

CHILD PROTECTION CORE GROUPS GUIDANCE

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This document provides guidance about multi-agency child protection core groups in Suffolk, specifically key principles and remit of core groups, the arrangements for convening meetings and the responsibilities of core group members (including the lead social worker). It aims to help professionals fulfil their statutory responsibilities for safeguarding children, in accordance with Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, section 175 & 157 of the Education Act 2002 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013.

Particular emphasis is given to involving parents/cares and the child/young person, when appropriate, and to ensuring that there is agreement and clarity amongst all parties about working towards outcomes and actions which prioritise the child's welfare through their child protection plan.

We will on request produce this policy, or particular parts of it, into other languages and formats, in order that everyone can use and comment upon its content.

CHILD PROTECTION CORE GROUPS GUIDANCE

SUMMARY

Core group members must:

- meet within 10 days of the initial cp conference
- meet thereafter at least every 6 weeks
- develop the child protection plan and sign it
- know what their own roles and responsibilities are for safeguarding the child
- implement the child protection plan and monitor its progress
- make any necessary additions to the plan if risks to the child increase
- ensure parents/carers are helped to be fully involved
- ensure the child's experiences, views, wishes & feelings are known and shared

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This guidance is for all members of child protection core groups. It covers the arrangements for holding and attending core group meetings, the roles of members, and how Child Protection Plans are developed and implemented.

1.2 The purpose of a core group is to develop, implement and monitor the progress of a child's protection plan, in order ensure the child is protected from significant harm and to prevent him/her from suffering further significant harm.

1.3 Membership of the core group will be agreed at the initial child protection conference, although new members may join if they become directly involved in helping to safeguard the child.

1.4 The conference will also identify the lead social worker (usually the child's allocated social worker) who will act as the lead professional, co-ordinating core group meetings, ensuring members are communicating well with each other and ensuring that the child's protection plan is being put into practice.

2. FIRST CORE GROUP MEETING

2.1 The date, time and venue of the first core group meeting will be agreed at the initial conference, and must be held within 10 working days of it.

2.2 The main purpose of first core group meeting is to develop the child protection plan which was drawn up at the initial conference. This might include adjusting the language so it is clearer or more understandable, identifying specific services or resources, clarifying who will make referrals, etc. (see also 'Child Protection Plan' below).

2.3 The core group may adjust and add to the child protection plan, but may not remove any agreed actions or tasks. The reasons for any changes must be clearly recorded by the lead social worker in their report to the next review conference.

2.4 It is essential that the parents/carers (and the child, if a member of the core group and attending the meeting) are appropriately supported at this initial meeting, particularly that they are helped to fully understand the reasons for the child protection plan, the

identified outcomes for the child and the specific actions and expectations required of them and of others (see also below).

2.5 Once the child protection plan has been discussed, all members of the core group – including parents/carers – must sign it, to confirm they have read and understood it. The lead social worker will retain this copy on the child's files and ensure all members receive a copy within 15 working days.

2.6 Any disagreements or dissent about the child protection plan should be recorded in the core group minutes: a summary of this information must be clearly included in the lead social worker's report for the next review conference.

3. SUBSEQUENT CORE GROUP MEETINGS

3.1 The frequency of subsequent core group meetings will usually have been specified by the chair of the preceding conference. However, meetings should be held at least every 6 weeks; frequency should reflect the levels of risk and of multi-agency co-operation needed to safeguard the child.

3.2 The purpose of subsequent core group meetings is to review the implementation of the child protection plan and the progress made towards the identified outcomes for the child. Each core group meeting should monitor the timescales set, to avoid drift or delay and should carefully consider what difference the plan is making to the child's safety and wellbeing.

3.3 The child's current experiences, views, wishes & feelings (including about their own wellbeing and safety) should be considered at each core group meeting.

3.4 The core group may make further adjustments or additions to the child protection plan, to reflect changes in risk, need or circumstances for the child or their family. However, it may not remove any agreed action or task. The reasons for any changes must be clearly recorded by the lead social worker in their report to the next review conference.

3.5 The date and venue for the next core group meeting should be confirmed at the end of each meeting and clearly recorded in the minutes.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF CORE GROUP MEMBERS

4.1 Core groups are multi-agency meetings and therefore the collective responsibility of all professional members. All members, including professionals working specifically with parents/carers or other adults in the child's family, are reminded that the core group must remain child-focussed.

4.2 The lead social worker will usually chair core group meetings. If they are sick or otherwise unable to attend, their line manager will take responsibility for ensuring that a sufficiently informed duty social worker attends in their place. If, in very exceptional circumstances, no representative from CYPS social care is available to attend, the core group meeting should nevertheless proceed. It should be chaired by another professional member of the group who must update the lead social worker or their line manager of the outcome of the meeting, within 3 working days.

4.3 Minutes must be taken at all core group meetings, using the template attached. Minutes may be taken by any professional member of the group. However, it is the lead

social worker's responsibility to ensure that minutes are accurate, that they are distributed to all core group members within 15 working days and that they are clearly recorded on the child's CYPS social care electronic records.

4.4 All members of the core group share joint responsibility for developing and implementing the child protection plan (see below), refining it as needed, monitoring progress towards the planned outcomes for the child and making recommendations to subsequent child protection review conferences about whether or not the protection plan needs to continue.

4.5 The lead social worker should report any significant changes to the core group or child protection plan to the conference chair within 5 working days.

4.6 All core group members are expected to attend every core group meeting. If a professional member is unable to attend a meeting, they must let the lead social worker know and must provide a written report in advance.

4.7 A core group meeting will be considered quorate if at least two professional members attend.

4.8 If there are concerns about poor attendance or engagement by an agency representative, the lead social worker should inform the chair of the previous child protection conference.

5. SUPPORTING PARENTS/CARERS TO PARTICIPATE

5.1 The lead social worker must ensure that parents/carers are appropriately supported and enabled to attend core group meetings, for example by providing an interpreter, signer or advocate, etc. if wanted.

5.1 The time and venue of core group meetings should take into account the wishes and needs of the parents/carers (as well as other core group members), including any religious or cultural factors and any work or childcare commitments.

5.3 The lead social worker should consider parents'/carers' need for childcare and should assist them to identify suitable provision, if required.

5.4 In some cases a parent/carer may not be able to attend in person (for example if a parent with parental responsibility does not live locally, or is subject to bail restrictions). In these circumstances, the lead social worker should obtain their views and wishes in advance and ensure they are shared at the meeting.

5.5 In situations of domestic abuse or significant family conflict, the lead social worker must decide how to involve both parents/carers in ways that do not place anyone at risk and do not prevent the meeting remaining focussed on the child's needs.

6. SUPPORTING THE CHILD/YOUNG PERSON TO CONTRIBUTE

6.1 The lead social worker must also ensure the child/young person is able to contribute to core group meetings and that their current views and wishes are clearly shared. This may involve the child or young person attending the meeting (or part of it) in person, by them sending a letter, drawing or recording, or by an advocate attending on their behalf.

6.2 Children and young people may need help to understand why any significant changes have been made to their protection plans; their views about this should be known to all core group members.

7. THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

7.1 A child protection plan is a detailed working tool for the core group to help reduce the likelihood of the child suffering significant harm. It must be recorded concisely and clearly, in language that parents/carers (and the child/young person, if appropriate) can understand.

7.2 The child protection plan must be signed by all core group members, including the parents/carers, at the end of the first core group meeting to confirm that everyone understands its purpose and their own roles. In some instances, the child protection plan may ask for a written agreement to be drawn up with the parents, for example when additional and specific details are needed about contact arrangements or improvements to home conditions etc. A written agreement is an addendum to a child protection plan, not a replication of it.

7.3 The child protection plan should clearly set out:

- the developmental & welfare **needs of the child/ren** & the **identified risk factors** which increase the likelihood of significant harm
- what the intended **outcomes** are for the child, and how will these be measured or determined.
- the specific **actions, tasks & services** needed to help ensure these outcomes are achieved
- clear **roles and responsibilities** for each member of the core group, including the parents/carers
- agreed **timescales** for action, service provision or change; these must reflect the child's own timescales.
- Detailed **arrangements for seeing the child** regularly, to monitor his/her wellbeing, circumstances, developmental progress and safety, and to obtain his/her opinions, understanding and wishes (see below)
- a **contingency plan**, detailing what actions will be taken if the protection plan fails to safeguard the child and/or the likelihood of significant harm increases

7.4 Any dissent or disagreement about the child protection plan, whether by family members or professionals, must be recorded on the plan. However, the intended outcomes for the child will remain the same and can only be changed by the conference.

7.5 If there is a significant reduction in the level of risk to the child, the core group may request, via the lead social worker, that the next review child protection conference is held earlier than scheduled. This decision is at the discretion of the chair.

7.6 If there is a significant increase in the level of risk to the child, the lead social worker will seek management advice, which will be fed back to the core group. This may include making adjustments to the child protection plan, the local authority seeking legal advice or, in exceptional circumstances, requesting that the next review conference is held earlier than scheduled.

8. ARRANGEMENTS FOR SEEING THE CHILD

8.1 The lead social worker must have face-to-face contact with the child in accordance with the child protection plan and at least every 20 working days, to help develop a trusting relationship and to gain an understanding of the child's experiences, views, wishes and feelings. The lead social worker should speak/communicate with older children alone, as well as in the company of their parents/carers and other household members. On at least some occasions, babies and very young children must be seen *awake*, mobile (if of sufficient age/ability) and in the company of their parents/carers. Parents should be helped to understand the reasons for this.

8.2 When appropriate (and in line with the Healthy Child Programme and Health Visitor Quality Standard) babies and young children under 2 years who are the subject of a child protection plan may be required to be seen unclothed by their midwife or health visitor. This is especially important when there are concerns about chronic neglect, physical abuse or other forms of abuse which may affect the child's physical health or development. This will be discussed fully in the conference, gaining the parents' cooperation as part of the child protection plan. (In some cases children over 2 years may also need to be seen unclothed by a health professional; this must be discussed fully in conference and the child protection plan must provide clear details about the arrangements and responsibilities for this. It is also essential that the child is comfortable with this.)

8.3 All children who have a child protection plan should be seen by a professional member of the core group at least every 10 working days. However, children who are particularly vulnerable may need to be seen more frequently by the lead social worker and/or other professionals, according to assessed levels of risk and need. This is likely to require detailed and careful co-ordination by the core group, and should be clearly recorded in the core group minutes.

8.4 Some visits to see the child may need to be unscheduled or unplanned, for example to allow the lead social worker to gain a more accurate assessment of the child's circumstances, living conditions and day-to-day experiences. Parents/carers should be helped to understand why this is necessary.

Record of Core Group Meeting

This document is highly confidential. Its contents should not be shared with anyone unless they have a need to know in the interests of the child(ren) concerned.

This report is for the attention of parent's and carers, and professionals who are working with a child or family member who are invited to or sent the record of the Core Group.

Child(ren): **Names** **Held on:** **date** **at:** **Venue**

Attendance:

Apologies / not attended:

Action required (or being taken) to implement Protection Plan:

Address every element of PP. Clarify a) what is expected of parents? b) What is expected of professionals? Who does what/when/how etc

***Development of Detailed Child Protection Plan**

Address every element of PP since last CPC, and since ICPC as appropriate

	Planned Outcomes (what is required for child's safety/ development)	Actions to be taken	By Whom	Timescale
	<i>ENTER CP PLAN HERE:</i>			
*	<i>ENTER MINUTES FROM MEETING HERE:</i>			
1				
*				
2				
*				
3				
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4				
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5				

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6			
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7			
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8			
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9			
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10			
*			
11			
*			

Significant changes and events since last Child Protection Conference or Core Group:

Re: child, family and professionals

Effectiveness of PP? If not, what should be altered, and how?

Is it effective/viable? Is compliance an issue? Significant changes should not be made without discussion with Chair of the Child Protection Conference.

Current risk assessment:

Refer to risks as identified at last CPC and ICPC as appropriate

Focus of future work:

Date time/ place of next Core Group meeting or CPC:

Signed:

Date:

Distribution: Social Care Manager, Child Protection Manager etc
