



This handout is intended to explain Child Protection Conferences to professionals who have been invited to attend.

What is a Child Protection Conference?

Detailed information on your role in a Child Protection Conference is available in the Berkshire Local Safeguarding Partnership Child Protection Procedures and within statutory guidance - Working Together (2023).

If you have been invited to a Child Protection Conference then your contribution is important. If you cannot attend, you must continue to provide a report and also arrange for a suitably briefed representative from your agency to attend on your behalf, who is able to fully participate. Attendance by relevant agencies is monitored.

Child Protection Conferences in West Berkshire are undertaken using a framework designed to increase family involvement in drawing up the child protection plan. This may be different to Child Protection Conferences attended in other areas.

What you need to do before the Conference:

It is important that families do not hear new information at the conference and it is the responsibility of all agencies who have relevant information to make this available to the families involved and the conference chair in the form of a written, legible and signed report. A report template is provided with all professional invitations.

The report should be provided to and discussed with parents, and children when appropriate, at least 48 hours in advance of an initial conference and 5 working days before a review conference. The report should also be provided to the Conference Chair at least 48 hours prior to an initial conference and 5 working days in advance of a review conference. These timescales are to give families sufficient time to prepare for such important meetings about their family life. Please respect them by keeping to these timescales.

To work collaboratively towards agreed goals we need to ensure that professionals as well as families are “held to account” for their contribution to safeguarding children. The Chair is responsible for quality assuring the practice of all professionals involved Guidance on Child Protection Conferences for Professionals in conference.

Timeliness of reports is monitored and Issues Resolutions will be raised by the CP Chair whenever these timeframes are not met.

The Conference Process:

You should arrive at least fifteen minutes before the Conference is scheduled to start you will be taken into a room to wait to be called into the meeting. Please do not talk about the family during this time. At the same time, the Chair meets with family members in the conference room to talk about how the meeting will run and how they might best be supported to participate.

West Berkshire Initial Child Protection Conferences are all minuted by an experienced administrative staff member within the Quality Assurance & Safeguarding Service. All participants within the conference will receive a copy of these minutes within 20 working days of the conference taking place.

Information Sharing:

The social worker is usually the first professional asked to summarise what they know about the child and family, including what they consider the dangers, risks and protective factors are. Other professionals are then asked for their information. As all participants will have read your report you only need to pull out your key concerns. By keeping your information sharing succinct and focused you will help to inform a clear plan and to ensure that the meeting is not overly long for families.

Family members are given the opportunity to ask questions about any information shared at conference, so it is important that you have prepared them for what you will be saying. When you are sharing information take care in your analysis to distinguish between fact, observation, allegation and opinion. If an opinion or general information is provided about a family or family member, the Chair will ask the presenter to provide the evidence on which the opinion or generalisation is based.

When you provide information from another source i.e. it is second or third hand, this should be made clear. The most pertinent points that are raised during discussion are written by the Chair onto a whiteboard at the front of the room to inform the risk analysis.

The Plan:

After relevant information has been shared everyone in the meeting agrees a plan to address the harm that has been identified. You need to be able to describe in concrete terms your concerns and what you will see when things are safe enough. These outcome statements focus on the differences that you will see in the child. Alongside outcome statements, tasks for family members and professionals will be agreed. You will be asked to say what you can contribute to help achieve the outcomes and to commit to clear and achievable timescales for any tasks.

Decision Making:

All professional members of the conference are asked about the future likelihood of significant harm to each of the children. This is the basis upon which a decision regarding the status of the plan is made. That is whether the plan should be a child protection plan or a child in need plan. Even if you have not met the family before you are still asked for your decision on the basis of the information presented to the

conference. The Chair will explain the threshold for a child protection plan and will ask each professional for their view on whether the threshold for a child protection plan has been met and the reasoning behind your decision. Please do not repeat statements made by other professionals, it is sufficient to concur with their reasoning and add any new information. The Chair is responsible for the conference decision and if there is disagreement may encourage discussion between the professionals. The Chair will usually accept a majority view but may exceptionally over-rule this.

Attendance of Young People and Wider Family at Conference:

All children aged 10 years and over will normally be invited to their conference where appropriate to do so. In some circumstances a social worker may decide that the young person does not have sufficient understanding or they should not be invited due to the impact of the conference on the child. In some circumstances the young person may choose not to attend. A young person may attend all or part of the conference, taking into account the confidentiality of parents and siblings. The social worker will prepare the young person for the conference in advance.

Wider family members will be invited to conference if they need to know information in order to reduce the risk to the child and they are able to contribute to the task of keeping the child safer. They may also attend to support a parent.

There may be occasions when family members are excluded from the conference and these decisions will be made by the Chair, please see the child protection procedures for information about exclusions.

Bringing a professional observer to Conference:

As part of their professional development you may want to bring a member of staff from your agency to attend the Conference as an observer. All enquiries of this nature should be made to the Chair in writing at least one week prior to the meeting date. If appropriate, the Chair will then seek permission of the social worker and family and respond to the request in writing. Any observers who have not followed this process will not be admitted to the meeting.

What if I do not agree with the Conference decision?

If you consider that the decision reached within the conference places the child at (further) risk of significant harm you should first seek to discuss your concerns with the Chair immediately following the conference. If you remain dissatisfied you should follow the Resolving Professional Difference of Opinion & Escalation Procedure accessible via the following link:

https://berks.proceduresonline.com/west_berk/p_conflict_res.html.

Pending the outcome of this procedure, you are still required to fulfil any tasks allocated to you as part of the plan.

Family members have a separate complaints process and they are sent details of this with their invitation.

When will I get copies of the Plan?

The Plan agreed at the conference will be sent out by the Chair within 24 hours of the conference. If you have any concerns in relation to the accuracy of the plan, you should put your amendment in writing to the Chair within 5 working days of receipt of the plan.

Confidentiality:

Information shared verbally or in writing in the Conference must only be shared outside the meeting if it is to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children. Conference minutes and reports are confidential and should not be passed to a third party without the consent of either the Chair or by order of the Court.

If you have any queries about child protection conferences that cannot be answered by reading the relevant part of the child protection procedures or discussion with your named / lead / designated child protection manager, then please contact West Berkshire's Quality Assurance & Safeguarding Service on 01635 503153.

West Berkshire Council is committed to equality of opportunity. We will treat everyone with respect, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

If you need this information in a different format, such as audio tape or in another language, please ask an English speaker to contact the Complaints and Public Information Manager. Telephone 01635 519787, or e mail on ccsc@westberks.gov.uk.

