

Strategy Discussions - Practice Guidance

This guidance has been developed and agreed by the Somerset Safeguarding Children's Partnership to compliment the detailed statutory and local guidance already available about strategy discussions. Here are the relevant links to statutory and local guidance:

- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)
- [Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures](#)
- [Somerset Children's Services Procedures Manual](#)

1. When is a Strategy Discussion held?

Whenever there is **reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm** there should be a strategy discussion involving local authority children's social care (including the residential or fostering service, if the child is looked-after), the police, health and other involved agencies such as the referring agency. This might take the form of a multi-agency meeting or phone calls and more than one discussion may be necessary. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral to Children's Social Care (CSC) or at any other time, including during the assessment process and when new information is received about child/ren already open to CSC.

If there is no agreement about whether or not the concerns about a child meet the threshold for a strategy discussion this should be discussed with the social worker and/or Team Manager and the rationale for the decision clearly recorded on the child's record by each agency. The [SSCP Resolving Professional Differences protocol](#) may also be appropriate.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Share available, relevant information.
- Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation.
- Decide whether enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 should be undertaken.

Where there are grounds to initiate an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, decisions should be made as to:

- What further information is needed if an assessment is already underway and how it will be obtained and recorded.
- What immediate and short-term action is required to support the child and ensure an appropriate plan is in place, and who will do what by when.
- What information will be shared with the child's parents/carers and wider family where appropriate.
- Whether legal action is required.

2. Preparing for a Strategy Discussion

- The Social Worker (SW) completes a strategy request form for CSC Business Support Team to organise the meeting: [Strategy Discussion Request Form](#)

It is important to ensure that all of the professionals who may have relevant information about the child are invited. If the strategy discussion is held during the school holidays the identified contact for the school should be invited.

- The CSC Team Manager (TM) reviews the strategy discussion request form prior to this being sent to the Business Support Team to be arranged.
- The TM will manually start strategy discussion request form on the subjects of the strategy on the CSC LCS system.
- If the strategy discussion is being minuted by someone other than the TM else, reassign to them, otherwise the TM keeps in their own LCS tray.
- If not already on LCS, attendees will need to be added by Business Support.

All professionals attending a strategy discussion should consider the following questions prior to the strategy discussion:

- What is the contextual information relevant to the concern?
- Is there evidence to suggest that child is suffering or is likely to suffer from significant harm? If so, please state the nature of harm.
- Is there evidence that this harm is attributable to anything the parents/carers have done?
- Is there evidence that this harm will be ongoing?
- What outcomes do we want the strategy discussion to achieve?

If it is not possible to attend, all invitees should provide relevant information considering the questions above.

3. Who minutes a Strategy Discussion?

The responsibility for minuting a strategy discussion rests with CSC. Business Support staff will minute strategy discussions in complex cases, such as in the following situations:

- There is a non-accidental injury.
- A child has been admitted to hospital or is suffering from a medical condition.
- There are issues connecting multiple children who aren't related.
- Where there is an active Police investigation, including child exploitation.

For other strategy discussions, the Team Manager is responsible for ensuring the meeting is minuted and clear actions are agreed.

4. How will the Strategy Discussion take place?

Strategy discussions will typically be held as Microsoft Teams meetings; however, they can sometimes be attended in person (such as if taking place in hospital).

CSC Business Support staff will arrange a teleconference either via the conference line (participants will receive a dial in telephone number and pin) or via MS Teams, with a link to join the virtual meeting.

5. Strategy Discussion Agenda

Please refer to this document as a guide when chairing or attending a strategy discussion:

[Strategy Discussion Agenda](#)

6. Chairing a child exploitation (complex) strategy

Please refer to this document as a guide when chairing a child exploitation (complex) strategy discussion:

[Strategy discussion Child Exploitation complex guidance](#)

7. Writing up and completing on LCS

A strategy discussion should be written up and completed on LCS, and minutes sent out to attendees within 24 hours. If needed, the Team Manager can request Business Support distribute minutes. Professionals should respond with any queries/amendments within 24 hours of receipt of the minutes.

Should EDT involvement be required prior to completion of the strategy discussion on the LCS system arrangements should be made to ensure they have relevant information available to them – e.g. via email or a telephone call. Having the draft minutes on LCS, along with clear outcomes and actions, would assist with this.

8. Progression to Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC)

Where concerns of significant harm are substantiated, and the child is judged to be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm social workers should convene an ICPC. The timing of this conference should depend on the urgency of the situation and respond to the needs of the child and the nature and severity of the harm they may be facing. The ICPC should take place within 15 working days of a strategy discussion, or the strategy discussion at which section 47 enquiries were initiated if more than one has been held. The area ISU support

team need to be notified of the date the strategy was held and the social worker will need to complete an invite list.

The social worker should discuss with the parent and child/young person consent for an advocacy referral (for 4 years plus).

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