

Working Together to Resolve Professional Disputes

This Quick Guide and the full Policy must be used together with the Suffolk Safeguarding Children Board Procedures and Guidance found at www.suffolkscb.org.uk.

Suffolk LSCB recognises that in most circumstances, professionals in Suffolk refer cases appropriately and there is mutual agreement on the status and disposal of the referral.

However, the LSCB also recognises that there are situations where disputes over thresholds emerge.

This quick guide is intended to assist in circumstances where a threshold is contested. There may also be occasions when concerns about professional practice may be raised in respect of an individual, or group of individuals, or where there may be concerns about the response of a professional colleague to a situation involving actual or likely harm to a child.

The first and key principle should be that it is everyone's professional responsibility to problem solve and come to an agreed resolution at the earliest opportunity, always keeping in mind the child's safety and welfare.

All agencies are responsible for ensuring their staff are competent and supported to escalate appropriately intra and inter-agency concerns and disagreements about a child's wellbeing.

Dispute at the Point of Referral:

1. The referrer and their Manager re-visit the referral, taking into consideration any comments that have been made by the receiving service and any appropriate amendments made.
2. Following amendments, if dispute continues then professionals should attempt to resolve difference through discussion and/or meeting within 5 working days [or a timescale that protects the child]. Consideration may be given to calling a professional's meeting involving Children and Young People's Service.
3. If professionals are unable to resolve differences within timescale, their disagreement must be addressed by more experienced/senior staff. Most day to day inter-agency differences of opinion will require a LA children's social care team manager to liaise with their first line manager equivalent in the relevant agencies. These first line managers may wish to seek advice from their agency's nominated/designated child protection adviser.
4. If agreement cannot be reached between first line managers within a further 5 working days or a timescale that protects the child [whichever is less], the issue **MUST** be referred without delay through the line management to a senior manager.

Alternatively, [i.e. in Health Services] input may be sought directly from the designated nurse or doctor in preference to the use of line management.

5. The professionals involved in this process must contemporaneously record each intra and inter-agency discussion they have, approve and date the record and place a copy on the child's file, together with any other written communications and information.
6. Where professional differences remain unresolved, the matter must be referred to the heads of service for each agency involved. In the unlikely event that the issue is not resolved by the steps described above, and/or the discussions raise significant policy issues, the matter should be referred urgently to the LSCB for resolution.

Dissent regarding the implementation of a child protection plan:

Professionals in all agencies have a responsibility to act without delay to safeguard the child (i.e. by calling for a case to be allocated or for a strategy meeting/discussion, for a core group meeting or for a child protection conference or review conference).

Concern or disagreement may arise over another's professional decision, action or lack of action in the implementation of the child protection plan, including the timing, quoracy or decision making of core group meetings, progress of the plan or professional practice. Professionals should therefore attempt to resolve differences in line with the actions outlined above.

Specialist Facilities

Specialist regional facilities, e.g. Mother and Baby Units, must have in place a protocol/guidance which sets out how any dispute between professional bodies will be managed. This protocol/guidance should take account of the role of the Local Authority Children & Young People's Service in the locality of the specialist service.

Further information about all Suffolk Safeguarding Children Board publications can be found on our website. www.suffolkscb.org.uk