

Strategy Discussions: Guidance

Purpose, timing and attendance

Strategy discussions should be held when there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer **significant harm**.

- The strategy meeting should include all key agencies (health, police, education) and collate information from other sources (about both children and adults), such as adult social care, mental health, drugs and alcohol, YOS, housing, etc, if they cannot attend. The meeting should include the professional referrer.
- The attendance of partners should be weighed against the urgency of the individual meeting. It is essential that as much information as possible is obtained from all relevant sources to inform the strategy discussion.
- The strategy discussion/meeting should be held within 24 hours unless there is no immediate risk of significant harm and, by holding it later, fuller information would become available, for example concerning fabricated and induced illness or historic sexual abuse.
- Strategy meetings should always include key professionals but there may be occasions when immediate safeguarding decisions have to be made and a telephone conversation between Police and Childrens Services will suffice. This should be followed up with a formal strategy discussion so that all agencies can participate in information sharing and longer term decision making.
- A strategy discussion should be used to share information, agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation and decide whether enquiries under s47 of the Children Act 1989 should be undertaken.
- Any strategy discussion/ meeting planned or held on a Friday, should be held as early as possible to enable timely interventions by either children's social care or the Police and avoid situations that may lead to services not being available. Outside of normal working hours the EDT should have a strategy discussion with the Police on call and a fuller discussion with all partners can then happen during office hours. EDT can start S47 actions if required.

Content

Strategy discussions should be chaired by a Team Manager and should record the following key information:

- Why a strategy discussion is being held – specific details about the concern/incident and clear understanding of how the information was shared and by whom
- Summary of information available from relevant agencies
- Clear threshold decision as to why threshold for s47 has, or has not, been met
- Clear detailed plan of how the s47 investigation, if required, will be carried out. All actions must be 'SMART': it must be clear who is doing what, and the timescale for action.
- Record any disagreements from partner agencies and any escalation taken
- By who and when will parents be informed if they are not aware of the concerns. There should be clear understanding that, if there is a protective parent, we should be working in partnership even if under s47, unless to do so would impact on a criminal investigation or increase the risk to a child. Whilst enquiries might start without parental consent, this should be obtained as soon as practicable without compromising any investigation. If the

strategy meeting decides to proceed without parental consent, the rationale for this must be clearly recorded.

- For all family members whether there are any communication/language needs or cultural considerations to ensure interviews can be effective

The strategy discussion (and recording) should also cover the following areas:

Child:

- Who will see child, when will this happen and where. What factors should be considered regarding engaging with the child ie; language needs/disability, etc
- Develop a clear plan for the interview, including location/setting and respective roles if joint interview.
- Whether they are able to give their own, informed consent to being interviewed (consider age and competency)
- If ABE required: when and where. If not, why not required. Consider implications for ABE if child may have been filmed by perpetrator.
- Clear rationale if medical required: when/where will it happen. If not, why not required.
- If legal action/advice is required; record advice received and subsequent discussion with manager regarding next steps

Siblings: whether siblings are also subjects of the strategy discussion and s47 investigation. If not, why, and what intervention do they require and why.

Adults:

- How concerns will be addressed with alleged perpetrator/protective carer.
- What are the arrangements for any criminal investigation
- What information can be shared with the family

Staff Safety: Consider whether there is any information that raises concern about staff safety and if so how this will be managed

LADO: Consider whether there is a need to consult with LADO. If the perpetrator works with children or vulnerable adults then need to advise relevant team. If a Looked After Child then the Head of Service, 14-25 must be notified immediately.

Progressing the Investigation

- Once the investigation is underway, it is essential that social workers (and the Police, if joint) have ongoing discussions with their line manager regarding next steps as the case unfolds
- Any disagreement between the social worker and the police officer (or any other professional involved in the investigation) must immediately be brought to the respective line managers' attention for discussion/resolution.

The plan made at the strategy meeting / discussion should also reflect the requirement that any Initial Child Protection Conference should be held within 15 working days of the strategy meeting / discussion. To ensure the conference is in time the request must be submitted within 5 days. If there have been more than one meeting, the timescale starts from the one at which it was decided to initiate the enquiry. In exceptional circumstances, such as Fabricated and Induced illness, enquiries will be more complicated and may require more than one strategy discussion.

If the strategy meeting / discussion concludes that a further strategy meeting / discussion is required, then a clear timescale should be set and be subject to regular review by the social work

manager bearing in mind the safety of the child at all times.

The actions agreed as part of the strategy discussion should be in SMART format such that they are clear about who is doing what and the timescales for action. They should also include contingency plans should things not develop as anticipated.

If the conclusion of the strategy discussion is that there is no cause to pursue the s47 enquiry then consideration should be given to continuing the multi-agency assessment to establish the needs of the child for any Early Help or family support services as a Child in Need.