

Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership

Resolving Multi-Agency Professional Disagreements

and Escalation Policy

1. Aims and objectives

- 1.1 This policy aims to ensure all agencies working within Southwark have access to guidance to quickly resolve professional differences where there are concerns about the welfare and safety of children and to ensure the opinion and assessment of agencies are given equal weight when there is a disagreement.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to promote a strong culture of partnership working. This culture will lead to early resolution of disagreements and earlier help offered to the child and their family.
- 1.3 Occasionally situations arise when workers within one agency feel that the actions, inaction or decision of another agency do not adequately safeguard a child. There are key areas where disagreements may arise, which could include:
 - Levels of need and thresholds
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Progressing plans
 - Communication (intra and inter agency)
 - Disagreement on lead agency as part of the step up/down process to/from children's social care intervention
 - Practice and case management issues
- 1.4 This guidance seeks to support the quickest resolution to disagreement to ensure the child is protected. The guidance takes as its key principle that the child's safety and wellbeing must be the paramount concern and that wherever possible disagreements should be resolved at the lowest possible stage in support of this. This principle is underpinned by risk management and should a child be considered at risk of immediate harm emergency action should be taken alongside a referral to children's social care and the designated safeguarding lead in your agency should be informed immediately.
- 1.5 This policy does not replace statutory complaints processes available to individual partner agencies. Each agency will also have a whistleblowing policy and these mechanisms may from time to time need to be considered alongside this policy. All agencies are responsible for ensuring that their staff are supported and know how to appropriately escalate in order to resolve professional disagreement about a child or young persons' wellbeing and the response to safeguarding needs.

2. Key principles of resolution

- The child or young person's safety and wellbeing is paramount
- Key family information needs to be shared appropriately and often. There is no justification to not share information that will protect a child
- Follow safe information sharing guidance and seek urgent advice if you feel compromised.
- Seek to resolve the issue quickly at the lowest organisational level appropriate.
- Ensure professional differences do not place the child at risk
- Ensure accurate and contemporaneous recording of the child's file of key decisions and discussion held in relation to the resolution process.
- As a professional be assertive in raising your concern – you are an advocate for the child and it is your responsibility to be involved in managing professional conflict and disagreement in the case.

3. Process

- 3.1 Professionals should attempt to resolve differences through discussion within one working week or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is the shortest)

Within each stage the expectation of those involved is a risk assessment will be undertaken to ensure raising an escalation is safe and the child does not need alternative protection such as police protection, child protection referral or a referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer. If it is safe to do so then proceed to Stage 1.

- 3.2 **Stage1: Involving the worker from the other agency and informing your line manager**

The professional or volunteer with concern should raise the matter with the relevant practitioner or decision maker verbally and in writing **within 2 working days** of the disagreement or receipt of a decision. The originating professional should inform their manager they are taking this action.

The professional or volunteer with concern should provide the evidence they are basing their challenge or disagreement. The receiving practitioner must read and review the case file and speak with the concerned professional or volunteer with concern **within 3 working days** and try to find a mutually agreeable way forward via discussion or meeting.

- 3.3 **Stage 2: Escalate line manager to line manager**

If the professionals or volunteers are unable to resolve the matter satisfactorily within the timescale, the concern or difficulty should be escalated to their respective line managers **within the same working day** and a **resolution should be achieved within a further five days** or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less). The first line manager should where appropriate consult their agency's designated safeguarding professional.

Where a resolution is reached the receiving line manager will confirm the outcome with their counterpart in the agency raising concerns, within a **further two working days**

3.4 **Stage 3: Escalate to operational heads of service /assistant directors**

If agreement cannot be reached following the involvement of first line managers, then the issue must be referred to the relevant senior manager and the designated safeguarding lead in the agency.

Following referral to senior managers a resolution should be achieved within a further 5 working days or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

The manager dealing with the issue will consider involvement of the head of service in their agency if required.

Where a resolution is reached the receiving line manager will confirm the outcome with their counterpart in the agency raising concerns, within a **further two working days**.

3.5 **Stage 4: Escalate to Quality Assurance Unit**

If the professional disagreement remains unresolved following discussions between respective heads of service and/or the discussion raises significant policy issues, the matter should be referred to the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, within Southwark Children's Social Care. A form is found at Appendix 2 to support this process

Following referral to the Quality Assurance Unit a resolution should be achieved within a **further two working days** or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

A record of the escalations will be maintained in order to identify any patterns of escalation and these will be reported quarterly into the SSCP.

To escalate to the QAU, please complete the form at Appendix 2 and email to SSCP@southwark.gov.uk, using the heading 'Stage 4 Escalation'.

3.6 **Stage 5: Escalate to the SSCP independent chair**

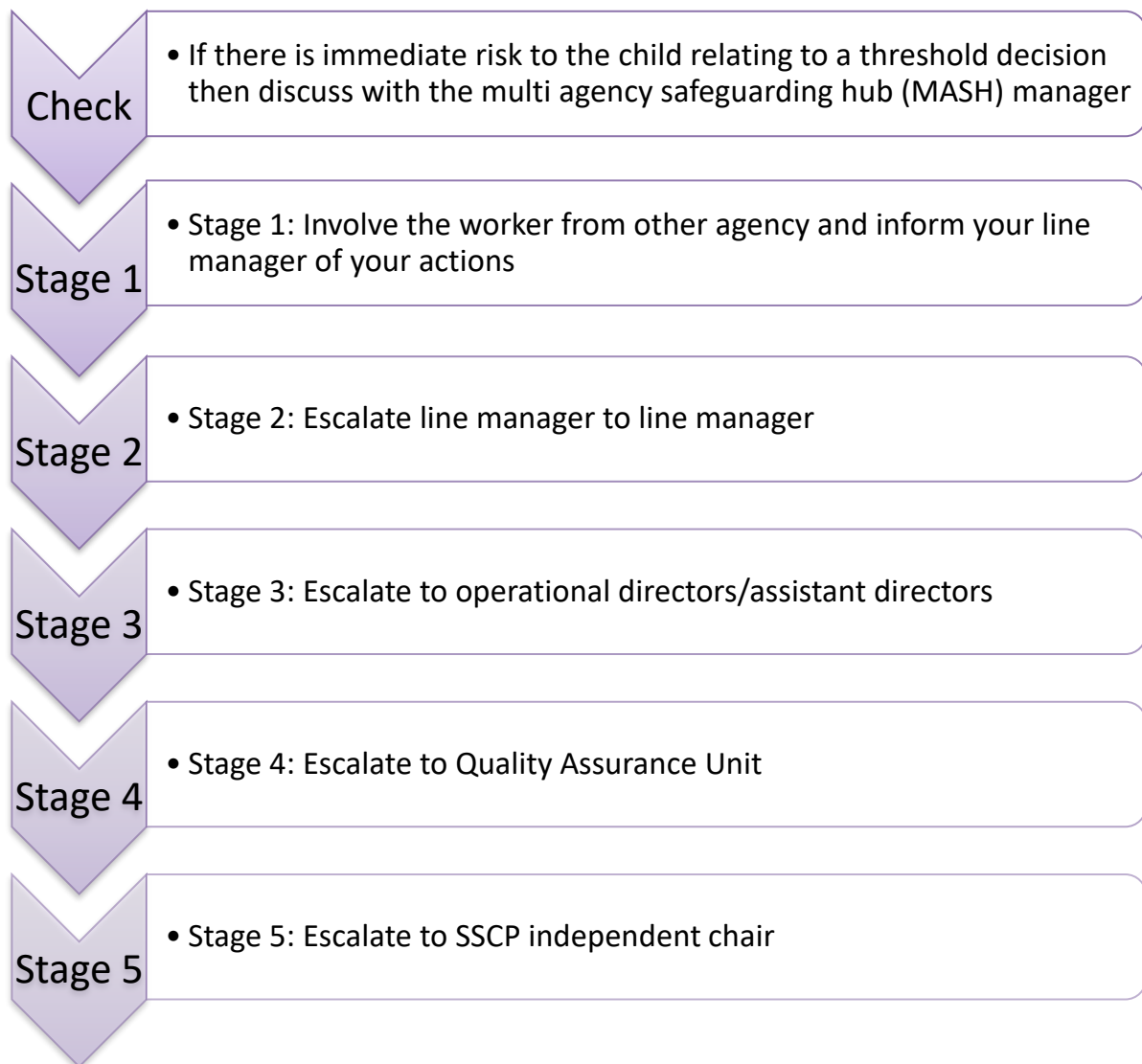
In the unlikely event that stage 4 is unable to resolve the professional disagreement, the matter will be escalated (via the Quality and Assurance Lead) to the Independent Chair of the Southwark Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP). The Chair may seek further information from the parties involved and will make recommendations to the agencies for resolution of the matter. The Chair will make recommendations within five working days of the issue being brought to their attention.

The SSCP is not an operational body and cannot direct the actions of partner agencies. However as the SSCP as a body has a strong expectation that the recommendation of the SSCP Chair will be acted upon and if not a record maintained formally and reported upon to partner agencies.

Appendix 1:

Flow Chart to guide SSCP multi-agency escalation procedure for professionals or volunteers with child protection or child welfare concern

If a professional or volunteer is unhappy with a decision or response from any agency following a referral within the partnership then the following flowchart sets out a quick glance at the process



Actions agreed by Safeguarding advisor (*to be completed by referring SA*):

Should the Head of Service be contacted?	Yes	No
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Identify the following:

Who will do what?	What will be undertaken?	By when?

Outcome achieved following completion of actions:

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Name of Referrer:

Agency details:

Sign _____ **Date:** _____

Safeguarding Designated Lead Professional:

Sign: _____

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