

# Strategy Discussion Multi-Agency Requirements Protocol



This is an approved North Somerset Safeguarding Children Board document and should not be edited in any way.

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***To be read alongside 'Child Protection Enquiries - Section 47 Children Act 1989: North Somerset Safeguarding Children Board Procedures Manual' Link: [Strategy discussion/meeting and Section 47 Enquires](#)***

## ***When a strategy discussion must take place***

**"Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm there should be a strategy discussion".** (*Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*)

This includes any new referrals in respect of an unborn child, child/young person, and when there is new information on an existing case open to Children's Social Care.

When there is a death of a child/young person in a family, in which abuse or neglect is suspected, and there are other children/young people in the household.

If the alleged abuser is under the age of eighteen a separate strategy discussion must take place to consider their needs.

Complex and organised abuse. This may be defined as abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related children/young people. The adults concerned may be acting in concert to abuse children/young people, sometimes acting in isolation or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children/young people for abuse.

## ***Convening a strategy discussion and purpose***

Local Authority Children's Social Care should convene a strategy discussion to determine the child/young person's welfare and plan rapid future action if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child/young person is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

For allegations/concerns indicating immediate risk of harm to the child/young person an urgent strategy discussion must be held on the same day as the receipt of the referral.

Regarding complex and organised abuse, a strategy discussion must be arranged to take place as a matter of urgency to assess the need for future action to be taken safeguard the child/young person and whether a criminal investigation should take place.

## ***How and where a strategy discussion takes place***

A strategy discussion may take place as a meeting or by other means e.g. by telephone. In complex referrals a face to face strategy meeting should be held, as it is likely to be the most effective way of discussing the child/young person's welfare and the planning of future action.

Due to the distance some professionals have to travel a conference call strategy discussion will be available. In these circumstances it must be adequate to plan an enquiry and, therefore, must include the agencies directly involved with the child/young person. This will help expedite information sharing and timely decision making.

It is vital that strategy discussions take place in a way that ensures all key people are available and able to be fully involved. The venue may be a school or hospital setting, police station or an office in the premises of Children's Social Care - wherever the most relevant people can attend and contribute.

## ***Agencies and professionals involved in a strategy discussion***

Strategy discussions must involve professionals who are sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their agency, as follows:

- Manager from Children's Social Care
- An appropriate Police representative
- Health professionals involved with the child/young person such as Health Visitor, School Nurse, CAMHS, and/or named/designated nurse/doctor;
- Community Paediatricians are to be involved under the following circumstances:
  - a medical examination is expected
  - the child/young person is an inpatient in any health organisation
  - non-mobile babies with injuries

- sexual abuse (to help direct whether examination is appropriate and where this is best undertaken - WISH clinic, SARC or STAR)
- CSE cases
- FGM
- Other agencies as appropriate (for example children's centre/school/nursery and, in particular, any referring agency). In the case of a pre-birth strategy discussion this must involve the midwifery services
- The referrer, if they are a professional (but not if they are a member of the public)
- Any criminal justice agencies who have involvement, such as Probation/CRC, or YOS
- If the parent/carer of the child/young person has mental health issues it may be appropriate to involve the adult's Social Worker or Community Psychiatric Nurse or GP. However, this should not impact on the priority to safeguard the child/young person concerned

Regarding complex and organised abuse, the strategy discussion will be chaired by a Local Authority senior manager from Children's Social Care and must take place within one working day of the receipt of the referral and be formally recorded. The Service Leader for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance must be informed and will inform the Independent Chair of the LSCB, if appropriate.

The senior manager of Children's Social Care (chair) and the Police (Detective Inspector or above, or equivalent Police staff member) should attend the meeting. The meeting will involve senior staff from health, education and other agencies as required and, where necessary, must ensure coordination across Local Authority boundaries.

### ***Agency information required for a strategy discussion***

The strategy discussion must have information available from the referrer. Professionals participating in the strategy discussion must have all their agency's relevant current and historical information and reports relating to the child/young person available to be able to contribute and to assist decision making as to what immediate protective action may be necessary. Senior health staff will access Connecting Care and review information available.

There should also be discussions with the following to obtain information:

- the duty paediatrician who would examine the child/young person (where it is thought a medical examination is needed)
- the named medical consultant for the child/young person's health care (where the child/young person is an in or out hospital patient)
- the senior ward nurse (where the child/young person is an in-patient)

## ***Strategy discussion tasks***

The discussion should be used to:

- share available information
- agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation
- decide whether enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 must be undertaken

Where there are grounds to initiate an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, decisions should be made as to:

- what further information is needed if an assessment is already underway and how it will be obtained and recorded
- what immediate and short-term action is required to support the child/young person, and who will do what by when
- whether legal action is required
- the timescale for the assessment to reach a decision on next steps should be based upon the needs of the individual child/young person, and no longer than 45 working days from the point of referral into Local Authority Children's Social Care
- Consider the assessment and the key action points, if already in place
- Agree if a child/young person needs any medical assessment, who will undertake it, and who will support the child/young person and their family
- Agree what further information is required about the child/young person and family, and how this should be obtained and recorded
- Plan how the Section 47 Enquiry should be undertaken (if one is to be initiated), including the need for any medical assessment, and who will carry out what actions, by when and for what purpose
- Agree what action/safety plan is required immediately to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child/young person, and/or provide interim services and support. If the child is in hospital, decisions should also be made about how to secure the safe discharge of the child/young person
- Agree who should be interviewed, who by, for what purpose, and when
- Agree when the child/young person will be seen alone, (if appropriate for the child/young person) by the social worker during the course of these enquiries and agree the methods by which the child/young person's views, wishes and feelings will be ascertained so that they can be taken into account when making decisions

- Understand whether the child/young person may have difficulties communicating due to additional needs or disability. In such situations it is important to find the best person to offer advice and help the child communicate with you
- In the light of the race, ethnicity, beliefs and culture of the child/young person and family, consider how these should be taken into account and to establish whether an interpreter will be required; and
- Consider the needs of other children/young people who may be affected (e.g. siblings and other children/young people, such as those living in the same household, and/or in contact with alleged abusers)
- Determine what information from the strategy discussion will be shared with the family, unless such information sharing may place a child/young person at increased risk of significant harm or jeopardise police investigations into any alleged offence/s;
- Safety Planning should use the Signs of Safety Framework

Health practitioners should:

- advise about the appropriateness or otherwise of medical assessments, and explain the benefits that arise from assessing previously unmanaged health matters that may be further evidence of neglect or maltreatment
- provide and co-ordinate any specific information from relevant practitioners regarding family health, maternity health, school health mental health, domestic abuse and violence and substance misuse to assist strategy and decision making
- secure additional expert advice and support from named and/or designated professionals for more complex cases following preliminary strategy discussions
- undertake appropriate examinations or observations, and further investigations or tests, to determine how the child's health or development may be impaired.

The Police should:

- discuss the basis for any criminal investigation and any relevant processes that other organisations and agencies might need to know about, including the timing and methods of evidence gathering
- lead the criminal investigation (Local Authority Children's Social Care have the lead for the Section 47 Enquires and assessment of the child/young person's welfare) where joint enquiries take place.

In exceptional circumstances, enquiries may be more complicated and may require more than one strategy discussion. If the strategy discussion concludes that a further strategy discussion is required, then a clear timescale should be set and be subject to regular review bearing in mind the safety of the child/young person at all times.

Whilst the strategy discussion is not the point at which a decision is made to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC), the plan should reflect the requirement to convene an ICPC within 15 working days of the date of the strategy discussion at which it was decided to initiate the Section 47 Enquiry.

Where appropriate notify the Designated Officer for Allegations (DOfA) (Formerly known as LADO) and/or the Safeguarding Adult Team in specific cases where there are allegations against people working, in a paid or voluntary capacity, with children and/or vulnerable adults.

## ***Recording and distribution of minutes and action plan***

All agencies involved in a strategy discussion should take notes of the actions agreed at the time.

A full record of the strategy discussion will be completed by the Chair detailing any information shared, all decisions reached and the basis for these, all actions agreed, by whom and with timescales. A copy of the strategy discussion minutes will be sent by secure email to all parties within 24 hours of the discussion. If any agency disagrees with the record of the discussion they should contact the Chair immediately. If there is no contact within 48 hours then it will be accepted that the record is agreed.

The record of the strategy discussion will be recorded onto the child/young person's record on LCS in the Strategy Discussion form within 24 hours.

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