
- the outline or revised child protection plan

6.112 The record of the conference will clearly note reasons for the exclusion of any parent, carer or child of sufficient understanding, for part or all of the conference. The conference will set out on differently coloured paper the contents of any 'confidential slot'. Parents/carers must not be provided with a copy of the record of the conference from any other source than the chairperson. This is to ensure that they do not inadvertently receive a part of the record to which they are not entitled.

6.113 Following any conference which makes the child subject of a child protection plan, the decisions and recommendations (LSCB2a) should, wherever possible, be sent to all core group members, including the parents, within 1 working day of the meeting.

6.114 The full record of the conference (LSCB2) will be sent out within 20 working days of the conference to all those who attended or were invited to attend, including family members, except for any part of the conference from which they were excluded. Supporters will not usually be sent a separate copy of the record, but a solicitor may be provided with a copy of the record, if the parent requests this.

6.115 Any representations about the accuracy of the conference record should be directed in writing to the conference chairperson within 15 working days of receipt of the document, with suggested amended wording. An agreed amendment may either be circulated or may be referred to in the record of the subsequent conference. The original notes of the minute taker will be kept for 20 working days after the record of the conference is distributed (or until any representation about accuracy is resolved).

6.116 The record of child protection conferences is confidential and should not be passed by professionals to a third party (except when handed on to a successor worker within the same agency) without the consent of the conference chairperson or order of the court. However, in criminal proceedings the police may reveal the existence of child protection records to the CPS and in Care Proceedings the record of the conference may be revealed in court.

6.117 Every agency must establish arrangements to ensure safe and confidential storage and should retain the record of child protection conference records and other child protection records in accordance with their own record retention policies.