



Diogelu Gwent
Gwent Safeguarding

Children Safeguarding Board and Adult Safeguarding Board

Multi Agency Practice Guidance Resolving Professional Differences



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1. Purpose and Context

- 1.1 This protocol is intended to support practitioners in resolving professional differences **only** where there has been a Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF) submitted in respect of a child or a Duty to Report (DTR) referral form submitted in respect of an adult. The Gwent Safeguarding Board area is committed to the continuous improvement of joint working arrangements to safeguard children and adults and promote their welfare. The Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 specifies the local authority as the lead agency for Safeguarding. All Relevant Partners have a Duty to Report under this legislation.
- 1.2 Effective joint working arrangements are supported by legislation, national policy and guidance and protocols and practice guidance developed by Safeguarding Children and Adults Boards. However, it is still possible for professionals to disagree about the management of a child or adult's case. Differences can arise about a number of issues but most often are about:
- thresholds for action/inaction
 - roles and responsibilities
 - inter-agency communication
 - timeliness of interventions.
- 1.3 The protection of children and adults fundamentally depends on effective joint working between professionals and agencies. This requires an open and honest approach and the recognition that in some instances this may involve professional challenge and the need to resolve professional differences of opinion.
- 1.4 It is essential that professional differences are resolved as swiftly as possible so as not to lose focus on the safety and welfare of the children or adults. Professional differences must not impede the progress of case working.
- 1.5 One way of achieving this is by providing professionals with a framework for expressing concerns that may arise about the management of cases. This practice guidance sets out that framework.
- 1.6 In the course of routine practice, there should be an initial attempt to resolve any professional differences on an informal basis, as would be the expectation for any effective joint working arrangements. Where practitioners are working with children who are named on the Child Protection Register, an alternative process to resolving professional differences might be to consider Multi-Agency Supervision. For further information on this process, please see the following hyperlink:
- http://www.sewsc.org.uk/fileadmin/sewsc/documents/regional/SEWSCB_Multi-Agency_Supervision_Guidance_-_revised_2016.pdf
- 1.7 If professional differences remain despite having followed these usual business practices, the challenging agency should clearly communicate to the Local Authority that it wishes to invoke this Resolving Professional Differences Guidance.

2. Professional Responsibility

- 2.1 Research and case reviews have consistently emphasised the need for good inter-agency communication, constructive professional challenge and the swift resolution of professional differences of opinion.
- 2.2 It is the responsibility of all professionals, regardless of status or agency, to challenge other professionals appropriately if they believe that the action, or inaction, of another professional/agency is placing a child or adult at risk of harm, or contributing to a situation where a child or adult may be at risk of harm. It is also the responsibility of all professionals to ensure that all multi agency documentation (e.g. minutes from child / adult protection conferences, strategy meeting documentation, assessments etc.) truly reflect any difference of opinion and if not that this is challenged for accuracy.
- 2.3 Some professionals may require support from their line managers in order to challenge other professionals, as they may feel inexperienced, lacking in authority, or wary of causing conflict. It is essential that managers provide relevant and appropriate support.
- 2.4 It is also the responsibility of all professionals to escalate concerns if they can't resolve the issue and they remain concerned.
- 2.5 It is essential when trying to resolve the concerns that you are clear about the outcome you are seeking e.g. do you want the agency to change their course of action or do you want your concerns recognised and listened to? etc.
- 2.6 Resolution does not necessarily mean that everyone will agree; there will be occasions when agencies will continue to disagree on the course of action required in a case, however, this process encourages open and transparent communication between professionals and agencies that allows for the debate to be had and the concerns to be explored. The focus should always remain upon the safety / wellbeing of the child or adult.

If at any stage in this process, it is identified that immediate action is necessary to safeguard a child or adult, then this must be referred to Children's or Adult's Services without delay or escalated within own agency for immediate action.

3. The Process

- 3.1 This protocol is intended to support practitioners in resolving professional differences **only** where there has been a Multi-Agency Referral Form (MARF) submitted in respect of a child or a Duty to Report (DTR) referral form submitted in respect of an adult. In the first instance the professional who has a concern about a case or differing professional opinion should attempt to resolve these differences with the other professional / agency involved. This should be done as soon as possible with a view to resolving the differences and agreeing a course of action.
- 3.2 If they are unable to agree a way forward, professionals should discuss this with their respective line managers / supervisors as soon as possible. (In certain agencies this could be a designated safeguarding officer)
- 3.3 If agreement cannot be reached at this stage, then the challenging agency should contact, in writing, the child / adult Safeguarding Team Manager within the Local Authority within 5 working days of instigating this process.

- 3.4 If after making contact with the child / adult Safeguarding Team Manager the professional differences still remain then a multi-agency meeting with all involved professionals should be arranged by the Local Authority. It should be made clear to all involved agencies attending this meeting that this falls under the Resolving Professional Differences Guidance. The meeting should be chaired and hosted by the Local Authority, normally the child / adult Safeguarding Team Manager, or a professional with sufficient knowledge and experience to chair a complex meeting. The Chair of the Resolving Professional Differences meeting should clarify whether any immediate action is required to safeguard the child or adult being discussed and gather the information required in order to be able to fulfill their role.
- 3.5 The purpose of this meeting is to consider and resolve the differences of opinion and agree a way forward.
- 3.6 If resolution cannot be achieved by this stage then the Chair of the Resolving Professional Differences meeting should inform the Local Authority Safeguarding Service Manager within 48 hours and request a review of the case. The Local Authority Safeguarding Service Manager should inform and consult with the respective Head of Service. The Gwent Safeguarding Business Unit (GSBU) should be notified by the Safeguarding Service Manager that a professional challenge has been escalated at this point. The number of challenges at this stage will be monitored through the GSBU.
- 3.7 The case review request will be considered by the Safeguarding Service Manager against the following criteria:
- i) One or more professionals believe that the child or adult is at risk of harm as a consequence of another agency's action / inaction, and
 - ii) Steps 1 to 4 of this process have been followed and there is still no resolution.
- 3.8 The Safeguarding Service Manager should decide whether any immediate action to safeguard the child / adult is required and whether a review of the case should be undertaken.
- 3.9 The Safeguarding Service Manager will also decide whether the case review will be undertaken and by whom. This must be an organisation that has had no involvement in the case i.e. another independent agency / independent Local Authority. The Safeguarding Service Manager will notify the safeguarding leads of the agencies involved, of these decisions within 5 working days.
- 3.10 The process for undertaking a case review will be subject to local or regional arrangements. There is an expectation that the professionals involved will be included in the case review and will be kept fully informed.
- 3.11 Following completion of the case review, a report will be presented to the Safeguarding Service Manager. The report will identify any actions taken and outcomes for the child or adult. The Head of Service is informed.
- 3.12 Feedback will be given by the Chair of the Resolving Professional Differences meeting to all professionals involved in the case review and the Local Safeguarding Network on conclusion.

All discussions (including telephone and email correspondence) must be recorded in accordance with the recording policies and procedures of the individual agency. Any meetings that are held must be recorded as minutes and disseminated to all those in

attendance. At any stage of this process any informal meetings / discussions should be recorded and outcome actions agreed and shared with other agencies.

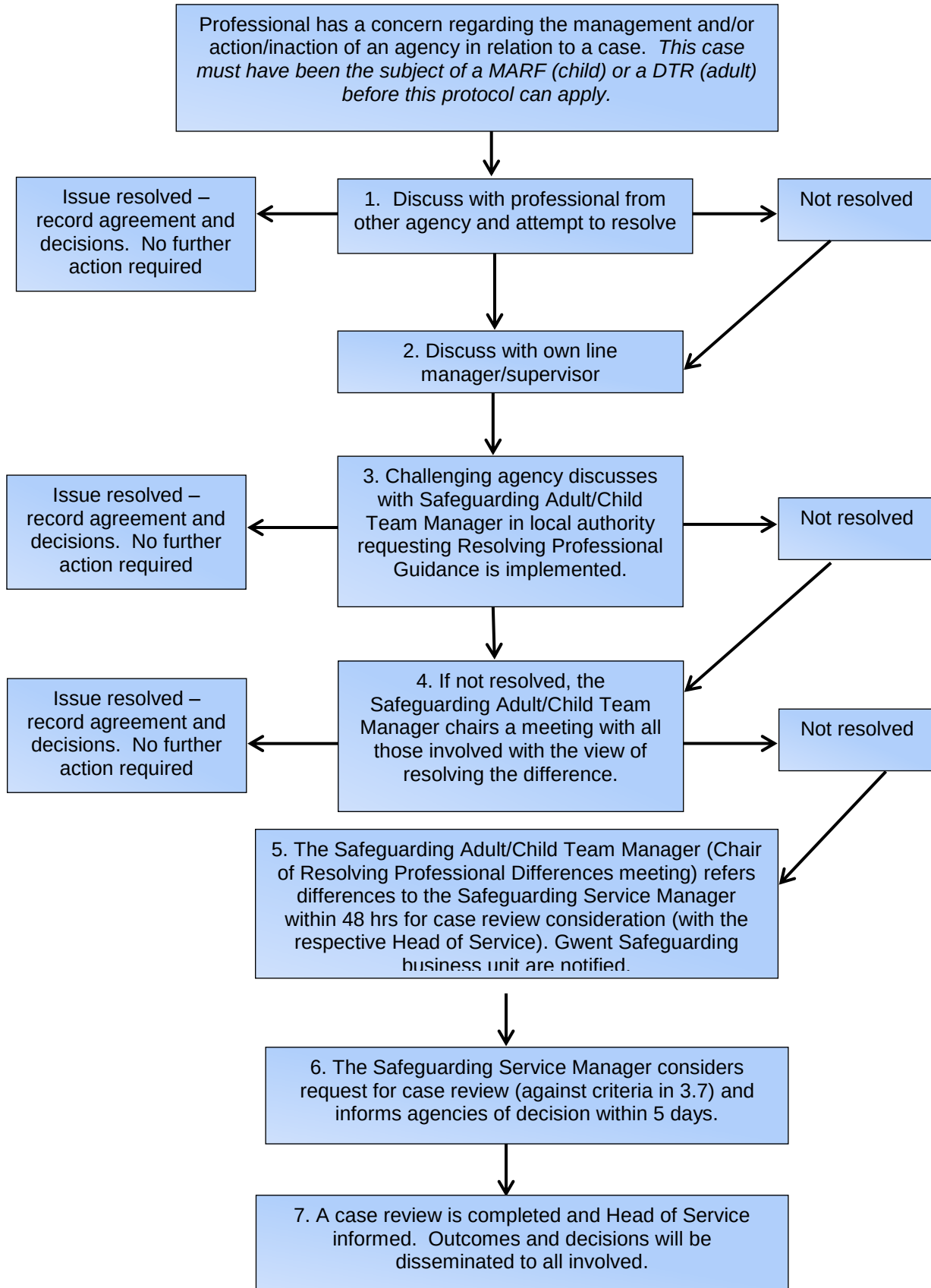
For Information Advice and Assistance Service Adults

Blaenau Gwent	01495 315700	DutyTeamAdults@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
Caerphilly	0808 100 2500	IAAAdults@caerphilly.gov.uk
Monmouthshire Monmouth/Usk/Raglan	01600 773041	
Monmouthshire Abergavenny	01873 735885	
Monmouthshire Chepstow/Caldicot	01291 635666	
Newport	01633 656656	info@newport.gov.uk
Torfaen	0800 328 4432	

For Information Advice and Assistance Service Children

Blaenau Gwent	01495 315700	dutyteam@blaenau-gwent.gcsx.gov.uk
Caerphilly	0808 100 1727	contactandreferral@caerphilly.gov.uk
Monmouthshire	01291 635 669	
Newport	01633 656656	info@newport.gov.uk
Torfaen	0800 328 4432	

Process Flow Chart



Resolving Professional Differences Guidance Agenda

1	Introductions, apologies and non-attendance: • All to introduce themselves, job title and organisation • List others who could not be present or are pivotal to case.
2	Purpose of meeting: • Advise of authority hosting the process • Advise where the professional challenge has derived from (Agency, division and person) • Advise that resolution was not achieved at an earlier part and so meeting has been called as per protocol
3	Adult/child information and nature of the safeguarding concern: • Introduce the child/family • Summarise the nature of the safeguarding concern • Share relevant chronology or case history
4	Nature of the professional difference and overview of decisions made so far: • Challenging agency to share their concern and disagreement with decisions made/not made
5	Presentation of information from each agency: • All present to share their information
6	Outcome/course of action – can a resolution be reached? • Is more information needed before a decision can be made? If so, list who will gather this information and by when. • Chair to decide what course of action they feel is appropriate • Does this satisfy challenging agency – if not resolution cannot be reached. • Determine views off all as to what course of action they feel is necessary
7	Summarise agreed actions: • Summarise the next steps/next stage of the process • Summarise what has been agreed and if all were in agreement
8	Is a further meeting required? • Set further date if required