

Improving the Child Protection Conference experience and outcomes – information for all safeguarding partners

Context:

Oxfordshire County Council's Children, Education and Families Directorate will soon be implementing the Family Solutions Plus (FS+) model to provide integrated family-focussed safeguarding services at the right time, in the right way, to effectively reduce risk and create lasting change for children.

Principles and ethos:

We want every child in Oxfordshire to have the greatest chance in life. We want to make sure that we deliver the highest quality services. How we practice directly impacts on outcomes for children and families.

Underpinning all of our work, we aim to be:

- **Child centred** - with a focus on the experiences, progress and outcomes of the child and their journey.
- **Restorative** - based on working *with* children and families, building relationships and characterised by high support and high challenge.
- **Outcome focused** - rather than process-focused.
- **Positive** - informing and encouraging improvement and **positive** change.
- **Reflective** - promoting reflective practice and shared learning.
- **Strengths-based** - identifying and building on strengths.
- **Motivational** - understand where people are on their cycle of change and supporting them to find their motivation to achieve change.

To reflect this approach and ambition, following consultation and feedback from our safeguarding partners, the Quality Assurance service is changing the way child protection conferences will take place from 1 September 2020.

Key values and principles for improved child protection conferences:

- **Openness and transparency – to ensure families feel valued and respected**
- ❖ Families should be aware of all information gathered about them prior to conference discussion.
- ❖ Agency assessments should be shared and available prior to conference.
- ❖ “No surprises” approach followed to allow conference to focus on planning and prevent “re-assessment” of information.

- ❖ Language (written and spoken) used to describe children, families and behaviours will be respectful and mindful of potential long-term impact and “labelling”.
 - **Empowering children and families to make changes**
- ❖ Actively seeking to rectify the imbalance of power families can experiences in formal meetings.
- ❖ Meeting rooms will become less formal and more child and family focussed in furnishings and décor to support feelings of inclusivity and value.
- ❖ Families and young people will be more actively involved in analysis of risk and concerns and development of outline plans.
 - **Timely and effective support**
- ❖ Sufficient preparation for conference by all agencies is critical for success.
- ❖ Children, families and agencies need to quickly receive clear and concise documentation from conferences to guide effective implementation of child protection plans.

What changes can agency representatives expect when being invited to attend child protection conferences?

- ❖ Invitations will require key agencies to attend in person or by video conference through MS Teams in accordance with Working Together 2018. Going forward, hybrid conferences (a mixture of physical and virtual attendance) may become the norm.
- ❖ Invitations will remind participants of their obligations to **prepare and share** written reports pre-conference and the principles underpinning this.
- ❖ Applying the principle to respect families and ensure “no surprises” means that “new” information from agencies will only be shared* in exceptional circumstances to avoid undermining the integrity of the conference. **Responsibility therefore lies with professionals to ensure adherence to this principle.**
- ❖ The majority of the conference time will be spent including the family and professionals in clarifying the risks (and how this differs from a worry or concern) and facilitating everyone’s contribution to creation of a SMART plan which reduces risks.
- ❖ As Child Protection (CP) Chairs are all experienced Children’s Services social workers, their specific knowledge and skills will be maximised on to support the relationship-based elements of the principles of FS+ working, within a conference context.

- ❖ The CP Chair will focus on dynamically engaging the family in the task.
- ❖ Written output from conferences will change. A written summary of the Conference and the agreed outline Plan will be developed during the conference and shared with conference participants, alongside the formal decision letter, by the end of the next working day.
- ❖ Minute takers will no longer attend conferences and for quality assurance purposes, an audio recording of the conference will be made and stored securely by Oxfordshire County Council. Data protection issues have been fully addressed. Refer to the [Process to request audio file of recorded Child Protection Conference](#) for further information

*excluding reports from GP and TVP as is current practice.

Conference invitations to partners will set out these changes for you.

Please do not hesitate to contact any of the Quality Assurance Team if you have further queries.

We hope you share our enthusiasm to improve conferences to achieve better outcomes for children and a more positive experience for all attendees. It is our aim to ensure the time we all dedicate to these multi-agency meetings is used to its best effect to bring about change.

Your participation and support in this, is, as ever, greatly appreciated. Please continue to complete feedback forms after conferences so that we can continue to improve our approach.

Best wishes,

CEF Quality Assurance Service/Safeguarding and Review Teams.

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