



Children's Safeguarding and Family Help

Child protection: joint working between social workers and IROs

Camden's Children and Learning Directorate uses relational practice as the foundation for all our work. Our integrative relational practice framework is based on our values, and is designed to help achieve the Directorate's purpose: to work with children, families and communities to make a positive, lasting difference to their futures, so they have the best start in life.

We recognise the impact of structural inequalities on the lives of the children and families we work with and as a service we will embrace inclusive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice based on our values and our mission to champion social justice.

Our practice framework centres on honest and compassionate relationships with those we serve and with each other. It is an expectation that all Directorate policies and procedures are implemented in line with our practice framework, and that any actions within policies and procedures reflect its ethics, values and practice expectations.

1. Purpose of policy

- Where children are subject to a child protection plan, it is essential that social workers and managers work in partnership with the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) who chair the conferences in order to keep the child safe, achieve good outcomes and ensure Camden discharges its child protection duties.
- This policy sets out how IROs, social workers and managers should work together to ensure a high standard of social work practice and robust decision-making for all cases where the child is subject to child protection procedures.

2. The IRO service and child protection

2.1 Structure of service

- Camden's IRO service is based in the Quality Assurance service of CSFH and comprises of 5 LAC IROs and 5 child protection IROs who are managed by the IRO service manager. All child protection conferences in Camden are chaired by an IRO.
- In line with the requirements set out in *Working together to safeguard children (2018)* none of the IROs are in any way connected with the management or case decision-making for individual cases or with the provision of resources for cases. Because of this independence, IROs are in a position to quality assure social work practice within the child protection arena.

2.2 Role of the IRO in child protection

The IROs provide independent advice, oversight and scrutiny of child protection processes in Camden in the following ways:

- through their role as chair of the child protection conference and their oversight of the conference process
- by offering consultation to social workers on individual cases that helps them assess the risks to the child, apply thresholds and make decisions on child protection interventions

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- through their role as LADO and chairing strategy meetings involving allegations against staff
- by chairing child exploitation response meetings in complex cases;
[child-exploitation-policy-and-procedures.pdf](#)
- by taking action to alert social workers and managers where there are any concerns about standards of practice in child protection cases
- by providing information and advice on child protection and safeguarding issues to senior managers in CSFH and partnership agencies within the Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP)
- by contributing to the development of CSFH and CSCP child protection and safeguarding policies.

2.3 Management of the service

The IRO service manager and child protection service manager will:

- provide supervision for IROs that covers professional support and guidance
- oversee case allocation and ensure caseloads enable IROs to have the capacity to carry out their functions
- ensure there is suitable provision for training for IROs
- liaise with other CSFH managers in order to promote efficient service delivery and good outcomes for children
- provide any reports on child protection activity in the borough to senior management meetings or the Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership.

3 Description of services

Allocated child protection IRO

Each CSFH team/service has a named child protection IRO who links with the team/service in order to provide advice and consultation on child protection issues arising from individual cases and will meet with the teams on a regular basis in order

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to discuss general child protection issues. IROs also act as CSFH representatives on a variety of multi-agency panels.

Allocated IROs are:

Sonia Forbes (Service manager)	Bloomsbury FIT, Hampstead FIT
Sarah Browne	St Pancras FIT
Hellen Stack	MASH/ BIT teams/MARAC
Julia Simmonds	Holborn FIT
Saleena Douglas	Kilburn BIT
Ena Mahoney	CYPDS
Jacqui Fearon	Mornington LAC/Somers Town LAC/LADO/MAPPA
Lauren Ganatra	Chalk Farm LAC

Consultations

- Social workers can seek advice on child protection issues from IROs. In general, social workers should try to approach the IRO allocated to their team but can seek advice from another IRO if necessary. Once a child is subject to a child protection plan social workers should try to consult with the Chair of the conference and only seek advice from another IRO if the chair is unavailable.
- Generally, social workers should consult with an IRO with the knowledge and agreement of their supervisor or manager who should also attend the consultation.
- Where an IRO gives advice on a case following consultation with social workers and managers this will be recorded in the IRO consultation case note in the child's MOSAIC case record.

Strategy meetings

IROs will chair strategy meetings (and child exploitation response meetings):

- where there are allegations or concerns about adults who work with children (LADO cases) including foster carers
- that involve CSE or CCE where the RAG rating is Red or Amber
- cases that are complex, for example:

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- more than one team or agency is involved
- cases involving connected victims or organised abuse as defined in Part A chapter 8 of the pan London procedures
- peer on peer abuse
- new and emerging areas of work
- very serious abuse
- young children with serious head injuries.

IROs should where possible chair meetings for their allocated team but if the IRO is unavailable, another IRO or the Child Protection service manager may be approached.

Recording contacts

All contacts between CP IROs and parents, children, staff, advocates and others, including case consultations and midway reviews, should be recorded on the IRO contact record available on MOSAIC.

4. The IRO as conference chair

4.1 Role of the chair

- IROs are allocated to chair the initial child protection conference when the case is first booked into a conference slot and once allocated, will remain the chair for all child protection conferences until the child protection plan is discontinued. Details of their role are set out below.
- As conference chair, the IRO is responsible for the conduct of the conference and ensuring CSFH and partner agencies within the CSCP follow the procedures set out in *Working together to safeguard children* and chapter 4 of the pan London child protection procedures.
- [CP4. Child Protection Conferences \(london safeguarding children procedures.co.uk\)](https://london safeguarding children procedures.co.uk)
- A full list of the responsibilities of the conference chair can be found in appendix 1 but as part of the quality assurance role, conference chairs should check that the following expected standards are adhered to and take up issues via the escalation procedures set out in section 6.
 - Conferences are held within the timescales set out in *Working together*.
 - There is an allocated social worker at all times.

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- The child is seen at home by the social worker every 10 days or as set out in the child protection plan.
- The core group meets regularly.
- There is a mid-way meeting with the social worker between review conferences to monitor progress where required.
- The conference process and core group meetings are recorded on the MOSAIC case record.

4.2 Making arrangements for conferences

- Social workers should liaise with the conference chair if specific arrangements need to be made regarding the conference to help parents and children attend and/or participate, for example ensuring parents with disabilities can access the building, or having interpreters or advocates present to support participation.
- Social workers should also discuss whether to split conferences so that participants attend at different times. This may be necessary in the following circumstances:
 - in domestic abuse cases, in order to protect the victim
 - where the children in the family have different fathers, in order to ensure their confidentiality
 - where children will attend but it is thought they should not be party to all information
 - in any other circumstances where the chair identifies that it is necessary.

4.3 Sharing information between review meetings

- A child's situation will not remain static and social workers will need to keep the conference chair informed and consult with them regarding any significant changes in the child's life.
- 4.1.24 of the pan-London procedures states that in the following circumstances a review case conference should be brought forward and social workers should therefore notify the conference chair of any of the following so that a decision can be made:
 - Child protection concerns relating to a new incident or allegation of abuse have been sustained.

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- There are significant difficulties in carrying out the child protection plan.
 - A child is to be born into the household of a child or children already subject to child protection plans.
 - An adult or child who poses a risk to children is to join, or commences regular contact with, the household.
 - There is a significant change in the circumstances of the child or family not anticipated at the previous conference and with implications for the safety of the child.
 - A child subject to a child protection plan is also looked after by the local authority and consideration is being given to returning them to the circumstances where care of the child previously raised concerns (unless this step is anticipated in the existing child protection plan).
 - The core group believe that an early cancellation of the need for a child protection plan should be considered.
- For cases where a child subject to a child protection plan becomes looked after, staff should refer to the Discharge of child protection plans policy: [.discharge-of-child-protection-plans.pdf](#)
- Social workers should also ensure conference chairs are informed of the following changes:
 - change of allocated social worker
 - where the child is charged with any offence leading to referral to YOS, remands or any sentence following criminal proceedings
 - concerns about exploitation or extra-familial harm
 - exclusion from school
 - episodes of running away or going missing
 - significant health diagnoses, illnesses or hospitalisation, including mental health diagnoses.
- Social workers should also provide the conference chair with copies of minutes from any professionals meeting that takes place regarding the child.

4.4 Deciding on early reviews

- A child protection plan can only be changed at a review child protection conference. Where any new child protection concerns or incidents arise or there are significant changes to the child's situation, these must be considered by the professional network. An early review conference may

need to be convened in order to respond effectively to new developments and continue to ensure the plan can keep the child safe.

- However, not all changes will warrant an early review, and may be better discussed at a multi-agency meeting instead. It is important that any changes are discussed between the social worker and conference chair and a decision taken as to whether the impact of the change on the child's safety and wellbeing is such that a review needs to be brought forward.

4.5 Mid-review meeting

- A mid-review feedback meeting should take place between the social worker and the conference chair to monitor the implementation of the child protection plan and the functioning of the core group. Team managers should only attend if they need to make a decision following the outcome of the meeting.
- At the previous conference, the conference chair will select a suitable date where the social worker will meet with the chair to look at progress and any issues that may have arisen.
- The meeting agenda should cover the Signs of Safety headings:
 - What are we worried about?
 - What's working well?
 - What needs to happen?
 - What is the scale of worries?
- The midway review should be recorded in the IRO contact form (choosing the drop-down option of midway review) and uploaded onto the MOSAIC case record. The Signs of Safety Headings should be used when recording details of the meeting discussion.
- Although it is an expectation that the meeting is held for all cases, there may be some cases where there are no issues around implementation and the chair may decide that a meeting is not necessary, particularly if it is likely that the child protection plan will end at the next review conference.

5 Referring on child protection cases

- Child protection procedures are designed to be a short to medium term intervention and where a plan fails to bring about change in a reasonable timeframe, there is an expectation that action is taken for cases to be monitored and stepped up where necessary in order to prevent drift and delay for the child.
- There are two processes that should be used to help in decision-making and moving cases forward:
- ***Referral to the Support and Challenge Panel***: This is a multi-agency panel that considers cases where a child protection plan remains in place after 18 months (ie; following the second 6 monthly review) or cases where a child becomes subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time 2 years after the previous plan ended. For details on referral please see the Support and challenge panel terms of reference at: [multi-agency-support-and-challenge-panel.pdf](#)
- ***Recommendation of a Legal Planning Meeting***: The Chair can make the recommendation at the conference for a LPM to be held it is the team manager who will decide on whether or not to act on the recommendation.

6. Issue resolution and escalation

- As part of their oversight function, conference chairs have a duty to raise issues stemming from child protection processes in individual cases as well as raising concerns about poor practice in general, for example:
 - poor quality assessments updated assessments
 - assessments or updated assessments not made available in advance of the conference
 - statutory child protection visits not carried out
 - frequent change of allocated worker
 - no regular core group meetings held
 - poor recording of processes on MOSAIC.
 - drift and delay in the case with no action taken to escalate despite recommendations by the conference.

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- It is expected that the majority of concerns will be resolved informally following discussion between the chair, the social worker and their manager but unresolved matters or serious concerns will need to be referred on within the management hierarchy via Camden's formal issue resolution system.
- The purpose of the system is to:
 - resolve problems as quickly and as informally as possible so that they do not impact on the child's safety and welfare
 - ensure Camden continues to discharge their duties under child protection law
 - support good practice and enable managers to pick up on trends and issues as they arise so they can be addressed in a timely manner.
- Appendix 2 sets out the formal framework for escalation of concerns involving child protection cases. The general principles of the system are:
 - Where possible, issues will be dealt with between the chair, social worker and team manager in the first instance without referral to the formal resolution system; only serious concerns or unresolved matters will be referred on to senior managers.
 - Escalation of concerns to the next level of management will be discussed with the Child Protection service manager and notified to all parties.
 - Responses to notification of concerns will be given within the timescale requested by the IRO service manager.
- Chairs should use the CP Alert form to record all concerns, decisions and agreed actions relating to issue resolution procedures and escalation. It is essential that as the issue is escalated through the stages, the relevant managers, service managers and Heads of Service record on the relevant parts of the form to provide a note of discussions held between social workers/managers under the escalation policy, any issues raised and any actions agreed following discussions.

Appendix 1 **Chairs responsibilities under pan-London procedures**

The chair should ensure that all conference participants are aware of expectations for how the conference will be conducted and particularly ensuring parents and children are able to participate (4.4.1).

Chairs are also responsible for the following decisions:

- whether independent observers can attend the conference (4.3.3)
- whether an inquorate conference should go ahead (4.3.11)
- requests to record a case conference (4.3.8)
- deciding with the social worker on whether and/or how the child will attend the conference (4.4.12)
- deciding, on representations from the social worker or other conference participants, whether parents should be excluded from all or part of the conference (4.5.1)
- deciding on what category of harm the child has suffered (4.8).

With regards to the minutes of the conference, chairs should make the following decisions:

- whether to exclude information from a parent's copy (4.14.5)
- whether a friend, supporter or solicitor of the parent who attended the conference should be given a copy (4.14.6)
- whether a child should be given a copy (4.14.8)
- whether third parties can receive a copy (4.14.10)

Where the decision of the conference is that the child should be subject to a child protection plan, the chair should ensure the following (4.8.2):

- The risks to the child are stated and what is needed to change is specified;
- A qualified children's social worker is identified as a lead social worker to develop, co-ordinate and implement the child protection plan.
- A core group is identified of family members and professionals;
- A date is set for the first core group meeting within ten working days of the initial conference and timescales set for subsequent meetings;
- A date for the child protection review conference is set;
- The outline child protection plan is formulated and clearly understood by all concerned including the parents and, where appropriate, the child.

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If the conference decides that the child should not be subject to a child protection plan, the chair should ensure the following (4.8.3)

- The conference draws up a child in need plan or makes appropriate recommendations for a plan.
- The conference considers any local protocols in place referred to as 'step down procedures' or Family Group Conference processes.

The chair will be the first point of contact for those who wish to complain about the conduct of the conference and the decisions made (4.12.2). Complaints should be addressed to the chair in the first instance and will be dealt with under the CSCP procedure available at: [CSCP-Complaints-Procedures-July-2021.pdf](#)

Appendix 2: Issue resolution system

Stage	Notification to:	Type of concern	Actions required	Timescales
Informal stage	Social worker and team manager	Minor concerns around compliance with child protection processes or implementation of the child protection plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair raises issues with the social worker and team manager via email or through meetings and discussion takes place to try to resolve the issues. Chair makes a record of any discussion and resolution, including agreed actions, in the consultation section of the MOSAIC record. 	10 working days before Chair notifies social worker and manager of possible formal notification to service manager then a further 10 working days to resolve
Stage 1	Team manager and IRO manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serious concerns about social work practice ie; no report available for conference Non-compliance with statutory requirements: visits and reviews not carried out in timescales Where the child has or will make a formal complaint Minor concerns that have not been resolved informally in a reasonable timescale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chair discusses issues with child protection service manager and a decision is made on using formal procedures. Chair sends out a formal Notice of Concern via the MOSAIC alert to the team manager and IRO manager. The team manager discusses the issues raised with the parties and the child protection 	5 working days unless a shorter timescale is specified by the IRO service manager

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			<p>service manager.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The team manager formally replies to the chair stating whether the issues raised have been accepted and what action will be taken to resolve matters. 	
Stage 2	Service manager	Serious concerns listed above that cannot be resolved in an appropriate timescale at the previous level.	As above with the chair discussing next steps with the child protection service manager before sending a notice of concern email. The Service manager to formally reply to the chair stating their decision on the matter.	5 working days unless a shorter timescale is specified by the child protection service manager
Stage 3	Head of Service	Serious concerns listed above that cannot be resolved in an appropriate timescale at the previous level.	As above but the Head of Service to reply formally	As above
Stage 3	CSFH Director	Serious concerns listed above that cannot be resolved in an appropriate timescale at the previous level.	As above but the CSFH Director to reply formally	As above
Stage 4	Executive Director – Children and Learning	Serious concerns listed above that cannot be resolved in an appropriate timescale at the previous level.	As above but the Executive Director to reply formally	As above

