



North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Professional Resolution and Escalation Procedure

Introduction

NEL Safeguarding Children Partnership expects all agencies to adopt a proactive approach towards problem solving which enables professional disagreements to be resolved as close to front line practice as possible. This procedure applies to all professionals working with children and families within North East Lincolnshire and describes the steps that should be taken to resolve professional differences of opinion about actions taken, or decisions made, in respect of arrangements for helping or protecting children. This procedure should be applied at all stages of the early help and safeguarding pathway from early identification and the provision of early help to the implementation of statutory child in need or child protection processes. This procedure should also be followed in other specific situations where there are differences of opinion.

Key principles

All agencies work within different structures and from a variety of perspectives, yet all agencies have a duty to comply with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and to work cooperatively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Transparency, openness and a willingness to understand and respect individual and agency views are core aspects of safe and effective multi agency working.

Safeguarding arrangements apply across the early help and statutory safeguarding pathway and all agencies should encourage others to meet their responsibilities.

Where a professional/agency believes that another professional/agency is not meeting their responsibilities, or that a child is not being safeguarded, then they have a responsibility for communicating such concerns through these agreed procedures.

There is an onus on the professional/agency who are invoking the escalation process to be minded about how swiftly resolution needs to be agreed framed around meeting the child's needs.

At every point, all agencies' staff should ensure discussions and outcomes are recorded in the agency records and the child's record. At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that a child is safeguarded and the child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.

Should a professional/agency believe that a situation is in need of urgent resolution, it may be appropriate to begin the resolution process at senior manager level rather than working through the other levels of resolution. Should urgent resolution be required, the onus is on

the professional/agency invoking the escalation process to contact the relevant person in the other agency by telephone rather than awaiting a response to an email.

When any professional considers that a child is at risk of significant harm, they must ensure that their concerns are escalated on the same working day, using their own agency's safeguarding procedures and following the below North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership documents as appropriate:

- Helping, Supporting and Protecting Children and Families in North East Lincolnshire Threshold Document. [NEL-Threshold-Document-2024-28-FINAL-refresh-May-2025.pdf](#)

Process

There are a range of situations in which professional disagreements arise, however they are most likely to arise as a result of differing views of thresholds, a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities, requirements for multi-agency meetings, and the need for action and communication. They fall into the four following categories.

1) Resolving differences of opinion in individual cases

Differences of opinion about the provision of help or arrangements for safeguarding

Where any professional/agency believes that another professional/agency is not meeting their safeguarding responsibilities, and that safeguarding arrangements and procedures are not being appropriately applied, they have a duty to challenge and resolve this using the following staged process.

Differences of opinion may relate to many different situations. For example, during assessment, planning, intervention or reviewing work with children and their family networks or the application of legislation in a particular child's case. There are other situations, and this list is not exhaustive.

There may be situations where the quality and effectiveness of the help and support being provided to a child and their family is at the core of the difference of opinion and there are other mechanisms to address this within the individual agencies and broader partnership arrangements. In such circumstances, a discussion may need to be held between line managers or senior managers.

A. Practitioner to Practitioner

Initial attempts to reach solutions should be at practitioner/case worker level between agencies. The initial attempts to resolve the difference of opinion should be within a timescale that safeguards the child, prevents things becoming worse, and when needed, protects the child from harm.

The respective workers must identify explicitly what is expected, why they believe that the safeguarding arrangements are not being applied and what needs to be done to ensure that this is achieved.

Both practitioners should ensure that any agreed outcome is clear, that both have the same understanding of the agreed solution and that this is recorded clearly and consistently on each agency's case record.

B. Line Manager to Line Manager

If unresolved, the concern should be referred straight away by each worker to their respective line manager who in turn is expected to discuss this with their counterpart in the other agency.

Line managers should attempt to resolve the disagreement and ensure that a clear record is kept at all stages by both parties. In, this must include written confirmation between the parties about the nature of the disagreement(s) and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.

C. Senior Manager to Senior Manager

If professional disagreements remain unresolved following discussions between respective managers, then this should be further escalated to senior managers within each organisation.

They will agree the next steps to be taken to resolve the issues.

D. Multi agency review of the case

If professional disagreements remain unresolved following discussion at a senior manager level, they will facilitate (or agree who does facilitate within their own agency) a multi-agency discussion to review the case with appropriate practitioners / supervisors or managers involved.

The senior managers will agree who will chair the meeting.

A written record will be made of the key areas of discussion, disagreement, agreements and actions. Children's Services and the agency will retain this record on the child's file.

E. Safeguarding Partners and Independent Scrutiny Officer

In the unlikely scenario that the matter remains unresolved, the senior managers will refer it to the safeguarding partners for their discussion and resolution. An Independent Scrutiny Officer may be requested by the North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board / safeguarding partners to facilitate a mediation meeting with the relevant senior managers and practitioners / supervisors or managers involved.

2) Differences of opinion about convening a child protection conference

Following a section 47 enquiry if Children's Services make the decision not to proceed with a child protection conference, then other practitioners involved with the child and family have the right to request that Children's Services convene a child protection conference, if they have serious concerns that a child's welfare may not be adequately safeguarded. The request should be supported by their agency's senior manager / designated safeguarding lead or professional and clearly detail the agency's concerns. The request should be made in writing to the Service Manager for the Independent Reviewing Service.

A. Service Manager to Service Manager

The Service Manager from the Independent Reviewing Service will liaise with the senior manager / designated safeguarding lead or professional regarding the request for a child protection conference. At this stage efforts should be made to resolve the difference of opinion about how the case should be managed. This can be achieved through a professional consultation meeting involving the child's social worker / supervisor and

manager also the relevant practitioners for the agency who believe that a child protection conference should be held.

A clear record should be kept by both parties about the agreed outcome and how the matter will proceed.

B. Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker to Senior Manager

If a resolution cannot be agreed the Service Manager for the Independent Reviewing Service will inform the Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker who will liaise with the relevant senior manager from the agency. The Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker will agree with the senior manager within the respective agency where the concerns lie and the next steps to be taken to resolve the issues.

C. Multi agency review of the case

If professional disagreements remain unresolved, the Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker and a senior manager from the relevant agency will facilitate a multi-agency discussion to review the case with practitioners / supervisors or managers involved.

The senior managers will agree who will chair the meeting.

A written record will be made of the key areas of discussion, disagreement, agreements and actions. Children's Services and the agency will retain this record on the child's file.

D. Safeguarding Partners and Independent Scrutiny Officer

In the unlikely scenario that the matter remains unresolved, the senior managers will refer it to the safeguarding partners for their discussion and resolution. An Independent Scrutiny Officer may be requested by North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board / safeguarding partners to facilitate a mediation meeting with the relevant senior managers and practitioners / supervisors or managers involved.

3) Differences of opinion arising during a child protection conference

Professionals will send the reports for child protection conferences to the conference chair in a timely manner in order that the chair has time to prepare for the conference. This will highlight potential areas of difference to the conference chair. The social worker should also discuss potential differences of opinion with the conference chair in advance of the meeting and the conference chair will record the discussion on the child's records.

Non-unanimous decisions in a child protection conference

Differences of opinion arising during a child protection conference should, in the first instance, be managed by the conference chair. The main reasons for a difference of opinion will be around the decision of whether or not a child needs a child protection plan or whether a child protection plan should be discontinued or continue. Reasons for dispute must be considered within conference and the decisions reviewed by conference members.

Majority view in a child protection conference

If within conference there is a majority view then the decision is made on this majority view.⁶ The concerns and reasons of those who have a differing view will be clearly recorded in the full conference record. If the agencies who formed part of the minority view would like to discuss the decision making process and / or their evidence, analysis, professional judgement or have concerns about the safety or welfare of the child then they should refer the matter straight away to their line manager and for school staff this will be the designated safeguarding lead.

A. Line Manager to Line Manager

The line manager/designated safeguarding lead or professional is expected to discuss the concern with the Service Manager for the Independent Reviewing Service. Line managers / designated safeguarding leads or professionals should attempt to resolve the disagreement and ensure that a clear record is kept at all stages by all parties. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about the nature of the disagreement(s) and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.

B. Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker to Senior Manager

If professional disagreements remain unresolved following discussions between respective managers then this should be further escalated to senior managers within each organisation. The Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker will agree with the senior manager within the respective organisation or agency where the concerns lie the next steps to be taken to resolve the issues.

C. Multi agency review of the case

If professional disagreements remain unresolved the Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker and the senior officer from the relevant agency will facilitate a multi-agency discussion to review the case with practitioners / supervisors or managers involved. The senior managers will agree who will chair the meeting. A written record will be made of the key areas of discussion, disagreement, agreements and actions. Children's Services will retain this record on the child's file.

D. Safeguarding Partners and Independent Scrutiny Officer

In the unlikely scenario that the matter remains unresolved, the senior managers will refer it to the safeguarding partners for their discussion and resolution. An Independent Scrutiny Officer may be requested by the North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board / safeguarding partners to facilitate a mediation meeting with the relevant senior managers and practitioners / supervisors or managers involved.

Equally divided view in a child protection conference

If there is an equally divided view, the conference will be adjourned for a brief period – not exceeding 15 working days in order for the matter to be reassessed.

Staff will inform their line manager and agencies should re-evaluate their evidence, analysis and professional judgement in preparation for the meeting.

Line managers can discuss the case with the Service Manager for the Independent Reviewing Service. Line managers should attempt to resolve any disagreement and ensure that a clear record is kept at all stages by all parties. In particular this must include written

confirmation between the parties about the nature of the disagreement(s) and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.

The conference will be reconvened and each agency consulted to reach a consensus.

During this period the child will continue to be subject of a child protection plan. If it was an initial conference where there was an equally divided view the child will be made subject of a child protection plan pending a reconvened meeting to reach a consensus.

A. Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker to Senior Manager

If the reconvened conference cannot reach a unanimous or majority view then the child will continue to be the subject of a child protection plan. The issue will be passed to the Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker for further consideration alongside senior managers within the respective organisations or agencies where the concerns lie.

B. Multi agency review of the case

If professional disagreements remain unresolved, the Deputy Service Director Practice Standards and Principal Social Worker and a senior manager from the relevant agency will facilitate a multi-agency discussion to review the case with practitioners / supervisors or managers involved.

The senior managers will agree who will chair the meeting.

A written record will be made of the key areas of discussion, disagreement, agreements and actions. Children's Services will retain this record on the child's file.

C. Safeguarding Partners and Independent Scrutiny Officer

In the unlikely scenario that the matter remains unresolved, the senior managers will refer it to the safeguarding partners for their discussion and resolution. An Independent Scrutiny Officer may be requested by the North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board / safeguarding partners to facilitate a mediation meeting with the relevant senior managers and practitioners / supervisors or managers involved.

4) Differences of opinion in relation to cases that may be serious child safeguarding cases

Should there be any differences of opinion about:

- whether a case meets the criteria of a serious child safeguarding case
- whether a child safeguarding practice review should be undertaken or
- any part of the process

The organisation's representative(s), who holds the difference of opinion, will liaise with the safeguarding partners representatives and the North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Team in relation to this issue.

A. Safeguarding Partners Representative

The safeguarding partners representatives are the Designated Nurse Safeguarding Adults and Children (Humber and North Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership), Service Director Safeguarding, Youth Justice and Family Help, North East Lincolnshire Council) and Detective Superintendent (Humberside Police). The safeguarding partners representatives have been delegated the responsibility for making recommendations to the safeguarding partners.

B. Safeguarding Partners

Should the matter remain unresolved the safeguarding partners representatives will refer the case to the safeguarding partners for them to reach a resolution.

C. Independent Scrutiny Officer

If the matter remains unresolved, an Independent Scrutiny Officer will be requested to facilitate a mediation meeting with appropriate staff from the relevant organisations.