

Multi-Agency Escalation Policy

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Introduction

This policy explains how concerns and cases should be escalated to the Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) and how any issues with the application of thresholds should be resolved. It is for use by all partners in relation to inter-agency issues, so the same timescales and escalation period should apply across all agencies (although it should be noted that the structural hierarchies may be slightly different in different organisations). All professionals should feel confident and empowered to raise concerns, pursue expert consultation and call multi-agency meetings to facilitate information sharing and discussion.

This policy is not a paper exercise, instead it encourages a culture of professional curiosity, challenge and resilience as we work together to understand and agree actions to safeguard children facing complex, and at times, perplexing situations.

This policy review has been informed by recent Lambeth Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, particularly the review for Child "Angela". It will next be reviewed in May 2024.

Policy

Stage 1: Professional engagement and challenge

In cases where professionals consider a child to be at immediate risk of significant harm, concerns must be escalated to their manager/supervisor and/or safeguarding lead on the same working day.

In cases where there are concerns, but the child is not considered to be at an immediate risk of significant harm, professionals should, in the first instance, attempt to resolve differences or concerns through discussion and/or by meeting with the relevant practitioner/agency within 5 working days or a within a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

At no time should professional disagreement detract from ensuring that a child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety is paramount and all professionals and agencies are responsible for communicating such concerns as per the guidance provided in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) and the London Child Protection Procedures.

The person raising a concern must always record information about the child, a brief description of their concern and the outcome sought and a copy of it must be kept on the records of the child subject of the concern. When the concern is escalated, this written information must be provided.

Stage 2: Line Manager

If the professionals are unable to resolve the matter satisfactorily, the concern must be escalated to the practitioner's line manager within 24 hours and a resolution should be achieved within 5 working days or a within a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

Stage 3: Agency Safeguarding Leads

If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between the practitioners' line managers, the issue must be escalated to the relevant safeguarding leads for the agencies concerned within 24 hours.

Stage 4: Joint agency collaboration

The safeguarding leads must work together to consider a strategy to resolve the matter and will communicate the outcome to the individuals/agencies involved. A multi-agency meeting should be called. At this meeting, all agencies should share the information they have regarding the child and family, clearly outlining their view on the risks and opportunities they identify in safeguarding the child.

Stage 5: Head of Service

If a satisfactory resolution to the concern cannot be achieved, the safeguarding leads will escalate the matter to the Head of Service within their agency within 5 working days or a within a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).

Stage 6: Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership

In the unlikely event that the issue cannot be resolved by the steps described above and/or the discussion raises significant policy issues, the Head of Service will refer the matter to the Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership for resolution within 5 working days or less, depending on urgency.

Professionals involved in the conflict resolution process must keep contemporaneous records of any intra and inter agency discussions and actions taken and ensure that this is recorded on the child's file, together with any other written communication and information.

Circumstances where the policy is over-ridden

There are certain instances where the escalation policy described here should be over-ridden and the Director for Children's Services (DCS) and the Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership should be made immediately aware by whoever first comes to know. These are instances of:

- Child death
- Life changing injury
- Abduction of child on a Child Protection plan or in care
- Immediate threat of judicial review; or
- Imminent threat of media attention, particularly which might place a family under stress

Additional Notes

At all stages of the process, actions and decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with the relevant personnel, to include the worker who raised the initial concern. 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.

Contact details

Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership

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- Naeema Sarkar, Assistant Director (Quality Assurance), Children's Social Care, Lambeth Council
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A practice issue arises with another agency

