

**Practice guidance for remote CP Conferences during COVID 19 period following restrictions on movement.**

**Updated 1.4.2020**

To date, Oxfordshire County Council followed relevant self-isolation and social distancing advice to actively maintain an inclusive approach which promoted maximum parental involvement in Child Protection Conferences.

On PHE advice, Review Conferences immediately became “remote” meetings with all participants dialling in or using Skype for Business. This reflected the already established relationships between parents, young person and the professional Core Group.

Acknowledging the unique nature and function of Initial Conferences and the stress these can potentially place on parents, a decision was made for only Social Worker, CP Chair and parents to meet in person for these events. This was to ensure parents were respectfully and adequately supported and placed at the heart of the process whilst keeping all parties safe from possible infection. Due to rapidly changing circumstances in respect of available rooms, this did not come into effect.

On 23.03.2020 the UK government imposed further restrictions on the public’s movements in order to limit the spread of COVID-19 which has led to this revised guidance.

For an initial period of three weeks from 25.03.2020, the following approach will be adopted for Initial Child Protection Conferences. This will be reviewed week commencing 13.04.2020 or sooner should any further government advice be received.

The priority will be to keep as close to business as usual and core social work values as much as possible:

**Participation:**

CP Chairs will chair all ICPCs and RCPCs remotely.

A range of ICT solutions are being explored to promote the remote chairing approach.

Arrangements for parents and young people’s participation will be a priority and made on a case by case basis by the CP Chair and Social Worker/ATM/TM, see 5. below.

It is expected the SW will initially inform the family, by telephone, of the date and time of the conference and let them know they will also have follow-up discussions with the CP Chair, which will include deciding how they will participate.

A Skype for Business or Microsoft Teams invitation can then be sent to parents/family members. They should be supported to participate by using any of the same means available to professionals.

Partner agencies will be invited to contribute, for example, by Skype for Business, Microsoft Teams, conference call, What’s App or simply by speakerphone. Please refer to separate guidance on use of these methods.

Arrangements for invitation of schools need to be agreed and arranged on an individual basis.

**The aim will be to use one method of communication per meeting where at all possible to maximise sound quality etc.** As a Microsoft organisation, OCC aims to promote the use of Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams.

The interpreting service can currently only be provided through mobile phone/speakerphone.

**Report sharing:**

As far as possible, we should only share with professionals what has been shared with parents and young people.

**Review Child Protection Process**

1. **Support for children during RCPC** –

 Allocated social worker arranges Early Help Practitioner to support the family during the Conference by engaging the children in a remote activity. This is, of course, dependent on a second electronic device being available to the child in the home. It is essential that this is arranged 3 days before Conference so that the Early Help Practitioner allocated to undertake this task is able to speak with the children to begin to establish a rapport with them at least once before the Conference, if not previously known to them. Social Worker contacts their CFCM, who will identify an EH Practitioner/FSW for the task. This should be an EHP/FSW known to the children where possible. The identified worker will then liaise directly with the allocated social worker to arrange to meet the children and plan an activity to be undertaken with them remotely during the Conference. This ensures that the potential impact of parents’ possible distress or frustration during Conference is reduced, and that another professional is virtually “present” during the Conference to ascertain the children’s wellbeing throughout and then report any concerns to the allocated social worker following the Conference.

1. Social Worker writes full LCS Social Worker Conference Report for RCPC 3 days before Conference and sends to manager – either line manager, TM, SM, Case Progression Manager or HOS, dependent on availability – by COB 3 days before Conference, for review and authorisation.
2. SW then alerts CP Chair that report is available on LCS at least 48 hours before Conference.
3. SW contacts parents by phone at least 48 hours before Conference to discuss contents of the report - see Appendix 1; SW verbally shares headlines of report; reason for Conference/ongoing concerns; strengths and protective factors; recommendation regarding continuation of CP plan, and proposed outline plan; SW obtains parents’ views in response to this. SW checks whether parents have an email address. SW should also check that parents/carers have wifi in their homes; if they don’t, it may be helpful to support parents with additional phone data to support their access to the Conference – SW to discuss this with their Manager. It is also essential to check which apps/technology parents/carers have to participate in the Conference; SKYPE, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp, conference calling are all acceptable but Zoom cannot be used.
4. If parents have an email address, this to be shared with Case Conference Administrators.
5. SW sends report and record of parents’ views to FSS/CWD Administrator via their team administration inbox, using the subject title – “Abridged Conference Report required” (see appendix 1); Administrator creates abridged report for agencies, and forwards to Case Conference Administrator for distribution via EGRESS to professionals, copying in SW and Conference Chair, 48 hours before Conference.

Where the **full** Social Work report has been shared with the family, and thus no abridged report required, the Social Worker should directly email CCA admin 48 hours prior to Conference, copying in the Chair, advising that the full report can be distributed to partner agencies by Egress.

1. If parents/carers have an email address, abridged Conference report **must be password protected and** **sent via 2 emails from the Social Worker.** The first email to contain a copy of the report and the second email to contain the password. Temporarily, Egress does not need to be used for emails to families, only professionals. **It is essential that the abridged report is password protected and that the password is sent separately to the report.**
2. SW has telephone discussion with CP Chair 1 day before Conference.
3. Case Conference Administrators will be responsible for sending calendar invitations to all participants for RCPC’s. In order to do this, the social worker must provide the parent’s email address as soon as possible. Invitations will be sent out to parents first and then the invitation will be forwarded to professionals. Parents will not be able to join the meeting without their email address being provided.

If the decision from the SW/Chair, is for the family to participate in a different way, CCA must be informed so they can progress arrangements to send out electronic invitations for professionals for the RCPC.

1. Case Conference Administrators will send out feedback forms to family members and professionals with the invitation to the RCPC.

**Initial Child Protection Conference Process**

 This process is for ICPCs convened in CAFAT, FSS & CWD Teams;

1. Arrangements for an ICPC are slightly different. In order to send out invites for an ICPC the social worker must provide the parent’s email address to the Case Conference Administrator at the earliest opportunity. Without this, no arrangements can be made to organise an ICPC via Skype/Teams. SW to inform CCA as soon as they have told the family there will be a conference and provide Case Conference Administrator with email address for invitations to be sent.
2. **Support for children during the ICPC** –

 Allocated social worker arranges Early Help Practitioner to support the family during the Conference by engaging the children in a remote activity. This is, of course, dependent on a second electronic device being available to the child in the home. It is essential that this is arranged 3 days before Conference so that the Early Help Practitioner allocated to undertake this task is able to speak with the children to begin to establish a rapport with them at least once before the ICPC. Social Worker contacts the FSS Service Manager for their area and the Service Manager will identify which CFC will provide an EH Practitioner for the task. The identified worker will then liaise directly with the allocated social worker to arrange to meet the children and plan an activity to be undertaken with them remotely during the Conference. This ensures that the potential impact of parents’ possible distress or frustration during Conference is reduced, and that another professional is virtually “present” during the Conference to ascertain the children’s wellbeing throughout and then report any concerns to the allocated social worker following the Conference.

1. Report for Conference is completed using the Child & Family Assessment Form on LCS, 3 days before ICPC is scheduled to take place; SW completes full report which includes all performance data reporting requirements, but then **clicks print** **and selects only the following sections for saving as PDF and sharing with parents:**
* Analysis, including recommendation regarding CP plan and plan category.
* child and young person’s development needs
* parental capacity
* family and environmental factors
* signatures
1. SW notifies their manager that the report is available on LCS for review and authorisation following completion, 3 days prior to ICPC.
2. Following manager authorisation of ICPC report, SW notifies CP Chair that the report is available on LCS for their review.
3. SW then prepares report to be shared with parents; the report **must be password protected and can be emailed to parents who have an email address. See separate guidance on how to save a PDF.**

There will need to be 2 emails to the family, first email to contain the report, the second email to contain the password**.** For parents with no email address, the process detailed above regarding report sharing via telephone to be followed. There will be no one size fits all approach and discussions (agreement recorded on LCS) should take place with the parents including the option of report being put through letterbox in exceptional circumstances.

1. If report is sent by email, telephone conversation with parents required to ensure safe receipt, check on their wellbeing following reading report, and to ascertain their views and wishes in response to it.
2. When the SW has shared the C&F assessment with the family, alert their own admin team that final report is ready and can be shared with Case Conference Administrator to circulate to agencies.
3. Conference planning conversation between SW and CP Chair (and ATM/TM if necessary) takes place 48 hours before conference date to explore and risk assess the most appropriate means of supporting parents’ participation in conference.

1. *N.B Be mindful that in certain circumstances full attendance may not be appropriate for all family members. It may be decided that a phone conversation takes place between the CP Chair and Social Worker with parents, pre and post conference if there is clear evidence of direct risk to the child.*

*However, also be aware that while you may be concerned about children being directly exposed to their parent’s anger or distress as a result of the discussion, a decision to exclude a parent from this meeting may well undermine trust and may make it harder to work openly in the future. It may then take longer for positive change to come about for the child. It is a sad fact that children have already often been exposed to their parent’s heightened emotions and we are unlikely to know the true extent of this. A child can just as easily be exposed to these feelings after a parent has attended a meeting in person or a social worker has visited, for example. The professional challenge is to recognise that children cannot always be fully protected from this and to focus on establishing trusting relationships with parents to mitigate against these risks, and carefully monitoring parents’ emotional presentation after Conference; if it is assessed that the parents’ ability to self-regulate is poor and that their level of distress poses an increased risk to their child/ren, consideration must be given to a proportionate professional response to this, including whether a direct visit to the family is warranted.*

1. CP Chair has telephone discussion with parents 1 working day before Conference confirming how they can participate in the conference.

**Pre-conference planning**

The CP Chair will contact the parents by phone pre-conference to confirm the meeting arrangements and to carry out the usual pre-conference conversation with them. A discussion will take place about what means are available to the family to join the conference.

Families may choose to attend the entire meeting (barring the usual arrangements for professionals only time) by telephone or virtual attendance. CP Chairs will be responsible for ensuring families are clear how to access the meeting.

Where parents are attending conferences virtually, CP Chairs will ask them to confirm who is with them and will have no alternative but to accept the response at face value.

The CP Chair will capture these discussions/decisions on case notes on LCS.

**Information sharing post – conference**

1. Case Conference Administrator will send out a copy of the LCS CP plan to families. This will be password protected. The first email to contain the plan, the second email to contain the password.
2. Case Conference Administrators will send out a copy of the LCS CP plan to professionals via Egress.
3. Within 20 working days, Case Conference Administrators will send out a copy of the record of Conference in Word format. For families, this will be sent out password protected (2 emails the first containing the minutes the second containing the password).
4. Within 20 working day, Case Conference Administrators will send a copy of the minutes (word document) to all professionals via Egress.

Conferences will only be cancelled in exceptional circumstances. The additional risks of remote conferencing are acknowledged but these are essential statutory meetings which need to continue to take place. QA Service Managers are responsible for decisions about how these take place and will consider and promote all available options to ensure the aims of a conference are achieved.

The intention will be to ensure as many conferences proceed as possible in order to share information, update risk assessments, outcomes and plans. A collegiate approach between teams and agencies will be critical to achieving this. The plan developed at Conference should note the potential impact of the current Public Health restrictions and what change is realistic to expect. Core groups will be expected to proactively amend and update timescales and actions in review periods.

Conferences will be as succinct and short as possible. CP Chairs will focus on risk analysis and development of a SMART plan. It will therefore be even more important that social workers write their reports in good time, that they are authorised, and the main points subsequently shared with families’ pre-conference and not solely at the meeting.

As per current practice, CP Chairs and/or Social Workers will update parents post Conference by phone, Skype, Teams, What’s app etc. if parents have been unable or unwilling to attend.

QA Service Managers will lead on interpreting, implementing and reviewing this guidance flexibly as the position around COVID 19 develops. This guidance is not exhaustive given the rapidly changing advice; please discuss further with your Service Manager should you require more detailed information.

Hazel Cringle, Safeguarding Manager

Laura Clements, Head of Service (FSS)

Maria Godfrey, Head of Service (Front Door)

Updated 2.4.20

**Appendix 1 –**

Guidance for Social Worker’s pre-Conference call to parents

1. Go through your report with parent/s, ensuring that you share your analysis of the current situation and any progress made, ongoing concerns and protective factors, the child’s views, and your recommendation regarding creation/continuation of CP plan, and what you propose be included in the plan.
2. Obtain parents’ views on your report and recommendations, and their wishes in respect of the plan and its proposed actions.
3. Discuss with parent/s how they will participate in the Conference remotely; what tech platform will be used, and whether they have any queries or concerns about this. Remind parents to use headphones if they have them.
4. If the parent/s need an interpreter, ensure that telephone interpreting arrangements are in place and that parent/s is clear about how this will work.
5. Ascertain whether the adult will have any adult support during the Conference, and establish whether this support person is appropriate, and whether the proposed support arrangement accords with social distancing measures.
6. Ascertain arrangements for the child/sibling group during the Conference – will children of sufficient age and understanding be participating in the Conference, and will children who should not be party to the Conference due to age and/or needs be appropriately cared for and protected from the Conference discussion during the Conference?
7. Establish what, if any arrangements are in place for parental support following the Conference, and, if necessary, arrange a call with parent/s after Conference to check on their wellbeing and consider follow-up support, including a possible visit should parents’ emotional presentation be of significant concern and deemed a risk to the child/ren.
8. Discuss any concerns you have arising from this discussion with your line manager and the CP Chair directly following your call.

**Appendix 2 –**

Template for abridged report –

**Family Details**

Names, DOBs, Ethnicity, Gender, Address

**Social Worker’s Analysis**

Child/young person’s views

Social Worker’s analysis of current situation and progress made

**Social Worker’s recommendation regarding new/continuing CP plan**

Outline plan