



Escalation Policy

For the Resolution of Professional Disagreements relating to safeguarding children and adults with care and support needs

WOLVERHAMPTON SAFEGUARDING TOGETHER PARTNERSHIP

Version Control

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Purpose

Occasionally there may be times when practitioners disagree on whether the actions, inaction or decisions of another agency adequately safeguard a child or an adult with care and support needs. The purpose of this protocol is to ensure that in such situations issues between agencies are resolved in a timely manner.

Professional disagreements will sometimes arise over another practitioner's decisions, actions or lack of actions in relation to a referral, an assessment or an enquiry which are considered to be unsafe. Disagreements can be healthy and foster creative ways of working with children, adults with care and support needs and families. **However, disagreements always require resolution.**

The safety and wellbeing of a child or adult with care and support needs must be the paramount consideration at all times and professional differences must not detract from timely and clear decision making. All practitioners working with children, adults with care and support needs and families have a duty to act assertively and proactively to ensure the individuals' welfare is seen as a priority at all levels of professional activity.

It is also incumbent on the practitioners involved to ensure that problems are resolved within the shortest timescale possible to protect the individual. **Agencies should therefore exercise their judgment as to whether the timelines outlined in this protocol need to be achieved more quickly.**

It is the responsibility of all practitioners to initiate a challenge to actions, inaction or the decisions made by other agencies where they believe there is evidence to suggest that the health, development, well-being or safety of a child or adult with care and support needs may be compromised.

When using this protocol, practitioners should be reminded that this document outlines the process for resolving multi-agency disputes arising from actions, inaction or decisions that are believed not to be in the best interest of a child, adult with care and support needs and/or family, or which is likely to place an individual / family at increased risk of harm. This is not a protocol to address single / inter-agency disputes, or complaints about individual practice. These should be channelled through single agencies internal processes and/or complaints procedures.

Agencies are also reminded that single agency policies in relation to dispute resolution should make reference to, and direct practitioners to the use of this document.

Key principles

Practitioners should:

- Share key information appropriately and often.
- Aim to resolve a professional dispute at the earliest possible stage and as swiftly as possible. A timeframe is detailed further on in this policy.
- Ensure that telephone contacts are shared - go back to basics and attempt a telephone conversation in the first instance to discuss concerns.
- Recognise that professional challenge can be facilitated through consistent communication and information sharing between agencies, and through clear plans for children, adults with care and support needs and families.
- Always strive to know which other agencies and individual staff members are involved with the child or adult with care and support needs, and their family.
- Avoid disputes which delay decision making which may place children or adults with care and support needs at further risk.
- Liaise with the safeguarding lead in their organisation at the earliest opportunity. Clarity is expected from all agencies in respect of designated roles and responsibilities.
- Keep the focus on the safety and welfare of the child or adult with care and support needs at all times.
- Familiarise themselves with the routes within their own agency for escalation and resolution.
- Ensure that at all stages of the process, accurate actions and decisions are recorded (on the file) and shared with relevant personnel including the practitioner who raised the initial concern. This must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.
- Highlight gaps in policies, procedures and/or processes that must be brought to the attention of the agency representative of the Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together Partnership.
- Stay proactively involved; safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- Use the WST dispute resolution process set out at section 4.

The role of practitioners and agencies

Practitioners providing services to children, adults with care and support needs and families should work co-operatively across all agencies. Effective partnership working relies on open and honest relationships and clear communication between staff from different agencies.

WST expects professionals working directly with children, adults with care and support needs, and their families to share information appropriately in line with national and local guidance and to work to plans agreed in all relevant forums (case discussions, meetings, and conferences) to safeguard children and adults with care and support needs in the local area.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults with care and support needs is a responsibility shared by all agencies. Whilst the Local Authority is allocated a 'lead' role in co-ordinating responses to risk, or causes, of significant harm to children or adults with care and support needs, effective intervention is dependent upon inter-agency information sharing, planning and multi-agency service responses.

Problem solving is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children and adults with care and support needs. WST expects all agencies to adopt a proactive approach towards problem solving which enables professional disagreements to be resolved as close to front line practice as possible.

All agencies are responsible for ensuring that their staff are competent and supported to escalate appropriately any inter-agency concerns and disagreements about the safety or wellbeing of a child or adults with care and support needs.

The process of resolution, where difficulties or disagreements arise between agencies, should be kept as simple as possible. The aim, where possible, is to resolve difficulties quickly and without delay at a peer-to-peer level.

Actions should always be based on a robust assessment of the risk of harm to the child or adult with care and support needs and the impact of the given situation on the individual's wellbeing. Decisions and actions should be commensurate with the risks posed to the child or adult with care and support needs. Whilst this protocol sets out expected timescales within which matters should be escalated where an inter-agency disagreement has arisen, in some situations it may be necessary to act sooner to protect a child or adult with care and support needs. **The timescales indicated should not be a reason for delaying action.**

If a child or adult with care and support needs is thought to be at immediate risk of harm the designated safeguarding lead within the agency identifying the concern should take appropriate action in line with your own agency and [WST procedures](#).

Each practitioner is responsible for recording professional discussions and decision-making in line with the case recording protocols and procedures in each agency or setting. Those involved in the resolution process must accurately and contemporaneously record each intra- and inter-agency discussion they have and approve and date the record.

Where the disagreement involves actions in relation to an individual child or adult with care and support needs, a record of the intra- and inter-agency discussion and any other written communication, where appropriate, should be placed on the individual's record or other appropriate recording mechanism i.e. supervision record, escalation log etc.

Process for resolution and escalation

Practitioners should attempt to resolve differences through discussion within 10 working days or a timescale that protects the child or adult with care and support needs from harm (whichever is shortest).

Stage	Parties involved	Process	Maximum duration (working days)	Cumulative duration (working days)
1	Practitioners	In relation to the safeguarding needs of a child or adult with care and support needs, after discussion with their line manager, the practitioner should raise the matter with the relevant practitioner verbally and in writing within 2 working days of the disagreement or receipt of a decision.	2 days	2 days
		The practitioner should provide clear evidence-based reasons for their disagreement. The receiving agency must read and review the case file. They must speak to the disputing practitioner and attempt to find a mutually agreeable way forward within 3 working days. Where a resolution is reached the responsible worker will advise the agency of the outcome in writing (i.e. email) by the end of the third working day.	3 days	5 days
		When any professional considers a child or adult with care and support needs is at immediate risk of significant harm, then the individual must ensure their concerns are escalated immediately in line with established safeguarding procedures.		

2	Line Managers / Safeguarding Lead	If the practitioners in the two agencies are unable to resolve their disagreement following exploration of the facts, each should raise their concerns with their respective manager or named lead for safeguarding, who should attempt to resolve the differences within 2 working days. If agreement is reached, the receiving agency will write to the disputing agency confirming the outcome by the end of the second working day.	2 days	7 days
3	Service / Senior Managers / Safeguarding Lead	If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between the line managers / safeguarding lead, the issue must be referred in writing within 24 hours to the relevant senior manager. The relevant senior managers should engage in dialogue within 2 working days to resolve the issue.	3 days	10 days
4	WST Agency Representative	Where a resolution is still not agreed after Stage 3, the service/senior manager will raise the disagreement within a further 2 working days with their agency or sector's WST representative. Their WST representative will then write to their equivalent in the agency with whom they have the dispute and meet within a further 2 working days to achieve a final resolution.	4 days	14 days
5	Exceptional circumstances	WST expects that professional disputes will be resolved within the first 3 stages of the process set out above, however, it is recognised that there may be occasions when some issues will remain unresolved at the end of stage 4 above. Where this is the case, a referral should be made for the attention of the WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group Chair*, who will mediate the activities through to a resolution.	5 days	19 days

6	Exceptional circumstances	Should a resolution not be reached after referral to the WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group Chair, a further referral will be made to the WST Executive Group** for review and a final decision.	5 days	
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* In exceptional circumstances only, where the matter remains unresolved and the concerns of the complaining agency persist, the Director of this agency should write immediately and within no more than 2 working days, to the WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group Chair, via the WST Partnership Manager. The Chair will seek written representation initially and may request a meeting with those involved at all levels of service delivery to seek their views and solutions to the concerns raised. The Chair will make a final and binding decision on the most appropriate way to proceed and this will be communicated to all involved within 5 working days of the issue being brought to their attention. Alternatively, the Chair will identify a partnership member from an uninvolved agency to chair a meeting of the most senior managers with operational responsibility for the case. This meeting will review the issues at hand and provide a final opportunity for the involved agencies to ensure that there is a full understanding of the issues before the decision is finalised. The chair of this meeting will report back to the WST Scrutiny & Assurance Chair.

** If the complaining agency remain unsatisfied with the response received from the WST Scrutiny and Assurance Co-ordination Group Chair, independent WST representative Chair or WST Executive Group, it may be necessary to seek formal independent arbitration to reach a timely and mutually acceptable conclusion.

Following use of Resolution and Escalation Process:

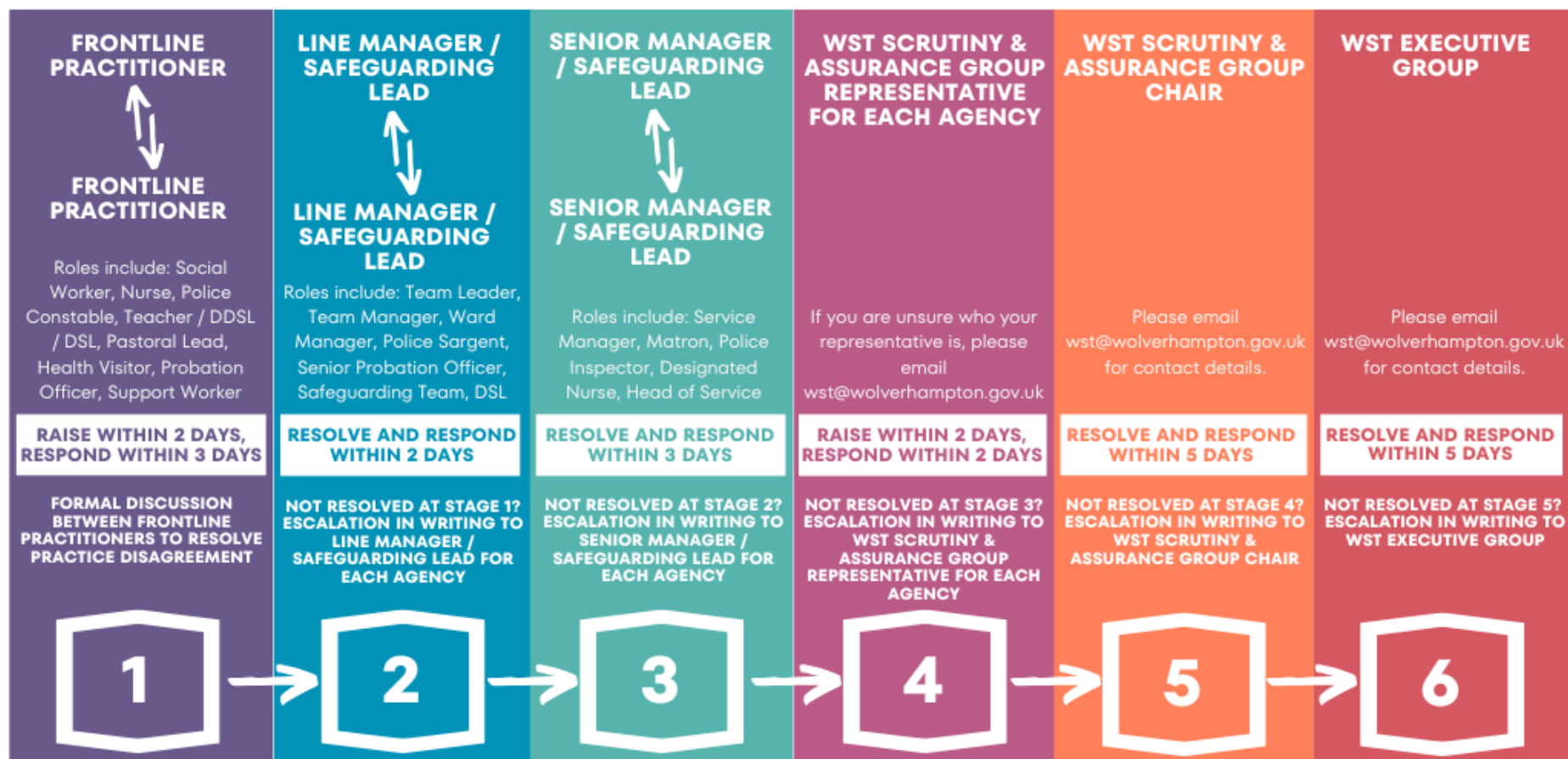
It may be useful for individuals to debrief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships.

Appendix 1: Situations where disagreement and dispute may arise

Occasions may arise where one practitioner disagrees with the actions of another and therefore in such cases this policy should be followed.

- Where one practitioner disagrees with the action of another in relation to a particular course of action, such as closing involvement with a child, or adult with care and support needs or family.
- Where one practitioner or agency considers that another practitioner or agency has not completed an agreed action for no understandable or acceptable reason.
- Where one agency considers that the threshold for action is inappropriate to support the needs of a child or adult with care and support needs and/or places an individual at further risk.
- Where there is a disagreement as to whether a particular agency needs to be involved in the safeguarding process.
- Where a practitioner or an agency considers that the safeguarding needs of the child or adult with care and support needs are better met by a Child Protection Plan/adult safeguarding plan and have requested that a Child Protection Conference/safeguarding meeting be called and feel that this has been refused.
- Where a range of practitioners and professionals have concerns about an agency's response to safeguarding concerns relating to a specific child or adult with care and support needs.
- Where there is a disagreement over the sharing of information and/or provision of services.

Appendix 2: WST Escalation Policy Process Flow Chart



Best Practice:

- For each stage, initiate a phone call with other agency professional.
- Follow up with an email, with the subject line: Formal Escalation Stage XX to ensure that the receiving agency is aware of the escalation and can work to the required timeframes.

Appendix 3: WST membership and agency safeguarding leads

Organisation	Name
Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	Associate Director of Safeguarding
City of Wolverhampton Council	Deputy Director of Children's Social Care Deputy Director for Education Deputy Director of Adult Social Care Head of Adult Services Head of Service, Specialist Support Education Strategic Lead
Healthwatch Wolverhampton	Manager
Probation Service	Head of Probation, Walsall & Wolverhampton
NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board	Associate Director of Nursing for Safeguarding and Partnerships Designated Nurses, Wolverhampton Place
Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust	Head of Safeguarding Deputy Head of Safeguarding
Safer Wolverhampton Partnership	Head of Communities, Public Health
Voluntary Community and Faith Sector	WVCA Operations Manager
West Midlands Fire Service	Safeguarding Manager
West Midlands Police	Detective Chief Inspector Public Protection Unit Chief Inspector Local Policing Area
Wolverhampton Homes	Assistant Director
Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together	Partnership Manager Quality Assurance Lead and Project Manager Partnership Support Officer

For direct contact details please contact: wst@wolverhampton.gov.uk