

An Open Letter

CHSCP
1 Reading Lane
Hackney
London
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13 June 2022

Dear Colleagues,

Re: Multi-Agency Engagement – Together Everyone Achieves More (TEAM)

Our ability to work together as an effective ‘multi-agency team’ continues to be the cornerstone of our local safeguarding arrangements. We all recognise that when we do this well, our capacity to protect children from harm is enhanced and outcomes improved. Children are safer.

Whilst we see good practice, some residual issues remain that require your particular focus as a safeguarding professional. Many will be familiar to you, but in line with the CHSCP's priority on '*basic practice*' and the recent publication of the reviews into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, I am sending this reminder to you all.

Please take the time to read this briefing, digest it, reflect on your own practice and talk about it with your supervisor and in your team meetings.

Above all, use the material when you are working. For example, don't dismiss the strategy discussion agenda template as a 'tick box' – it isn't. Don't think the conference guidance doesn't apply to you – it does. None of this material undermines your professional experience or your judgement, but what it does do, is help very busy practitioners keep focused when trying to work in complex situations.

Strategy Discussions

The CHSCP has undertaken two audit rounds on strategy discussions over the last few months. Whilst we have seen evidence of agency attendance improving and good practice in terms of information sharing and timeliness, there are some issues that require focus and improvement.

If you have yet to do so, you can watch the CHSCP's video guidance on strategy discussions [HERE](#).

Use of Guidance & Templates

- There needs to be more consistent use of the CHSCP strategy discussion template to ensure all areas that need to be considered are routinely addressed. Social Workers should be leading on this.
- However, whatever your role, if you are invited to a strategy discussion (even if you are experienced), download the agenda template to ensure you are 100% clear that all areas that need to be covered have been covered.
- If the chair isn't sticking to this template, challenge them and prompt participants to ensure that all the issues have been taken into account (even if no action is needed).

Significant Others

- Professionals need to understand the significant relationships in a child's life, *'including their extended family or peer network, and to build a picture of the child's experiences that draws on their views and listens to their concerns'*.
- In this context, all information about other household members or significant adults connected to a child needs to be factored into the strategy discussion process. This helps identify the potential risks that some of those individuals might pose, as well as understanding the protection that some can afford. This is a simple message and one that requires absolute compliance.

Active Anti-Racist Practice

- There has been some excellent work locally on anti-racism, but we need to evidence this and make sure our practice is 'actively' anti-racist. Making sure strategy discussions improve how they consider the impact of ethnicity, culture, identity and discrimination is one simple way to help show we mean what we say. The agenda template has a section on this. Make sure this aspect is routinely covered and not considered an afterthought or irrelevant to mitigating harm.

Minutes

- Detailed minutes are needed in all cases, including for those strategy discussions held on open cases. Again, this is not complicated. This is routine. If you attend a meeting and don't receive the minutes, you also have a responsibility to chase them.

Background Information

- Some of the audited strategy discussions on open cases omitted the full background history (likely on the assumption that practitioners knew the case). When assessing risk in families, this inevitably includes looking at what has gone before. Don't make the mistake that this isn't relevant at the strategy discussion stage. Whilst more detailed analysis can follow, considering patterns of behaviour or repeated incidents needs to be a fundamental part of the discussion to ensure safe and effective planning.

Child Protection Conferences

Last year, the CHSCP audited this area of practice. Whilst much good practice was seen, several recommendations for improvement were identified. To support this area of practice, the CHSCP has released a new video guide to complement the existing material available on our website. Please take the time to watch this by visiting our webpage: [HERE](#).

Attendance

- If invited, there is an expectation that you attend a Child Protection Conferences and that you prioritise this in your diary.
- Without quoracy and the right people being there, our collective understanding of risk and our ability to mitigate this for children will be hindered.
- In those exceptional circumstances where you are invited but unable to attend for unavoidable reasons, you should:
 - Inform the conference administrator;

- Submit a written report; and
- Arrange for a well-briefed agency representative to attend and speak to the report.
- Agencies are also expected to share a report about the child and family in written form with the family and other agencies as appropriate, prior to the conference, whether or not they are able to attend the conference.

Working with Families

- With regards to the last bullet point above, families should not be attending a conference without being aware of what an agency is saying about them. However, far too often this is what they experience.
- This is no more complicated than the practitioner talking through the report beforehand, ideally as part of a face-to-face meeting. If not possible, a video call or telephone call is better than nothing. Everyone should be able to find the time to do one of these.
- In line with our local arrangements, reports must be shared and discussed with the family at least **3 working days before** and Initial Child Protection Conference and **5 working days** before a review.

Significant Others

- As with strategy discussions, all information relating to other household members or significant adults connected to a child needs to be factored into the conference process. Ensure your reports cover this level of detail and that you are prepared to talk about what you know at the conference itself.

The Quality Assurance Sub Group is revisiting CP Conferences in September 2022 and will be scrutinising effectiveness with a particular focus on the above three areas. With the launch of the new material and support from yourselves, I am optimistic that the partnership can positively shift these issues in the right direction.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Gamble', written in a cursive style.

**Jim Gamble QPM,
Independent Child Safeguarding Commissioner, CHSCP**