



Escalation and Effective Challenge

1. Purpose of the Policy

Children's safety can only be assured, and their welfare promoted where professionals work jointly, sharing responsibility for case management and decision making. Within this, the importance of a culture which supports professional challenge cannot be underestimated. It is inevitable that from time to time, there will be practitioner disagreement and in North Tyneside professional challenge is recognised as a positive activity and a sign of good professional practice, a healthy organisation and effective multiagency working. In order to support that challenge, a clear framework should be in place to ensure that timely and effective escalations are made.

National and local serious case reviews have highlighted the importance of professionals challenging decisions to ensure the best outcomes for children and their families. Locally SCRs have found that there is a lack of consistency in the use of escalation where there have been differences and disagreements between agencies.

The purpose of this policy is to explain what to do when a professional has a worry or disagreement with an agency decision or action related to a child. Its aim is to ensure that the focus is kept on the child's safety and well-being through promoting a culture of professional challenge and providing a framework for timely and effective resolution.

Working Together 2018 states that '**clear escalation policies for staff to follow when their child safeguarding concerns are not being addressed within their organisation or by other agencies**' should be in place. Similarly, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019 promotes that - 'if, after a referral, the child's situation does not appear to be improving, the referrer should consider following the local escalation procedures.

This policy therefore relates to the multi-agency children's workforce working with children and families receiving support and services across early help, child in need, child protection and looked after children.

2. Related policies

This policy is not a complaint policy – if there is a complaint about professional conduct, single agency policies should be followed. If the complaint is about a particular agency, that agency's complaints procedure should be available.

If a professional, parent, carer, members of the child's network including children and young people themselves, has a disagreement with a decision made by the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) there is a separate policy available [here](#)

If a parent/carer or child (if of sufficient age and understanding) wishes to complain about the process of a Child Protection Conferences or appeal against a Conference decision, they should be referred to the North and South of Tyne Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures, link [here](#).

3. Definition

Professional challenge is a fundamental professional responsibility. In this context it is about challenging decisions, practice or actions which may impact on the child or young person's safety and wellbeing. Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children.

Occasionally situations may arise when professionals within an agency consider that the decision made by professionals from another agency is not adequate or a safe decision. Many professional challenges will be resolved on an informal basis by contact between the professional raising the challenge (or their manager) and the agency receiving the challenge. However where there is a need to, unresolved concerns or worries should be escalated using this policy.

Disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around:

- A difference of view in relation to levels of need
- A lack of understanding about roles and responsibilities
- Quality and progression of the child's plan
- Communication

4. Principles

- The child's safety and welfare is the paramount consideration at all times, meaning disputes should never leave a child at risk of harm.
- Worries and disagreements should be resolved at the earliest possible stage
- There is a value in exchanging and recognising differing professional views and expertise to achieve best outcomes.

- A culture of respectful professional challenge is expected and crucial in terms of resolving disagreements.
- As the focus of challenge is about the intended outcome of the intervention, it should include critical reflection, questioning and an openness to professional challenge from colleagues as well as a willingness and confidence to challenge others
- That learning is applied to address any identified practice and policy issues.

5. Resolving disagreements and escalation

When disagreements arise the following process should be followed.

Discussions and outcomes should be accurately recorded on the child's record – including recording dates, who was involved, key areas of issue and concern, and the outcome including reference to use of the stages set out in this policy.

➤ **Stage 1 – Discussion between practitioners - within 1 day**

Any practitioner who is worried about a decision/action should contact the practitioner who made the decision/took the action to express their views and worries and discuss the rationale for the decision. Often differences are based on misunderstanding of agency policy and lack of communication and as such can be resolved quickly.

Feedback should be given to all parties involved

If the worries cannot be resolved, both practitioners should raise their concerns with their line manager/supervisor within one working day.

➤ **Stage 2 – Discussion between practitioner and their manager/supervisor - within 1 day**

The **practitioner** who raised the concerns about the decision should share their concerns with their line manager/supervisor stating the evidence for their worry, what outcome they would like to be achieved and how they believe the differences can be resolved. The manager/supervisor should then contact the manager of the practitioner who made the decision, to try to negotiate a resolution to the issue. If the issue remains unresolved move to stage 3.

Feedback should be given to all parties involved within 1 working day of request.

➤ **Stage 3 – Escalate to operational managers, service managers or named/designated safeguarding leads – within 5 days**

The issue should be escalated to a Service Manager or named/designated safeguarding lead. This may involve a meeting between the agency raising the professional challenge and the receiving agency to discuss the different views and to find a resolution that is child focused.

Feedback should be given to all parties involved

At this point the NTSCP should be notified of the nature of the professional challenge (see template at Appendix A). The Partnership has a role in monitoring issues identified and how policy and practice issues are being addressed.

➤ **Stage 4 – Escalate to Senior Management/Leadership, Assistant Director – within 5 days**

If the issue cannot be resolved between operational managers and named/designated safeguarding lead – the agency raising the professional challenge should escalate it to the relevant senior manager/leadership role, for example the Assistant Director in Children’s Services.

Feedback should be given to all parties involved

➤ **Stage 5 – Escalate to Safeguarding Partners Executive – within 5 days**

If the issue remains unresolved it should be formally raised to Safeguarding Partners Executive via the Assistant Director of Children’s Services or Senior Managers of relevant agencies. The Safeguarding Partners Executive will agree a way forward – this may include dispute resolution, independent review, advice etc.

At this stage outcomes for the child should be clear and issues relating to policy and practice should be taken forward.

Feedback should be given to all parties involved.

6. Recording and reporting

At all stages a record should be kept, by all parties. In particular this must include written communication about agreed outcomes and how the outstanding issues will be pursued. All records should be retained on the child’s case record.

To monitor relevant policy and practice issues and use of this escalation policy, key information should be submitted to NTSCP using the template at Appendix A.

NTSCP will collate the emerging issues from the use of this policy and report within the Annual Report.

****Launch of Safeguarding Professionals Advice Line****

From Monday 03 February 2020, the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) will offer a dedicated telephone advice line to safeguarding professionals.

This development enables professionals to directly access Social Work advice in relation to a worry about the safety of a child or young person. The offer of advice is intended to assist the professional in coming to an informed decision about whether a safeguarding referral to the MASH should be made or other action taken. The

telephone line is only available to safeguarding professionals and is not intended for family members, carers or members of the general public.

Professionals can access the advice line on **0191 643 5555** between 8:30am and 5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 8:30am to 4:30pm on Fridays. At times of high volume of calls, a professional may be directed to a voice mail and advised to provide their contact details. We will make every effort to respond promptly.

Professionals using the advice line will be reminded at the start of the telephone discussion that a brief record of the conversation and the advice given will be taken and retained by the MASH. This will enable us to assure the quality of the response, the advice given and to understand the demand and use of the line.

All staff are reminded that the Safeguarding Professionals Advice Line does not replace the well-established and effective referral pathway for safeguarding concerns in relation to children and young people. This should always be used when there are concerns that a child is at immediate risk of harm.

Document reviewed	September 2019
Document review date	September 2020

Appendix A

Escalation Notification to the North Tyneside Safeguarding Children Partnership

This template should be completed and submitted by the senior manager or safeguarding lead from the agency raising the concern. It should be submitted at stage 3 of the policy process and subsequently updated if stage 4 and 5 are used. You do not need to include details of any child or family

Purpose of the template – to monitor use of this policy and capture core issues and how these relate to policy and practice.

Name	
Role	
Agency	
Contact details	

Brief description of your worry about a decision made

Brief description of what has been done to resolve the issue

Brief description of the outcome of these actions

If resolved, please describe what was agreed in section A below

If unresolved – complete the section B below

Section A**Section B**

Completed forms should be returned to Sue Burns, Business Manager, NTSCP
– sue.burns@northtyneside.gov.uk