

Somerset Resolving Professional Differences

Working together to get the right support for families

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



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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.

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USEFUL RESOURCES:

[Resolving Professional Differences form](#)

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



[Strategy Discussions - practice guidance](#)

[South West Child Protection Procedures](#)

INTRODUCTION

Safeguarding children is a shared duty across all agencies. When concerns arise about another professional or organisation's action or inaction, it is essential to raise them respectfully. Constructive challenge plays a key role in strengthening multi-agency collaboration and ultimately leads to better outcomes for children and families.

This protocol emphasises that safeguarding children is a shared responsibility among all professionals working with children and families in Somerset, across statutory, voluntary, community, and faith sectors.

When disagreements arise about how best to support a child, the Resolving Professional Differences (RPD) protocol provides a structured process for respectful and timely resolution at any point in the child's journey. This process promotes open communication, multi-agency collaboration, and clear escalation through management channels. The aim is to ensure that differing opinions do not delay or compromise support for the child, but instead enhance outcomes through effective partnership working and constructive dialogue.

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.**

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:

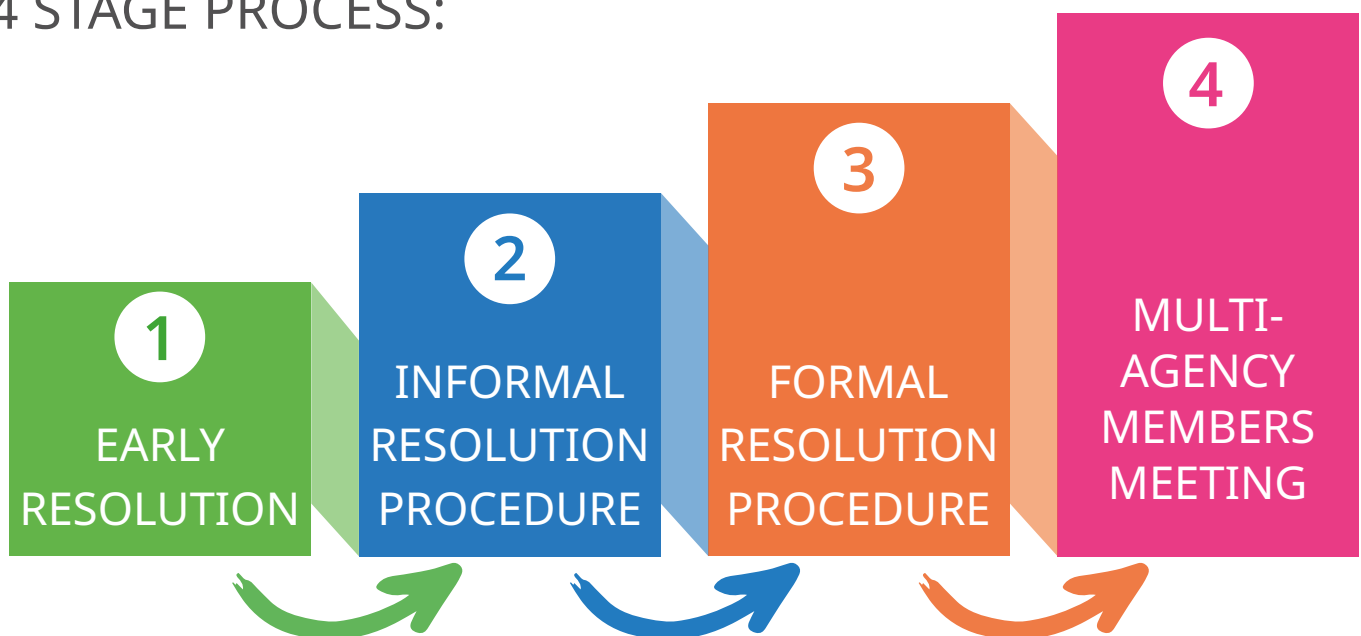
- Each agency must consistently document concerns, actions, responses, and outcomes at every stage, ensuring timely challenges are raised to prevent delays in support for the child or family.
- Professional disagreements should be addressed promptly and collaboratively through discussions with line managers or safeguarding leads, aiming to resolve them at the practitioner level wherever 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 Social Care must be contacted on 0300 123 3078

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.

Timescales:

A response should be received within 3 working days.

If not resolved → move to **STAGE 2**

STAGE 2: INFORMAL RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

2

ACTION:

Practitioner A's line manager to make contact with practitioner B's line 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.

Where it is recorded:

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

Timescales:

A response should be received within 3 working days.

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) who will forward to the relevant person in Agency B. The SSCP Business Unit will log the receipt of the form for monitoring purposes.

Agency B senior manager should arrange to meet with Agency A and provide a response within 5 working days. The Resolving Professional Differences form must be updated to reflect any further actions taken to address and resolve the professional disagreement.

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.

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.

Where it is recorded:

Resolving Professional Differences form completed and shared with Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) Business Unit who will save on internal systems.

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

Timescales:

A discussion should take place between agency managers and a formal response should be shared within 5 working days to both the referring agency and the SSCP Business Unit.

If not resolved → move to **STAGE 4**

STAGE 4: SSCP MULTI-AGENCY MEMBERS MEETING

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 for a SSCP multi-agency meeting.

The SSCP Business Unit will contact representatives from the Quality and Performance Subgroup to take part in a meeting to consider the Resolving Professional Differences form along with a summary of activity to resolve to make an informed decision on next steps.

This panel would meet to hear representations from involved parties (a representative from Agency A and Agency B, ask questions, and make a multi-agency decision. This approach aims to provide a more balanced, transparent, and effective resolution process.

Where it is recorded:

Minutes to be taken by Somerset Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP) Business Unit.

Timescales:

A meeting will be set up by the SSCP Business Unit and held within 10 working days.

The outcome of the meeting will be formally shared with the referring agency following the multi-agency discussion.

The Protocol acknowledges that in urgent or life-threatening situations, the formal process may be bypassed in favour of immediate escalation through agency management structures. If you feel this is the best course of action, you should discuss with your line manager in the first instance.

This document is for use by any agency and is a resource to support with appropriate challenge between agencies. If you are unsure who you should escalate to, please contact the SSCP Business Unit (SSCP@somerset.gov.uk) who will be able to support you with identifying the appropriate person.



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 5 working days.

OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

The SSCP Business Unit will review the themes, outcomes and learning from Resolving Professional Differences and prepare 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 share any good practice examples with the SSCP Business Unit by emailing SSCP@somerset.gov.uk, this will be fed back to the agency/agencies identified.





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