

BLACKPOOL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD MULTI-AGENCY STANDARDS FOR SAFEGUARDING



**BLACKPOOL
SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN BOARD**

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INTRODUCTION

Blackpool Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) recognises that no one agency or professional can effectively keep a child safe and that children are best protected when professionals are clear about what is required of them individually and how they need to work together. It is a challenging and complex area of work which requires a shared commitment, effective communication and, above all, a focus on achieving the best outcomes for the child.

These standards should be read in conjunction with the BSCB thresholds document, Keeping Children Safe in Blackpool, and outline the expectations of agencies and professionals who work with children who require a statutory child protection response. The standards reflect the requirements of Working Together 2015 and the Pan-Lancashire Policies and Procedures for Safeguarding Children Manual and will develop and change over time to ensure that they reflect statutory guidance and best practice.

The standards are an important part of the framework to deliver continuous improvement in safeguarding practice. They are intended for professionals working with children and families, but can also be used to help families understand how organisations work together to safeguard children in Blackpool.

BSCB will regularly review the standards and audit practice to test multi-agency compliance and the effectiveness of the standards and services to safeguard children.

A CHILD-CENTRED APPROACH

The needs of children are at the centre of everything we do as single agencies and a partnership and should maintain the focus of all practitioners, irrespective of their professional background.

	Expected Standard
1.	The needs of the child are at the centre of all safeguarding processes
2.	Children should be seen alone and sufficient time taken to develop their trust
3.	A 'Think Family' approach is necessary, but analysis should focus on the impact of the behaviour of the adults on the lived experiences of the child
4.	Consideration should be given to who is the best placed professional to work with the child in each situation
5.	The focus of all activity should be securing the best outcomes for the child, not the completion of processes

STRATEGY DISCUSSIONS

A multi-agency Strategy Discussion is normally held following a referral or assessment which indicates that a child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. A meeting will take place in the majority of cases as this is the most effective way to have the discussion. The purpose of a Strategy Discussion is to decide whether there are grounds for a Section 47 Enquiry.

	Expected Standard	Criteria
1.	Strategy Discussions are held whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, serious harm	The need for a Strategy Discussion may be identified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the point of referral • During an assessment • During the management of an open case
2.	If required a Strategy Discussion may take the form of a meeting	A Strategy Discussion can take the form of a series of phone calls or a multi-agency meeting (in which some attendees may participate remotely). More than one discussion or meeting may be necessary.
3.	Strategy Discussions must be attended by Children’s Social Care, health professionals and Lancashire Constabulary, together with other attendees relevant to the child’s needs and situation	Children’s Social Care will invite the agencies which hold or need to be given relevant information about the child. This will usually include the referrer. The health professional(s) most able to provide the information necessary to make effective decisions will be identified and should attend. In cases of harmful sexual behaviour (peer on peer abuse) a representative from Blackpool Young People’s Service will be invited to facilitate AIM processes. While every effort will be made to identify and facilitate the attendance of all relevant professionals this will not be allowed to unnecessarily delay the Strategy Discussion. When it is necessary to convene a strategy discussion outside office hours it is accepted that attendance may be more limited.

	Expected Standard	Criteria
4.	Strategy Discussions are timely	Strategy Discussions should be convened whenever there is cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, immediate harm. It is therefore likely that they will need to be held on the same day that the issue is identified. Processes should be expedited where it is necessary to prevent further harm to the child.
5.	Strategy Discussions will have an agenda	<p>The discussion should be used to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share available information ● Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation ● Decide whether a Section 47 enquiry should be undertaken <p>When there are grounds to initiate a Section 47 enquiry, decisions should be made as to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What further information is needed and how it will be obtained ● What immediate short term action is required to support the child ● Whether legal action is required
6.	Strategy Discussions will formulate clear actions	<p>Actions will include clear timescales and individual responsibilities, reflecting the requirements to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference (if required) within 15 working days of the Strategy Discussion.</p> <p>The means of reviewing actions will be agreed.</p>
7.	Strategy Discussions will have defined outcomes	<p>The possible outcomes can be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Initiate Section 47 enquiries ● Complete and assessment under Section 17 of the Children Act ● Undertake a Police investigation ● Take no further action or step down to appropriate early help or universal services
8.	Strategy Discussions will be recorded	Children's Social Care will produce and distribute minutes which clearly record decisions reached and actions agreed. A decision as to what information should be shared with the parents and by whom will be made.

SECTION 47 ENQUIRIES

A Section 47 Enquiry is initiated to determine whether a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm and what type of action is required to safeguard the child. It is carried out by undertaking or continuing with an existing assessment.

	Expected Standard	Criteria
1.	Children’s Social Care will undertake Section 47 Enquiries when they are statutorily required to do so.	<p>This duty applies in the following circumstances:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there is information to indicate that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm • Where a child is subject to an Emergency Protection Order (EPO) • Where a child is subject to Police Protection
2.	Section 47 Enquiries will be led by a social worker, supported by police, health and other relevant professionals	<p>Local authority social workers have a statutory duty to lead Section 47 Enquiries with the support of police, health professionals, teachers and other relevant professionals.</p> <p>In cases of peer on peer abuse the victim and perpetrator should be allocated different social workers.</p>
3.	Professionals will conduct Section 47 Enquiries in accordance with expectations for their discipline	<p>The social worker will see the child to ascertain their wishes and feelings, interview the parents and/ or carers, systematically gather information about the child and family and analyse this to determine the child’s needs and level of risk that they face.</p> <p>Other agencies will provide information relevant to their discipline e.g. information about criminal proceedings, specialist health assessments. Police actions will be in accordance with <i>Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings</i> guidelines.</p>
4.	The subject child will be seen alone by the lead social worker, all other children in the household will be directly communicated with	<p>Consideration should be given as to how best to engage the child and develop their confidence in the available time.</p> <p>It may be necessary to speak to a child victim without the knowledge of the parent or carer.</p>

	Expected Standard	Criteria
5.	Section 47 Enquiries will reach clear conclusions as to whether a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm	<p>Where concerns are substantiated an Initial Child Protection Conference should be convened. The timing of this conference should respond to the needs of the child and be within 15 working days of the strategy discussion at which the Section 47 Enquiry was initiated.</p> <p>Where concerns are not substantiated the social worker should discuss the case with the child, their parents and other professionals and determine whether other support would be useful and if the child's health and development should be re-assessed, how often and by whom.</p>
6.	The conclusions of a Section 47 Enquiry will be clearly communicated to the child, parents and all professionals involved in the strategy discussion and subsequent enquiry	<p>Professionals may be notified of the outcome of a Section 47 Enquiry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through a re-convened Strategy Discussion • Through the Initial Child Protection Conference • By individual contact <p>The record of the Section 47 Enquiry should include details of who the outcome was shared with and how.</p>
6.	Professionals are able to escalate concerns including requesting that a Child Protection Conference is convened	Professionals should initially discuss concerns with their line manager or agency safeguarding lead, before using the Pan-Lancashire Resolving Professional Disagreements process.

CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

Child Protection Conferences are convened when a child is considered to be at risk of significant harm. Conferences bring together family members (including the child, where appropriate), supporters/ advocates and those professionals involved with the child and family to plan and review how best to reduce the risk to the child.

	Expected Standard	Criteria
1.	Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) will be held whenever a child is judged to suffer, or be likely to suffer, significant harm.	<p>When one or more of the following circumstances apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Harm is caused by a person with whom the child lives or has significant contact ● Harm is due to failure on the part of the parent/ carer ● Risk to an unborn child ● Where a person posing a risk has joined or plans to join the family ● Where an application for a court order has been refused, but agencies consider risk remains ● Where a child already subject to a child protection plan moves into the authority ● Where a child protection plan was not made or ended, but circumstances have significantly changed ● A child has died as a consequence of parenting/ care received and there are other children in the household <p>The child should not already be in the care of the local authority.</p>
2.	Child Protection Conferences will be convened within required timescales	<p>The timing of all conferences should meet the needs of the child.</p> <p>ICPC must take place within 15 working days of the strategy discussion or</p> <p>The first Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) will take place within three months of the ICPC and subsequent RCPC at intervals of not more than six months (when an unborn child is made subject to a child protection plan the RCPC will take place within four weeks of their birth).</p>

	Expected Standard	Criteria
3.	Child Protection Conferences will be chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) - also known as Safeguarding Chair - who has met the child and parents in advance	<p>IROs must be social work professionals who are independent of case management.</p> <p>The same IRO should chair subsequent conferences, wherever possible.</p> <p>The IRO should meet the child and parents in advance to ensure that they understand the purpose and the process of the conference.</p>
4.	Child Protection Conferences will be attended by Children’s Social Care, health, police and education professionals, together with others appropriate to the child	<p>Invitations to attend will be extended to all professionals thought necessary for effective decision making and planning.</p> <p>The health professional best placed to contribute to the Conference should attend and may represent other health professionals.</p> <p>The timing of the Conference should maximise attendance from the family and professionals.</p>
5.	Conferences will be quorate	<p>As a minimum Conferences should be attended by Children’s Social Care and two other disciplines who have direct contact with the child or family.</p> <p>In exceptional circumstances inquorate Conferences may proceed. This may be where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fewer than three disciplines are involved ● Where sufficient information, including reports from non-attendees, is available ● Where previous Conferences have been inquorate and/ or there is unlikely to be greater attendance at a future date ● A delay will be detrimental to the child.
6.	Parents or carers will attend or be involved in Conferences	<p>The social worker should ensure that parents have sufficient information to make a meaningful contribution to the Conference.</p> <p>Professional reports should be shared with the parents by their authors 2 – 3 days prior to the Conference and only on the same day in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>Children’s Social Care will provide support services such as interpreters.</p> <p>The circumstances of the child and parents will be taken into account in the scheduling Conferences and decisions in respect of professional requests to re-schedule Conferences.</p>

	Expected Standard	Criteria
7.	All attendees will have sufficient information to participate as required	<p>Professional attendees should have sufficient expertise and knowledge to contribute effectively to the conference.</p> <p>Professionals who cannot attend should submit a written report prior to the conference and arrange for a well briefed agency representative to attend and speak to the report.</p> <p>The BSCB conference report should be used for such reports and the report should indicate what the risks are to the child</p> <p>Attendees will be provided with the time to read all reports to the Conference prior to its start.</p>
8.	The voices, wishes and feelings of the child will be central to the Conference	<p>The child must be given the opportunity to contribute to the Conference, including through attendance. Children who attend may bring a supporter or Children’s Advocate, with a referral made ahead of the ICPC or subsequent RCPC.</p> <p>The social worker will ensure that the child has sufficient information to make a meaningful contribution and provide them with the opportunity to complete a Conference pack.</p> <p>Children’s Social Care will ensure that any specific needs that the child has are addressed to allow them to participate.</p> <p>If the child is not able, or does not wish, to attend the social worker will represent their wishes.</p> <p>The social worker will provide the child with feedback on the outcomes of the Conference.</p>
9.	All Conferences will follow a set agenda	<p>The agenda will allow the Conference to hear:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The reasons why the conference is being convened ● A summary of the incidents of concern ● All available evidence obtained through Section 47 Enquiries and other assessments ● Written contributions from agencies and family members ● The views of all agencies represented at conference ● The views of the child and family members

	Expected Standard	Criteria
10.	Conferences will make a decision as to whether the threshold for a Child Protection Plan (CPP) is met and under what category	<p>All professionals will be given the opportunity to state whether they judge that the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm and therefore whether a Child Protection Plan should be made and, if so, under what category. A single category should be used taking account of the primary concern relating to the child. Multiple categorisation should be avoided.</p> <p>Where the Conference is in respect of more than one child, a separate decision should be made in respect of each child.</p> <p>The majority view of the conference will ordinarily prevail, although the Chair does have the right to overrule this.</p> <p>If any professionals or family members do not agree with the decision of the Conference this will be recorded in the minutes. Disagreements should be resolved through the Chair within the Conference wherever possible. Where a complaint cannot be resolved within a Conference professionals should follow the Resolving Professional Disagreements Process and family members should follow the Complaints process.</p>
11.	Conference attendees will agree the required Plan when the threshold is met	<p>When the Conference reaches the decision that the threshold for a Child Protection Plan is met, the Conference should decide what outline plan would be most appropriate to meet the needs of the child while providing the required safeguards.</p> <p>This outline plan should focus on drawing out the high risk indicators present within the family that are leading to unmet need</p> <p>This may not necessarily mean a Child Protection Plan and alternatives, particularly a Child in Need plan, should be fully considered.</p> <p>The contents of the outline plan should be clearly explained to the parents/ carers.</p>

	Expected Standard	Criteria
12.	Conferences will agree core group members and the dates of subsequent meetings	<p>A children’s social care social worker will be the lead professional and carry statutory responsibility for the child’s welfare.</p> <p>Core Group membership should include all professionals who have responsibility for the completion of the detailed child protection plan which should be formulated at the first core group.</p> <p>The first Core Group will be within ten working days of the Conference and subsequent meetings at no more than four weekly intervals.</p> <p>This first core group will focus on looking at the high risk indicators identified at the ICPC and formulating agreed actions to reduce this risk. This should say what the impact on the child(ren) will look like if risk is reduced</p> <p>Parents need to be clear about what the high risk indicators are, and why these are the most worrying factors within the family and why</p> <p>The dates for all core groups and the Review Conference will be set at the CPC.</p>
13.	When the threshold for a Child Protection Plan is not met Conferences will consider what plans may be necessary to support the child	<p>The need for a Child in Need or Early Help plan must be considered and, if agreed, the contents of outline plans and meeting dates agreed.</p> <p>Informed parental consent will be necessary for either plan.</p>
14.	Conferences for unborn children will be held in accordance with the Pre-Birth Protocol	<p>The specific timings set out in the Pre-Birth Protocol, which is available on the Pan-Lancashire Policies and Procedures website, must be adhered to. This includes situations in which the unborn child is being considered in conjunction with older siblings.</p>
15.	All attendees will have the knowledge and support to appeal against the decisions of a Conference	<p>All family members and professional attendees will be provided with written information as to how to appeal against the decision of a Child Protection Conference</p> <p>In the first instance, it is expected, that concerns will be voiced within the Conference and that the IRO will attempt to resolve it immediately.</p> <p>Complaints may be in respect of conference processes, decisions or that inaccurate information was presented or further information is now available.</p> <p>The full complaints process is included on the Pan-Lancashire Policies and Procedures website.</p>

REPORTS TO CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

Reports will be requested from all agencies involved with a child prior to all Child Protection Conferences.

	Expected Standard	Criteria
1.	Reports by professionals will be submitted no later than 48 hours prior to the Conference.	Reports are required whether or not the professional is able to attend the Conference and should be submitted, even if only to note that the agency has not had the expected contact with the child or family member.
2.	All professional reports will be shared with parents or carers and, if appropriate, with the child before the Conference.	Reports should be shared with the parents or carers by the authors prior to their attending the Conference. Parents or carers will receive all reports as part of the Conference pack, but should have seen them beforehand to prevent any 'surprises'.
3.	Reports by professionals will be written in a standard format on the BSCB template agreed.	A pro-forma will be sent out with the Conference invitation and is also available on the BSCB website.
4.	Reports will be evidence based and analytical and refer to protective factors, high risk indicators and their impact on the child. Parental capacity to change if understood should be included covering observations around parental engagement with agencies when concerns have been raised	The centre of all analysis should be the impact of known factors on the lived experience of the child. This should include observations of the child and any parent/child engagement seen All conclusions drawn should have clear reference to their supporting evidence.
5.	Reports will be written in a manner that can be understood by the parents or carers and, if appropriate, the child.	Any potential issues regarding the accessibility of reports by parents or carers (e.g. due to them not speaking English, or as a consequence of a disability) should be raised with the Conference Chair at the earliest possible opportunity to allow appropriate measures to be taken.
6.	Reports and other documents will be securely transmitted	Reports will ordinarily be submitted by email. All professionals must comply with their own agency's policies for the secure transmission of data.

CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE MINUTES

A record of the Child Protection Conference will be sent to all families and professionals who will have the opportunity to make representations.

	Expected Standard	Criteria
1.	The decisions of the Conference will be outlined in a Conference decision sheet	<p>The Decision sheet, via the Chair’s Report, will be available within 1 working day to all those invited to attend the conference, including parents or carers.</p> <p>It will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The decision of the conference • If a Child Protection Plan has been made the name of the lead social worker and core group membership • If a Child in Need plan has been made the name of the lead professional
2.	Conference minutes will be distributed within agreed timescales	<p>The Conference minutes will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sent to all professionals who were invited to attend • Distributed within 15 working days of the Conference • Made available in a format that the parents or carers and child, where appropriate, can understand
3.	All parties have the right to request amendments to the minutes	<p>Requested amendments should be submitted to the Conference Chair within 20 working days of receipt of the minutes.</p> <p>The Chair may agree to the amendments at this point, or may raise the request at the subsequent Review Child Protection Conference.</p>
4.	Conference minutes are confidential	<p>Minutes should be stored securely in accordance with individual agency’s information governance policies.</p> <p>Minutes are confidential and should not be passed to third parties without the consent of the Chair, or by a Court Order.</p>

CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

Each child who is considered to have suffered, or be likely to suffer, significant harm must have a Child Protection Plan. A Child Protection Plan will address the risk factors that were identified at the Child Protection Conference. An outline plan will be agreed at the Child Protection Conference and developed by the Core Group.

	Expected Standard	Criteria
1.	The purpose of the Child Protection Plan will be clearly understood by all parties.	<p>The overall aims of a Child Protection Plan are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that the child is safe and prevent him or her from suffering further harm ● Promote the child’s welfare, health and development ● Support the family to safeguard the welfare of the child, provided it is in the child’s best interests and focus on reducing the high risk indicators that have been identified ● The plan CANNOT eradicate risk but should be about reducing the risk to a level where the impact to the child does not constitute significant harm
2.	Actions will be SMART and address risk	<p>The Child Protection Plan should at the first core group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set out what work needs to be done to reduce the high risk indicators why, when and by whom ● Set out expected and achievable child-focussed outcomes i.e. what this reduced risk will look like for the child and the strategies by which they will be achieved ● Have regard for the availability of resources ● Identify when and in what situations the social worker will see the child, both alone and with family members present ● What assessments specialist or otherwise may be required including a full understanding of parental capacity to change ● Include contingencies for foreseeable changes in circumstances

	Expected Standard	Criteria
3.	The Child Protection Plan will be shared and agreed with the parents or carers	<p>The parents or carers and, if appropriate, child should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about the evidence of significant harm which resulted in the Child Protection Plan, what needs to change and what is expected of them. This should relate to the identified high risk indicators • Receive a written copy of the plan in their preferred language or format that makes clear what is expected of them
4.	All parties will implement actions within agreed timescales and, if this is not possible, report it to the social worker and Core Group at the earliest opportunity	<p>It is the responsibility of the named lead professional for each action to ensure that it is delivered within agreed timescales and to take action if this is not possible.</p> <p>When it is clear that the agreed aims of the Child Protection Plan are not being met, the social worker will discuss the case with their team manager to agree next steps which will be shared with the Core Group</p>

CORE GROUPS

The Core Group’s task, through the Child Protection Plan is to reduce the risks, or prevent the occurrence of further significant harm to the child, to the point where the child no longer requires a Child Protection Plan.

	Expected Standard	Criteria
1.	Core Group membership is appropriate to the needs of the child and their situation	<p>The Core Group should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lead social worker • Parents or carers and other significant family members • Professionals who have direct contact with the child and family • Other specialists necessary for the delivery of the Child Protection Plan
2.	Core Groups are held within agreed timescales	<p>The first Core Group meeting must be held within ten working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference, although consideration may be given to holding it immediately after the Conference.</p> <p>Thereafter the Core Group should meet as frequently as is necessary to discharge its function, but not more than four weekly.</p>
3.	Core Groups will be held at a time and venue that promotes attendance by the parents or carers and, where appropriate, the child	<p>It is the responsibility of the lead social worker to schedule Core Group Meetings and ensure that agencies are aware of the dates for these meetings.</p> <p>Parents or carers should be given the opportunity to set the time and venue of each meeting. Their request should be followed unless there is a good reason not to do so.</p>
4.	Changes to the time or venue should be clearly communicated to all parties in advance	<p>Core Group meetings are expected to go ahead as scheduled. Any changes made must remain within expected timescales.</p> <p>Changes should only be made after consultation with the parents or carers and, if appropriate, child.</p> <p>Agencies should raise any issues relating to not being invited to core groups as soon as possible with their safeguarding lead and with the service manager within Children’s social care</p> <p>All Core Group members should be contacted, in advance, to notify them of any changes to the time or venue of meeting.</p>

	Expected Standard	Criteria
5.	Family members and, where appropriate, children will be supported to attend and engage in Core Groups	Core group venues will be accessible and the needs of all attending will be catered for. Family members attending a Core Group for the first time will be prepared by the social worker and the purpose of the meeting explained.
6.	Core Group members must prioritise their attendance at Core Groups meetings and ensure a consistency in group members	Regard should be given to professional's availability in the setting of meeting times. When a professional is not able to attend they should provide an update as to their contact with the child and family members and progress toward actions for which they are responsible. They should ensure that a suitably briefed and qualified professional attends in their place. Attendance at Core Group Meetings is subject to BSCB audits.
7.	Core Group meetings are ordinarily chaired by the social worker and minutes should be taken by another professional attendee	Core Group members should share responsibility for taking minutes of meetings over the life of the Child Protection Plan. Handwritten notes should be taken on the template available on the BSCB website and passed to the social worker at the end of the meeting.
8.	An up to date version of the Child Protection Plan should be available to each Core Group meeting	The social worker is responsible for providing all attendees with a copy of the Plan.
9.	Core Groups should ensure that the Child Protection Plan is delivered and achieves lasting change	The focus of the Core Group should be about reducing the risk as identified at the conference for the child. The success, or otherwise, of actions should be judged by their outcomes and not the completion of processes.
10.	The minutes of the Core Group should be distributed in line with required timescales	Core Group meeting minutes will be distributed within ten working days. Any disagreements between family members and/or professionals should be recorded within the minutes. Where resolution cannot be achieved within the Core Group the Resolving Professional Disagreements Process should be followed.
11.	Contact visits by the social worker and Core Group members to the child and/or family members will be purposeful and take place within agreed timescales	The frequency of visits must be detailed within the Child Protection Plan and must never exceed intervals of four weeks. The child must be seen alone at each visit and a baby awake. Refusal or avoidance of contact with the child must be viewed as a serious breach of the Child Protection Plan and must be escalated by the lead social worker to their manager. Records of contact should include verbatim records of what the child said.