

The Gloucestershire Child Protection Conference Decision Making Process – The role of the Conference Child Protection Chair in Decision Making

This practice guidance note has been written to confirm the role of the Child Protection Conference Chair in decision making during Initial Child Protection Conferences and Review Child Protection Conferences.

The child protection 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?
- Is the child likely to suffer Significant Harm?

The test for the likelihood of the child suffering Significant Harm in the future should be either 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 **Conference 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 quorumⁱ; 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 consensus, the decision will normally be made by a simple majority. However, the Conference Chair has the final decision as to whether a Child Protection Plan is required.

The **Conference Chair** has final decision making powers if they consider the majority decision to be either:

- An unsatisfactory decision that the child should have a Child Protection Plan where, in the Chair's 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 Chair's opinion, the child would be at continuing risk of significant harm if a Child Protection Plan was not in place

In such circumstances the **Conference Chair** must apply the criteria for a Child Protection Plan ensuring that all members are fully informed. Ultimately the child should remain the subject of a Child Protection Plan if they feel to do otherwise would compromise a child's safety.

The **Conference 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 Conference Chair exercising his or her decision-making powers. Where a decision is made to adjourn a Conference, it must be reconvened within 28 days;

Any dissent by professionals at the conference must be recorded in the conference minutes

If parents/carers disagree with the decision, this also must be recorded in the minutes and the **Conference Chair** must discuss the issue with them and explain their right to and the process for challengeⁱⁱ.

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**. Where a child who is the subject of a Child Protection Plan becomes **Looked After**, the Child Protection Plan should form part of the child's **Care Plan**.

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

ⁱⁱ http://www.proceduresonline.com/swcpp/gloucestershire/p_complaints.html