

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY  
PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE




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## Protocol for Professionals Meeting

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Policy & Procedure Sub-Group of the Public Protection Committee (PPC) requested that a short-life working group review and update the existing Protocol for Professionals Meeting which was agreed by Child Protection Committee in 2008 to take into account the new governance structure of PPC in keeping with the wider Public Protection agenda.
- 1.2. Representatives from Education, NHS and Social Work met and in reviewing the existing protocol agreed that there remained a need for a protocol to provide a structure and guidance for staff to enable them to meet within a Professional forum under certain circumstances. It was agreed that the protocol applied equally to work with adults as it did to children.
- 1.3. This protocol is therefore aimed at all professionals working with adults, children and their families.

## 2. Purpose of Professional Meeting

- 2.1 The purpose of a Professionals Meeting is to provide a forum for professionals to meet to discuss and debate complex practice issues specific to individual children and their families and adults in the community, in circumstances where the opportunity to do so does not fit into any existing forums or processes. The aim is to assist professionals to analyse information on a multi-agency basis and to form professional judgements taking account multi-agency perspectives.
- 2.2 Professional judgment is a deliberate process occurring within a professional context guided by specific knowledge and skills. It is honed through

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reflective discussions with colleagues and managers, practice wisdom, training, and knowledge developed through use of research and evidence-based practice.

- 2.3 A Professionals Meeting is not a planning forum and should not be confused with these but could be used to inform decision-making and planning within such meetings.

### 3. Considerations for Convening a Professional Meeting

- 3.1. There are currently many multi-agency meetings designed to allow professionals in partnership with the person or parents of children to consider multi-agency information, identify the needs of the person and together formulate plans to meet these needs. In most circumstances these meetings should provide the appropriate context for multi-agency discussion and debate.
- 3.2. Meetings within existing processes for children include: Child's Plan Meetings; Looked-After Child Reviews; Child Protection Planning Meeting (as part of a joint investigation); Initial Child Protection Case Conferences and Core Group Meetings.
- 3.3. Meetings within existing processes for adults include: Adult Initial Referral Discussions; Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings; Adult Support and Protection Meetings (Conferences, Core Groups); Care Programme Approach (CPA) Meetings (mental health) and Adults with Incapacity (AWI) Meetings.
- 3.4. However, there may be exceptional circumstances with particular complexities where an additional level of professional discussion and multi-agency analysis is required out with these existing meeting structures.
- 3.5. This may be because communication amongst the key professionals is difficult or there is disagreement about levels of concerns, thresholds, or proposed action plans. It is important that professionals are able to explore the issues underlying these without professional disagreement having an adverse impact on adults, children and their parents. Disagreement can be healthy and generate constructive debate which may ultimately lead to more robust assessment and action planning.

### 4. Criteria

- 4.1. The criteria for convening a Professionals Meeting are where a family/ individual is already known to agencies and there is an existing professional network and one or more of the following also apply:
- Where there is no existing forum or meeting structure to discuss and debate specific issues.
  - Where the issues are of a particularly complex or unusual nature.
  - If the professional network feels 'stuck' in terms of future planning and concerns are increasing as a result.

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- If there is professional disagreement or confusion, for example, around thresholds or roles and responsibilities which cannot be resolved within existing forums.

**5. Convening a Professionals Meeting**

- 5.1. If a practitioner feels the above criteria for convening a Professionals Meeting has been met, they should discuss this with their Line Manager.
- 5.2. If advice is needed, this can be sought from Public Protection Leads for example, Education Safeguarding Manager, Public Protection Team in NHS, Community Mental Health Team Manager, Social Work Line Manager or anyone in equivalent advisory roles within your own organisation.
- 5.3. When a single agency considers that the criteria has been met to convene a Professionals Meeting, they should consult with partners in the relevant agencies to seek agreement. Once agreement is reached, discussion should take place in terms of who should be involved in the meeting and also identify who is best placed to chair the meeting.

**6. Escalation**

- 6.1. If an agency considers the criteria is met but agreement cannot be reached with partners to proceed to a Professionals Meeting, escalation processes should be utilised which will usually involve discussion with Line Managers until the matter can be resolved and agreement reached about the way forward.

**7. Chairing**

- 7.1. When considering who is best placed to chair the meeting, the following factors should be taken into account:
  - The chair should have an appropriate level of seniority, for example, Senior Social Workers, Team Managers, Nurse Managers, Schools Senior Management Team, Health Visitors.
  - They should have appropriate levels of skills in chairing meetings and facilitating multi-agency discussion.
  - Any issues relating to power imbalances and required objectivity.

**8. Attendance - Who should be involved?**

- 8.1. Generally, practitioners directly involved with the child or adult should be included, but consideration needs to be given to the relevance of individual roles and responsibilities and the requirement to participate.
- 8.2. When considering attendance, it is important to remember what research tells us regarding effective decision making: The optimal number of people to make effective decisions is 6. At that point, personal and group performance is highest. Every additional person reduces efficiency by 10% so the number of professionals attending should reflect this.

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- 8.3. There may be circumstances where it is important to consider whether to include or seek advice from additional professionals who have expertise in an area of practice which is particularly relevant to the area of concern (for example, substance misuse services). This would enable complex information to be presented and evaluated from a sound and objective evidence base.
- 8.4. It should also be noted that without explicit consent from adults, children and their families, Police Scotland will only be able to share information with statutory partners.

## **9. Links to other Meetings/Processes**

- 9.1. The Professionals Meeting cannot be a substitute for existing meeting structures. If at any point during the Professionals Meeting, participants believe the child or adult is suffering from, or at risk of, immediate significant harm, then existing child protection or adult support and protection procedures should be implemented.
- 9.2. The Professionals Meeting needs to consider how the conclusion from this discussion will be taken into existing planning forums.

## **10. Communication with child, parents, or adults**

- 10.1. Consent is not needed to proceed to a Professionals Meeting, but good practice would be to inform adults, children and their families when one is taking place when appropriate. The only time it may not be appropriate would be when this could increase the risk to a child or adult by doing so. This requires the application of professional judgement and consensus from all professional participants.
- 10.2. Parents and children, where appropriate, should normally be informed in advance that a Professionals Meeting is going to take place and why it is felt to be necessary.
- 10.3. With adults, clinical and professional judgement should be exercised in relation to informing the individual.
- 10.4. The meeting should agree who will feedback the outcome of the meeting to the adult, parents and child where appropriate. When sharing the outcome with parents, it is important to ensure that what is shared is reflective of what is recorded.

## **11. Outcomes**

- 11.1. The outcome of the meeting should be a clear understanding of what the next steps are.
- 11.2. Whilst the Professionals Meeting cannot produce a plan to meet the child or adult's needs – as this should be compiled with the adult, child and parents – any decisions or actions agreed should be clear and documented.

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## 12. Recording

- 12.1. The Chair will be responsible for ensuring a brief note which summarises key points of discussion including, any recommendations or decisions, is produced and shared with those attending within 10 working days.
- 12.2. Agencies thereafter are responsible for ensuring that the record is securely stored in accordance with legislative and agency requirements, including the Data Protection Act 2018.

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