

CALDERDALE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

MULTI-AGENCY PROFESSIONALS MEETINGS

Guidance for Practitioners

Updated March 2017



Introduction

Parental involvement in multi-agency meetings has been advocated since the publication of *Working Together* in 1988 and again in 1991. Some children are also now supported to attend multi-agency meetings or have their views represented and are at the centre of looked after children reviews. The presence of parents and/or children in multi-agency meetings can be helpful in that it brings the child more clearly to mind, allowing for greater focus. Accuracy of information and facts can also be checked and clarity in respect of the parent and child's views can be obtained.

In addition to routine planning meetings, core groups, conferences and reviews, there are occasions when it is not appropriate to involve children and young people or their parents/carers in multi-agency meetings. **These can be useful at every level of the Continuum of Need.**

Where Professionals meetings take place, they should be focused on outcomes for the child and family and form part of a continuous process of assessment, planning, implementation and review across all levels of need, including early help. They will facilitate quality assurance of the case and lead to staff being able to challenge families (especially where there is disguised compliance, hostility and resistance); and one another openly and effectively.

Note: It is important to recognise that these meetings should supplement and not replace existing good practices of engaging family members in assessment and planning activity.

Purpose of Professional Meetings

Professionals Meetings provide an opportunity for professionals involved with a family to come together not only to share information, but also to help determine the direction of a case and the plan for a child; they may be held to resolve uncertainty, controversy or inter-agency disagreement. They may be helpful where there are particularly complex family concerns, with extensive professionals/networks.

When to call a Professionals Meeting

It will be important to be honest with family members from the outset in order to maintain an open and honest relationship, unless to do so would put the child or young person at additional risk. Consequently it will usually be necessary to inform them during initial contact of the possible requirement for a professional only meeting and in circumstances where decisions have been made without family members being present, they should be communicated to the family as soon as possible afterwards

Professionals Meetings should only be held after careful consideration is given to the need to exclude parents from the meeting. Because parents have been excluded from one meeting is not enough reason in itself for exclusion at others.

Holding a Professionals Meeting will be of most value when:

- Cases are failing to progress or;
- Starting to drift or
- Adults are hostile, reluctant or failing to comply.

If a Professionals Meeting is necessary, the timing will be a matter of judgement but will need to be held within a timescale that will influence potential plans for the child.

A Professionals Meeting is likely to be a one off meeting, but there will need to be a plan made to ensure that the issues that it was convened to consider, have been resolved. If any professional is still concerned following the decisions of the Professionals Meeting, it should be referred to their line manager who will make contact with their equivalent in the relevant agency.

Who can convene Professional Meetings?

Any professional in the 'team around the child' or child protection core group or their Manager can request a Professional Meeting.

Chairing Professional Meetings

A Manager or other senior staff who is not directly involved with the case from any agency should Chair the meeting and facilitate discussion.

Attendance at Professional Meetings

Any professional who is either actually involved with the family or potentially involved in any protection or support plan that is being considered can attend a Professional Meeting.

Minutes from Professional Meetings

There should be a record made of the decision to hold the meeting, decisions reached and recommendations made at the Professionals Meeting¹. The Chair of the

¹ See Multi-Agency Meetings [Good Practice Guide](#)

meeting will have responsibility for ensuring that the record is made and distributed to those present. The decisions and recommendations made at a Professionals meeting will need to be shared with the parents unless, exceptionally, the Chair determines against this.

Reviewing Decisions and Recommendations made at Professional Meetings

The decisions and recommendations made at Professionals meetings should inform the development of the case and form part of the planning process. In this way, the decisions and recommendations will be reviewed at future TAC, Core Group, Child in Need meetings or Child Protection Review Conferences.

Considerations

²Initially practitioners may bring partial or biased information to the multi-agency meeting and there may be competing interpretations of a situation. Any decisions reached need to be based on the best information available and be as objective and fair as possible. It is important to understand the relevance of any information presented and to analyse it in terms of relevance for the child. **Professionals should seek to see the situation through the eyes of the child.** Intuition should not be ignored but requires exploration and consideration against the full range of information available.

Group decisions can be dominated by a desire to avoid conflict rather than a determination to establish the facts. The tendency to hold on to first impressions can result in fixed views and a reluctance to reconsider even in the light of new information. The introduction of challenge from someone who does not have direct involvement with the case and use of standardised tools to measure progress will help to mitigate against unhelpful processes. The opportunity for professionals to analyse information without parents/carers present will reduce the risk of over-reliance on information supplied by family members.

The use of a tool such as the [Discrepancy Matrix](#) and a framework, such as [Strengthening Families Approach](#) will assist processing and the analysis of the information available

² Ward et al (2014) Assessing Parental Capacity to Change when Children are on the Edge of Care Research Report