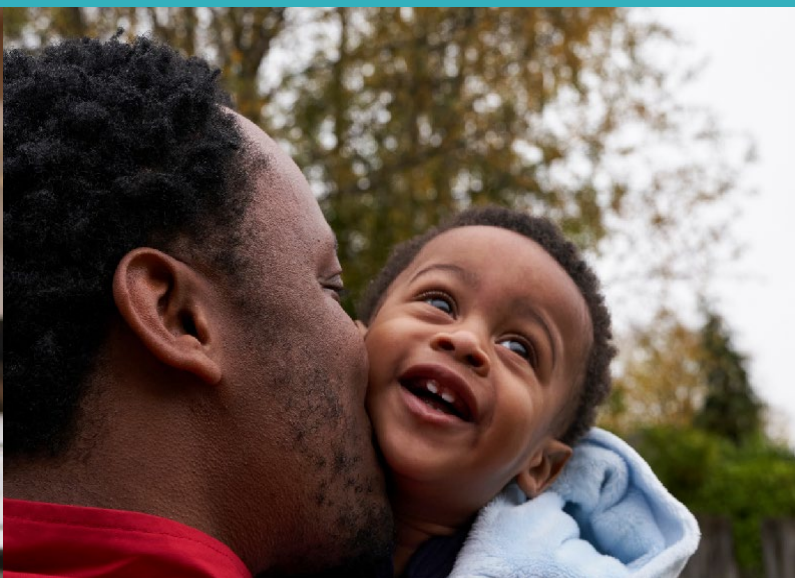


Derby City and Derbyshire

Multi Agency Dispute Resolution and Escalation Protocol November 2024



1. Introduction

What is this process? This process outlines the steps to be taken when there are disagreements between practitioners from differing agencies in relation to concerns about the safety and welfare of a child or young person, and / or action being taken to safeguard a child or young person.

Why do we need this process? When working with practitioners from other agencies there will at times be differences of opinion with regards to how to respond to an identified concern about a child, young person or family. This process has been designed to guide practitioners in the steps that they should take when concerns arise.

Who is this aimed at? This process is aimed at practitioners working co-operatively across all agencies, using their confidence, skills and experience to make a robust contribution to safeguarding children and promoting their welfare within the framework of discussions, meetings, and case management. These practitioners will come from a wide range of agencies both statutory and non-statutory.

At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout

This policy provides workers with the means to raise concerns that they have about decisions made by other practitioners or agencies. Please also see [DDSCP Safeguarding Children Procedures](#) for further information and guidance and the [DDSCP Threshold Document](#) to aid decision making.

If the dispute / difference of opinion relates to dissent from Child Protection conferences, the local [Derby City and Derbyshire County DDSCP Dissent process following CP conference](#) should be followed.

- 1.1 National and local child practice reviews have highlighted the importance of practitioners challenging decisions to ensure the best outcomes for children and their families. [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) states that 'clear escalation policies for staff to follow when their child safeguarding concerns are not being addressed within their organisation or by other agencies' should be in place. Similarly, [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) promotes that - 'if, after a referral, the child's situation does not appear to be improving, the referrer should consider following the local escalation procedures'.

1.2 Professional Disagreement

When having conversations (and working) with practitioners from other agencies there will at times be differences of opinion with regards to how to respond to an identified concern about a child, young person or family. Disagreements can be a sign of developing thinking, and the value of exchanging ideas from different perspectives should not be underestimated. When there are disagreements between agencies, this should be recognised as potential for healthy debate. However, disagreements may disadvantage the child or family involved if they are not resolved constructively and in a timely manner.

In order to support and challenge a clear process needs to be in place to ensure that all

practitioners involved in multi-agency work understand the steps they should take when these concerns arise. This process should however be measured in its approach to allow practitioners the opportunity to openly discuss their concerns with other practitioners.

However some disagreements, if they can't be resolved, may need to be escalated up to first line managers (and beyond if appropriate) who should address any concerns and aim to reach a resolution as swiftly as possible. Throughout practice the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is the primary concern, and professional disputes must not obstruct this. If you feel that a practitioner or an agency is not acting in the best interests of the child, young person or family, you have a responsibility to respectfully challenge the practitioner or agency. Should you have a concern that a child is at risk of, or is suffering significant harm, this should be responded to using your own agencies safeguarding procedures.

Where there are differences and disagreements between agencies or practitioners, a clear framework should be in place to ensure that timely and effective resolution is reached. All workers should feel able to challenge decision making and to see this as their responsibility in order to promote the best multi-agency safeguarding practice for the unborn, children, young people and their families/carers. **Please refer to pathway document – appendix 1**

Professional challenge should be recognised as a positive activity and a sign of good professional practice and effective multiagency working. **It is every professional's responsibility to 'problem solve'. Communication is extremely important and is the key to resolving professional misunderstandings or disagreements.**

At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.

1.3 Potential Areas of Disagreement

The following is not an exhaustive list of potential areas of disagreement for which this policy may be used:

- Differences in the handling of referrals / requests for services between agencies
- Differences in decision made for threshold not met / no further action
- Differences in decision made regarding not proceeding to a child protection medicals
- Disagreement on attendance at multi-agency meetings
- Differences in opinion with regards to a child's plan, outcomes and findings of assessments and appropriateness, progression of plans and communication
- Concern about the action or inaction of another professional in relation to the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person
- Information sharing concerns
- Disagreement about the provision of services identified for the child.
- Application of threshold and case progression – levels of need
- Roles and responsibilities
- Re-unification of a child with parents following a period in care

For further guidance please refer to the [DDSCP Threshold Document](#)

2 Key Principles

Practitioners should always:-

- Follow the timescales which are prescribed within this policy;
- Ensure that they share key information in a lawful and appropriate manner;
See [DDSCP Information Sharing Guidance for Practitioners](#). Additional information on this issue can be found in the national guidance [Information sharing Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers](#). **Note: The UK GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) does not prevent, or limit, the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children and young people safe;**
- The pathway – appendix 1 should be followed and only in circumstances where there are imminent concerns should any stage of this pathway be expedited;
- Seek to resolve the issue quickly at the operational practice level rather than at the management level;
- Keep focus on the child’s safety and welfare at all times ensuring professional differences do not place children at further risk by obscuring the focus on the child or delay decision making;
- Familiarise themselves with the escalation process within their agency;
- Ensure accurate and contemporary recording on the child’s file of key decisions, actions and conversations in relation to this resolution process;
- Stay proactively involved – safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility.
- Resolve difference of opinion at the earliest stage and the lowest level.
- There should be no barriers to escalation if needed.

3 Dispute Resolution Process

Practitioners involved in this resolution process must keep an up to date record of all discussions they have and with whom, including within agency and multi-agency conversations, and if by email – always acknowledge receipt of the email or response.

Agreed actions and outcomes (including dates) must also be recorded along with any outstanding issues and how these will be addressed. All summaries/outcomes/decisions of the escalation should be retained on the child’s case record in CSC and health.

Some matters may be resolved very quickly, and this will be determined by the complexity of the issue. In all cases, the matter should be resolved as swiftly as possible, and the primary focus shall be on ensuring the safety and welfare of the child concerned.

Practitioners may feel concerned about the actions of a particular agency, but it is the statutory responsibility of that agency to make a final decision on case work (for example, agreeing a social care single assessment is the responsibility of the relevant local authority).

Stage 1: Professional Disagreement. Discussion between frontline practitioners – resolution within 2 working days (unless there is an imminent safeguarding concern)

In the first instance the practitioner with concerns should raise the concerns with the relevant practitioner in the other agency verbally. The key at this stage is trying to come to an understanding of each other's perspectives and to potentially fill in the gaps of knowledge either practitioner might have. For example; what other assessments have been completed or the strengths of protective factors or any risk factors. This is the key opportunity to ensure effective collaboration to ensure the best possible decisions are reached.

The practitioner with concerns should seek advice from their manager or their agency's designated safeguarding lead if they do not feel that their concerns have been understood and they feel that the issue has not been resolved.

If there is no resolution it is important that the relevant practitioners should meet face to face /or have a verbal discussion via phone or via a MS teams meeting, prior to considering escalation to stage 2.

If the practitioners are unable to resolve the professional disagreement at this stage, this conversation should be recorded and progress to stage 2. Differences should be resolved within 2 working days.

At any stage of disagreement/escalation a practitioner should always acknowledge receipt/response

Stage 2: Discussion between front line operational manager or named professional /designated lead within the agency . Resolution within 2 working days (unless there are imminent safeguarding concerns).

If the practitioners are unable to resolve their professional disagreement themselves within the 2 day timescale it must be reported by them to their front line operational manager or named professional / designated leads or equivalent in each agency, who should together discuss the issues and concerns raised.

The purpose of escalating the dispute to this level is to reach a position where differing professional disagreements have been taken into account and efforts made to explore whether dispute has arisen through lack of clarity or understanding in the professional dialogue. Ultimately a decision will need to be reached where agencies agree a way forward where the welfare of the child takes precedence.

If there is no resolution it is important that the relevant practitioners should meet wherever possible, prior to considering escalation to Stage 3.

NB – Within health provider services the Named Professionals if unable to resolve difference of opinion / dispute and need to escalate further to stage 3 they should seek further advice from their Safeguarding Head of service prior to escalating to the Designated Nurse or Doctor .

Stage 3: Escalation to Senior Management- resolution within 10 working days from escalation to them (unless there are imminent safeguarding concerns). Complete the Escalation Template

If the issue is not resolved at stage 2 and professional disagreements remain, the front line operational manager or named professional / Designated Leads or equivalent should consider completing the DDSCP Escalation Template as a minimum (see appendix 2) and identify the presenting and underlying issues. It is expected that they will provide feedback to all frontline parties and send the completed template to the relevant partner agency Senior Management to review and resolve.

In cases where significant concerns remain after discussion between front line operational managers or named professional /designated leads, this should be raised with respective senior managers, to review and resolve with equivalent lead.

If there is no resolution it is important that the relevant practitioners should meet wherever possible, prior to considering escalation to Stage 4

Senior Managers must update/submit DDSCP Escalation template (see appendix 2) and identify the presenting and underlying issues. Senior Managers will provide feedback to all parties involved in the process in their organisation.

Progress to Stage 4 if necessary

Stage 4: Escalate to Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

Cases can only be escalated to Stage 4, after all stages 1-3 of the Dispute Resolution and Escalation Policy have been followed and no agreement can be reached by Senior Management. The case will then be sent for arbitration to the Delegated Safeguarding Partner who chairs the Executive Board.

Where disagreements and escalations raise significant issues or themes in relation to local safeguarding practice following escalations, these should be relayed to the Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership via email: ddscp@derby.gov.uk to consider the most appropriate response and identify/address any policy / procedure and practice issues. These Stage 4 Escalation will be logged by the DDSCP.

The Senior Manager/ Service Director leading on the issue should ensure the Escalation Template is updated and shared with the Partnership team, and that feedback / decision reached by the **Delegated Safeguarding Partner who chairs the Executive Board** is given to all parties involved in the escalation process within their organisation.

As required by national guidance, the Delegated Safeguarding Partner will ensure that necessary steps are taken to resolve the difference of opinion so that

- there is a prompt, appropriate and effective response to ensure the protection and support of the child is achieved
- organisations and agencies are challenged appropriately, effectively holding one another to account

Safeguarding partners and relevant agencies are responsible for discharging their own



statutory and legislative duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Safeguarding partners and relevant agencies will be expected to understand each other's differences of views and resolve such differences locally.

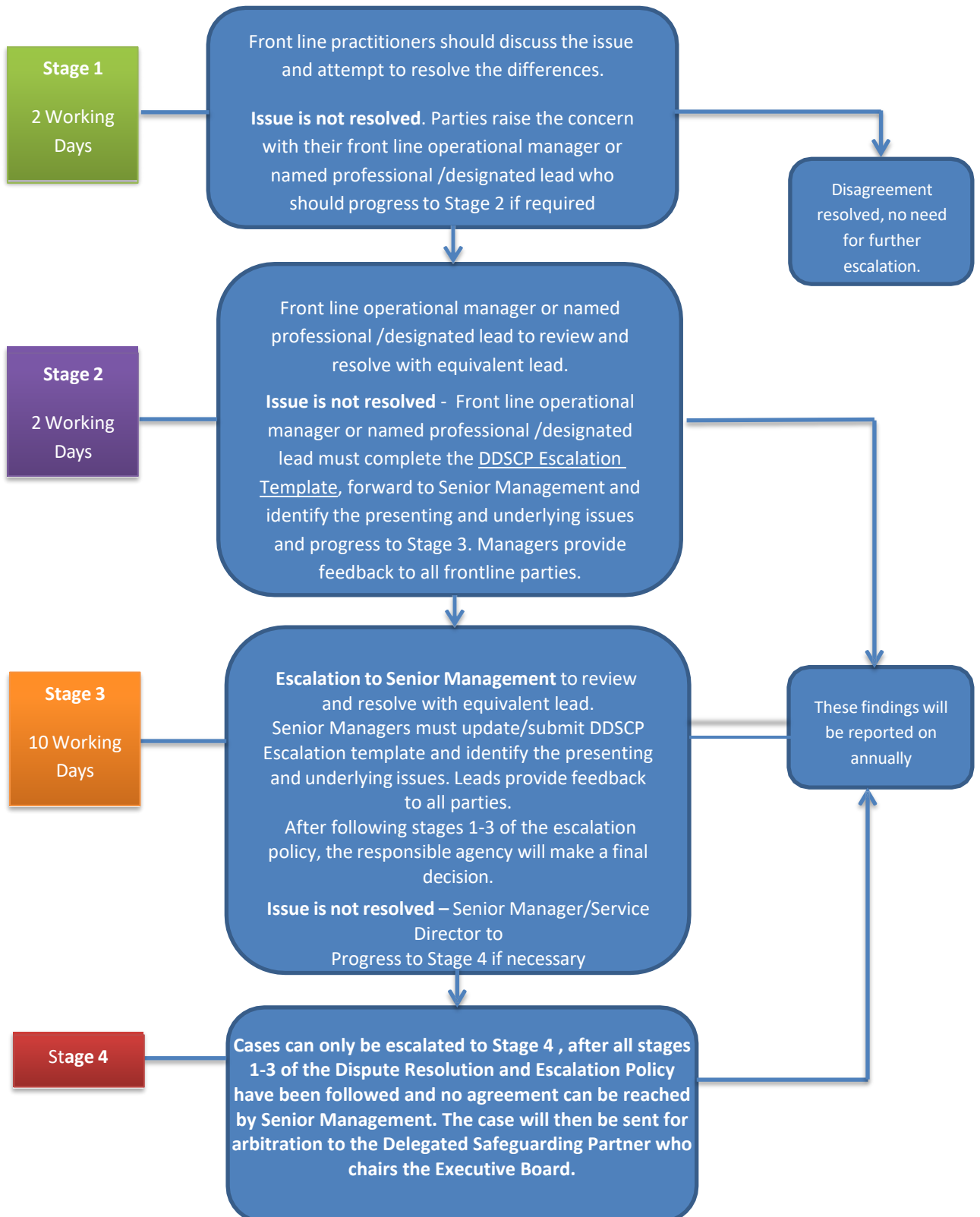
Conflict of interest: Should a significant conflict of interest in a specific stage 4 escalation be identified, the **Delegated Safeguarding Partner (who chairs the Executive Board)** will agree with the other Delegated Safeguarding Partners the most appropriate resolution of the conflict of interest. This may include a Delegated Safeguarding Partner from a different statutory partner taking the lead role to resolve the escalation.

Appendix 1: Resolution of Professional Disagreement Flowchart

It is every professional's responsibility to 'problem solve'. Communication is extremely important and is the key to resolving professional misunderstandings or disagreements.

This is for any professional working with a child who has concerns about another agency's decision. Concerns should be specific and evidenced based as to the need and difference.

At all stages the discussion and outcome should be within the timescales prescribed and focused on the child's needs.



Appendix 2: Escalation & dispute Resolution Template

(To be used when concerns are escalated to stage 3 and 4)

Pin No. e.g.(mosaic, liquid logic)	Name of Unborn/Child/ Children:	Date of Birth:	Department & name/position of practitioner escalating	Agency (with which there is a concern) & name of practitioner/position:

Escalated to (name & position)	Stage 3 or 4	Date of escalation	Escalated to within partner agency (name & position)	Date of escalation

Brief description of nature of concern:

Outcomes sought:

Update from each stage of Escalation:

Name of Referrer:

Agency / Department:

Telephone number: **Email:**

Signature: **Date:**

Derby & Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Email for Stage 4: ddscp@derby.gov.uk

Cases can only be escalated to Stage 4 , after all stages 1-3 of the Dispute Resolution and Escalation Policy have been followed an no agreement can be reached by Senior Management. The case will then be sent for arbitration to the Delegated Safeguarding Partner who chairs the Executive Board

This document replaces all previously published Escalation Policy and Process guidance. It must be read in conjunction with the [Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Procedures](#)

Version	Author/s	Signed off by	Date	Review Date
1	DDSCP Policy & Procedures	DDSCP Policy & Procedures	December 2019	November 2021
2	DDSCP Policy & Procedures	DDSCP Policy & Procedures	November 2024	November 2025