



**Croydon Safeguarding Children Board**

# Escalation and Resolution of Professional Disagreement in Safeguarding Children



Policy agreed	CSCB Quality and Assurance Practice and Performance sub-group November 2018
Review	November 2019

# Croydon Safeguarding Children Board

## Escalation and Resolution of Professional Disagreement in Safeguarding Children

### Purpose and scope

Children's safety can only be assured and their welfare promoted where professionals work jointly, sharing responsibility for case management and decision making. Within this, the importance of a culture which supports professional challenge cannot be underestimated. Professional challenge is recognised as a positive activity and a sign of good professional practice, a healthy organisation and effective multiagency working. Where there are differences and disagreements between agencies, a clear framework should be in place to ensure that timely and effective resolutions are made. National and local serious case reviews have highlighted the importance of professionals challenging decisions to ensure the best outcomes for children and their families. Locally SCRs have found that concerns about decisions made are often not followed up with robust professional challenge.

The purpose of this policy is to explain what to do when any professional has a concern or disagreement with an agency decision or action related to a child. Its aim is to ensure that the focus is kept on the child's safety and well-being through promoting a culture of professional challenge and providing framework for timely and effective resolutions.

Working Together 2018 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'<sup>1</sup> should be in place. Similarly, Keeping Children Safe in Education<sup>2</sup> 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'.

This policy therefore relates to the multi-agency children's workforce working with children and families receiving support and services at Early Help, Child in Need, Child Protection and Looked After Children. This policy does not replace the need for single agency dispute resolution procedures which should be in place to manage disputes on decisions between internal services (such as Children's Social Care CERPs).

This policy is not a complaint policy – if there is a complaint about professional conduct, single agency policies should be followed. If the complaint is about a particular agency, that agency's complaints procedure should be available. If there is a complaint about the decisions of the Croydon

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<sup>1</sup> [Working Together 2018 Chapter 2](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Keeping children safe in education 2018 Part One](#)

Safeguarding Children Board, the CSCB Complaints policy should be followed:  
<http://croydonlcsb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/CSCB-COMPLAINTS-PROCEDURE-FINAL-COPY-080317.pdf>

This policy should be read in conjunction with the London Child Protection Procedures, Part B1 Chapter 11, Professional Conflict Resolution:  
[http://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/profess\\_conflict\\_res.html](http://www.londoncp.co.uk/chapters/profess_conflict_res.html)

## Definition

Professional challenge is a fundamental professional responsibility. In this context it is about challenging decisions, practice or actions which may affect the efficacy of the child or young person's, or his or her family's, safety and wellbeing. Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children.

Occasionally situations may arise when professionals within an agency consider that the decision made by professionals from another agency is not adequate or a safe decision. Many professional challenges will be resolved on an informal basis by contact between the professional raising the challenge (or their manager) and the agency receiving the challenge. However where there is a need to, unresolved concerns should be escalated using this policy.

Disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around:

- Levels of need
- Roles and responsibilities
- Quality and progression of plans at Early Help, Child in Need, Child Protection or for Looked After Children
- Communication

## Principles

The policy applies the following principles to help ensure that best practice is upheld:

- The child's safety is the focus at all times, meaning that disputes should be resolved in a timely manner and disputes should never leave a child at risk
- Disagreements and differences should be resolved at the earliest possible stage
- Best outcomes for a child are assured when all professional views and expertise are recognised and shared
- A culture of respectful professional challenge is encouraged and well received
- Professional challenge and critical reflection is about the focus and intended outcome of intervention - it should include questioning and being open to professional challenge from colleagues as well as being confident to challenge others

- Being professionally challenged should not be seen as a slur on the person's professional capabilities but rather an indication that all professional views and perspectives are being actively considered within decision making
- That all professionals are willing to seek to resolve differences in a timely and focussed manner to ensure best outcomes for the child
- That learning is applied to address underlying practice and policy issues.

In order to build this within local practice, professional challenge and curiosity should be encouraged by all professionals and especially those responsible for overseeing cases and those in safeguarding and practice lead roles.

## **Resolving disagreements and escalation**

All professional disagreements should be resolved at the earliest opportunity. Where disagreements are directly impacting the enablement of decisions and actions, the following process should be followed when it is clear that no child is at immediate risk of harm.

Each stage of resolving the issue should take no longer than 7 working days.

Whilst these stages may not neatly fit into all agencies management structures, the framework should be applied as best as possible.

Discussions and outcomes should be accurately recorded on the child's record – including recording dates, who was involved, key areas of issue and concern, and the outcome including reference to use of the stages set out in this policy.

In all cases where a professional believes a child to be at imminent risk of harm and another agency disagrees they should refer direct to a team manager in the relevant agency urgently.

Ultimately the responsibility for action rests with the lead agency for the child's case.

### **Stage 1 – Discussion between front line workers**

Any professional who is unhappy about a decision/action should contact the professional who made the decision/took the action to express their views and concern, and discuss the basis of that decision. Often differences are based on misunderstanding of agency policy and lack of communication and as such can be resolved quickly. If the matter cannot be resolved, each front line worker should raise their concerns to their line manager/supervisor.

### **Stage 2 – Discussion between front line manager/supervisor (team)**

The professionals involved in the dispute should raise their concerns with their line manager/supervisor stating the evidence for their concern, what outcome they would like to achieve and how differences can be resolved. The front line managers/supervisors should then contact each other to try to negotiate a settlement to the dispute or if this is not possible, clarify the issues before moving on to the next step. Feedback should be given to all parties involved.

### **Stage 3 – Escalate to operational managers or named/designated safeguarding leads**

If the front line team manager considers it appropriate, the issue should be escalated to an operational manager or named/designated safeguarding lead. A multi-agency meeting should be held between the agency raising the professional challenge and the receiving agency to discuss the different views. This should involve the relevant named/designated safeguarding leads and operational manager to discuss the issues and to find a resolution that is child focused.

At this point the CSCB Business Team should be notified of the nature of the professional challenge (see template at Appendix A). The Board has a role in monitoring issues identified and how policy and practice issues are to be addressed.

To monitor relevant policy and practice issues and use of this escalation policy, , key information should be provided to the CSCB Business Team, the **Escalation template at Appendix A should be completed and submitted as shown.**

Feedback should be given to all parties involved.

### **Stage 4 – Escalate to Senior Management/Leadership**

If the issue cannot be resolved between operational managers and named/designated safeguarding lead – the agency raising the professional challenge should escalate it to the relevant Senior Management/leadership role within the relevant agencies, at minimum this should be the Head of Service.

At this point the CSCB Business Team should continue to be involved. The Board has a role in monitoring issues identified and how policy and practice issues are to be addressed. The Escalation template at Appendix A, should be submitted or updated and sent as shown.

Feedback should be given to all parties involved.

### **Stage 5 – Escalate to Safeguarding Partners Executive**

If the issue remains unresolved it should be formally raised to Safeguarding Partners<sup>3</sup> Executive via the Director of Children’s Services or Senior Managers of relevant agencies. The safeguarding partners executive will agree a way forward – this may include dispute resolution, independent review, advice etc.

At this stage outcomes for the child should be clear and issues relating to policy and practice should be taken forward.

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<sup>3</sup> Safeguarding Partners under Working Together 2018 include Local Authority, Clinical Commissioning Group and Police.

Feedback should be given to all parties involved.

## **Recording and reporting**

At all stages a record should be kept, by all parties. In particular this must include written communication about agreed outcomes and how outstanding issues will be pursued. All records should be retained on the child's case record.

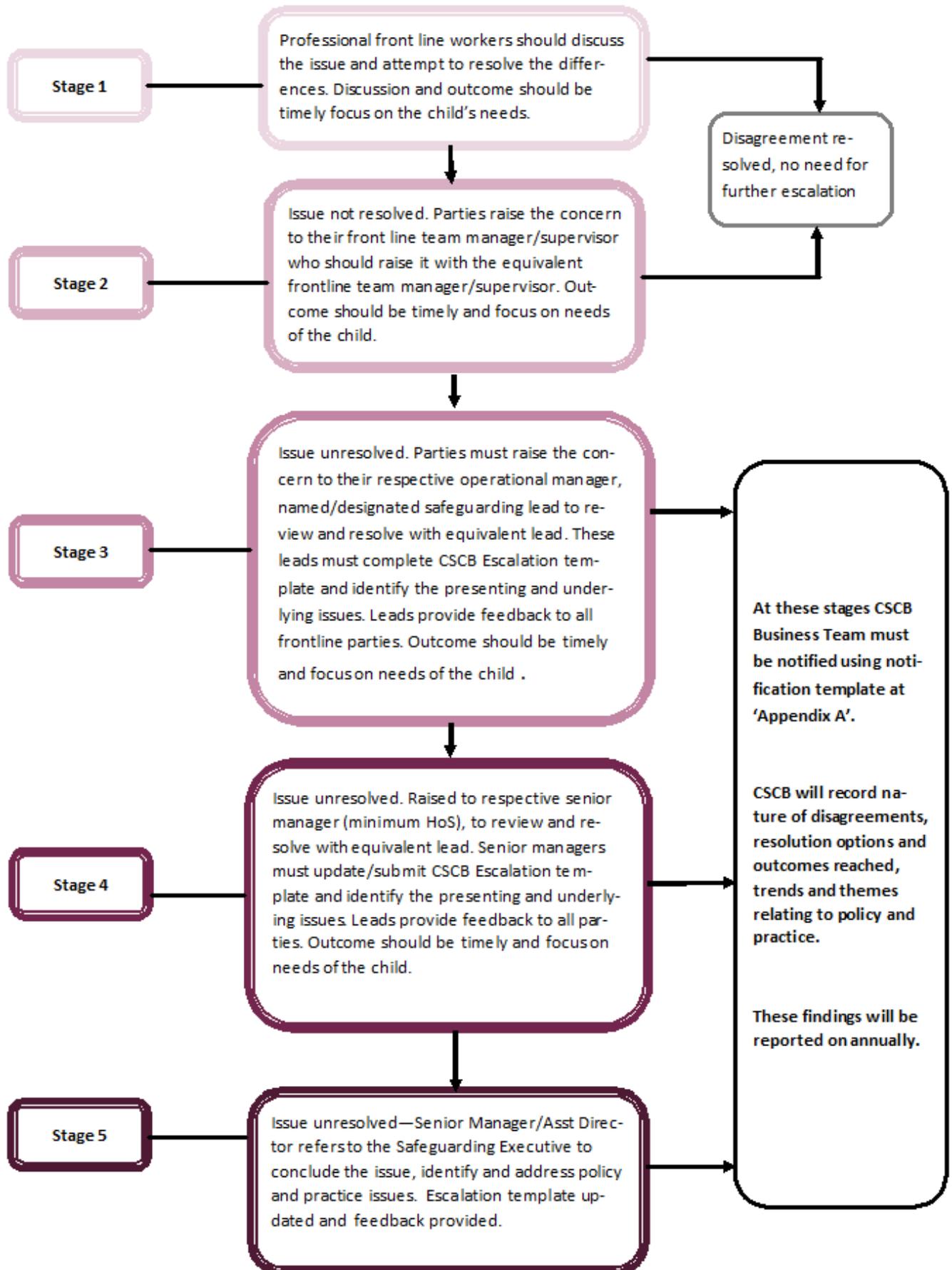
The CSCB Business team will collate the emerging issues from use of this policy and report within the Annual Report.

**CSCB Quality Assurance, Practice and Performance Sub-Group  
November 2018**



## CSCB Resolution of Professional Disagreement

Any professional working with the child has concerns about another agency's decision. Concern should be specific and evidence based as to the need and difference is.  
Each Stage should be within 7 working days or sooner.



## APPENDIX A



### Escalation Notification to Croydon Safeguarding Children Board

This template should be completed and submitted by the Operational Manager or Safeguarding Lead or Head of Service from the agency raising the concerns. It should be submitted at Stage 3 and subsequently updated if Stage 4 and 5 are used. Do not include details of any child or family.

Purpose of this template –

- To monitor use of this policy and capture core issues and how these relates to practice and policy. Use of this policy will be reported on annually.

Name	
Role	
Agency	
Contact	

Brief description of your concern about a decision made – (incl. evidence of need, key procedural issue/disagreement)

Brief description of what has been done to resolve the issue?

Brief description of the outcome of these actions?  
If resolved – describe what was agreed, (incl. key policy or practice issues addressed)  
If unresolved – complete the next below

If unresolved, this section must be completed to request a CSCB led Dispute Resolution Meeting

Completed forms should be returned to  
[SafeguardingChildrenBoard@croydon.gov.uk](mailto:SafeguardingChildrenBoard@croydon.gov.uk)

