



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

***Working Together (2015) and the Children Act (2004) place an equal duty on partner agencies to safeguard children and therefore agencies have a responsibility to escalate concerns until there is a satisfactory resolution. (Family A, 2018)***

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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 to safeguard the child effectively. 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 SSCP website: [Allegations management](#)

Efficient resolution of differences requires the effective use of line management structures and courageous conversations in order that escalation is effective. The resolution of differences of opinion at an early stage is still the application of the protocol for resolving professional differences.

## **Differences may arise in relation to:**

- Quality and outcomes of assessments
- Application of the 'Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset – Thresholds for Assessment and Services' guidance.
- Roles and responsibilities of workers
- Criteria for referrals
- 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
- ✚ Decisions made within strategy discussions

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 safeguarding of the child.

This protocol is applicable to all Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) 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.
- ✚ Concerns, actions, responses and outcomes must be clearly recorded during every step of the process.
- ✚ All professionals retain ongoing responsibility for safeguarding while any professional differences are being resolved.
- ✚ Differences and disagreements with other agencies should be discussed with line manager/safeguarding leads and resolved as simply and quickly as possible and between practitioners/line managers where at all possible.

- ✚ All practitioners should respect the views of others whatever their level of experience or qualification.
- ✚ Working together effectively depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies with the confidence to intervene and challenge positively, and this challenge should be welcomed as a means of improving the outcomes for children.
- ✚ 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><b>Early Resolution</b></p> <p>Practitioner A contacts practitioner B to discuss the issue and resolve it, if possible. This should be recorded on the child's record in line with agency guidance.</p> <p><b>If not resolved, move to stage 2</b></p>	RPD form should <b>not</b> be used in this situation
Two	<p><b>Informal Resolution Procedure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practitioner A's manager contacts practitioner B's manager for discussion and negotiation, clearly setting out the issue that needs to be resolved and the desired outcome of the resolution for the child/ren. It may be helpful to refer to the RPD protocol.</li> <li>Agree a timescale for a response from the Agency B's manager, if it is not possible to resolve the issue straightaway.</li> <li>This should be recorded on the child's record in line with agency guidance.</li> </ul> <p>For the purposes of this process, the Manager referred to above will be the Safeguarding Lead (health, education, voluntary agencies), Team Leader/Operations Manager (Children's Social Care), or Police Manager.</p> <p><b>If not resolved, move to stage 3</b></p>	RPD form should <b>not</b> be used in this situation
Three	<p><b>Formal Resolution Procedure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the professional difference requires immediate/urgent resolution in order to protect the child, please contact Children's Social Care (0300 123 2224). If a child is in immediate danger contact the Police on 999.</li> <li>Agency A completes first part of the 'Resolving Professional Differences' form (see Appendix 1), with sign off by a senior manager, and sends the SSCP (<a href="mailto:SSCP@somerset.gov.uk">SSCP@somerset.gov.uk</a>).</li> <li>The form should contain full details of all discussions and actions already undertaken at stages 1 and 2 of the process and why the issue has not been resolved.</li> </ul>	RPD form to be completed

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SSCP Business Unit will send the form to the relevant manager in the agency B, within two working days, who will arrange for a response.</li> <li>• The SSCP Business Unit will acknowledge receipt of the form and advise to whom it has been sent. The Business Unit will log the receipt of the form for monitoring purposes.</li> <li>• Agency B senior manager responds to Agency A within 10 working days and updates the RPD form stating what further actions have been taken to resolve the issue.</li> <li>• A copy of the updated RPD form, and any other response (e.g. email) is sent to SSCP Business Unit to be logged for monitoring purposes (<a href="mailto:SSCP@somerset.gov.uk">SSCP@somerset.gov.uk</a>).</li> </ul> <p><b>If not resolved, move to stage 4</b></p>	
Four	<p>If the professional difference cannot be resolved by senior organisational leads, then, in exceptional circumstances, either agency can request that the matter can be referred to the SSCP Executive.</p> <p>The Executive has the final say in this regard, and once a decision is made at stage four, there is no further option to appeal.</p> <p>Where appropriate, the Executive may request that the Learning and Improvement Subgroup reviews the case or may direct the Independent Scrutineer to compile an independent summary of the issues, along with suggested action(s).</p>	

## 4. Recording the professional difference and resolution

All steps of the process should be documented. The form listed in Appendix One should be used to accompany any professional difference raised at stage 3 and returned to the SSCP for onward progression to the other agency.

## 5. Monitoring the process

The SSCP 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 are not received within 10 working days.

## 6. Outcomes and Learning

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

The SSCP Quality and Performance subgroup will then determine whether any actions are required as a result of the analysis of the RPD forms received.

# Appendix One

## Resolving Professional Differences Form

Resolving Professional Differences form April 2021