

Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Resolving Professional Differences

April 2025



Introduction & purpose

We know that practitioners from all agencies, across the Partnership, want the best for children, young people and families. On occasion, a desire to get it right for them will mean disagreement between practitioners or agencies. This document sets out an approach for managing difference of opinion between agencies within the Partnership. There are separate single-agency policies for managing disagreements within your own agency and for whistle-blowing.

This is more than an escalation procedure and should be seen as an approach to resolving different professional views, within the context of 'Building Support for Children and Families' and with a clear focus on getting it right for children, young people and families. This document replaces all previous PSCP/PSCB escalation/resolution policies.

The vast majority of the time, professional differences will be resolved through the direct line management arrangements of the professionals involved. It will be exceptional that a disagreement will need to be progressed further than this.

A well-functioning Partnership should expect to have professional differences and should create a culture where these differences can be discussed and resolved in a helpful way that always remains focused on outcomes for children and young people. Safeguarding is not a science and there will always be discussion and debate about the best way of achieving what we want for children, young people and families.

We should be seeking, across the Partnership, to resolve professional differences within the same frameworks that we use to work with families; we should be seeking to work restoratively 'with' each other; we should be trauma-informed in our language and approach, and we should be seeking a discussion and resolution at the earliest opportunity.

Successful resolution relies on a culture that is best characterised as 'confident humility' – that balance, on the one hand, between people and organisations being skilled, expert, trained and confident and, on the other, the appreciation that no-one knows everything or holds all the answers, that different perspectives add depth and understanding and that everyone can get it wrong, at times.

At an organisational level, this means:

- Senior leaders in all partner agencies will need to lead this policy by example and demonstrate and model the behaviours needed for it to be successfully embedded into the local culture.
- Professional differences about safeguarding responses are to be welcomed and their resolutions are considered likely to improve outcomes for children.
- There is an expectation that there is a collective responsibility for problem solving regardless of where the specific issue lies.
- That external mediation can be useful, when needed, and can be provided by another partner agency best suited to the issue.

At an individual level, this means:

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- Ensuring that only the best interests of children and young people drives the professional difference.
- Concerns have been thought through with senior safeguarding leads.
- Differences are raised with respectfulness, balance and clarity.
- That clear evidence is provided or if it is a 'gut feeling', say it is and own it as such.
- Understanding any personal motivation that might be driving the difference of view.
- Understand where there might be an over identification with one family member at the expense of another.
- Tenacity is not the same as stubbornness or inflexibility.

It does not mean:

- 'And another thing' – saving up complaints or concerns.
- Complaining to colleagues not the source of the concern.
- Blaming frontline staff for organisational 'failings'.
- Silence.
- Refusing to listen to, or reject out of hand, answers provided.

Professionals raising issues with each other can almost always result in an agreed way forward. When they do not, there is an expectation that resolution will be sought manager to manager and that this continues up the hierarchies, until a resolution is reached. If necessary, this should be up to and include the senior managers and strategic leaders in partner agencies.

The majority of the agencies are represented, either directly or indirectly, on the Partnership's Multi-Agency Performance and Quality Assurance subgroup (MAPQA). This protocol requires that all instances of professional difference going beyond frontline managers (reaching stage four or above) should be reported to the MAPQA.

The MAPQA will therefore have as a standing item at every meeting to report on professional differences and case resolutions to ensure there is an overview of areas of challenge. Understanding the pattern of professional difference and case resolutions is an important part of gauging the health of the system. Of equal, if not greater importance, will be the need to understand the lack of case resolutions being reported as that might indicate a lack of appropriate challenge and 'grit' in the system.

The protocol

Stage one – seeking supervision within own agency:

Any practitioner who feels that a decision is not safe or is inappropriate should initially consult a safeguarding lead/supervisor/manager within their own agency to clarify their thinking to identify the problem; to be specific as to what the difference of view is about; outline any actions to date that may already or potentially impact on this decision and what they aim to achieve. They should also be able to evidence the nature and source of their concerns and should keep a record of all discussions on the appropriate child/family record.

Stage two – practitioner to practitioner:

Initial attempts should be taken to seek a resolution to any differences, at the earliest opportunity and with those practitioners directly involved with a family. This would normally be between the people who disagree. It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may

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affect the confidence of some practitioners to pursue this if unsupported. A record of this discussion and the outcome should be recorded by both agencies on the appropriate child/family record.

Stage three – frontline manager to frontline manager:

If the difference of view is not resolved at stage two, then the concerned practitioner should contact their supervisor or manager within their own agency who should raise the concerns with the equivalent supervisor or manager in the other agency/agencies as appropriate. A record of this discussion and the outcome should be recorded by both agencies on the appropriate child/family record, being clear that this has happened between managers. This evidences an appropriate level of challenge and management oversight for this child/family.

Stage four – senior manager to senior manager:

If the difference of view is not resolved at stage three, the supervisor or manager reports to their respective service manager, operations manager, head of service or named/designated safeguarding representative (senior manager). The appropriate senior managers must attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion. The senior manager should also notify the PSCP MAPQA by completing this [form](#). The PSCP will review and keep a record of all professional differences that reach this stage. A record of this discussion and the outcome should be recorded by both agencies on the appropriate child/family record, being clear that this has happened between senior managers. This evidences an appropriate level of challenge and senior management oversight for this child/family.

Stage five – strategic leader to strategic leader:

If the difference of view is not resolved at stage four, the senior manager identified at stage four reports to their service director/strategic leader. The appropriate service director or strategic leader must attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion. The service director or strategic leader should also notify the PSCP MAPQA by completing this [form](#). The PSCP Business Unit will review and keep a record of all professional differences that reach this stage. A record of this discussion and the outcome should be recorded by both agencies on the appropriate child/family record, being clear that this has happened between service directors /strategic leaders. This evidences an appropriate level of challenge and strategic oversight for this child/family.

Timescales

Some matters may be resolved very quickly, and this will be determined locally by the complexity of the issues. In all situations, the matter should be resolved within specified timescales, and the primary focus will be on ensuring that the safety and welfare of the child concerned is assured whilst discussions take place. Nobody should step away from supporting a child or young person whilst seeking a resolution to any professional differences.

At each stage, a resolution should be sought within 5 working days of reaching that stage. Once stage four / five are reached then an update to the PSCP Business Unit should also be provided within those same timescales.

Flowchart *indicating who is likely to be the appropriate person at each stage*