



Protocol for Professionals' Meetings,

Multi-Agency Working Forums and Escalating Concern Processes

Management Information

Responsible Manager	Public Protection Committee
	Name: Policy & Procedure Sub-Committee and Self Neglect Steering Group
	Designation: Lead Officer Public Protection (CP)
Date Agreed	16/07/2024
Agreed by	Policy & Procedure Sub-Committee
Implementation Date	26/07/2024
Last Review Date	Sept 2026
Next Review Date	Sept 2028

Version Control

Version	Date	Author	Comment
1	18/07/2024	Clare Cowan (m/a collaboration)	Final
2	08/01/2026	Clare Cowan, Sandie Donald, Self Neglect Steering Group	Incorporated escalating concern meeting. V1.1
3	26/01/2026	Sandie Donald, ASP MASH	Updates in escalation section
4	12/06/2026	Sandie Donald / Caroline Ronaldson / Clare Cowan	Updates in escalation section

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. Good communication is central to effective multi-agency working. This protocol is designed to make it as easy as possible for frontline practitioners to work together and build trusting relationships.
- 1.2. It aims to provide the necessary structure to enable staff to meet within a professional forum, as appropriate, to meet the needs of adults or children.

2. Purpose of a Professionals' Meetings

- 2.1. The purpose of a Professionals' Meeting is to support and provide a forum for practitioners to meet to discuss and debate complex practice issues specific to individual children and their families and adults in the community. The aim is to assist professionals to analyse information on a multi-agency basis and to form professional judgements taking account of multi-agency perspectives. A Professionals' Meeting is a distinct process which has a different format and purpose to other multi-agency working forums.
- 2.2. A Professionals Meeting is not child or adult planning meeting and should not be confused with these. Actions will be taken from a professional meeting which will support decision-making in the best interest of the adult or child. **A Professionals' Meeting should not replace existing risk management processes such as Adult Support and Protection, Child Protection and MARAC and their associated meeting**
- 2.3. Practitioners should inform the adult/child parent/carer of the professionals meeting, the purpose of this and any outcome. Any change to an existing adult or child's plan can only be made within the existing planning forums e.g. ASP protection plan, self-directed support plan, or child's plan meeting.
- 2.4. Effective information sharing is crucial to the success of risk management under this process. Local information protocols should be used to ensure information is shared proportionately and in a timely manner. [Information Sharing](#)

3. Professional Judgement

- 3.1. Professional judgment is a deliberate process occurring within a professional context guided by specific knowledge and skills. It is honed through reflective discussions with colleagues and managers, practice wisdom, training, and knowledge developed through use of research and evidence-based practice. It is important to respect others professional contributions and judgements when working in a multi-agency way. Different perspectives can serve to enhance risk assessment and planning processes.

4. Professional Curiosity

- 4.1. Multi-agency professional forums require the use of Professional Curiosity for best outcomes. Practitioners must be 'respectfully uncertain' and ensure they are actively listening and asking direct questions. Checking out the information that is being received and reflecting on all the information is important to avoid making assumptions or taking information at face value. Nurturing professional curiosity and challenge are fundamental to partnership working to keep adults and children safe. It is everyone's responsibility to 'problem solve.'

5. Criteria for a Professional's Meeting

- 5.1. The adult, child or family must be already known to agencies and there is an existing professional network and one or more of the following also apply:
 - a. Where there is no existing forum or meeting structure to discuss and debate specific issues.
 - b. Where the issues are of a particularly complex or unusual nature.

- c. If the professional network feels unable to progress in terms of future planning and concerns are increasing as a result.
- d. If there is professional disagreement or confusion, for example, around communication, thresholds or roles and responsibilities which cannot be resolved within existing forums.
- e. High risk and complex cases deemed not to meet the threshold for intervention under the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007.
- f. High risk and complex cases (ASP or non-ASP) where, despite multi-agency protection / support planning, the risks remain of significant concern.

- 5.2. In such cases, a Professionals' Meeting should take place. It is important that professionals are able to explore the issues underlying these without professional disagreement having an adverse impact on adults, children or their parents or carers.
- 5.3. In order to resolve professional disagreements or misunderstandings, communication is key. The aim must be to seek resolution **as soon as possible, ensuring that the child or adult's safety and welfare are paramount**. There must be respectful challenge whenever a professional or agency has a concern about the action or inaction of another.
- 5.4. It is important to highlight that disagreement can be healthy and generate constructive debate, which may ultimately lead to more robust assessment and action planning. 'Vulnerable competence,' which does not expect workers to get it right all the time, given the complexity of practice, must be respected and understood.
- 5.5. If the adult is already being risk managed under Child Protection or Adult Support and Protection Procedures, **all risk management options within these procedures must have been exhausted first**. If the team surrounding the adult or child cannot resolve risk, then the Chair of the Adult Support and Protection Case Conference or child's planning meeting would arrange a Professionals' Meeting.

6. Convening a Professionals' Meeting

- 6.1. Where possible, other existing forums should be considered prior to consideration of a Professionals' Meeting, such as Multi-Agency Group Supervision or Reflective Learning Practitioner forums.
- 6.2. If a practitioner feels the above criteria for convening a Professionals' Meeting has been met, they should discuss this with their Line Manager.
- 6.3. 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.
- 6.4. 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.

7. Chair of a Professionals' Meeting

- 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. 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. 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.
- 8.3. 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. Escalation and professional disagreement

- 9.1. It is expected that good practice when working together to support children and adults will include elements of professional constructive challenge.
- 9.2. Dumfries and Galloway Public Protection Partnership is clear that whenever a professional or agency has a concern about the action or inaction of another, the aim must be to resolve a professional disagreement at the earliest possible stage. **Always keeping in mind that the child or adult's safety and welfare is paramount.**
- 9.3. Professionals should always seek to resolve disagreements at the earliest stage before escalating to senior managers.
- 9.4. Disagreements can arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around:
 - Adult Support & Protection concerns or inquiries, where disagreement exists around thresholds for intervention.
 - Perceived levels of risk.
 - Levels of need and whether a concern has met the threshold for a service or intervention.
 - Lack of understanding around roles and responsibilities, particularly managing expectations.
 - Level or quality of communication/ information sharing.
 - Action or lack of action progressing plans - drift.
 - Decisions around plans and direction of support not being stepped up or down and / or closed.
 - An agency believes it is necessary to seek a multi-agency response.
 - Perceived lack of engagement, from key partners, in the multi-agency risk management process.
- 9.5. If an 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.
- 9.6. If an agreement cannot be reached where a Professional Meeting has taken place, escalation processes should be followed. There are specific escalation protocols and guidance available within other policy and procedures and should be followed when working within other professional forums and legislation. For example, the [Dumfries and Galloway Children's Services Resolution and Escalation Protocol](#) and [Dumfries and Galloway Multi-Agency Adult Support and Protection Guidance](#)

- 9.7. As noted, it is every practitioner's responsibility to problem solve where there is disagreement and ensure that communication is clear and open, and that disagreement and escalation does not result in time delay in considering next steps for the adult or child.
- 9.8. If a child, young person or adult is considered to be at immediate risk of significant harm, you must ensure that your concerns are escalated on the same working day using established child protection and adult support and protection referral procedures.

10. Links to other Meetings/ Processes

- 10.1. 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.
- 10.2. The Professionals' Meeting needs to consider how the conclusion from this discussion will be taken into existing planning forums.

11. Communication with Child, Parents, or Adults

- 11.1. 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.
- 11.2. 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.
- 11.3. With adults, clinical and professional judgement should be exercised in relation to informing the individual.
- 11.4. The meeting should agree who will feedback the outcome of the meeting to the adult, parent/ carer and child where appropriate. When sharing the outcome with parent/ carer, it is important to ensure that what is shared is reflective of what is recorded.

12. Outcomes

- 12.1. The outcome of the meeting should be a clear understanding of what the next steps are.
- 12.2. 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 parent/ carer, any decisions or actions agreed should be clear and documented.

13. Recording

- 13.1. 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.
- 13.2. 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.

14. Other Tools Available to Support Professionals

These may be more appropriate spaces for reflective collaboration or learning where decision making is not time sensitive due to risks, or to aid practitioners' learning when multi-agency working has been a challenge or has worked very well.

Group Supervision

- 1.1. The purpose of Group Supervision is to draw upon collective resources to provide reflection opportunities and support. It can enable practitioners to be solution focussed regarding practice issues and can play an important role in building relationships.
- 1.2. A Group Supervision might be held when it is identified that professionals would benefit from a reflective and supportive environment. Any practitioner can arrange a Group Supervision.
- 1.3. Group Supervision can be single or multi-agency and can help practitioners think 'into' the work and how best they can work with families. The aim is to bring out the best ideas from practitioners via shared analysis, creating an environment within which creativity and ideas can be fostered, thereby making it more likely for the group to make the desired improvements. Throughout the process participants learn from each other and are given the opportunity to 'think through' how they can work with risk and the uncertainty this brings.
- 1.4. Group Supervision promotes organisational learning and creates parallel learning processes across the organisation. Group supervision is crucial to continuous improvement and ongoing learning. It underpins and supports all levels of an organisation to think about practice and to reflect. It promotes group cohesion and self/ organisational evaluation.
- 1.5. Group Supervision is not a planning forum. It follows a process to ensure the opportunities it creates are maximised. Group supervision offers many benefits as it provides an opportunity to discuss and reflect on challenges, encourages professional curiosity and helps relationship building within and across agencies.

Reflective Learning Practitioner Forums

- 1.6. The Reflective Learning Tool was initially developed to address those situations in Public Protection where there is learning to be drawn but does not require a formal Learning Review. However, it is not exclusive to this arena and can also be very much applied in other areas of practice where any staff and managers wish to draw learning about areas for improvement or strengths in practice.
- 1.7. The Reflective Learning Tool can be used in single or multi-agency practice where there is no requirement for a formal Learning Review, for which there is very distinct and separate formal guidance. Reflective Learning spaces are not planning forums. The tool supports improvement and encourages celebration of success through learning from good practice. Any practitioner, through consultation with their Line Manager, can arrange a Reflective Learning Practitioner forum.

- Step into Leadership – Group Supervision Group
https://stepintoleadership.info/assets/pdf/group_supervision.pdf
- Supervision – Reflective Case Discussion Model Using Group https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PT_The-reflective-case-discussion-model-of-group-supervision_FINAL.pdf
- Supervision in Children's Social Care
https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/KB_Using_group_supervision_in_childrens_social_care_Final.pdf
- [Achieving effective supervision - Iriss](#)