



Protocol for Resolving Professional Differences in Work Relating to the Safety of Children

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1. Introduction

There are many different aspects to safeguarding children, and many scenarios where professionals working together may find themselves having differing views on the best course of action for the child. This protocol is a generic resolution process which can be used at any decision-making stage in the child's journey. Local and national evidence shows that effective intervention occurs where agencies talk to each other and co-ordinate their response.

Disagreements can be a sign of developing thinking; the value of exchanging ideas from different perspectives should not be under-estimated and is one of many benefits of partnership working. However, disagreements may disadvantage the child or family involved if they are not resolved constructively and in a timely manner.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a responsibility shared by all agencies. If you feel that a professional or an agency is not acting in the best interests of the child, young person or family, you have a responsibility to respectfully challenge the professional or agency.

In most cases these issues are resolved by discussion and negotiation between the professionals concerned. It is the responsibility of all agencies to ensure that they have robust arrangements to resolve their own internal disagreements.

This protocol provides a process for resolving professional differences where professionals work within different agencies. The protocol should not be used when there is a complaint about the conduct of an individual. In such situations the relevant organisation's complaints procedure will apply. (Where you believe a practitioner's conduct may have harmed a child you will need to follow your agency's allegations management policy. For more information please see the allegations management page of the SSCB website:

<https://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/working-with-children/allegations-management/>)

Efficient resolution of differences requires the effective use of line management structures and courageous conversations in order that escalation is effective.

Differences may arise in relation to:

- Criteria for referrals
- Application of the 'Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset – Thresholds for Assessment and Services' guidance.
- Quality and outcomes of assessments
- Roles and responsibilities of workers
- Quality of Service provision
- Timeliness of interventions
- Information sharing and communication
- Decisions about the need for child protection conferences
- Decisions made at child protection conferences
- Decisions made about looked after children

This list is not exclusive, and differences may arise about other matters.

At no time must professional differences detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout any escalation and professional differences must not impede the progress of case working.

This protocol is applicable to all Somerset Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) agencies, including the voluntary, community and faith sectors.

2. Key principles of resolving professional differences and professional responsibility

- ✚ The safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is paramount, and should they be considered to be at risk of, or suffering significant harm, Children's Social Care must be contacted (0300 123 2224). If a child is in immediate danger contact the Police on 999.
- ✚ The process of resolving professional differences and disagreements should not be viewed negatively, as improvements to outcomes for children and young people can be found through the learning which effective resolution can provide.
- ✚ Disagreements must be resolved in a timely manner.
- ✚ Concerns, actions, responses and outcomes must be clearly recorded.
- ✚ All professionals should take responsibility for their own cases, and their actions in relation to case work.
- ✚ Differences and disagreements should be resolved as simply and quickly as possible and at the lowest individual practitioner/line manager level where at all possible.
- ✚ All practitioners should respect the views of others whatever their level of experience.
- ✚ Working together effectively depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies with the confidence to intervene and challenge positively.
- ✚ Professional differences are reduced where workers have clarity about roles and responsibilities and the ability to discuss and share problems in networking forums.

3. Process for resolving professional differences

Stage	Action	RPD form
One	<p>Preventing Dispute</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioner A (challenger) contacts practitioner B (challenged) to discuss the issue and resolve if possible <p>If not resolved, move to stage 2</p>	RPD form should not be used in this situation
Two	<p>Informal Resolution Procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency A Challenger's manager contacts Agency B's manager for discussion and negotiation Agree a timescale for a response from the Agency B's (challenged) manager <p>(For the purposed of this process, the Manager referred to above will be the Safeguarding Lead (health, education, voluntary agencies) Team Manager (Children's Social Care), or Police Sergeant.</p> <p>If not resolved, move to stage 3</p>	RPD form should not be used in this situation
Three	<p>Formal Resolution Procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency A (challenger) completes first part of the 'Resolving Professional Differences' form (see Appendix 1) and sends the SSCB (lscb@somerset.gov.uk). The form should contain full details of all discussions and actions already undertaken at stages 1 and 2 and why the issue has not been resolved. The SSCB Business Unit will send the form to the relevant manager in the challenged agency who will arrange for a response. Agency B (challenged) responds to form within 10 working days and updates the RPD form stating what further actions have been taken to resolve the issue. A copy of the updated RPD form, and any other response (e.g. email) is sent to SSCB (lscb@somerset.gov.uk) and to the challenging agency. <p>If not resolved, move to stage 4</p>	RPD form to be completed
Four	If the dispute cannot be resolved by senior organisational leads, then, in exceptional circumstances, the matter can be referred to the SSCB Independent chair.	

4. Recording the professional difference and resolution

All steps of the process should be well documented. The form listed in Appendix One should be used to accompany any professional difference raised at level 3 and returned to the SSCB.

5. Monitoring the process

The SSCB business unit will:

- Acknowledge receipt of all RPD forms, reminding agencies of the timescales for resolution;
- record all RPD forms that it receives;
- track the progress of RPDs and
- follow up with agencies if responses to challenges are not received within 10 working days.

6. Outcomes and Learning

The SSCB Business Unit will review the themes, outcomes and learning from RPDs and prepare six monthly reports for the Quality and Performance Subgroup.

The SSCB Quality and Performance subgroup will then determine whether any actions are required as a result of the analysis of the RPD forms received. Reports on the number and nature of professional differences will be monitored on a 6 monthly basis and reported to the SSCB as required to inform future learning for partnership working.

Appendix One

Resolving Professional Differences Form

<https://sscb.safeguardingsomerset.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/RPD-form-amended-November-2018.docx>