

Delivery of Child Protection Case Conferences and Child in Care Reviews whilst Covid-19 restrictions are in place.

As like many services, the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service has been required to review how Child Protection Case Conferences and Child in Care reviews are delivered whilst there are restrictions in place.

As of today (18/03/2020) all Council buildings remain open, although where possible and appropriate staff are being allowed to work from home. For staff in the high-risk categories as set out by the Government they will all be working from home for a period of isolation. Staff who are well and who do not fall into the high-risk category can continue to work from Council buildings if working from home is not available to them due to the area of service they work.

Bath and North East Somerset Council has cancelled all scheduled meetings apart from those related to Safeguarding and to Covid-19. Critical services will continue to be a priority for the Council, and this includes Child Protection Conferences and Child in Care reviews. However, in order to hold these meetings safely there has been a need to review how these are delivered.

Child Protection Case Conferences

Invites:

Initial and Review Child Protection Case Conferences will continue to go ahead, and the Safeguarding Service will look to hold these within the statutory timescales. Invites to conferences will continue to be circulated by post, email and globalscape, although the latter may be problematic for some agencies if staffing levels are low. In this instance where globalscape has been used the Safeguarding Service will endeavour to identify with relevant services whether there are alternative methods that can be used to share information.

The venue for Conferences will be either the One Stop Shop in Bath or The Hollies in Midsomer Norton, no alternative venues will be used until further notice. For any conferences that may have been arranged to take place in a child's school, GP surgery or community setting, these will now be held in the nearest council building and the venue will be confirmed in the invite letter.

Conference arrangements:

The Independent Chair and allocated Social Worker are expected to have a discussion at least two working days before any scheduled conference to consider the best way for the conference to be held. Where attendance of a parent, carer, family member or professional in person is not possible there will be access to conference calls / skype.

Attendance in person or by telephone:

The administrators within the Safeguarding Service will be contacting professionals by telephone to confirm their attendance and to establish how they wish to join the meeting i.e. in person or by telephone. An administrator will circulate instructions as

to how to join the conference by telephone in advance of the meeting either the day before or on the morning should the conference be in the afternoon.

Parents participation:

The Independent Chair and Social Worker will need to ensure the parents are able to contribute / participate in the meeting, this could involve the Social Worker and parent being in the family home and dialling into the conference together or attending a council office to access a telephone.

Where a parent cannot attend and is unable to access conference calls the Independent Chair and Social Worker will need to decide as to how a parent is involved in the conference, has an understanding of the information shared at the conference and knows what the outcome of the conference is. For some families it may be that the Independent Chair talks with the parent before and / or after the conference, this however will be a decision for the Independent Chair and Social Worker to make together.

Reports for conference:

Professionals will continue to provide reports for conferences and ensure the content of these are known to the parents, where these can't be shared in person the safeguarding service would request that there is as a minimum a telephone discussion. Parents should receive a copy of all reports and each agency is responsible for providing these directly to the parent.

Quoracy:

For any decisions to be reached at a Child Protection Case Conference there must be in attendance the child's social worker or a representative of the local authority's children's social care department and two other professional groups or agencies, which have had direct contact with each child who is the subject of the conference. In exceptional circumstances, where a child has not had contact with three agencies, the conference can go ahead and make decisions about the Child Protection Plan.

Postponement:

In respect of Review Child Protection Case Conferences, if the Independent Chair and Social Worker identify that the conference will not be quorate or that the parent's absence will be detrimental to the ongoing work with the family then the decision to postpone the conference will be agreed. All conferences that are cancelled whilst the Covid-19 restrictions are in place will be reported to the Deputy Lead for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance who in turn will inform the relevant Head of Service. For these children, there will need to be consideration as to how ongoing risks are being managed.

Oversight of plans:

Independent Chairs will be expected to maintain robust oversight of plans for children, where there is an identified need for an immediate safety plan or contingency plan, the Independent Chair will seek regular updates as to the implementation of these and progress.

Child in Care Reviews

Child in care reviews will continue to be held during this period of restrictions but these will all be carried out by conference call or telephone discussions **if** holding a review in the child's placement is not possible or appropriate.

Contact with child:

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) will make every effort to have contact with the child for whom they are the IRO, this may include skype, telephone discussion, email exchange, text messages or a letter being sent. Decisions around the delivery of child in care reviews will be determined jointly by the IRO and allocated Social Worker or in their absence the Social Worker's manager.

IRO's will continue to gather information about the child's needs and will seek to ensure the child's care plan is meeting their needs. Social Workers will be expected to provide a report for all child in care reviews, sharing this with the IRO 48 hours in advance.

Oversight of plans:

There will be some children identified as being particularly vulnerable given their level of need, location of placement and placement setting. IRO's will ensure they maintain robust oversight of these children and how their needs are being met, particularly during this period of restrictions. IRO's will also consider holding more frequent reviews for these children.

Visiting children:

Where possible IRO's will consider visiting children in placement or meeting them outside in the community in an appropriate setting such as park, school site (if open) or in carers garden. Again, this will be at the discretion of the IRO and in consultation with the child's carer.

Given the ever-changing guidance in relation to Covid-19 and restrictions this guidance will continually be reviewed and updated. This guidance will be circulated to children's social care and other agencies / professionals.

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