



## **MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS APPENDIX C**

### **DISPUTE RESOLUTION AND ESCALATION PROCEDURE JANUARY 2025 – JANUARY 2026**

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## 1. Introduction and scope of the procedure

Effective partnership working is key to keeping children and young people safe from harm. The BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership (the BCP Partnership) celebrates the outstanding safeguarding work undertaken by practitioners and managers across services and encourages constructive challenge as part of the BCP Partnership culture for continuous learning.

The procedure adopts a strength-based approach and encourages partners to submit examples of good practice as well as escalating differences of opinion; you can use the compliments form to do this [escalation/compliment form](#).

The procedure can be used by all agencies and partners working to safeguard children within the BCP area. It promotes emergency action if required but allows time for reflection and opportunities for discussion and review in non-urgent situations.

This procedure can be applied in situations that involve one child, a group of related children, or where there is a possible thematic safeguarding concern relating to several children and young people.

*Example – a concern or issue could be raised in relation to a particular agencies' service delivery that is impacting on the safety of children or young people. If it is identified as a thematic concern relating to several children, these concerns should be **raised at stage three** of the procedure immediately.*

Good practice examples are included in appendix two to assist partners to identify how and when to use the procedure.

The procedure must **not** be used where there are concerns about a practitioner or manager's suitability to work with children; these concerns are to be notified too the Local Authority's Designated Officer (or LADO)<sup>1</sup> [lado@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:lado@bcpcouncil.gov.uk) In circumstances where there are concerns about malpractice or fraud by an individual or organisation, the relevant organisation's Whistleblowing procedure should be used.

## 2. Principles of dispute resolution and escalation

The BCP Partnership promotes effective multi-agency working through a culture of high partner support and challenge and recognises there can be differences of opinion between partners, practitioners and managers that require resolution through challenge and escalation.

The experience of the child is at the heart of our work and resolving professional differences can help to re-focus decisions around what the child is telling us, what is observed, and what safeguarding actions are required.

Practitioners and managers should be curious and open to explaining their decision making, actions and ways of working. This will allow partners to understand if they have a legitimate challenge to make, or that they have not fully understood the rationale for another agency's approach.

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<sup>1</sup> [Allegations Against Staff - BCP Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

Most disagreements and misunderstandings can be resolved through discussion, exploration and negotiation and should be resolved in a timely way, so the welfare of the child is always at the centre.

The procedure adopts a process to enable time for practitioner and manager reflection, challenge and escalation if required. However, there will be times when it is necessary to initiate all stages within a shorter period, so the safety of the child is not compromised.

3. **Stages of escalation** (the procedure recognises that manager titles and levels vary across partner organisations therefore partner judgement is encouraged when interpreting the stages of escalation)

➤ **Stage one: frontline managers**

Where practitioners are concerned about a decision that has been made e.g. on the progress or delay of agreed plans, availability of resources or capacity issues, which have not been resolved at practitioner level they should raise the matter with their line manager.

The line manager will discuss and seek to resolve the matter with the line manager from the agency raising the dispute.

The discussion and outcome should be recorded by the managers in the relevant child's records within **three working days of the dispute being raised**.

➤ **Stage two: second tier managers (e.g. service managers)**

Where line managers are unable to agree a resolution at stage one, they should escalate the matter with their second-tier manager e.g. service manager.

The second-tier manager should review the evidence and discuss it with the practitioner and line manager to gain a clear understanding of the dispute. The discussion and outcome should be recorded by the second-tier managers in the child's records wherever possible within **six working days of the dispute first being raised**.

If the second-tier managers cannot reach a resolution within this timescale, they should escalate it to stage three.

➤ **Stage three: heads of service/service directors**

Heads of service are responsible for stage three escalations and may need to involve practitioners and line managers to gain a clear understanding of the issues and concerns under consideration. It is the responsibility of individual agencies to identify the appropriate officer.

All agencies involved in escalations at stage three and above must keep a record in their individual agency escalation log **and provide the details to the BCP business team** via the [escalation/compliments form](#). The stage three escalation lead for each agency is responsible for making this notification.

If the matter relates to a number of children, and appears to be a safeguarding theme the head of service can use the [escalation/compliments form](#) to report this.

Alternatively, they can email the BCP Partnership email box [safeguardingchildrenpartnershipbcp@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingchildrenpartnershipbcp@bcpcouncil.gov.uk) with the details, which will be recorded on a spreadsheet maintained by the business unit. It is **not** the role of BCP business team to resolve the issues; they should be notified so they can track any practice or systemic issues, and report these to the BCP Partnership.

Every effort should be made to resolve the matter at stage three so that safeguarding the child is not compromised in any way. In circumstances where the dispute has not been resolved, this will need to be recorded. The senior manager leading the process should ensure that any decisions made at stage three are recorded in the child's records.

The heads of service leading the stage three process should ensure that any organisational or systemic issues identified have a plan in place for resolving these. Stage three must be completed within **nine working days of the dispute being raised**.

➤ **Stage four: senior leaders**

In the unlikely event a dispute cannot be resolved at stages one-three it will need to be escalated to the senior leaders of the agencies involved.

The statutory Designated Safeguarding Partners for the BCP Partnership are the:

- Corporate Director for Children's Services, BCP Council
- Assistant Chief Constable, Dorset Police
- Chief Nurse, NHS Dorset (Integrated Care Board)

Stage four must be completed **within twelve working days of the dispute being raised**. Details should be recorded on the child's records and a further notification sent to the BCP Partnership business team by the agency's stage four lead using the [escalation/compliments form](#) or by sending an email to the partnership email box [safeguardingchildrenpartnershipbcp@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingchildrenpartnershipbcp@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

**4. Recording**

Decisions made in respect of a dispute should be fed back to the relevant practitioners and managers with the detail of the challenge and resolution recorded in the child's record.

**5. Learning lessons**

Escalations are likely to highlight issues relating to multi-agency, misunderstandings, competing priorities, resource, or capacity issues. It is important that reasons for escalations and their resolutions are logged and collated by single agency organisations as indicators of practice/ procedure or system issues. The logs should be reviewed regularly by each agency owner, so that remaining concerns and learning can be shared.

The BCP Partnership business team will send out a monthly [escalation/compliments form](#) asking partners for details of all escalations a stage three and above occurring in the previous month. Data gathered will be reported to the BCP Partnership Quality Assurance and Learning Group.

## **Appendix one - potential areas of disagreement**

Below is a non-exhaustive list of the types of concerns that may require escalation but provides examples:

- The response to a situation by any agency which is not perceived to be in the child's best interest
- A plan for a child at any level on the continuum of need which is not making the progress anticipated
- There is not a shared understanding of why an agency has made a particular decision
- A referral not considered to meet the threshold for assessment by children's social care
- There is disagreement as to whether the child protection procedures should be invoked
- There is a disagreement over the sharing of information and/or provision of services
- There is disagreement over the outcome of any assessment and whether the appropriate action plan is in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child
- Themes have been identified in relation to the safeguarding of children that require strategic oversight. For example, it may have been identified that young people are frequenting a certain area in the community that poses risks to children and appropriate safeguarding action is not being taken to address those concerns
- Thematic issues may have been identified around a particular agency's model of service/delivery that is impacting on the safeguarding of children and young people.

## Appendix two - scenarios and sample wording for escalating disputes

### Scenarios

1. A practitioner has sent a referral form to Children's Social Care (CSC) Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) with concerns about a family. The response from CSC MASH is that the concerns do not reach Level 4 in the continuum of need and that the practitioner should undertake an early help assessment and bring together other partners working with the child and family to hold a Team Around the Family meeting. The practitioner's line manager escalates this to the CSC MASH manager, and they have a discussion looking at the continuum of need document and agree there are elements of Level 4 need, but the CSC MASH manager is able to explain that at present services do not know if the family can recognise and address these needs with services and input at Level 3. The practitioner's manager accepts the advice and understands better the reason for the decision.
2. A child in need has a plan which is addressing areas of risk, and the child is known to be suffering a level of harm. There is a sense that the family are trying to change, but there is the potential that this is disguised compliance. There have been regular planning meetings, but in supervision one of the partner's line managers is unhappy that the case has not been considered at a strategy discussion to have a multi-agency view on whether the concerns indicate s47 enquiries should be undertaken. There is a discussion between the managers of the partner agency and CSC. The CSC manager explains that reason for not previously convening a strategy discussion is that the team around the family have been working together for three months and that it is felt that information has been gathered and is known by everyone. However, it is agreed that a formal strategy discussion will be convened for the agencies to look at the cumulative information together and consider whether there should be s47 enquiries.
3. A practitioner is concerned that a child with a child in need plan is not making progress expected and that the plan is not addressing needs. The practitioner's safeguarding lead contacts the children's social manager and has a discussion about these concerns. They review the plan together and agree there needs to be clearer timescales set for the objectives. The practitioner can contribute with an additional outcome expected for the child by a certain time and the work they will undertake to support this improvement. The plan is enhanced, and all agencies are clearer about when there will need to be a change of approach because goals have not been achieved.
4. A practitioner is concerned that they hear from a parent that the commitment made by another agency to visit and undertake direct work with the child has not been happening. There is an initial discussion between practitioners, but this does not resolve the concern and there is risk that progress in improving the child's situation is not happening at the pace expected. The practitioner discusses with their line manager who shares the concern and escalates this to the manager in the other service. There is an email exchange between the managers and input improves once the role and purpose of visiting is discussed in supervision by the manager and worker.
5. An adult service agrees actions with a parent that has potential to impact on their child's welfare. The children's services manager confirms that front-line practitioners

have discussed and not been able to resolve the situation and then raises an escalation with the adult service manager. This escalation outlines the challenges faced in the multi-agency work with parent and child. The managers discuss the concerns and recognise that the adult services have not been fully involved in the children services planning and so had not seen the links. There is an agreement that the team around the family is widened to include adult services. Both managers agree to review their systems to ensure this practice is embedded.

6. There is a disagreement at child protection conference that the plan is going to create enough change for the child. A partner line manager escalates the concern to the CSC manager, and they review the plan together. They cannot agree and so both liaise with their senior managers who again review the plan and discuss the case. They cannot reach agreement, but have gained an understanding of each other's position, which is recorded on the child's record. The plan continues with agreement for more frequent core groups to check progress which will be reported to both senior managers. As the escalation process is complete without reaching agreement, service leads are copied into the records so that they can consider joint working arrangements.

**Wording that could be used:**

7. I made a referral last week and understand that there was a decision not to progress with a Level 4 assessment. Please can we discuss as I need to understand that the concerns have been fully understood?
8. I am concerned that the work agreed in our joint plan has not progressed. I understand that there have been pressures in workloads, but I need to understand what can be done for the family which will achieve the goals we set out.
9. I am worried that the behaviours that are being observed in our setting are not being given the weight they deserve by the practitioner drawing together the assessment. How can we work together to ensure that what this child is trying to tell us through different behaviours is understood?
10. I am making this request under stage two of the Procedure.
11. I have a concern that we are not being effective as a multi-agency group in helping this family to make improvements.

**VERSION CONTROL**

| VERSION   | DATE APPROVED | REVIEW DATE   |
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| Version 1 | February 2025 | February 2026 |
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