



# **Resolution of professional disagreements in work relating to the safety of children**

**(Escalation Policy and Procedure)**

January 2023

## Definitions:

Escalation	Is the course of action that should be taken by professionals where they have concerns that the child or young person's safety is compromised by the action of other agencies, or that other professional input does not support effective safeguarding of the child or young person.
Resolution	Is the desired outcome of this protocol – that all parties concerned reach a shared understanding, with minimal dissent, of the next steps in order to keep the child or young person safe
Complaints	A complaint is as an expression of dissatisfaction with the services provided. If a service user believes they have been unfairly treated by a particular service, they have a right to complain.
Local Authority Designated Officer	Involved in the management and oversight of allegations against people who work with children. Allegations about those who work with children are passed to the designated officer, or team of officers, without delay.
Whistleblowing	<p>You're a whistle-blower if you're a worker and you report certain types of wrongdoing. This will usually be something you've seen at work - though not always.</p> <p>The wrongdoing you disclose must be in the public interest. This means it must affect others, for example the general public.</p> <p>As a whistle-blower you're protected by law - you should not be treated unfairly or lose your job because you 'blow the whistle'.</p>

## Inter-agency Escalation Policy:

### *Resolution of professional disagreements in work relating to the safety of children*

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This policy has been developed by the Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership to ensure that all agencies working with children and young people in the Islington (including Health, Education, Housing, Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care, Probation, Police and community and voluntary sector organisations), have access to a straight forward multi-agency policy to quickly resolve, and where necessary escalate, professional differences where there are concerns that the welfare and safety of children and young people are at risk of being compromised. This policy should be read alongside Resolving Professional Differences in London Safeguarding Children Procedures<sup>1</sup>.

- 1.1 Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children. Effective working together depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies.
- 1.2 Professional disputes are reduced by clarity about roles and responsibilities and airing and sharing problems in networking forums. Effective working together depends on resolving

disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies; and a belief in a genuine partnership that ensures the response is in the best interest of the child.

1.3 Professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion. Disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around thresholds and roles and responsibilities. Some examples may include:

- Where one professional disagrees with the action of another around a particular course of action, such as closing involvement with a child or family or disagreement with threshold decision.
- Where one agency considers that the plan is inappropriate and that a child's needs are not being best met by the current plan.
- Where one worker or agency considers that another worker or agency has not completed an agreed action for no acceptable or understood reason, which may compromise the safeguarding of the child or young person.
- Where a member of staff or an agency considers that the child's safeguarding needs are better met by a Child Protection Plan and have requested that a Child Protection Conference be called and feel that this has been refused.

## 2.0 **Aim and Objectives**

2.1 It is important to:

- avoid professional disputes that put children at risk, obscure the focus on the child or delay decision making
- resolve difficulties (within and) between agencies quickly and openly
- share information appropriately and often – in line with GDPR guidelines. There can be no justification for failing to share information that will allow action to be taken to protect children
- identify problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity and to promote resolution via amendment to protocols and procedures.
- ensure accurate and contemporary recording on the child's file of key decisions and conversations in relation to the resolution process

2.2 The safety of individual children and focus on children are the paramount considerations in any professional disagreement and any unresolved issues should be escalated with due consideration to the risks that might exist for the child.

2.3 **If a child is thought to be at risk of immediate harm, contact should be made to the Police and a referral must be made to Children Services Contact Team (CSCT: [CSCreferrals@islington.gov.uk](mailto:CSCreferrals@islington.gov.uk) or [0207 527 7400](tel:02075277400) immediately**

### **3.0 Escalation Policy**

The process of resolution should be as simple as possible.

3.1 The aim should be to resolve difficulties at practitioner / fieldworker level between agencies as soon as possible. Attempts at problem resolution may leave one worker/agency believing that the child/ren remain(s) at risk of significant harm. This worker/agency has responsibility for communicating such concerns through agreed channels (see flowchart).

3.2 The following stages are likely to be involved in the process of escalation for professionals from relevant agencies and may involve consulting a colleague to clarify thinking:

- recognition that there is a disagreement over a significant issue, which impacts on the safety and welfare of a child
- identification of the problem and clarity about the disagreement and what the aim is.

3.3 When there is a concern regarding policy or strategic matters, such as the interpretation of statutory guidance, the issue should be brought to the attention of the ISCP manager for review by the appropriate subgroup.

3.4 Disputes should be handled openly and efficiently with all relevant issues being identified for resolution. It is recommended that resolution of these issues be achieved within one week or less, but if a child's safety is believed to be at risk, the issue should be escalated to the next level within 24 hours.

3.5 This escalation procedure differs from the complaints procedure which should be apparent within your respective agencies, i.e. when a member of the public or service user makes a complaint this should be handled by your relevant department in your agency. Please read guidance on the LADO and Whistleblowing: [LADO: Working Together to Safeguarding Children](#).

### **Stage 1: Professional challenge and engagement**

- 3.6 In cases where a relevant practitioner has a concern, but the child is not considered to be at immediate risk of significant harm, the relevant practitioner should attempt to resolve differences or concerns through a verbal discussion, written communication or a meeting **within 2 working days** of the disagreement (or a within a timescale that protects the child from harm, whichever is less). It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some practitioners to pursue this unsupported.
- 3.7 The relevant practitioner raising the concern must always record information about the child, a brief description of their concern and the outcome they sought and a copy of this must be kept on the records of the child subject of the concern. When the concern has been escalated, this written information must be provided
- 3.8 Where a resolution is reached the responsible worker will confirm the outcome with the professional who has raised the concerns in writing within a further **2 working days**.
- 3.9 If the disagreement has not been resolved at this stage the relevant practitioner should make it known to the other agency that they are escalating this matter. If the relevant practitioner is escalating a concern towards a professional in another agency that is more senior than them, they should inform their line manager or senior management where appropriate. (see 4.10).

### **Stage 2: Line Manager**

- 3.10 If unresolved, the problem should be referred within **24 hours** to their line manager or designated/ named Child Protection advisor in their own agency or who will discuss with the manager or their equivalent in the other agency (e.g. Detective Sergeant, Practice/Team Manager, Safeguarding Children Advisor). At this stage it would be beneficial to consult with your respective Safeguarding Team.
- 3.11 If the case involves a child subject to a Child Protection Plan or a Child Looked After (CLA), the relevant Child Protection Chair or Independent Reviewing Officer must also be notified
- 3.12 If a resolution is not met **within 5 working days** then this should be further escalated.

### **Stage 3: Senior Management (Safeguarding Leads):**

- 3.13 If the problem remains unresolved between the line managers, the issue must be escalated to the relevant safeguarding leads (Inspector, Service Manager, Health Named Professional, Designated Safeguarding Lead) **within one working day**. At this stage a **Safeguarding Lead Conflict Resolution Referral Form** (see Appendix 1) should be completed, and copy sent to the ISCP Manager to identify for trends and themes.
- 3.14 The named safeguarding leads should discuss the issues identified and try to find a solution that is child focussed and ensures their safety and welfare. If this is not possible, the matter should be escalated to the next stage.

#### **Stage 4: Assistant Directors (or equivalent)**

- 3.14 In the unlikely event that the professional disagreement remains unresolved at senior management level, there should be a discussion between Assistant Directors (or equivalent e.g. Head of Safeguarding, Head Teacher, Detective Superintendent) in each agency. They would usually be members of Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership (ISCP). Where they are not members, the ISCP member representing the agency should also be informed of the escalation to Stage 4.
- 3.15 Directors should seek to resolve their disagreement **within 5 working days**, before the case is raised with the ISCP Chair. At this stage an escalation notification should be sent to ISCP business manager via [ISCP@islington.gov.uk](mailto:ISCP@islington.gov.uk)

#### **Stage 5: Resolution by the ISCP Chair:**

- 3.16 If a resolution is not reached at the levels above by the respective agencies then it should be referred to the ISCP Chair by the concerning agency via the Partnership's Business Unit.
- 3.17 The ISCP Chair may seek to resolve the issue or request that relevant senior partners convene with a Resolution Panel (consisting of Director level Statutory Partners & Education where applicable).

#### **Consideration for all stages**

- 4.1• To give independent consideration to the issues being raised providing feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the case being brought forward.
- To ensure that throughout the process, lines of communication remain open and clear and that the issue does not become clouded, personalised, or lost in other processes. Safeguarding the child supersedes any disagreement around decisions, therefore the safety of the child should always remain paramount.
  - To provide a briefing to senior managers across agencies on the issue being raised and possible routes to resolving the issue.
- 4.2 A clear record should be kept at all stages, by all parties. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued. All records should be retained on the child's case file / agency database.
- 4.3 At each stage it is important that the person who originally raised the concern is given feedback on what action has been taken in response. It is the responsibility of the person to whom the issue is referred to ensure that clear and timely feedback is provided.
- 4.4 When the issue is resolved, any policy issues should be identified and referred to the ISCP (Training and Workforce Development sub-group) to inform future learning and possible changes to existing policies and procedures.
- 4.5 It may also be useful for individuals to debrief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships and identify possible training needs.

- 4.6 Please note that this policy does not apply to cases where there may be concerns about the behaviour or conduct of another professional that may impact on a child's safety and well-being. In such cases, reference should be made via the LADO process, see [LADO: Working Together to Safeguarding Children](#).
- 4.7 These escalation procedures pertain to professionals having a disagreement where threshold applies. If a professional wishes to make a complaint regarding professional conduct around particular decisions that are made, this should be handled with the respective agencies' complaints procedure.
- 4.8 It is also the responsibility of the agency who the concern is about to make the final decision regarding threshold. For e.g. If Children Services has a disagreement with Health regarding a CP medical not being convened, then the decision around whether threshold is met or not should lay with the Health Service.
- 4.9 **Trends and themes are identified and reported to the ISCP Quality Assurance Subgroup to inform potential changes to policies and procedures.**

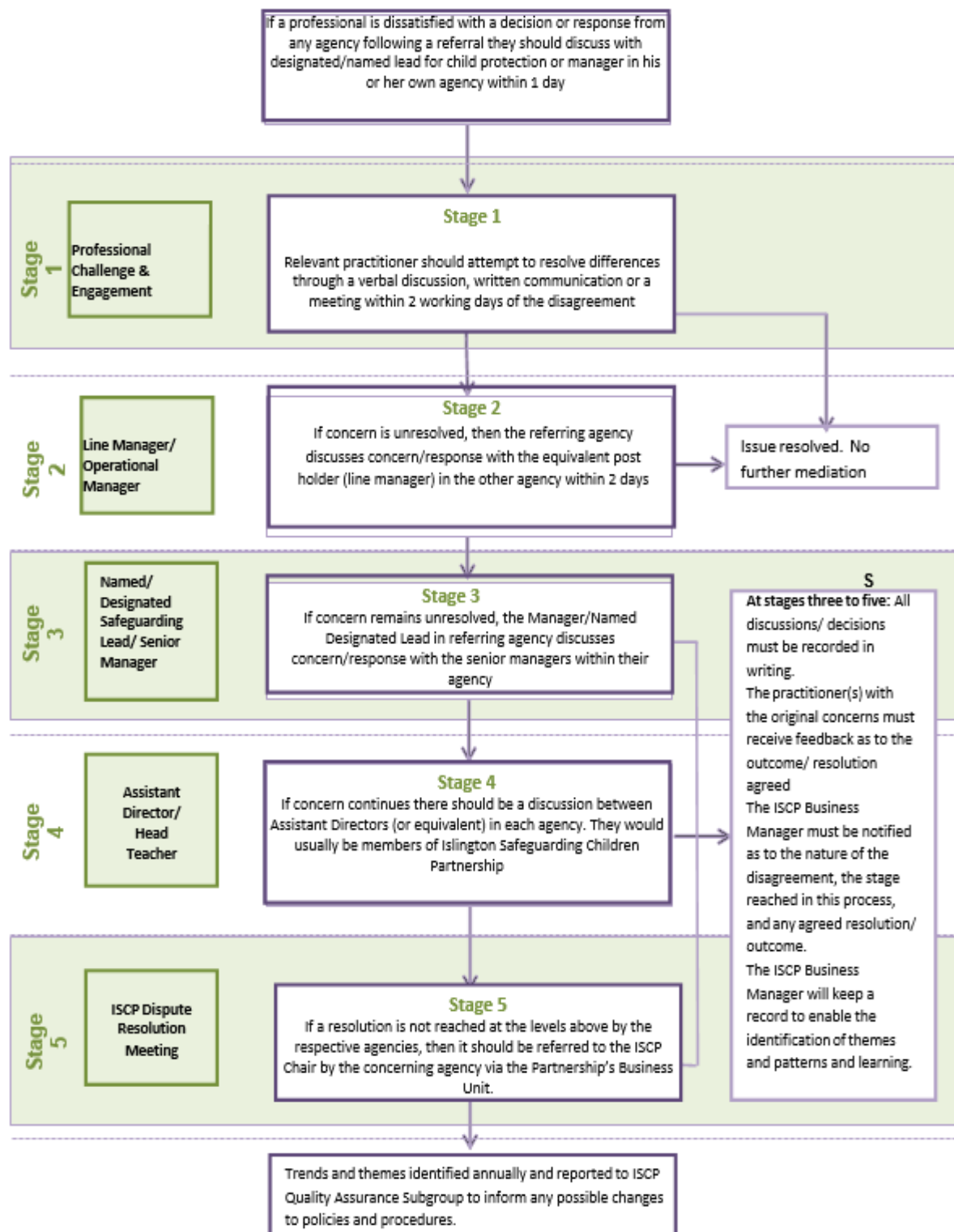
4.10

Stages	Position	Police	LBI CSC / ASC	LBI	Health	Education
1	Professional to Professional engagement	Police Constable / Detective Constable	Social Worker / Family Support Worker/ Housing Officer	Housing Officer / Community Safety Officer / Education Psychologist / Occupational Therapist	Health Visitor/ School Nurse/ GP / Education Psychologist / Clinical Psychologist	Teacher / SENCO
2	Line Manager	Detective Sergeant	Practice Manager / Team Manager	Team Manager	Safeguarding Children Advisor	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead
3	Senior Management (Safeguarding Leads)	Inspector (or above)	Service Manager (or above)	Service Manager / Service Lead	Named Nurse or Doctor / Designated Nurse or Doctor	Designated Safeguarding Lead/ Deputy-Asst Head Teacher
4	Directors (or equivalent)	Detective Superintendent (or above)	Assistant Director	Assistant Director	Head of Safeguarding	Head Teacher
<b>Referral to ISCP</b>						
5	Resolution Meeting chaired by ISCP Chair	<b>Resolution Panel</b>				

# Islington Safeguarding Children Partnership – Escalation Procedure Flowchart

Website: [www.islingtonscop.org.uk](http://www.islingtonscop.org.uk)

Email: [Michael.Daley@islington.gov.uk](mailto:Michael.Daley@islington.gov.uk)





# Safeguarding Lead Conflict Resolution Referral Form

Section A



To be completed by referring Safeguarding Lead in consultation with practitioner.

<b>Receiving Agency</b>	
<b>Name of Practitioner:</b>	
<b>Name of Agency:</b>	
<b>Name of Safeguarding Lead:</b>	
<b>Referring Agency:</b>	
<b>Date of Referral:</b>	
<b>Name of Referrer:</b>	
<b>Agency of Referrer:</b>	
<b>Name of Safeguarding Lead:</b>	
<b>Names of Children Concerned:</b>	<b>Date of Birth:</b>

<b>Provide a brief description of concern:</b>
<b>Outcome Sought:</b>

# Safeguarding Lead Conflict Resolution Form

## Section B

To be completed by referring Safeguarding Lead.

Action Plan (to be agreed by both Safeguarding Leads)				
Issue	Agreed Action	By Whom?	By When?	Outcome (to be completed at agreed timescales)

**Resolved:** Yes/No

**Notify Head of Service:** Yes/No

### Additional Comments