

Somerset Resolving Professional Differences

Protocol for Resolving Professional
Differences in Work Relating to the
Safety of Children



CONTENTS:

THIS PARTNERSHIP
PROTOCOL CONTAINS
DETAILS OF WHAT TO
DO SHOULD YOU FEEL
THE BEST COURSE OF
ACTION TO SAFEGUARD
A CHILD IS NOT BEING
TAKEN BY ANOTHER
AGENCY.

Introduction	2
Key principles of resolving professional differences and professional responsibility	3
Process for resolving professional differences	4
Recording the professional difference and resolution	7
Monitoring the process	7
Outcomes and learning	7
FAQs	8



USEFUL RESOURCES:

[Resolving Professional Differences form](#)

[Good Practice Nomination form](#)



[Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset](#)

[Strategy Discussions - practice guidance](#)

[South West Child Protection Procedures](#)

INTRODUCTION

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a responsibility shared by all agencies. If you feel that a professional or an agency is not acting in the best interests of the child, young person or family, you have a responsibility to respectfully challenge the professional or agency.

This **Resolving Professional Differences (RPD) protocol** is applicable to all staff in Somerset agencies who work with children and families. This includes the statutory, voluntary, community and faith sectors. There are many different aspects to safeguarding children and scenarios where professionals working together may find themselves with differing views on the best course of action to effectively safeguard the child.

This protocol provides a generic resolution process which can be used at any decision-making stage in the child's journey. Local and national evidence shows that effective intervention occurs where agencies talk to each other and co-ordinate their response.

The value of exchanging ideas from different perspectives is one of many benefits of partnership working. However, disagreements may disadvantage the child or family involved if they are not resolved constructively and in a timely manner.

In most cases, issues are resolved by discussion and negotiation between the professionals concerned. Efficient resolution of differences requires the effective use of line management structures and courageous conversations in order that escalation is effective. The resolution of differences of opinion at an early stage is still the application of the protocol for resolving professional differences.



DIFFERENCES MAY ARISE IN RELATION TO:

- Quality and outcomes of assessments.
- Application of the 'Effective Support for Children and Families in Somerset' guidance or criteria for referrals.
- Roles and responsibilities of workers.
- Quality of service to a family or care planning for looked after children.
- Timeliness of interventions, information sharing and communication.
- Decisions about the need for child protection conferences.
- Decisions made at child protection conferences or strategy discussions.
- Decisions made within strategy discussions.

This list is not exclusive, and differences may arise about other matters.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF RESOLVING PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCES AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The priority of the professionals is to ensure that the child is safeguarded effectively at all times, with the welfare and safety of the child remaining paramount throughout any escalation. Professional differences must not impede the safeguarding of the child. All professionals retain ongoing responsibility for safeguarding while any professional differences are being resolved.

RESOLVING A PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCE EFFECTIVELY:

- Concerns, actions, responses and outcomes must be **clearly recorded by each agency involved** during every step of the process. Conduct your challenge in a timely way to avoid any drift or delay in supporting the child/family.
- Differences and disagreements with other agencies should be discussed with line manager/safeguarding leads and **resolved in a timely way** between practitioners/line managers where at all possible.
- All practitioners should **respect the views of others** whatever their level of experience or qualification. Working together effectively depends on an open approach between agencies with the confidence to intervene and challenge positively, and this **challenge should be welcomed** as a means of **improving outcomes** for children. Families have complex lives and effective discussion and information sharing between agencies is vital to ensure the right support is being offered.
- Professional differences are reduced where workers have **clarity about roles and responsibilities** and the ability to discuss and share problems in networking forums.
- Be clear about the **specific risk/harm to the child** and **what outcome you are seeking** for them. What support could your agency offer to be part of the solution or way forward for the child/family?

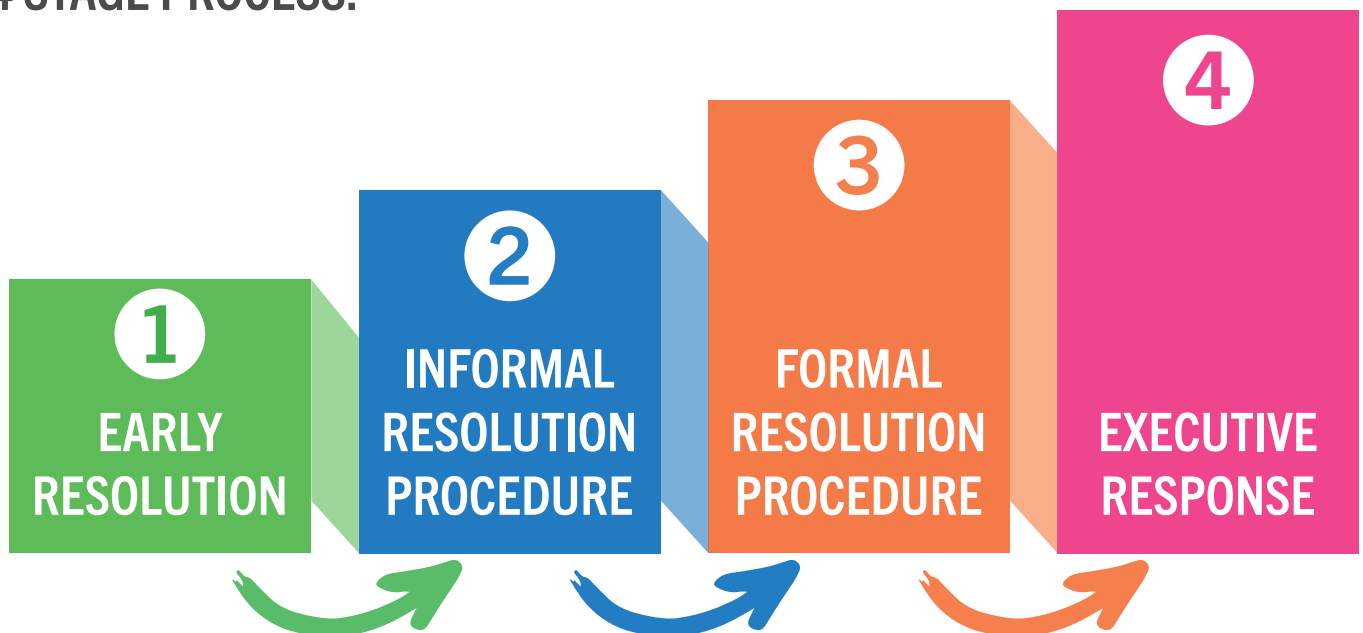


PROCESS FOR RESOLVING PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCES

The safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is paramount. If you are concerned that a child may be at risk of, or may be suffering significant harm children's social care must be contacted on 0300 123 3078

If a child is in immediate danger contact the Police on 999

4 STAGE PROCESS:



STAGE 1: EARLY RESOLUTION

1

ACTION:

Practitioner A makes contact with Practitioner B to discuss the issue which has arisen between agencies.

This could be due to the complexity of a family's situation and aims to provide clarity and try to resolve the issue through direct communication if possible.

Where it is recorded:

Practitioners A and B record this on their agency systems.

If not resolved → move to **STAGE 2**

STAGE 2: INFORMAL RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

2

ACTION:

Practitioner A's manager to make contact with practitioner B's manager for discussion in relation to the professional difference, highlighting the issue which requires resolution and the desired outcome for the child/ren.

Agree a timescale for a response from Agency B's manager if it is not possible to resolve the issue straightaway.

For the purpose of this process, the Manager referred to above will be the Safeguarding Lead (health, education, voluntary agencies), Team Leader/ Operations Manager (Children's Social Care), or Police Manager.

Where it is recorded:

Practitioner A and B's managers record this on their agency systems.

If not resolved  **move to STAGE 3**

STAGE 3: FORMAL RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

3

ACTION:

Agency A to complete the section A of the [Resolving Professional Differences form](#), with sign off by a senior manager.

Once complete, this should be sent via email to the SSCP Business Unit (SSCP@somerset.gov.uk) and Agency B. The SSCP Business Unit will advise if Agency A are unsure of who to send it to in Agency B and will log the receipt of the form for monitoring purposes.

Agency B senior manager should respond to Agency A **within 5 working days** and the Resolving Professional Differences form should be updated stating what further actions have been taken to resolve the professional difference.

A copy of the updated [Resolving Professional Differences form](#) and any other responses (e.g. email correspondence) should be sent to the SSCP Business Unit to be logged for monitoring purposes and to enable any further action required to take place.

Where it is recorded:

Resolving Professional Differences form completed and shared with Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) Business Unit.

Agency A and Agency B senior managers record this form on their systems.

If the SSCP Business Unit has not received an update from the agencies involved within 5 working days, this will be followed up to confirm whether the differences have been resolved and seek assurance on the outcome.

If not resolved → **move to STAGE 4**

STAGE 4: EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

4

ACTION:

If the professional difference cannot be resolved by senior organisational leads, then, in exceptional circumstances, either agency can request that the matter be referred to the SSCP Executive.

The Executive has the final say in this regard, and once a decision is made at Stage 4, there is no further option to appeal.

Where appropriate, the SSCP Executive may request that the SSCP Learning and Improvement subgroup reviews the case or may direct the SSCP Independent Scrutineer to compile an independent summary of the issues, along with suggested action(s).

Where it is recorded:

Recorded by Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) Business Unit.



RECORDING THE PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCE AND RESOLUTION

All steps of the process should be documented. The [Resolving Professional Differences form](#) (also listed under [USEFUL RESOURCES](#) links on page 1 of this document) should be used to accompany any professional difference raised at Stage 3 and shared with the SSCP Business Unit for onward progression to the other agency.

MONITORING THE PROCESS

The SSCP Business Unit will:

- Acknowledge receipt of all Resolving Professional Differences forms, reminding agencies of the timescales for resolution.
- Record all Resolving Professional Differences forms that it receives.
- Track the progress of Resolving Professional Differences.
- Follow up with agencies if responses are not received within 10 working days.

OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

The SSCP Business Unit will review the **themes, outcomes and learning** from Resolving Professional Differences and prepare **bi-annual reports** for the SSCP Quality and Performance subgroup.

The SSCP Quality and Performance subgroup will determine whether any actions are required as a result of the analysis of the Resolving Professional Differences forms received.

It is the responsibility of each agency representative at the SSCP Quality and Performance subgroup to ensure that key themes are being brought to the attention of the Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP).



Frequently Asked Questions:

What if I am unsure whether it is a Stage 3 Resolving Professional Differences?

If you are unsure whether your difference meets the criteria for use of the Resolving Professional Differences Protocol Stage 3 and above, then **please contact the SSCP Business Unit, at SSCP@somerset.gov.uk**, who will be able to arrange an informal consultation to discuss the matter further.

What if there is a professional difference within my agency?

If there is a professional difference within your agency, **please use your internal escalation policy or whistle blowing procedure**. It is the responsibility of all agencies to ensure that they have robust arrangements to resolve their own internal disagreements.

What if I have a complaint about conduct of an individual?

When this occurs, the relevant organisation's complaints procedure will apply. If you believe a practitioner's conduct may have harmed a child, you will need to follow your agency's allegations management policy. For more information, please see the allegations management page of the SSCP website: [Allegations Management](#)

What if something positive has happened and I want to share it as a good practice example?

You can use the **Good Practice Nomination form** to highlight the good practice of a practitioner or multi-agency group. You can find the [Good Practice Nomination form](#) listed under the **USEFUL RESOURCES** links on page 1 of this document.





This publication has been produced by the
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