# T:\Children's Safeguarding and Reviewing Service\LSCB\NEL Safeguarding Children Partnership\logo's\logo.JPG

# Initial Child Protection Conferences

## Related guidance

See Child Protection Review Conferences

## 1. Purpose of Initial Child Protection Conference

Following Section 47 enquiries, an initial child protection conference brings together family members (and the child where appropriate), with the supporters, Advocates and professionals most involved with the child and family, to make decisions about the child's future safety, health and development. If concerns relate to an unborn child, consideration should be given as to whether to hold a Child Protection Conference prior to the child's birth.

To bring together and analyse, in a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary meeting, all relevant information and plan how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child and protect them from harm. It is the responsibility of the conference to make recommendations on how organisations and agencies work together to safeguard the child in future. Practitioners and parents should be provided clear and accurate information about the conference process to support effective planning. All practitioners should approach the work with parents and carers in line with the principles set out in chapter 1 of the guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children.

Conference tasks include:

* Appointing a lead statutory body (either local authority Children's Social Care lead social worker, who will be a qualified, experienced social worker;
* Identifying membership of the core group of professionals and family members who will develop and implement the Child Protection Plan;
* Establishing timescales for meetings of the Core Group, production of a Child Protection Plan and for Child Protection Review meetings; and
* Agreeing an outline Child Protection Plan, with clear actions and timescales, including a clear sense of how much improvement is needed, by when, so that success can be judged clearly;
* Where the child does not require a Child Protection Plan but is considered to be in need, a safety plan needs to be agreed either at Child in Need (CIN) or Team around the family (TAF) level.

### 1.1 The Independent Chair

* Is accountable to the Director of Children's Services. Where possible the same person should chair subsequent Child Protection Reviews;
* Should be a professional, independent of operational and/or line management responsibilities for the case; and
* Should meet the child and parents in advance to ensure they understand the issues, the purpose, the process, and possible outcomes of the conference;
* Should be prepared to answer questions openly;
* Should approach the work with parents and carers in line with the principles set out in the chapter 1 of the guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children;
* Should ensure all participants are encouraged to contribute views independently.

### 1.2 Social workers / Lead Practitioners with their Managers should

* Convene, attend and present information about the reason for the conference, their understanding of the child's needs, parental capacity and family and environmental context and evidence of how the child has been abused or neglected and its impact on their health and development;
* Analyse the information to enable informed decisions about what action is necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child who is the subject of the conference;
* Share the conference information/report with the child (where appropriate) and family beforehand within 3 working days for an initial CP conference;
* Prepare a report for the conference about the child and family which sets out and analyses what is known about the child and family and the local authority's recommendation;
* Practice Supervisors will attend the initial CP Conference with the social worker; and
* Acknowledge conference decisions and recommendations within 24 hours and ensure actions are followed up within supervision and any trajectory planning;
* Social workers ensure that parents and carers have a copy of the initial outline plan prior to the first core group;
* Should the child become subject to a CP plan, the social worker should carry out a home visit, within one working day, to the child and family and share the outline CP Plan.

### 1.3 All Involved Professionals should

* Work together to safeguard the child from harm in the future, taking timely, effective action according to the plan agreed;
* Attend and present information about their understanding or the child’s needs, parental capacity, family, and environmental factors (including extra-familial contexts) and evidence of how the child has been abused, neglected, or exploited and its impact on their health and development;
* Bring their agency perspective, expertise and challenge and contribute to decisions about actual or likely significant harm and actions to address by contributing to the plan to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child who is the subject of the conference.

### 1.4 The NEL SCP should

* Monitor effectiveness of these arrangements.

## 2. When an Initial Child Protection Conference Should be Convened

An Initial Child Protection Conference must be convened when it is believed that a child may continue to suffer or to be at risk of suffering Significant Harm. Children's Social Care is responsible for initiating the conference.

The conference must consider all the children in the household (not just family members), even if concerns are only being expressed about one child. Where consideration is given to a child or children not being the subject of a conference, the reasons must be clearly stated in the social workers report and addressed within the assessment and agreed by the Practice Supervisor.

The Children's Services Lead is responsible for authorising the decision to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference and the reasons for calling the conference must be recorded.

Where a senior manager from another agency requests that an Initial Child Protection Conference is convened, this request will be given serious consideration by the relevant Children's Services Lead and a response will be given in writing. Where any issue of professional difference is not resolved then the escalation process needs to be followed

## 3. Timing of Initial Child Protection Conference

The Initial Child Protection Conference should take place within 15 working days of the:

* Strategy Discussion or where more than one has taken place, of the Strategy Discussion at which the Section 47 Enquiry was initiated; or
* Notification by another local authority that a child subject to a Child Protection Plan has moved into the area;When the Independent Review Service is notified of the child's move into NE Lincs, the child will be recorded as being subject to a Child Protection Plan on a temporary basis. When it is agreed that the child is in North East Lincolnshire on a permanent basis a transfer in conference is convened and this must occur within 15 days of receipt of the referral;
* On occasion an ICPC is booked and during Section 47 investigation the decision is taken that an ICPC is no longer required and the outcome of the investigation is Section 17 or case to be closed. The Service Lead jointly with the Practice Supervisor for the area concerned needs to agree this with those agencies involved in the Strategy Discussion that made the decision about the Section 47. The social worker will advise agencies of this change of plan/cancellation of ICPC.

## 4. Who Should Attend?

SeeSection 6, Enabling Parental Participation and, Section 8, Enabling Children's Participation.

The conference should consist of the smallest number of people consistent with effective case management, but the following should normally be invited:

* Parents and those with Parental Responsibility and/or relevant family members;
* The child and/or their representative or Advocate where deemed to be age appropriate (see Section 8.1, Involving the Child);
* The child's social worker and first line manager;
* The Police Protecting Vulnerable People Unit;
* Health services staff involved with the child/ren - e.g. health visitor, School Nurses, GP and Safeguarding Lead Nurse, Primary Care ;
* Schools, education welfare officers etc.
* The Consultant Paediatrician or other senior doctor responsible for any Medical Assessment/ongoing treatment of the child.

In addition, invitees may include those whose contribution relates to their professional expertise and/or knowledge of the family and/or responsibility for relevant services, and should be limited to those with a need to know or who have a contribution to make to the assessment of the child and family.

These may include:

* Supporter (including advocate), friend or solicitor (as supporters for the child and parent/carers); solicitors must comply with the Law Society guidance 'Attendance of solicitors at local authority Children Act Meetings'; and relatedCode of Conduct (2011); [Attendance of solicitors at local authority Children Act meetings | The Law Society](https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/family-and-children/attendance-of-solicitors-at-local-authority-children-act-meetings) [SRA | SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, RFLs and RSLs | Solicitors Regulation Authority](https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/standards-regulations/code-conduct-solicitors/)
* Health services involved with parent(s)/carers e.g. specialist doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists;
* Midwifery services where the conference concerns an unborn or new-born child (see Section 9, Pre-Birth Conferences);
* Probation Provider and/or staff in youth justice system or prison where relevant;
* Housing services;
* Mental health (adult or child) services;
* Alcohol and substance misuse services;
* Domestic Abuse Services;
* Any professional or service provider involved with the children or adults in the family, including foster carers, residential staff and/or Early Years staff;
* Legal services - if it is anticipated that legal advice will be required;
* The Children's Guardian and the child's solicitor where there are current court proceedings.

A professional observer can only attend with the prior consent of the Independent Chair and the family and must not take part in discussions or decision-making. There will only be one observer at any conference. It is the responsibility of the professional requesting the attendance of the observer to seek the permission of the family at least one day before the conference.

Professionals who are invited but unable to attend for unavoidable reasons should:

* Arrange wherever possible for another agency representative to attend on their behalf;
* Inform the Independent Review Service and Independent Chair;
* Submit a written report in the agreed format with copies (see Section 12, Responsibilities of the Independent Chair).

The time of day at which a conference is convened should be determined to facilitate attendance of the family and key contributors.

It is the responsibility of the allocated social worker to draw up a list of those to be invited from the list above, in with their line manager and the Independent Chair where appropriate. This list should be given to the safeguarding and review team, at least 10 working days prior to the conference. This is to ensure that as much notice as the urgency of the conference allows is given to invitees. Any agency with involvement with the child and/or family should be invited.

**Practice Supervisors for Social Care should attend the second review with the social worker.**

## 5. Quorum

The primary principle for determining a quorum is that there should be sufficient agencies present to enable safe decisions to be made in individual circumstances.

Normally, the minimum representation is the social worker and at least two other professional disciplines which have had direct contact with the child and family.

Where a conference is not quorate it should not ordinarily proceed and ideally should be reconvened within the timescales. However, if this is not possible the meeting can go ahead and in such circumstances the Independent Chair must ensure that either:

* A Child Protection Plan is produced; or
* The existing plan is reviewed with the professionals and family members that do attend, in order to safeguard the welfare of the child/ren;
* Another conference date must be set immediately, within 1 month.

In exceptional circumstances, and having regard to the impact upon the child and family of a postponement, the Independent Chair may decide to proceed with the conference despite lack of agency representation. This would be relevant where:

* The child has not had relevant contact with 3 professional disciplines - e.g. pre-birth conferences;
* Where sufficient information is available, including where written reports from non-attendees have been submitted;
* Where previous conferences have been inquorate and/or there is unlikely to be greater attendance at a future conference; and
* A delay will be detrimental to the child;
* Consideration should be given to using the Professional Resolution and Escalation procedure in relation to mon attendance/ no reports etc

## 6. Enabling Parental Participation

All parents and persons with Parental Responsibility must be invited to conferences (unless exclusion is justified as described below). Parents will be encouraged to contribute to conferences; usually by attending, unless it is likely to prejudice the welfare of the child.

See Section 7, Criteria for Excluding Parents or Restricting their Participation.

The social worker must facilitate the constructive involvement of the parents by ensuring in advance of the conference that they are given sufficient information about the process and practical support to make a meaningful contribution, including providing them with a copy and talk through of the Conference report at least 3 working days before the conference (see Section 10.1, Social Workers Report to Conference). Preparation should also include consideration of childcare arrangements and transport to enable the attendance of parents.

Invitations for the parent(s) to attend the conference should be conveyed verbally by the social worker and will be confirmed in writing by the Independent Review Service.

The social worker must explain to parents/carers the purpose of the meeting, who will attend, the way in which it will operate using signs of safety methodology and check they have received an information leaflet, the purpose and meaning if their child is deemed to require a Child Protection Plan and the complaints process.

As set out in the Equality Act 2010, the council has a duty to make changes to their services accessible to people with protected characteristics through the use of reasonable adjustments (including provision of an advocate). In order to anticipate people’s needs,social workers and Independent Chairsshould enquire about the need of reasonable adjustments when planning the conference in order for parents/carers to be involved as suitable. The social worker will record this on LiquidLogic. If reasonable adjustments are required, this will allow time for the needs to be discussed and actions put into place, as appropriate. It is acknowledged that questions asked about reasonable adjustments allow the conference process to be accessible for all necessary parties.

Parent advocacy is for parents who require support (because of a learning disability, mental health problem or communication need) to navigate children’s services and the legal system.

The role of the advocate is in:

* Helping the parent understand child protection processes;
* Helping the parent ask professionals questions;
* Getting across the parent’s point of view;
* Attending meetings if the parent is unable to participate.

**The Independent Chair and Social worker** should ensure that should a parent request an advocate commissioned by the local authority and this is declined, it should be clearly recorded under the Independent Chairs case note and the Social Work Case Note with reference to how this request is “unreasonable” in relation to the Act.

This should be clearly explained to the parent with the reason why.

The parent should also be advised that should they disagree with this decision that they can contact a Service Manager from the Safeguarding and Review Service Independent Review Service or the Service Lead of the Social Worker to review this decision.

Provision should be made to ensure that visually or hearing impaired or otherwise disabled parents/carers are enabled to participate, including whether they need assistance with transport to enable their attendance.

Those for whom English is not a first language must be offered and provided with an interpreter, if required. A family member should not be expected to act as an interpreter of spoken or signed language. The Social Work should indicate if an interpreter is needed for the conference.

The parents should be provided with details, from the Social Worker, regarding the right to bring a friend, supporter (including an advocate) or solicitor (in the role of supporter), details of any local advice and advocacy services and the Complaints and Appeals Procedure.

If parents do not wish to attend the conference they must be provided with full opportunities to contribute their views. The social worker must facilitate this by:

* The use of an advocate or supporter to attend on behalf of the parent (subject to the Independent Chairs agreement);
* Enabling the parent to represent their views in another way;
* Consideration should be given to meeting the Independent Chair prior to conference;
* Agreeing that the social worker, or any other professional, expresses their views.

## 7. Criteria for Excluding Parents or Restricting their Participation

In circumstances where it may be necessary to exclude one or more family members from part or all of a conference the request to exclude or restrict a parents participation should be discussed with the Independent Chair and confirmed in writing if possible at least 3 days in advance.

The agency concerned must indicate which of the grounds it believes is met and the information or evidence the request is based on. The Independent Chair must consider the representation carefully and may need legal advice before coming to a decision.

The decision should be made according to the following criteria:

* Indications that the presence of the parent may seriously prejudice the welfare of the child, for example where information shared could further victimise the child or increase the child's vulnerability to further abuse;
* Sufficient evidence that a parent/carer may behave in such a way as to disrupt the conference such as violence, threats of violence, racist, or other forms of discriminatory or oppressive behaviour or being in an unfit state e.g. through drug, alcohol consumption or acute mental health difficulty (but in their absence a friend or advocate may represent them at the conference);
* A child requests that the parent/person with parental responsibility or carer is not present while they are present;
* The need (agreed in advance with the Independent Chair) for members to receive confidential information that would otherwise be unavailable, such as legal advice or information about a third party or criminal investigation (it may be possible for them to attend the meeting for a particular section);
* Conflicts between different family members who may not be able to attend at the same time e.g. in situations of domestic abuse consideration should be given for a split conference;
* It is necessary to present information to the conference which, if shared with certain family members, might increase the risk to the child;
* Attendance by a known, alleged or suspected perpetrator may threaten or otherwise place the child at risk;
* Their presence may prejudice any legal proceedings or Police investigation, for example, because they have yet to be interviewed or because bail conditions restrict their attendance;

Exclusion at one conference is not reason enough in itself for exclusion at further conferences.

The possibility that the parent may be prosecuted for an offence against a child is not in itself a reason for exclusion although in these circumstances the Independent Chair may take advice from the Police and, if criminal proceedings have been initiated, the Crown Prosecution Service, about the implications arising from an alleged perpetrators attendance.

If the Independent Chair makes a decision to exclude or restrict the participation of a parent, the decision should be communicated to the following people:

1. The person making the request;
2. All other professionals invited to the meeting;
3. The parent concerned (in writing) - unless a decision is made that they should not be informed at all of the conference (see below).

The letter to the parent must be signed by the Independent Chair and set out:

* The reason for exclusion or restriction;
* An explanation of any other methods the parents have open to them to ensure their views and wishes are considered;
* How the parents will be told the outcome of the conference;
* The complaints procedure.

Any exclusion period should be for the minimum duration necessary and the decision to exclude must be clearly recorded in the conference minutes.

Those excluded should usually be provided with a copy of the social workers report to the conference and be provided with the opportunity to have their views represented to the conference.

If, in planning a conference, it becomes clear to the Independent Chair that there may be conflict of interests between the children and parents, the conference should be planned so that the welfare of the child can remain paramount.

This may mean arranging for the child and parents to participate in separate parts of the conference and make separate waiting arrangements.

It may also become clear in the course of a conference, that its effectiveness will be seriously impaired by the presence of the parent/s. In these circumstances, the Independent Chair may ask them to leave.

Where a parent is on bail, or subject to an active police investigation, it is the responsibility of the Independent Chair to ensure that the Police can fully present their information and views and also that the parents participate as fully as circumstances allow.

The decision of the Independent Chair over matters of exclusion is final.

Where a parent/carer attends only part of a conference as a result of exclusion, they will receive the record of the conference. The Independent Chair should decide if the entire record is provided or only that part attended by the excluded parent/carer. If the parent is excluded from the whole meeting the Independent Chair must discuss and agree with the Social Worker what record of the meeting if any the parent should receive.

## 8. Enabling Children's Participation

### 8.1 Involving the Child

The child must be kept informed and involved throughout the Section 47 Enquiry and, if their age and level of understanding is sufficient, should be invited to contribute to the conference; which can include attendance. There should always be a discussion with a child over the age of 10 years about their views on attending all or part of the conference in practice, the appropriateness of enabling an individual child to attend must be assessed in advance and relevant arrangements made to facilitate attendance at all or part of the conference. The children of North East Lincolnshire can be supported to attend conferences and express their views via NEL Question Pro/NIASS.

### 8.2 Criteria for Attendance of Child at Conference

A decision about whether to invite the child should be made in advance of the conference by the Social Worker, in consultation with the Independent Chair.

The key considerations are:

* Does the child have sufficient understanding of the process?
* Has s/he expressed an explicit or implicit wish to be involved?
* What are the parents' views about the child's proposed presence?
* Is inclusion assessed to be of benefit to the child?
* Will the conference be able to fulfil its aims of protecting the child if the child is present?

The test of 'sufficient understanding', is partly a function of age and partly the child's capacity to understand. A guiding principle is that usually a child under 10 should not be invited.

In order to establish her/his wish with respect to attendance, the child must be first provided with a full and clear explanation of the purpose, process and right to an independent advocate.

A declared wish not to attend a conference (having been given such an explanation) must be respected. The advocate can attend on behalf of the child.

Where there is a conflict between the wishes of the child and the views of the parents, the child's interests should be the priority.

Consideration must be given to the impact of the conference on the child. Where it will be impossible to ensure they are kept apart from a parent who may be hostile and/or attribute responsibility onto them, separate attendance should be considered.

The decision about attendance by the Independent Chair should be recorded on the child's file, with reasons.

### 8.3 Indirect Participation

If it is decided that the child should not attend or to restrict participation, every effort should be made by the social worker to obtain and present the views and wishes of the child, which can include:

* The child's independent advocate (see Section 8.6, Support to the Child After the Conference) or other professional speaking on the child's behalf (for example, a person with specialist skills or knowledge);
* Advocacy referral form [Advocacy | Child and Family Advocacy Services | NYAS](https://www.nyas.net/about-us/what-we-do/advocacy-services/)
* Views submitted by any means;
* The child meeting the Independent Chair before the conference to share their views;
* Consideration to be given to the child attending to observe rather than to contribute themself.

### 8.4 Direct Participation

If the decision is that the child is to attend the conference, then the social worker should:

* Ensure a referral is made for an advocate to NYAS [Advocacy | Child and Family Advocacy Services | NYAS](https://www.nyas.net/about-us/what-we-do/advocacy-services/) (see Section 8.5, Support to the Child After the Conference). The advocate will discuss and agree the following, (however if the child does not want an advocate then it is the responsibility of the Social Worker to do this):
* Ensure that the child has an opportunity to discuss any concerns that he/she may have about attendance;
* Explain to the child who will be at the conference, their roles and responsibilities in the meeting, the information likely to be discussed and the possible outcomes;
* Decide with the child the extent to which they wish to participate and how their wishes and views will be presented;
* Share and discuss the content of the social work report for the Conference (The Social Worker should always do this).

If the child is attending the Conference it is the responsibility of the Independent Chair (see also Section 12, Responsibilities of the Independent Chair) to:

* Clarify with the social worker what information will be available to the child both before and during the conference;
* Meet with the child and independent advocate/supporter prior to the conference and meet separately from the parents if required;
* Ensure that the child has sufficient support to present their wishes and views during the conference;
* Monitor the child's welfare throughout the conference, and arrange for them to have a break if necessary;
* Ensure that the child is informed of the decisions and recommendations of the conference in a way that they understand;
* Ensure that the conference record adequately reflects the child's contribution.

If the child is attending the conference, it is the responsibility of all professionals to:

* Make it clear which parts of the report can be shared with the child;
* Use language that is understandable to both the child and their family;
* Discuss with the social worker any potential difficulties arising from the child's participation.

It is essential that planning takes place prior to the conference to ensure that the practical arrangements are suitable. The social worker should in discussion with the Independent Chair:

* Identify a venue where the child will feel comfortable;
* Identify and meet any special needs;
* Arrange the timing of the conference to minimise disruption to the child's normal routine;
* Ensure that adequate time is available before the start for the child and his/her independent advocate to meet with the Independent Chair.

### 8.5 Support to the Child After the Conference

The advocate and Social Worker should ensure that immediately after the conference the child has an opportunity to discuss what happened during the conference, the decisions made and, where appropriate the outline child protection plan. If the advocate has concerns about the child these should be discussed immediately with the social worker and/or their manager.

## 9. Pre-Birth Conferences

A pre-birth conference is an Initial Child Protection Conference concerning an unborn child. Such a conference has the same status and purpose and must be conducted in a comparable manner to an Initial Child Protection Conference.

Pre-birth conferences should be convened following Section 47 Enquiries, where there is evidence that the unborn child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm and where there is a need to consider if a Child Protection Plan is required.

This decision will usually follow from a pre-birth Social Work Assessment and a conference should be held:

* Where a pre-birth assessment gives rise to concerns that an unborn child may be at risk of suffering Significant Harm;
* Where a previous child has died or been removed from parent/s as a result of suffering Significant Harm;
* Where a child is to be born into a family or household which already have children who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan;
* Where a person known to pose a risk to children resides in the household or is known to be a regular visitor;
* Other risk factors to be considered are:
* The impact of parental risk factors such as mental ill-health, learning disabilities, substance misuse and domestic abuse;A mother under sixteen about whom there are concerns regarding her ability to care for herself and/or to care for the child.
* The impact of parental risk factors such as mental ill-health, learning disabilities, substance misuse and domestic abuse;
* A mother under sixteen about whom there are concerns regarding her ability to care for herself and/or to care for the child.

All agencies involved with the expectant mother should consider the need for an early referral to the local Children's Social Care Services team so that assessments are undertaken and family support services provided as early as possible in the pregnancy.

### 9.1 Timing of Pre-Birth Conferences

In cases that seem likely to follow the child protection pathway the strategy meeting must take place at 25 weeks gestation and where the significant harm threshold is deemed met and ICPC should be convened but no earlier than at 28 weeks gestation.

Where there is a known likelihood of a premature birth, the conference could be held earlier.

### 9.2 Attendance

Because of the extreme vulnerability of unborn/newly born children, where a strategy discussion is deemed necessary these will be held as formally chaired meetings with all relevant partner agencies invited to participate. At a bare minimum every strategy meeting must be chaired by a Team Manager and involve the Police, Children's Health and the Midwifery Safeguarding Lead.

The key agencies involved with the unborn child and parent must be invited to the conference, including the Health Visitor (if pregnancy is after 32 weeks gestation). It is important that this conference makes an informed decision about whether or not the child is at risk of Significant Harm should remain in the parents' care and draws up protection plans that link to this decision.

Parents or carers should be invited as they would be to other Child Protection Conferences and should be fully involved in plans for the child's future.

### 9.3 An Unborn Child with a Child Protection Plan

If a decision is made that the unborn child should be made subject to a Child Protection Plan, the main cause for concern must determine the Category of Significant Harm and the Child Protection Plan must be outlined to commence prior to the birth of the baby.

The Core Group must be established and meet if at all possible prior to the birth, and certainly prior to the baby's return home after a hospital birth.

If a decision is made for an unborn child to have a Child Protection Plan, the Lead Social Worker must then ensure that **the name and correct birth date is notified** to the Core Group and amended in the files following the birth.

If the child is resident outside of the area at birth, the local authority in whose area the child is resident must be advised that the child is in their area and is the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

**Child protection review conference**

The review conference procedures for preparation, decision-making and other procedures should be the same as those for an initial child protection conference. The purpose is to review whether the child is continuing to suffer or is likely to suffer significant harm; to review developmental progress against child protection plan outcomes; to consider whether the child protection plan should continue or should be changed.

**Lead practitioners should:**

* Attend and lead the organisation of the conference;
* Determine when the review conference should be held within three months of the initial conference, and thereafter at maximum intervals of six months;
* Provide information to enable informed decisions about what action is necessary to continue to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, and the effectiveness and impact of action taken so far;
* Share the conference information with the child and family beforehand, where appropriate, and ensure that they understand the information provided;
* Approach work with parents and carers in line with the principles set out in chapter 1 of Working Together to Safeguard Children;
* Engage the family network where this is appropriate to support the child. If there is family group decision-making, such as a family group conference, parents and family networks should have the opportunity to prepare for it in advance;
* Record conference outcomes;
* Decide whether to initiate family court proceedings (all the children in the household should be considered, even if concerns are only expressed about one child) if the child is considered to be suffering significant harm.

**All involved practitioners should:**

* Attend, when invited, and provide details of their involvement with the child and family;
* Produce reports for the child protection review. This information will provide an overview of work undertaken by family members and practitioners and evaluate the impact on the child’s welfare against the planned outcomes set out in the child protection plan;
* Approach work with parents and carers in line with the principles set out in chapter 1 of Working Together to Safeguard Children;
* Be sufficiently skilled and experienced to prepare for and engage with the review, and able to critically assess and challenge their own and other’s input.

### 9.4 Timing of Review Conference

The first Child Protection Review Conference will be scheduled to take place within 91 days of the initial conference or within one month of the child's birth, whichever is the sooner.

## 10. Responsibilities of Social Worker before the Conference

### 10.1 Social Worker's Report to Conference

The social worker will provide to the conference a typed, signed and dated written report, which must be endorsed and counter signed by their manager. The report should include the dates when the child was seen by the Lead Social Worker during the Section 47 Enquiry, if the child was seen alone and if not, who was present and for what reason.

Information about all children in the household must be provided; the report should be clear about which children are the subjects of the conference, and reasons given if any children are not to be subjects.

For an Initial Child Protection Conference, the report should include:

* The concerns leading to the decision to initiate the Section 47 Enquiry, the dates of Strategy Discussions, agency consultations and the outcome of the Enquiry;
* A genogram of the immediate family, extended family and support network;
* A Chronology of significant events;
* Identified risk and protective factors;
* Safety plan and evidence of family group conferencing or robust family network meetings;
* Analysis and Recommendations.

The report should be provided to parents and older children (to the extent that it is believed to be in their interests) **at least 3 working days** in advance of the Initial Child Protection Conference to enable any factual inaccuracies to be identified, amended and areas of disagreement noted. Comments or suggestions made by the child/parents as a result of seeing the report must be included or conveyed verbally to the conference.

In exceptional circumstances where confidential information cannot be shared with the child or parent(s) beforehand, the social worker should seek guidance from their manager, who may wish to consult the Independent Chair.

Where necessary, the reports should be translated into the relevant language or medium, taking account of the language and any sensory or learning difficulties of the child/parents and redaction if necessary.

The report should be provided to the Independent Chair at least **2 working days** prior to the Initial Child Protection Conference with copies for all those invited.

The report will be attached to the minutes for circulation.

## 11. Responsibilities of Other Professionals/Agencies

### 11.1 General Responsibilities

All participants are responsible for the following:

* To make attendance at conferences high priority and if you can't attend ensure a representative can where possible and advise the Independent Review Service;
* To make available relevant information in a written report to the conference (seeSection 2, Other Agency Reports to Conference) and contribute to the discussion, assessment of risk and decision;
* To ensure that information to be presented by them at conference is shared with the child (if applicable) and parents beforehand, it is not appropriate unless in circumstances for the report to be shared with the family on the day of the conference;
* To ensure that their contribution is non-discriminatory;
* In circumstances where confidential/third party information cannot be shared with the child or parent(s) beforehand, to seek guidance from their manager and consult the Independent Chair to discuss how this will be managed within the meeting, Independent Chair;
* To ensure that information is communicated/translated in the most appropriate way taking account of the language and any sensory or learning difficulties of the child or parents;

To ensure that they are clear about their role within the conference.

### 11.2 Other Agency Reports to Conference

All agencies which have participated in a Section 47 Enquiry or have relevant information about the child and/or family members should make this information available to the conference in a written report. When providing reports for child protection conferences, practitioners should use the following formats: See Appendix 5: Child Protection Initial Agency Report Template [ICPC-Agency-Report-Template-v.-Dec.-24.docx](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nelincs.gov.uk%2Fassets%2Fuploads%2F2025%2F05%2FICPC-Agency-Report-Template-v.-Dec.-24.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)

The reports must make it clear which child/ren are the subject of the conference, but address any known circumstances of all children in the household.

If you are unable to submit the conference report 2 working days before an initial conference and 5 working days before a review conference then you need to bring sufficient copies for all those invited to the conference.

The reports will be attached to the minutes, for circulation.

The Independent Chair may consider the escalation procedure if the above is not adhered to.

## 12. Responsibilities of the Independent Chair

Child protection conferences, whether initial or review, will be chaired only by an Independent Chair from the independent chairs team. The Independent Chair is accountable to the Director of Children's Services. Wherever possible, the same person should chair the Initial Conference and following Child Protection Review Conferences in respect of a specific child. The Independent Chair must not have any operational or line management responsibility for the case.

The Independent Chair must ensure that, in addition to the social worker, at least two professional disciplines are represented at the conference unless agreed otherwise - see quorum for conference in Section 5, Quorum.

The Independent Chair is responsible for ensuring that conferences are conducted in line with these procedures and in an anti-discriminatory manner, ensuring that everyone uses unambiguous respectful language.

### 12.1 Before the Conference

The responsibilities of the Independent Chair in relation to decision-making about enabling/restricting parents' and children's participation are set out inSections 6, Enabling Parental ParticipationandSection 8, Enabling Children's Participation. See Sections 6, Enabling Parental Participation and See Section 8, Enabling Children's Participation

Prior to the conference, the Independent Chair should meet with the child, parents and any advocate(s) to ensure that they understand the purpose of the conference and how it will be conducted and explain the introduction and signing in sheet and get parents to sign this (see Appendix 1: Conference Attendance List). This may, where the potential for conflict exists, involve separate meetings with the different parties. Generally, meetings between the Independent Chair and family members and children, where appropriate, should take place 30 minutes or more before the conference formal starting time.

Explicit consideration should be given to the potential of conflict between family members and possible need for children or adults to speak without other family members present.

The level and manner of any supporters involvement in the conference will be negotiated beforehand with the Independent Chair. Supporters may seek clarification of information given by a conference member through the Independent Chair, but they will not be allowed to question conference members directly.

### 12.2 At the Start of the Conference

At the start of the conference a number of issues will be checked and highlighted by the Independent Chair:

* Set out the purpose of the conference; See Appendix 2, initial Case Conference agenda
* Address equal opportunities issues e.g. specifying that racist, homophobic and threatening behaviour will not be tolerated;
* Facilitate introductions and check the introduction and signing in sheet has been completed (see Appendix 1: Conference Attendance List).

### 12.3 During the Conference

The Independent Chair will ensure that:

1. The meeting will follow a set agenda (seeAppendix 3: Initial Case Conference agenda);

2. Parents are given a reasonable opportunity to:

1. Understand the purpose of the meeting and the role of all agencies involved in the protection of their children;
2. Consider and respond to any information or opinions expressed by other participants;
3. Contribute as fully as possible to the assessment and planning process;
4. Play a part in helping to safeguard and promote their children's welfare.

3 The conference maintains a focus on the welfare of the child/ren;

1. Consideration is given to the welfare and safety of all children in the household and within the family network;
2. All relevant people, including the subject child/ren and parents, have been given appropriate opportunities to make a full contribution and that full consideration is given to the information they present;
3. Relevant information in relation to the risks contained in the reports of those not present are made known to the conference;
4. The wishes and feelings of the child/ren are clearly outlined;
5. Needs arising from the child's gender and any disabilities, as well as those arising from the child's racial, cultural, linguistic or religious background are fully considered and accounted for when making decisions or developing plans;
6. Appropriate arrangements are made to receive third party confidential information;
7. Where a decision has been taken to exclude or restrict the level of parental or child participation, arrangements are made with the social worker for absent parents or carers and where appropriate children and young people to be informed of the decisions of conferences.
8. Consider and respond to any information or opinions expressed by other participants;
9. Contribute as fully as possible to the assessment and planning process;
10. Play a part in helping to safeguard and promote their children's welfare.

### 12.4 The Decision Making Process

The conference should examine the following questions when determining whether the child should be subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Has the child suffered Significant Harm? And is the child likely to suffer Significant Harm?

The test for the likelihood of the child suffering Significant Harm in the futureshould beeither that:

* The child is 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 finding 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.

If the child is at continuing risk of Significant Harm, it will therefore be the case that safeguarding the child requires inter-agency help and intervention delivered through a Child Protection Plan.

The Independent Chair must ensure that the decision about the need for a Child Protection Plan takes account of the views of all agencies represented at the conference and also takes into account any written contributions that have been made. This discussion will normally take place with the parents/carers present.

The decision will be taken by professionals attending the conference, i.e. those eligible to be counted for the purposes of establishing a quorum (see Section 5, Quorum); for example, this will not include the child, parents, carers, supporters although they may be asked to comment on the strengths, concerns, risks, future plans and protection.

Where there is no overall consensus, the decision will normally be made by a simple majority. Decisions are restricted to one per agency, where two professionals from one agency do not agree the meeting will adjourn whilst they reach a consensus decision. In the event that a consensus decision cannot be reached then their individual decisions will be counted as separate. Where a majority decision cannot be reached, the Independent Chair will make the final decision.

Where the Independent Chair considers in their professional judgement that the majority decision to be either:

* An unsatisfactory decision that the child should have a Child Protection Plan where, in the Chairs opinion, the criteria have not been met and/or such a plan is not necessary; or
* **An unsatisfactory decision that the child does not require a Child Protection Plan where, in the Chairs opinion, the child would be at continuing risk of suffering significant harm if a Child Protection Plan was not in place the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership has authorised the Independent Chair to have final decision-making powers.**

The Independent Chair must ensure that all members of the conference are clear about the conclusions reached, the decision taken and recommendations made, and that the conference minutes accurately reflect the discussions, the decision and, where relevant, the reasons for the Independent Chair exercising his or her decision-making powers.

Any dissent by professionals at the conference must be recorded in the conference minutes and refer to the Professional Resolution and Escalation Procedure.

If parents/carers disagree with the decision, this also must be recorded in the minutes and the Independent Chair must discuss the issue with them and explain their right to and the process for challenge (see Complaints in relation to Child Protection Conferences Procedure.

Where a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm in the future it is the local authority's duty to consider the evidence and decide what, if any, legal action to take. The information presented to the Child Protection Conference should inform that decision-making process but it is for the local authority to consider whether it should initiate, for example, Care Proceedings.

### 12.5 Categories of Significant Harm

If the decision is that the child is at continuing risk of suffering or likelihood of suffering Significant Harm and is therefore in need of a Child Protection Plan, the Independent Chair should determine the category of Significant Harm which the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering.

The need for a Child Protection Plan should be considered separately in respect of each child in the family or household. The category of Significant harm should be clearly recorded.

### 12.6 If a Child is Made the Subject of a Child Protection Plan

Where a decision is reached that a child needs to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan, the Independent Chair must ensure that:

1. A Child Protection Plan is outlined and clearly understood by all concerned including the parents and where appropriate, the child; and the outline plan sets out what the family has agreed and what needs to change in order to safeguard the child.A Lead Social Worker (i.e. a qualified social worker) is appointed to develop, coordinate and implement the Child Protection Plan (if this is not possible, the relevant manager should be the point of contact) and makes arrangements for the times and dates of Core Group meetings;
2. The membership of a Core Group of professionals and family members is identified, who will develop, implement and progress the Child Protection Plan as a detailed working tool - including the frequency of direct contact / visiting with the child and family; the initial Core Group meeting should be within 10 working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference and is agreed at the ICPC;
3. Any further action required to complete the Social Work Assessment is outlined and any other specialist assessments of the child and family identified, which are required to make sound judgements on how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.A contingency plan is in place if agreed actions are not completed and/or circumstances change;
4. The parents and child know the name of the Lead Social Worker and Core Group members and the date, time and venue of the first meeting;
5. The parents/carers and child/ren are advised of their right to invoke the appeals and complaints procedure and their right to challenge the decisions made by those present at the conference;
6. The decisions and recommendations of the conference are recorded in a clear manner;
7. A date is set for the Child Protection Review Conference, and under what circumstances it might be necessary to convene the conference before that date;
8. Parents, professionals and young people are provided with a feedback form to ascertain their views about the meeting. This information is collated and used to improve practice.

The Independent Chair is responsible for producing the plan and distributing within 24 hours to all agreed recipients. The Independent Chair is also responsible for ensuring the Children's Services Child file is updated with the plan.

### 12.7 If a Child is not Assessed as being in Need of a Child Protection Plan

A child may not be the subject of a Child Protection Plan, but he or she may nonetheless require services to promote his or her health or development. In these circumstances, the conference, together with the family, should consider the child's needs and what further help would assist the family in responding to them. Subject to the families views and consent, it may be appropriate to continue with and complete a Social Work Assessment of the child's needs to help determine what support might best help promote the child's welfare. Where the child's needs are complex, inter-agency working will continue to be important. Where appropriate, a Child in Need Plan should be drawn up and reviewed as perChild in Need Plans and Reviews Procedure.

### 12.8 Children Looked After who are the subject of a Child Protection Plan

Where a Child Looked After remains the subject of a Child Protection Plan, there should be a single planning and reviewing process, led by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), leading to the development of a single plan.

Consideration should be given to the IRO chairing the Child Protection Conference where a looked after child remains subject to a Child Protection Plan. Where that is not possible, it will be expected that the IRO will attend the Child Protection Review Conference and/or the CP Chair will attend any child looked after review.

The Children Looked After Review, when reviewing the child protection aspects of the plan, should consider whether the criteria continue to be met for the child to remain the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

Consideration must be given to ensuring that the multi-agency contribution to the review of the Child Protection Plan is addressed within the review of the Care Plan.

If a child is subject to a Child Protection Plan and then becomes a Child Looked After (CLA) the Independent Chair should discuss with the Service Lead and Independent Reviewing Officer if a Child Protection Plan is still required. If not the Independent Chair should contact the Meeting Support Assistant and authorise the sending out of a 10 day letter.

The first 10 day letter advises all those agencies involved in developing the Child Protection Plan that the child has become CLA and the intention to end the Child Protection Plan, unless there are objections within 10 days from the date the letter was sent. A second letter is sent at the end of the 10 days to confirm that the Child Protection Plan has been ended. A letter is also sent to the parents advising of this.

In some circumstances, a child may be subject to both a Child Protection Plan and LAC for a short period of time for example when a child is subject to section 20 until a decision is made as to whether care proceedings are to be initiated.

## 13. Minutes of Child Protection Conferences

The record of the conference is a crucial working document for all relevant professionals and the family.

All conferences will be minuted by a Safeguarding Support Assistant (SSA). The Independent Chair is responsible for ensuring that the minutes accurately reflect the discussion held and decisions and outline child protection plan.

Conference minutes should include:

1. Name, date of birth, ethnicity and address of the subject/s of the conference, parents/carers and other children and adults in the household;
2. Who was invited, who attended the conference and who submitted their apologies;
3. Any breaks in the Conference and anyone leaving or joining the meeting;
4. The reason for the conference;
5. A list of written reports available to conference and whether shared with parents or not;
6. A summary of the information shared and discussion and if a review conference progress and update on the Child Protection Plan;
7. Views and wishes of each child;
8. Views of parents/carers;
9. Opinions of agencies on risk and whether the threshold for suffering significant harm has been met, requiring the child to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan;
10. Decision on the threshold for suffering significant harm and whether a Child Protection Plan is required, with information outlining the reasons, including the category of Significant Harm;
11. The outline Child Protection Plan or any Child In Need Plan;
12. Name of Lead Social Worker if the child has a Child Protection Plan;
13. Members of the Core Group if the child has a Child Protection Plan and date of initial Core Group meeting;
14. Date of first Child Protection Review Conference;
15. Start and finish time of the Conference.

All written reports submitted to the conference will be appended to the minutes unless the authors request otherwise.

The decision of the conference and, if the child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, details of the category of significant harm, the name of the Lead Social Worker and Core Group membership should be recorded and circulated to all those invited who attended the conference within 24 hours.

If the child is subject to a Child In Need Plan, then the decision of the Conference and name of the Lead Professional should be recorded and circulated as above.

The minutes of the conference will be transposed within 10 working days and forwarded to the Independent Chair for signature and return. The minutes will be sent to all professionals who attended or were invited and to relevant family members within 16 working days of the Conference. Upon receipt of the minutes, if there are issues with accuracy or factual information the chair should be contacted within 5 working days of receipt of the minutes, after which the minutes will be recorded as an accurate reflection of the discussions.

Copies of the minutes should be posted to the parents, child (if old enough) and the child's advocate where appropriate by Safeguarding and Review team. The Social Worker may deem it more appropriate in specific circumstances to give a copy of the Minutes directly to the family to discuss with them. The Independent Chair and Social Worker should discuss and agree whether the child should receive a full set of minutes, redacted minutes or a later from the chair with a copy of the plan.

Where parents and/or the child/ren have a sensory disability or where English is not their first language, steps must be taken to ensure that they can understand and make full use of the minutes.

Where a parent or child has been fully excluded from the conference, the decision on what information they should receive will be taken by the Independent Chair in consultation with the Social Worker.

Where a supporter, solicitor, other family member or observer has attended a conference, the minutes will not be distributed to them unless they have a role in the Child Protection Plan and the conference agrees it appropriate.

Where a child has attended a Child Protection Conference, the social worker must arrange to see her/him and arrange to discuss relevant sections of the minutes.

**Conference minutes are confidential and should not be passed to third parties without the consent of the Independent Chair and/or Lead Social Worker, or by a Court Order. Independent Review Service maintain a record of who the minutes have been distributed to and any restrictions that have been applied.**

Where there are ongoing criminal proceedings, there should be consultation between the Police and the Crown Prosecution Service in relation to the sharing of the minutes.

The recipient agencies and professionals should retain the minutes of the Child Protection Conference in a manner which ensures their confidentiality and in accordance with their agencies record retention policy. Agencies should determine who it is appropriate to be given access to the minutes - usually this will be restricted to relevant staff, their manager and any person who has a role in the Child Protection Plan.

Subsequent requests for access to the minutes by professionals, parents or children who do not have a legal or direct role in the case should be referred to the Service Manager for Independent Chairs or the Independent Chair.

## 14. Audio Recording of Conferences

### 14.1 What the Law says

The Data Protection Act 2018 does not apply to the processing of personal data by an individual in the course of a purely personal or household activity. However, the scope of this provision in the context of recording is not clear. Jackson J in M v F (Covert Recording of Children) [2016] EWFC 29 expressed the view that a similar exemption contained in the previous Data Protection Act (1998) was intended to protect normal domestic use, and would not cover the covert recording of individuals, and particularly children, for the purpose of evidence-gathering in family proceedings and Ward of Court proceedings.

### 14.2 Human rights

Similarly, family members do not owe a duty to one another or to the social worker under the Human Rights Act. When it comes to matters of human rights it is the social worker, as an agent of the state, who owes a duty to the family and must act with a respect for the rights of privacy, family life and expression. These are all conditional rights and can be interfered with where they compete with other rights if it is necessary and proportionate to do so. A social worker is already by definition interfering with individuals' article 8 right to a family life and so must ensure they are weighing up all the competing rights.

If a parent were to make a recording and distribute it on the internet, social media or in some other way, this might be thought harmful to the child, either because it would lead to them being identified as a child with whom social services was involved, or the details of their private lives being made public (In some cases this might have a negative effect on an assessment of the parents' ability to see and meet their child's needs, or to work with professionals). A local authority (or a parent) might be able to seek an injunction to stop this or to secure removal of information if it was harmful to a child. If there are court proceeding concerning the child the distribution of a recording that identifies the child as the subject of the court case or that gives details of what has happened in the court is likely to be a contempt of court or a criminal offence (or both) and the court may be asked to grant an injunction.

This is not a clear-cut area, and legal advicemustbe sought as appropriate. Practitioners should be mindful that covert recording may be taking place, and should endeavour to ensure that they do not make statements during 'private' conversations which they would not be prepared to hear produced as evidence in court.

If someone was to use a recording of a meeting or a part of a meeting to harass somebody at the meeting or with explicit or implied threats of going public/putting on the internet it might amount to harassment.

If a parent requests to record a conference it is advised that the Independent Chair has a discussion with them in advance of the meeting to explain how conferences are minuted in North East Lincolnshire and that they will receive copies. It would also be helpful to explore the parent's reasoning for wanting to record the meeting and what they are going to do with the recording. The Independent Chair should make the parent aware of issues relating to sensitively and confidentially of the recording.

## 15. Appendices

Appendix 1: Conference Attendance List [Initial CP Conference Agenda.docx](Initial%20CP%20Conference%20Agenda.docx)

Appendix 2: Initial Case Conference Agenda [Initial CP Conference Agenda.docx](Initial%20CP%20Conference%20Agenda.docx)

Appendix 3: Child Protection Initial Agency Report Template [Child Protection Conference | NELC](https://www.nelincs.gov.uk/scp/professionals/child-protection-conference/)

Appendix 4: Flowchart 5: Action Following a Strategy Meeting [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6849a7b67cba25f610c7db3f/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_-_statutory_guidance.pdf#page=104)

Appendix 5: Flowchart 6: [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6849a7b67cba25f610c7db3f/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_-_statutory_guidance.pdf#page=105)

## 16. Further Information

### Legislation, Statutory and Government Non-Statutory, Guidance

Working Together to Safeguard Children [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6849a7b67cba25f610c7db3f/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_2023_-_statutory_guidance.pdf)