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## Professional dissent from the decision of a child protection conference

### The context

A child protection conference provides a forum for transparent discussion amongst family and professionals which should lead to a balanced view as to whether the threshold of significant harm is met or is not met. A conference is a multi-agency decision making process, all professionals have different perspectives which we should respect and each professional's opinion is recorded as a recommendation. Differing views amongst professionals can be openly expressed and preferably resolved but the final threshold decision rests with the child protection conference chair.

### Aim of the process

The aim of this process is to provide guidance to all practitioners who attend child protection conferences and their managers. The purpose is to ensure that when professionals are not in agreement with the decision made at a child protection conference the process for formal dissent is clear and transparent.

It is not a policy document for parents, who should be directed to the Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership complaints process in relation to child protection conferences guidance or the Windsor and Maidenhead Safeguarding Children Partnership complaints in relation to child protection conference guidance.

### Dissent definition

To dissent means that a professional disagrees so strongly with the conference decision that they cannot have their professional name attributed to the decision. Professionals must always consider whether dissenting from the conference decision will benefit the parents understanding of the risks and ultimately benefits the child. Dissent must always run parallel with the professional formally escalating their concerns.

Professional dissent from the conference decision is covered in section 4.11 of the ***Pan London Child Protection Procedures***, which state:

*4.11.1 If an agency does not agree with a decision or recommendation made at a child protection conference, their professional dissent will be recorded in the record*

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*of the conference. The procedures to apply the escalation process for professional disagreements should be implemented as soon as practicable after the conference has concluded. See Part B: Practice Guidance.*

*4.11.2 Each safeguarding partnership and other agencies should have a local protocol in place with a policy and procedure to address professional disagreements and dissent about the outcome of child protection conferences as well as core group meetings.*

Professional dissent from the conference decision is covered in section 4.11 of the **Pan Berkshire Child Protection Procedures**, which state:

*If an agency does not agree with a decision or recommendation made at a Child Protection Conference, their professional dissent will be recorded in the record of the conference. The procedures to apply the Resolving Professional Disagreement and Escalation Procedure for professional disagreements should be implemented as soon as practicable after the conference has concluded.*

### **The process**

Where a professional is not in agreement with the decision made by the child protection conference chair, the conference chair will discuss this with them within the conference. If the professional then wishes to proceed with a formal dissent, this will be recorded on the child protection conference written record.

Dissent can only be expressed within a child protection conference, dissent cannot be made by professionals who have not attended the conference or after the conference has ended.

The conference chair will inform the Head of Conferencing and Review / Quality Assurance Manager by email immediately following the conference that a formal dissent has been recorded.

Within five working days of the conference, the professional dissenting will put their professional view and rationale for their formal dissent in an email to the Head of Conferencing and Review / Quality Assurance Manager. They will specify what outcome they are seeking that will resolve their dissent. They may want to discuss with their safeguarding lead prior to putting their reasons for formal dissent in writing.

The Head of Conference and Review / Quality Assurance Manager will review the conference decision and will respond to the dissenting professional with their view, within 10 working days of receiving the formal email from the dissenting professional. The outcome may be that the dissent is not upheld, that the conference will be reconvened or that there will be an early review of the conference decision. This decision will be recorded on the child's social care record.

Should the matter remain unresolved, the dissenting professional will discuss this with their line manager and consider escalation to the Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership or the Windsor and Maidenhead Safeguarding Children Partnership, for further consideration and following the conflict and resolution policy.