



# Child Protection Handbook

*A guide for Professionals*

September 2025

## Contents

0. Executive summary / Practice Standards
1. Introduction
2. ICPC request and type of conference, including Transfer in conferences and Young People's Plans
3. Repeat child protection plans
4. Social Work report for conference, including pre-birth assessments
5. Practice standards for partner agencies
6. Participation and young people presented to conference
7. Pre-conference, including standing down conferences
8. At conference: including practice model, threshold and decision making, types of plan and impact of abuse
9. Plans and post conference
10. Midway reviews and Quality Assurance
11. Dispute resolution
12. Review conferences (RCPCs), including criteria for ending a plan and long-term child protection cases
13. Children subject to child protection plans that become looked after
14. Transfer out conferences

## 0. Executive summary / practice standards

### **Before Conference**

- An Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) should be held within 15 working days of the first strategy discussion. Interim safety plans should be in place and recorded on the child's file when this timescale is not met.
- ICPCs should be requested at the earliest opportunity following the strategy discussion and the invite list should include all key professionals and agencies working with the family.
- Interpreters must be booked by the social work team where required.
- All reports must be shared with families 2 working days in advance of the Conference, translated where required. CP Chairs will issue a dispute resolution where this has not been achieved.
- CP Chairs will contact parents prior to a conference and during that conversation will seek to visit or speak to the child/ren in advance of the Conference.
- Voiceability referrals should be made by the social worker for all children.
- Professionals involved with the family should ensure that the voice of the child is prepared for Conference, including identifying a professional to complete this resource with children- [Working with children and young people – Bolton Safeguarding Children](#).
- If a child is to be subject to a second or subsequent child protection plan then Head of Service oversight on the child's file is required.

### **At Conference**

- Child Protection Conferences should always be held in person, unless exceptional circumstances apply.
- Conferences should be as relational and restorative as possible, and this includes professionals not using their laptops during conferences unless there is a time-limited and specific reason for needing to do so.
- Conferences will always use the Bolton Family Framework and accompanying traffic light tool. (See Section 8 for more details).
- CP Chairs will conduct pre-meets with parents and interpreters (where applicable).
- The Conference will always include a discussion about wider family / genograms.
- Decisions made at Conference should be specific for each child in a sibling group.
- Decisions made at Conference by each agency will explain and apply the legal threshold of suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.
- Each participant will give their own decision and rationale to conference.
- The CP Chair will provide a summary before decisions are made and will advise and guide conference participants about the legal test.

### **Plans**

- The CP Chair will facilitate the production of a SMART outline child protection plan.

- The plan must always include a contingency/ back up plan about who will care for a child in an emergency.
- A family meeting should always be part of an outline plan unless one has already been completed.
- There should be child-friendly plans developed for all children of school age.
- It should always be clear about who is responsible for sharing the outcome from conference and the plan with the child.

#### **After conference**

- Outcomes will be sent out within 2 working days of conference.
- Minutes will be sent out within 20 working days of conference.
- Guidance for parents about how to appeal a conference decision will be sent out with the outcome.
- The CP Chair will conduct midway reviews in between all conferences, including between the ICPC and the first Review.

#### **Ending plans**

- An updated Child & Family assessment is required to support a social care recommendation to end a child protection plan.
- Head of Service oversight and agreement is required to support a social care recommendation to end a child protection plan at the first review, which should outline why exceptional circumstances apply.

## 1. Introduction

This guidance seeks to provide clarity about the local arrangements and expectations of all practitioners who attend Child Protection Conferences in Bolton.

The Handbook aims to bring together the guidance available regarding Child Protection conferences, the monitoring arrangements for children in need of protection and the role of the Child Protection Chair.

The guidance contained in this Handbook draws on local policy and procedural arrangements, various local guidance documents, and the statutory arrangements for Child Protection conferences. The statutory arrangements specifically referred to are:

- Children Act 1989 and 2004.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.
- IRO Handbook 2010.
- Bolton Safeguarding Children Safeguarding Partnership (BSCP) procedures.
- Bolton Children's Social Care Practice Standards 2024.

This Handbook should be read in conjunction with the above.

This document amalgamates previous guidance in existence and those documents should be disregarded, such as the previous Chair's Handbook or Conference user guide. This document supersedes all previous versions.

All local procedures can be found at:

[Welcome to the Bolton Children's Social Care Procedures...](#)

The core functions, tasks and responsibilities of a Child Protection Chair include:

- To ensure that Child Protection Conferences and associated activity is child focused, and the safeguarding of children is paramount and the centre of intervention, support, and planning.
- To ensure the voice of the child is heard and that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given full consideration. *See- Participation.*
- To monitor and review the progress of Child Protection plans and safeguarding arrangements. *See- Midway Reviews & QA.*
- To review the safety planning to ensure that it reflects current concerns and the needs of the child, and that actions are timely, balanced against risk and safety, and achievable, together with ensuring robust contingency planning is in place.
- To facilitate discussions, offer guidance, and ask questions in the pursuit of clarity of safety planning. *See- At Conference.*
- To monitor the performance of social work practice and highlight areas of good and outstanding practice, as well as challenge practice that requires improvement. *See- Midway Reviews & QA.*
- To monitor the performance of the multi-agency arrangements for safeguarding the child and ensure that they are compliant with relevant statutory guidance.
- To manage the safety and welfare of professionals, and children and families in attendance at Child Protection conferences.
- To ensure that Conference meetings are conducted in a professional manner.

- Should there not be a unanimous decision made at Conference, the Chair may provide either the casting vote or may overturn a majority decision of professionals where there is a compelling reason to do so.

### **Child Protection process**

An Initial Child Protection Conference is requested following a strategy discussion being held and a section 47 investigation finding that the risk of significant harm has been substantiated.

A process map below can be found in [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 \(page 104\)](#).

The purpose of the Conference is to bring together and analyse, in an inter-agency setting, all relevant information, to plan how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. It is the responsibility of the Conference to make recommendations on how agencies work together to safeguard the child.

Guidance for professionals about the definition of significant harm and the forms of abuse can be found in section 9.

All professionals attending a child protection conference in Bolton should have due regard to the Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) child protection practice standards:

[bcsp-child-protection-practice-standards](#)

These standards provide for:

- Effective Partnership Working
- Engaging and Supporting Children and their Families
- Effective Strategy Discussions
- Effective Conferences
- Effective Planning
- Effective Core Groups
- Managing and Supervising in Child Protection

All Child Protection Conferences in Bolton will be underpinned by the Bolton Family Framework, in particular the use of the traffic light tool which assists conference in deciding upon the level of risk and the interventions necessary to support the family to reduce the risk of harm.

## 2. ICPC request and type of conference

An Initial Child Protection Conference must be held within 15 working days of the first strategy discussion. To ensure this timescale is met, the allocated Social Worker must make the request for the conference to the CPU no later than 5 working days after the strategy discussion.

The invite lists for Conference should include all key professionals and agencies working with the family. The Child Protection Unit (CPU) will invite the child's GP.

The CPU will send to the child an introductory letter from the CP Chair and this will invite the child to the conference. All children aged 8 or above should be invited to their conferences unless it is clearly evidenced on the child's file and agreed by the CP Chair and social worker why it would not be appropriate and how their views will be sought and shared at the conference.

Voiceability referrals should be made by the social worker for all children to ensure that they have the opportunity to provide their wishes and feelings to an independent advocate. All children should be offered an advocate as part of the participation offer.

Interpreters must be booked by the social work team where required.

All fathers or others with parental responsibility (PR) should be invited to a Conference, unless it is clearly evidenced on the child's file and agreed with the CP Chair that this would not be appropriate. Should there be a civil order or bail conditions in place prohibiting parents attending Conference together, this must be discussed with the CP Chair in advance so alternative arrangements can be made.

The Child Protection Unit will complete the request for police information for the Conference.

### **Transfer in conferences**

An Initial Child Protection Conference for children from another local authority should only be requested for children who are **permanently** moving to the Bolton area.

The CPU will put a contact form on the child's record when all information has been received and the CP Chair Team Manager will then progress the Liquid Logic pathway. The Bolton social worker will be asked to complete a report for conference but the Child & Family assessment will be authored by the responsible Local Authority.

The North West protocol regarding transfer CP Conferences, which also includes the definition of "permanent", can be found here:

[NW Notification and Transfer of Children Subject of Child Protection Plans across Local Authority Boundaries Procedure 2021.pdf](#)

### **Young Person's Plan**

Some children will be at risk of significant harm that arises exclusively or predominantly outside of the home. Bolton has a Young Person's Plan (YPP) that manages the risk for this cohort of children.

As of 2025, children aged 13 or above are eligible for a Young Person's Plan. Young people are eligible if they are deemed to be at risk of significant harm, and that harm is entirely outside of the home. The aim of the YPP is to engage the young person more effectively and to consider the parent as a partner.

Young people are identified as being possibly suitable for the YPP following a strategy discussion and during the resultant section 47 enquiry. There is then a request for an ICPC made using the ordinary request form. At the meeting, seen as an ICPC equivalent, there is still a multiagency discussion, sharing of information and a decision at the conclusion about whether the YPP is the appropriate plan for the child. Professionals will be asked to determine the level of harm and the appropriate plan, with YPP an additional option.

The conference will consider the needs of all children in a sibling group. However, if the YPP is selected for the index child then this has established that the risk is outside of the home and that there is not a parental care deficit that contributes to the risk of significant harm. Therefore, unless a sibling has identified needs in their own right they will not be subject to a child protection plan. If a sibling did have such needs, it would be unlikely that a YPP would be put in place as the conclusion would likely be that there was a parental care deficit that contributed to the risk of significant harm.

Professionals in conference must establish a risk of significant harm in order to select the YPP, but they must also be assured that the parent/s is not a contributor to that harm, and the harm is found outside of the home.

If the YPP is selected, the young people will still technically have CP markers on their file. This is because of the case recording pathway infrastructure not yet being developed locally or nationally to recognise Young Person's Plans.

The Young Person's Plan will differ from a traditional child protection plan in that the CP Chair will visit the young person at home, will chair meetings every 6 weeks and the meetings will be attended by professionals chosen in consultation with the young person. The meetings may include broader services such as community safety or housing, and the content of the discussions may differ from a traditional ICPC- for example there may be a longer discussion around the locations a young person accesses in the community and what can be done in those locations to reduce the risk of exploitation.

### 3. Repeat child protection plans

Where a subsequent period of Child Protection planning is requested, the CP Chair will seek to ensure that the assessment or case file critically analyses the following:

- **The length of time since the previous CP plan ended:** this can be indicative of whether change has been sustained. The social work team needs to evaluate why the risk of significant harm has presented itself again and how long it has been since the last Child Protection plan. If it is less than one year, then there needs to be analysis around why a second period of Child Protection planning will benefit the child/young person, as opposed to other types of plan/intervention.
- **How long the previous CP plan was in place:** this will inform whether the previous plan was of sufficient duration to embed the necessary changes to reduce the risk of significant harm and sustain change. If, in the unlikely event, that the previous Child Protection plan was for 3 months, then it is possible that the plan was stepped down too early to embed the necessary changes but if the plan was for a year or more, this would reduce the likelihood of a further plan sustaining the required change.
- **Whether the risks are the same or whether there are new risks for the child:** if the risks and presenting issues are the same as the previous plan, then there should be analysis as to why there has not been sustained change; there may be issues of disguised compliance or traits of behaviour which have been repeated i.e., domestic abuse within different or the same relationship, concealed drug and alcohol use. This will inform whether a further period of Child Protection planning is likely to change the behaviour. If the risks are different then there should be analysis as to whether these new risks have surfaced as other risks have reduced.

The Chair must consider what work was completed with the family under the first Child Protection plan and what different services / action / support will be available that wasn't offered within the previous plan. The Chair should also consider the work completed after the step down from child protection on the first occasion via either Child in Need or early help.

A Child Protection plan will not be successful if there is a repeat of services that have clearly not worked for a family or requesting services that are clearly not going to work for an individual, i.e. group work for an individual who suffers with anxiety, or domestic abuse services for someone who does not acknowledge the domestic abuse.

If there are gaps in service provision that have not been addressed in previous Child Protection plans it is essential that these are escalated within Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership.

If a child is to be subject to a second or subsequent child protection plan then Head of Service oversight on the child's file is required.

## 4. Social Work report for conference, including pre-birth assessments

There is no separate ICPC report. The document which must be completed is the Child and Family Assessment on Liquid Logic. If the case is a new referral, it is accepted that the assessment will be akin to a 10-day assessment. If the case has been open prior to the s47, it is expected the social work assessment will reflect the length of time the assessment process has been ongoing. i.e., a comprehensive 45-day assessment will be expected for cases open for this length of time.

This report should be shared with all parents / adults with PR / children where appropriate 2 working days prior to the ICPC. The purpose for sharing this report is for parents / adults with PR / children to have the opportunity to read and understand the information about them and for them to identify any factual errors or matters of opinion that they disagree with, so they can present these views at the Conference. In addition, this will allow time for legal advice and/or advocacy to be sought prior to the child protection conference, if the parent wishes to do this.

All reports must be shared with families 2 working days in advance of the Conference, translated where required. CP Chairs will issue a dispute resolution where this has not been achieved.

### **Pre-birth cases**

Full details can be found in the Bolton pre-birth protocol (2024): [Pre Birth Protocol](#)

On completion of the Pre-Birth Assessment, a multi-agency strategy discussion must take place and a decision made whether to progress to Initial Child Protection Conference.

Where a pre-birth Initial Child Protection Conference is required. It will be held within 15 working days of the first strategy discussion. The full Pre-birth assessment will be used as the initial child protection case conference report.

The Child Protection Review Conference must be held within four weeks of the birth of the child.

## 5. Practice standards for partner agencies

All professionals attending a child protection conference in Bolton should have due regard to the Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) child protection practice standards:

[bcsp-child-protection-practice-standards](#)

Partner agencies should receive their invite to a child protection conference a minimum of 5 working days prior to the date of the meeting.

Partner agencies are expected to provide a written report to the child protection conference using the template provided by the BSCP, except for the police. Templates can be found at: [Working with children and young people – Bolton Safeguarding Children](#).

Partner agencies (except for the police) should share their report to conference with the family 2 working days prior to the conference. Good practice is sharing the report in person. Timely sharing of the report will ensure that parents are better informed and that partner agencies can discuss any support needs and services they can offer as part of the support plan.

Partner agency reports should be sent to the CPU a minimum of 2 working days prior to the conference. The administrator will then circulate an electronic pack of reports to all conference invitees.

There is an expectation that all agencies invited to the Conference will attend, with a deputy attending if necessary.

## 6. Participation and young people presented to conference

The Local Authority is committed to ensuring that the voices, wishes and feelings of young people and children who access services are used in a meaningful way.

It is important that the Conference process is proactive in capturing the views of children, young people, and their families. This promotes good practice and effective relationships, together with ensuring that the voices of children and their families are heard, and they can contribute to planning to effect change.

The starting point is that all children over 8 years old should be invited to attend their Child Protection Conference. The CPU will send to the Child an introductory letter from the CP Chair and this will invite the child to the conference. Professionals around the child should also reinforce in their conversations with children about their ability to attend their conference.

All children aged 8 or above should be invited to their conferences unless it is clearly evidenced on the child's file and agreed by the CP Chair and social worker why it would not be appropriate and how their views will be sought and shared at the conference.

All efforts must be made to enable the child to attend if they wish to and there is parental consent for them to attend. The Conference Chair and Social worker should discuss the arrangements for making the child/young person feel welcome and safe and consider how they can contribute to the discussion and planning. Participation can vary according to the young person's wishes. They may wish to attend the whole conference or just part of it, and this should be facilitated. They may wish to attend via video link from their school, which again should be facilitated. The child/young person may want to contribute in person and/or verbally, write a letter, or provide a presentation. The variety of participation options should be explained by the Conference Chair to the parent during their pre-conference discussions.

Social workers and Conference Chairs need to be mindful there may be children younger than age 8 that have the cognitive ability, emotional maturity and resilience to contribute to their Conference meeting, and who may wish to attend their conference. Therefore, a child's age needs to be considered as a guide rather than an absolute rule.

A referral to Voiceability should be made for all children, regardless of age. The child/young person may wish to have an Advocate attend a Conference with them or on their behalf.

CP Chairs will contact parents prior to a conference and during that conversation will seek to visit or speak to the child/ren in advance of the Conference. This will apply to both Initial and Review Conferences.

A Conference should agree who is the best person to provide feedback to a child, if they are not in attendance. This should be clearly recorded in the Conference minutes.

During the conference, the CP Chair should include within the plan who will be responsible for sharing the outcome of the conference and the content of the outline

plan with the young person and how the young person's response and feedback will be gained and recorded.

CP Chairs should also include within the plan who will be responsible for any safety planning required post conference if a young person attends and shares views or information that may put them at additional risk.

### **Young people subject to a CP plan**

For all 16- and 17-year-olds who are discussed at a Child Protection Conference, the following should be considered and implemented:

- If a decision is being made for a sibling group, the Chair should ask all professionals in their rationale to make a specific decision for the young person as opposed to all siblings being considered as one homogenous group.
- The views should be sought of a young person in respect of being made subject of a child protection plan and having a social worker.
- A young person should always be invited to participate in their conference (see Section- Participation)
- If a young person is made subject to a CP plan, it is expected that they would have needs in their own right included in the plan.

## 7. Pre-conference

It is expected that the social worker will explain to parents / adults with PR the purpose of the ICPC and who will be present, and what it means should their child(ren) become subject to a child protection plan. Parents must also be informed of their right to seek legal advice or to have a supporter or advocate with them at the conference.

The social worker is responsible for supporting the parent to make arrangements for childcare for the ICPC. Unless it is a child attending the conference in their own right, it is expected that alternative arrangements are made for children, except for children under 1.

CP Chairs will seek to contact parents / adults with PR by phone at least 2 working days prior to ICPC. This conversation will include whether reports have been shared with the family, seek their views and responses to concerns, explain and answer any questions about the conference process and ask to speak to a young person aged 8 or above.

Parents are able to be accompanied at a Conference by a supporter- this should be discussed by the CP Chair in their pre-conference discussion with a parent.

### **Standing down of conferences**

The decision to stand down a child protection conference can be made by the CP Chair and this decision will be clearly recorded on the child's case file and a rationale will be provided.

A conference may be stood down for the following reasons:

- The conference not being quorate. Further information regarding quoracy can be found in section 5.
- Social work report not being completed and signed off by a team manager.
- Partner agencies not attending and not providing a report, which means key information to inform planning and decision making is not available.
- Parents / adults with PR not having the social work report shared 2 working days prior to the conference, which means they are subsequently unable to access legal advice or support to enable them to participate or attend.
- Interpreters not being booked or not being able to attend.
- Unplanned or unavoidable IT outages or building issues.

Should a conference be stood down for the above reasons the CP Chair will raise a dispute. [See- Dispute Resolution.](#)

If an ICPC is stood down and falling outside of statutory timescales, an interim safety plan to ensure that the children are safeguarded prior to the rearranged date and

should be shared and agreed by the CP Chair and recorded by the social worker on case-notes.

## 8. At conference

### **Confidentiality and information sharing**

The Conference Chair will ensure all participants are provided with a statement around confidentiality and information sharing, this will include the sharing of information, the secure storage of information and the destruction of information.

All ICPCs will have a Confidential section within conference, and professionals can request a confidential section for Review Conferences. A confidential section can be utilised by the professional network to discuss any issues that could not be discussed in the open conference with parents present, and will most likely relate to police intelligence or criminal investigations.

### **Practice model**

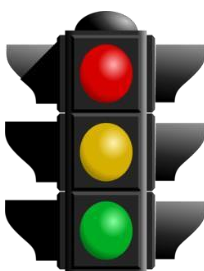
Conferences will always use the Bolton Family Framework and accompanying traffic light tool.

The original 5 principles of the Bolton Family Framework were:

1. Understand the world of the child.
2. Understand the world of the parent.
3. Recognise family strengths as well as concerns.
4. Engage families in the change process.
5. Measure change through actions and interventions.

The Conference discussion will focus on the lived experience of the child and the impact upon them. Professional Assessment of concerns and strengths are displayed by using the Traffic Light Tool.

The BFF model improves how practitioners engage with families, undertake assessments, write plans, conduct meetings, and measure change. It will make the experience for children, adults, families, and professionals more meaningful, easier to engage with and more focused on improving the daily lives of children and families in Bolton.



How we understand children and young peoples lived experience, day to day life, and perspective and ensure our intervention is making a difference:

### EVIDENCE OF NEEDS NOT MET LIKELY TO CAUSE SIGNIFICANT HARM

Section 47 Children Act 1989

*This really needs to change*

A Child Protection Plan must be in place if the conference identifies that concerns raised have reached and are placed in the Red section.

### EVIDENCE THAT HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT MAY BE IMPAIRED WITHOUT PROVISION OF SERVICES

Section 17 Children Act 1989

*Areas for development*

### EVIDENCE THAT NEEDS ARE BEING MET

*This is good and effective parenting*

*Family strengths that can be built upon*

The Conference agenda will follow the agenda below:

1. Chairs opening statement - Confidentiality/Data Protection.
2. Introductions and apologies / confirmation of addresses and recipients of conference minutes.
3. Confirmation of reports received and shared with parents/carers.
4. Reason for Initial Child Protection Conference.
5. Genogram discussion.
6. Summary, including S47 (Child Protection) investigation.
7. Police Information.
8. Views on the Daily Lived Experience of Child/ren.
9. View on the Daily Lived Experience of Parent/Carer.
10. Final confirmation of Traffic Light document- Analysis of Risk.
11. Conference decision and family views.
12. Conference Chair Summary (spoken to Child/ren).
13. Outline Child Protection Plan.

14. Contingency Plan.

15. Core Group members confirmed, and date of next core group agreed (if stepped down record CIN members and date of first CIN review).

16. Conference Review arrangements set if required.

### **Threshold/ decision-making**

The Initial Child Protection Conference should consider if a child is suffering significant harm and is likely to suffer significant harm in the future. Conference members should also consider section 31 Children Act 1989, which is that the harm is attributable to a lack of adequate parental care or control. Each child in the household should be considered separately. This is particularly the case for young people aged 16 and 17, who may have different needs or views to their younger siblings.

There are no absolute criteria on which to rely when judging what constitutes Significant Harm.

Consideration of the severity of ill-treatment may include:

- The degree and extent of physical harm.
- The duration and frequency of abuse or neglect.
- The extent of premeditation.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 broadens the definition of Significant Harm to include the emotional harm suffered by those children who witness domestic abuse or are aware of domestic abuse within their home environment.

Sometimes, a single traumatic event may constitute Significant Harm. In other circumstances Significant Harm is caused by the cumulative effect of significant events, both acute and long-standing, or the damaging impact of neglect, which interrupt and change or damage the child's physical and psychological development.

When judging what constitutes Significant Harm it is necessary to consider:

- The family context, including the family's strengths and support network.
- The child's development within the context of the family and within the context of the wider social and cultural environment.
- Any special needs, such as a medical condition, communication difficulty or disability that may affect the child's development and care within the family.
- The nature of harm in terms of the ill-treatment or failure to provide adequate care.
- The impact on the child's health and development.
- The adequacy of parental care.

In most conferences there will be a unanimous or majority decision from professionals about whether a child protection plan should be initiated or ended. Should there not be a unanimous decision made at Conference, the Chair may provide either the casting vote or may overturn a majority decision of professionals where there is a

compelling reason to do so. This decision will subsequently be reviewed by the Head of Service for Conferences, Reviews & Partnerships.

In Bolton, unanimous Conference decisions cannot be overruled and this has been agreed by the Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Any professional has the ability to dissent and this will be recorded in the Conference minutes.

Any professional can utilise the Safeguarding Partnership's escalation process, which can be found at [bolton-safeguarding-children-challenge-and-escalation-process](#).

### **Categories of child protection plan**

There are **four** categories for child protection planning:

- emotional harm.
- physical harm.
- sexual harm.
- neglect.

Full definitions can be found in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

[Working together to safeguard children - GOV.UK](#)

The category must be the most appropriate to the concerns for the safety and welfare of the child.

In cases where Domestic Abuse is a single issue, the most appropriate category would usually be that the child would experience emotional harm and /or physical harm if they became caught up in the middle of an incident. In domestic abuse cases where other factors such as alcohol or substance misuse are a factor, the most appropriate category may be neglect.

In addition to the statutory definitions, Conference participants will want to use evidence and research to inform their decisions. They consider the following when giving their rationale for threshold and category of child protection plan:

- Impact of physical abuse: Physical abuse can lead to neurological damage, injuries, disability, or death. Harm may be caused to children both by the abuse itself and through the emotional experience of the abuse taking place. Physical abuse has been linked to aggressive behaviour in children, emotional and behavioural difficulties and poor educational achievement. Physical abuse of children often coexists with domestic abuse.
- Emotional abuse is the *persistent* emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause *severe and persistent adverse* effects on the child's emotional development. There is evidence that there are long term adverse consequences for children's development where there is sustained emotional abuse, including serious bullying. Emotional Abuse has a significant impact on a developing child's mental health, behaviour, and self-esteem. Domestic

Abuse, adult mental health problems and parental substance misuse may be features of family life where children are exposed to emotional abuse.

- Sexual abuse: It may also be the exploitation of a child for sexual purposes (Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and cases of CSE are a form of sexual abuse. The child may not be aware of what is happening or that they are being abused, and a level of coercion or violence is not required for the situation to constitute abuse.
- Impact of sexual abuse: The severity of the impact of sexual abuse on a child is believed to increase the longer the abuse continues, the more extensive the abuse, and the older the child. The relationship of the abuser to the child, the extent of premeditation, the degree of threat and coercion, sadism and unusual elements are also important. The child's ability to cope with the experience of sexual abuse once recognised or who believes the child and the provision of services to help the child understand the abuse. The reaction of practitioners also has an impact on the child's ability to cope with what has happened, and on his or her feelings of self-worth.
- Neglect is the *persistent* failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the *serious impairment* of the child's health and/or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of parental substance abuse. Children may be abused or neglected through the infliction of harm, or through the failure to act to prevent harm.
- Severe neglect of young children has adverse effects on their ability to form attachments and is associated with impairment of growth and intellectual ability. Persistent neglect can lead to serious impairment of health and development and long-term social functioning, relationships and educational progress. Neglected children very often suffer from low self-esteem, feelings of being unloved and reject the love of others. It can also make children vulnerable to other forms of abuse as it can include apathy in parental ability to see risk and take appropriate action to safeguard. Also identified as a potential factor to push children towards the need to find self-worth, love elsewhere, increasing the risk of exploitation. The impact of neglect varies on the length and severity of the neglect and the age of the child. In severe cases neglect can result in death.

### **Decision not to make a child subject to a Child Protection Plan**

In cases where a Conference agrees that the level of significant harm is not met, a Child Protection plan is not required. All conference participants should then consider the child's circumstances within the Child in Need framework, i.e., whether the child is either:

- a) unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by a local authority;
- b) health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of such services; or

c) the child is disabled.

This also applies to children who step down from a child protection plan.

If a Child in Need plan is to be agreed, the Chair should discuss this with the parent/s and ensure that consent is provided. This should be recorded in the minutes and a plan should be devised to meet the needs of the child. As section 17 Children Act 1989 identifies, this must identify a role for the Local Authority.

## 9. Plans and post-conference

At the Initial Child Protection Conference, a Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-limited (SMART) outline plan will be co-produced by all attendees. The efficacy of the conference process will be assisted by conference participants already having a proposed outline plan which can be presented in the meeting. There are sections in both the Child & Family Assessment and agency report template to assist with this.

If a family meeting has already been conducted, this plan should be considered within the Conference and its contents should dovetail with the child protection plan. If a family meeting has not been held prior to the ICPC, the need for one should be included in the outline plan.

There is also an expectation that a Genogram will be requested as part of all plans following ICPC. This will be completed by the social worker to assist with the identification of wider family members who could provide support or alternative care if necessary in the future.

A comprehensive social work assessment will always be an action on the outline plan at the conclusion of an ICPC, unless otherwise agreed that there is already a good quality 45-day assessment completed.

Direct work with children will also always be an action on the plan, with clarity about any specific work which is required to understand the child's lived experience.

It will be important to consider for every child the support they require, including specifically whether they have young caring responsibilities and require assessment and intervention in that regard.

It is also good practice for any support identified for the family, for referrals to be made prior to the initial conference and for social workers to come to conference with an awareness of timescales for when that support will likely start.

At the end of the Conference meeting the plan and decision will be distributed via secure email within 48 hours of the Conference being held.

The initial social work child protection statutory visit should be completed within 5 working days of the ICPC.

The initial Core Group meeting should be held within 10 working days of the ICPC and the purpose of this meeting will be to refine and review the plan agreed at the initial conference.

Core group meetings are to be held a minimum of every 6 weeks, where the child protection plan is updated with any completed actions, and new actions identified to progress the plan.

Conference minutes should be completed at the earliest opportunity and distributed within 20 working days. The minutes should be an accurate and comprehensive record of the meeting, information shared and the plan- but are not a verbatim record. They will contain the views of those in attendance, including their decision and rationale in respect of threshold. They will be written in a professional manner that is accessible to the family and the child(ren).

The CPU will be responsible for translating Conference minutes for families who require it and the CPU will also be responsible for sending out feedback forms to professionals and parents/carers.

Guidance for parents about how to appeal a conference decision will be sent out with the outcome.



Appeals Against  
Conference Decisions

## 10. Midway reviews and Quality Assurance

Quality assurance in the Child Protection service is about placing an emphasis on quality of outcomes for children. This not only relates to the chairing of conferences, but also monitoring the progress of Child Protection plans and the quality of practice in between Conference meetings to ensure best planning for children and families and prevent drift and delay.

The Child Protection Conference quality assurance process starts at the request for a Child Protection conference. It includes the preparation for a Conference, the appraisal of the reports and information submitted by all agencies, together with in the ongoing monitoring arrangements thereafter.

Key points at which quality assurance activity is undertaken includes:

- ICPC and RCPC preparation
- Conference recommendations and outline plan
- Minutes
- Midway reviews
- DRPs
- Views for Legal Gateway panel
- Supervision – including discussion of any cases requiring escalation

### **Midway review**

The CP Chair will arrange a midway review following the ICPC and subsequent in-between each conference that follows for the duration of the child protection plan. The purpose of the midway review is to review the progress of the child protection plan, to ensure statutory duties are being completed and to identify any issues or delay that requires resolution.

The midway review form will be completed on Liquid Logic by the CP Chair.

Themes from quality assurance activity are captured for formal sharing with Heads of Service. For individual case concerns the Dispute Resolution process will be applied.

If themes emerge regarding partner agency involvement in the Child Protection process, which may include, non-attendance at Conference meetings or the quality of reports submitted to Conference, for example this will be either discussed with individual professionals or if considered serious escalated to their manager or the agency/ organisation lead for safeguarding, as identified by the BSCP.

## 11. Dispute resolution

It is expected that the Conference Chair forms a positive working relationship with the child's allocated Social Worker. However, there will be occasions where there is difference of opinion between the conference Chair and the child's Social Worker together with occasions when there is concern relating to practice, statutory duties, and service provision. In these circumstances the conference Chair has a responsibility to raise any concern to ensure that the agreed plan is being adhered to, and that the child's safeguarding needs are being met. If a Conference Chair assesses that the practice could be detrimental to a child's welfare, they have a duty to assertively challenge this.

Where concern is identified the Chair will in the first instance seek to resolve the issue informally with the child's Social Worker and/or their Team Manager dependant on the seriousness of the issues. A record of the conversation and concern will be added to the child's electronic file by the Conference Chair using the informal resolution case-note.

Any issue raised by a CP Chair with a Team Manager should ordinarily be viewed as an informal dispute and recorded as such. Given that Bolton is a restorative organisation, it is expected that the Team Manager is approached before the dispute is raised. Informal disputes should be used in the first instance rather than Stage 1, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the Conference Chair will follow the Dispute Resolution process. After the informal resolution, a Stage 1 dispute will be raised. This will require a response from the Team Manager. A previous dispute raised for the same issue should mean the next dispute is raised at the next stage.

The dispute must make clear the impact on the child arising from the unresolved issue. This impact may arise because of a single practice issue but is more likely to exist where there are multiple practice issues. There must be a clear identified resolution to the dispute included in the dispute record when raised by the CP Chair.

The CP Chair must track the dispute after it has been raised to ensure that matters are resolved satisfactorily.

Should the dispute fail to be resolved after the Stage 1, a Stage 2 dispute should be sent to the relevant Head of Service. A Stage 3 dispute form exists for the exceptional circumstances where the Assistant Director needs to be consulted.

A CP Chair may also raise a dispute resolution in respect of partner agencies and this will be recorded on the relevant form on the child's electronic record.

## 12. Review conferences (RCPCs)

Review Child Protection Conferences will be held no later than three months after the ICPC and then at six monthly cycles until the Child Protection plan is deemed no longer required. It is the responsibility of the child's allocated Social Worker to confirm the invitation details for Review Conferences with the CPU, 15 working days in advance of the meeting.

When a child has become subject to a Child Protection plan before they are born, an additional Review Conference will take place within 20 working days of their birth.

The social work report for the review conference is on the Liquid Logic pathway. The timescales for the report being signed off and shared with parents / adults with PR are the same as for an ICPC.

At subsequent review child protection conferences, the child protection plan will be updated and reviewed and will be sent out by the CP Chair in the outcomes form.

### **Assessments during the CP process**

All plans made at ICPC will include that a comprehensive social work assessment is completed prior to the first review. Further social work child and family assessments are expected annually, where there has been a significant change in circumstances or for a RCPC where the social care recommendation is to end the child protection plan. The CP Chair reserves the right to request an updated assessment at other times in the child protection planning cycle if there are case-specific reasons for doing so.

### **Criteria for ending a Child Protection plan**

A Child Protection plan may end when:

- A Child Protection Conference is satisfied that the child/ren is no longer at risk of significant harm.
- A Conference decides that an alternative plan is more appropriate to meet the needs of the child, such as a multi-agency response to contextual safeguarding.
- The child has reached the age of 18.
- The child is deceased.
- The local authority transfers the plan to another local authority
- The child has left the United Kingdom. For such cases a Review Child Protection Conference should be convened to determine what action needs to be taken.

Child Protection plans must only be ended at the first Conference Review stage under exceptional circumstances as significant harm is rarely resolved within three months. This must be agreed and recorded by the relevant social work Head of Service.

Should the conference decide that there is no longer a risk of significant harm, professionals should determine whether there are additional needs and actions

required that should form the basis of a Child in Need plan or whether there should be no plan at all. It should be discussed within conference that a Child in Need plan is voluntary, and the Chair should remind conference participants that monitoring alone is not a sufficient basis for a Child in Need plan.

### **Long term child protection cases**

If a child is subject to a child protection plan for over 12 months, this will be reviewed monthly in supervision between the CP Chair and their manager.

When a child has been subject to a CP plan for 15 months or above, this will be reviewed by Heads of Service via the CP tracking panel.

### 13. Children subject to child protection plans that become looked after

A meeting between the CP Chair for Child Protection and the IRO for Looked After Children should be arranged prior to the initial CLA review for a formal handover. This will be recorded on a case-note by the CP Chair.

A letter will be sent to members of the Core Group to explain the change of legal status and to invite any representations, which should be made within 10 working days.

The Child Protection status for the child will be ended outside of a Conference by the CP Chair Team Manager.

### 14. Transfer out conferences

When it becomes known that a child who is subject to Child Protection plan has moved out /is to move out of the Bolton area, either on a temporary or permanent basis, the child's allocated Social Worker should notify the CPU immediately.

The child's Bolton allocated Social Worker retains case responsibility until transfer of the Child Protection plan has formally taken place. This includes statutory visits and core group arrangements. However, there may be occasions when it is appropriate for the child's allocated Social Worker to negotiate with new local authority Children's Social Care Service to undertake some of these tasks on behalf of Bolton Children's Social Care for reasons such as distance.

A Child Protection marker will remain on the Child's electronic case file until the new local authority have held a Child Protection Conference and accepted case responsibility. The allocated Bolton Social Worker must keep the Bolton Child Protection Chair informed of progress until the case formally transfers to the accepting local authority.