



Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together Partnership



WST Escalation Policy

(for the Resolution of Professional Disagreements relating to safeguarding adults with care and support needs and safeguarding children)

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 Occasionally situations arise when workers within one agency feel that the actions, inaction or decisions of another agency do not adequately safeguard a child or an adult with care and support needs. The purpose of this protocol is to ensure that in such situations issues between agencies are resolved in a timely manner.
- 1.2 Professional disagreements will sometimes arise over another professional's decisions, actions or lack of actions in relation to a referral, an assessment or an enquiry which are considered to be unsafe. Disagreements can be healthy and foster creative ways of working with children, adults with care and support needs and families. **However, disagreements always require resolution.**
- 1.3 **The safety and wellbeing of a child or adult with care and support needs must be the paramount consideration at all times and professional differences must not detract from timely and clear decision- making.** All professionals working with children, adults with care and support needs and families have a duty to act assertively and proactively to ensure the individuals' welfare is seen as a priority at all levels of professional activity.
- 1.4 It is also incumbent on the professionals involved to ensure that problems are resolved within the shortest timescale possible to protect the individual. Agencies should therefore exercise their judgment as to whether the timelines outlined in this protocol need to be achieved more quickly.
- 1.5 It is the responsibility of all professionals to initiate a challenge to actions, inaction or the decisions made by other agencies where they believe there is evidence to suggest that the health, development, well-being or safety of a child or adult with care and support needs may be compromised.
- 1.6 When using this protocol, professionals should be reminded that this document outlines the process for resolving multi-agency disputes arising from actions, inaction or decisions that are believed not to be in the best interest of a child, adult with care and support needs and/or family, or which is likely to place an individual/family at increased risk of harm. This is not a protocol to address single/ inter-agency disputes, or complaints about individual practice. These should be channelled through single agencies internal processes and/or complaints procedures.
- 1.7 Agencies are also reminded that single agency policies in relation to dispute resolution should make reference to, and direct professionals to the use of this document.

Key Principles:

Professionals should:

1. Share key information appropriately and often
2. The aim must be to resolve a professional disagreement at the earliest possible stage, as swiftly as possible, always keeping in mind that the safety and welfare of a child, young person or adult with care and support needs is paramount. Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together Partnership (WST) encourages partners to seek resolution as soon as possible and a suggested timeframe is detailed further on in this policy.
3. Recognise that professional challenge can be facilitated through consistent communication and information sharing between agencies, and through clear plans for children, adults with care and support needs and families. Professionals should also strive to know which other agencies and individual staff members are involved with the child or adult with care and support needs, and their family.
4. Avoid disputes which place children or adults with care and support needs at further risk by obscuring the focus on the individual which delay decision-making.
5. Liaise with the safeguarding lead in their organization at the earliest opportunity. Clarity is expected from all agencies in respect of designated roles and responsibilities.
6. Keep the focus on the safety and welfare of the child or adult with care and support needs at all times.
7. Familiarise themselves with the routes within their own agency for escalation and resolution.
8. Ensure that at all stages of the process, accurate actions and decisions are recorded (on the file) and shared with relevant personnel (including the worker who raised the initial concern). This must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.
9. If the process highlights gaps in policies, procedures and/or processes, they must be brought to the attention of the agency representative on the Safeguarding Children/Adult Partnership who will inform the Chair of Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together Partnership.
10. Stay proactively involved; safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
11. Use the WST dispute resolution process set out at section 4.

2 The Role of Professionals and Agencies

- 2.1 Professionals providing services to children, adults with care and support needs and families should work co-operatively across all agencies. Effective partnership working relies on open and honest relationships and clear communication between staff from different agencies.
- 2.2 WST expects members of staff working directly with children, adults with care and support needs, and their families to share information appropriately in line with national and local guidance and to work to plans agreed in all relevant forums (case discussions, meetings and conferences) to safeguard children and adults with care and support needs in the local area.
- 2.3 Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults with care and support needs is a responsibility shared by all agencies. Whilst the Local Authority is allocated a 'lead' role in co-ordinating responses to risk, or causes, of significant harm to children or adults with care and support needs, effective intervention is dependent upon inter - agency information sharing, planning and multi-agency service responses.
- 2.4 Problem solving is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children and adults with care and support needs. The WST expects all agencies to adopt a proactive approach towards problem solving which enables professional disagreements to be resolved as close to front line practice as possible.
- 2.5 All agencies are responsible for ensuring that their staff are competent and supported to escalate appropriately any inter-agency concerns and disagreements about the safety or wellbeing of a child or adults with care and support needs.
- 2.6 The process of resolution, where difficulties or disagreements arise between agencies, should be kept as simple as possible. The aim, where possible, is to resolve difficulties quickly and without delay at a professional practitioner level.
- 2.7 Professionals' actions should always be based on a robust assessment of the risk of harm to the child or adult with care and support needs and the impact of the given situation on the individual's wellbeing. Decisions and actions should be commensurate with the risks posed to the child or adult with care and support needs. Whilst this protocol sets out expected timescales within which matters should be escalated where an inter-agency disagreement has arisen, in some situations it may be necessary to act sooner to protect a child or adult with care and support needs. The timescales indicated should not be a reason for delaying action.
- 2.8 If a child or adult with care and support needs is thought to be at immediate risk of harm the designated safeguarding lead within the agency identifying the concern should be informed immediately. The designated safeguarding lead should inform the Wolverhampton Multi -Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on 01902 555392 (for children) or 551199 (for adults).
- 2.9 Each staff member is responsible for recording professional conversations and decision-making in line with the case recording protocols and procedures in each agency or setting. The professionals

involved in the resolution process must accurately and contemporaneously record each intra- and inter-agency discussion they have and approve and date the record.

- 2.10 Where the disagreement involves actions in relation to an individual child or adult with care and support needs, a record of the intra - and inter - agency discussion and any other written communication should be placed on the individual's record.

3 Situations where Disagreement and Dispute may arise

3.1 With the publication of WSCB's multi-agency Thresholds of Need and Support document, the safeguarding criteria within the Care Act 2014 for adults and the introduction of the MASH as the front-door to Children's services and Adult and safeguarding, it is likely that there will be fewer disputes around thresholds to support for children, adults with care and support needs and families.

3.2 However, occasions may arise where one professional disagrees with the actions of another professional and therefore in such cases this policy should be followed.

- Where one professional disagrees with the action of another in relation to a particular course of action, such as closing involvement with a child, or adult with care and support needs or family.
- Where one worker or agency considers that another worker or agency has not completed an agreed action for no understandable or acceptable reason.
- Where one agency considers that the threshold for action is inappropriate to support the needs of a child or adult with care and support needs and /or places an individual at further risk.
- A disagreement as to whether a particular agency needs to be involved in the safeguarding process.
- Where a member of staff or an agency considers that the safeguarding needs of the child or adult with care and support needs are better met by a Child Protection Plan/adult safeguarding plan and have requested that a Child Protection Conference/safeguarding meeting be called and feel that this has been refused.
- Where a range of professionals have concerns about an agency's response to safeguarding concerns relating to a specific child or adult with care and support needs.
- There is disagreement over the sharing of information and/or provision of services.

4. Process for Resolution and Escalation

Professionals should attempt to resolve differences through discussion within **10 working days** or a timescale that protects the child or adult with care and support needs from harm (whichever is shortest).

Stage No.	Parties involved	Process	Duration	Cumulative Duration
1	Practitioners	Upon disagreement in relation to the safeguarding needs of a child or adult with care and support needs, in the first instance the professional from the other agency should raise the matter with the relevant practitioner verbally and in writing within 2 working days of the disagreement or receipt of a decision.	2 days	2 days
		<p>The professional should provide clear evidence-based reasons for their disagreement. The receiving agency must read and review the particular case file. They must speak to the disputing practitioner and attempt to find a mutually agreeable way forward within 3 working days. Where a resolution is reached the responsible worker will advise the agency of the outcome in writing (i.e. email) within a further 2 working days</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: yellow; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>WHEN ANY PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERS A CHILD OR ADULT WITH CARE AND SUPPORT NEEDS IS AT IMMEDIATE RISK OF SIGNIFICANT HARM, THEN THE INDIVIDUAL MUST ENSURE THEIR CONCERNS ARE ESCALATED ON <u>THE SAME WORKING DAY</u> USING ESTABLISHED SAFEGUARDING PROCEDURES.</p> </div>	2 days	5 days
2	Line/ Team Managers	If the receiving agency practitioner and the disputing practitioner are unable to resolve the disagreement following exploration of	2 days	7 days

Stage No.	Parties involved	Process	Duration	Cumulative Duration
		the facts, each practitioner should raise their concerns with their respective manager or named lead for safeguarding, who should attempt to resolve the differences within 2 working days . If agreement is reached, the receiving agency will write to the disputing agency confirming the outcome within a further 2 working days		
3	Service/Senior Managers	<p>If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between the line managers, the issue must be referred in writing within 24 hours to the relevant senior manager or other designated professional. The relevant managers should engage in dialogue within 2 working days to resolve the issue.</p> <p>A senior manager from any agency can request that a Child Protection Conference be convened. In such circumstances; contact must be made to the Safeguarding Manager (Children's) in the Safeguarding Service (01902 550477) and followed up in writing with the supporting evidence for this request. Any such requests must be given serious consideration by the Safeguarding Manager and a response provided in writing. Any request that is supported by a Senior Manager or Named Professional or Designated Professional, will normally be agreed.</p>	3 days	10 days
4	Director/Assistant Directors	Where a resolution is still not agreed after Stage 3, the service/senior manager will raise the disagreement within a further 2 working days with their agency or sector's WSCB WST representative. Their WST representative (or a senior manager	4 days	14 days

Stage No.	Parties involved	Process	Duration	Cumulative Duration
		<p>delegated by the WSCB WST rep) will then write to their equivalent in the agency that is the subject of the dispute and meet within a further 2 working days to achieve a final resolution</p> <p>Exceptional Circumstances</p> <p>WST expects that professional disputes will be resolved within the first 3 stages of the process set out above, however, it is recognised that there may be occasions when some issues will remain unresolved at the end of stage 3 above. Where this is the case, a referral should be made for the attention of the WST Independent Chair¹, who will mediate the activities through to a resolution</p>		

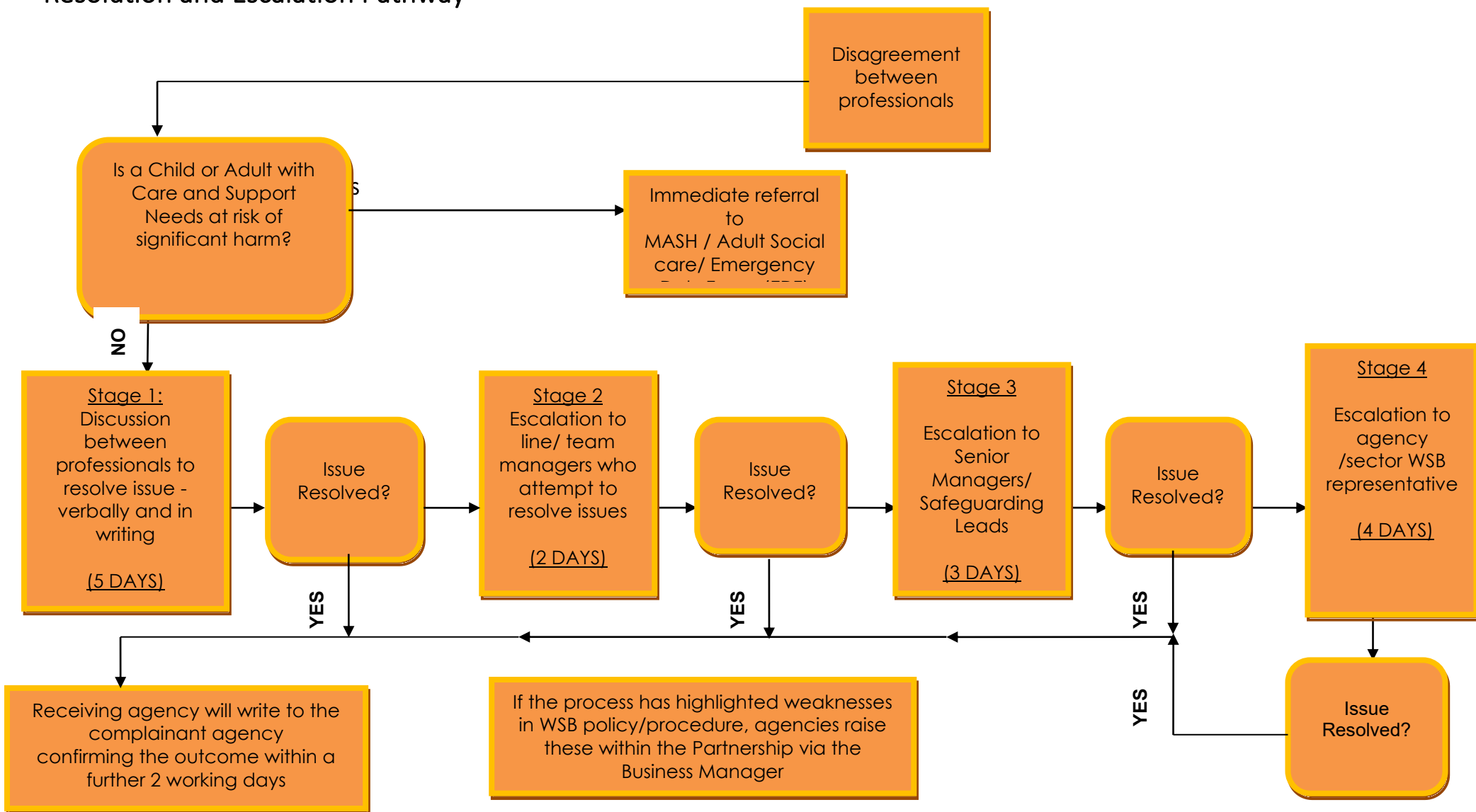
Following use of Resolution and Escalation Process:

It may be useful for individuals to debrief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships.

¹ In exceptional circumstances only, where the matter remains unresolved and the concerns of the complaining agency persist, the Director of this agency should write immediately and within no more than **2 working days**, to the WST Chair, via the WST Business Manager. The Chair will seek written representation initially and may request a meeting with those involved at all levels of service delivery to seek their views and solutions to the concerns raised. The Chair will make a final and binding decision on the most appropriate way to proceed and this will be communicated to all involved within **5 working days** of the issue being brought to his/her attention. Alternatively, the Chair will identify a partnership member from an uninvolved agency to chair a meeting of the most senior managers with operational responsibility for the case. This meeting will review the issues at hand and provide a final opportunity for the involved agencies to ensure that there is a full understanding of the issues before the decision is finalised. The chair of this meeting will report back to the WSCB Independent Chair.

Appendix 1

Resolution and Escalation Pathway



WST Membership & Agency Representing Safeguarding Leads

Agency	Role	Contact Details
Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust	Strategic Lead for Safeguarding Children and Adults	01902 446609
CAFCASS	Head of Practice	07920711365
Children in Need and Child Protection/MASH	Head of Service	01902 553039
Children with Disabilities	Head of Service	01902 555377
City of Wolverhampton Council	Head of Safeguarding	01905 550477
City of Wolverhampton College	Student Service Director	01902 836000
Early Intervention	Head of Service	01902 551272
Education- Wolverhampton	Primary Head	01902 558570
	Secondary & Special Head	01902 558350
	Independent Lead	01902 341230
Education Psychology	Principal Educational Psychologist	01902 550539
Looked After Children	Head of Service	01902 550182
Probation	NPS – Midlands - Interim Head of Probation, Walsall/Wolverhampton Cluster	01922 618501
Public Health	Head of Service	01902 551372
Safer Wolverhampton Partnership	Head of Service	01902 555300
Specialist Support Services – Children	Head of Service	01902 555955
Voluntary and Community Sector VCS rep	YOW Co-ordinator	01902 328985
West Midlands Police	Detective Chief Inspector	101
Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group	Designated Senior Nurse for Safeguarding	01902 444775
Wolverhampton NHS Trust	Head of Safeguarding - RWT	01902 695163
Youth Offending Team	Head of Service	01902 553722

For direct contact details please contact: wst@wolverhampton.gov.uk or tel: 01902 550645