

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY
PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE



**Protocol for Professionals' Meetings
and
Multi-Agency Working Forums**

Management Information	
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Policy & Procedure Sub-Group of the Public Protection Committee (PPC) requested that a short-life working group review and update the existing Protocol for Professionals' Meetings which was agreed in 2021.
- 1.2. In order to enhance multi-agency working across the Public Protection Partnership, it was agreed to include other multi-agency working arrangements such as Group Supervision and Reflective Learning. This protocol aims to provide the necessary structure to enable staff to meet within a professional forum, as appropriate, to meet the needs of adults or children.
- 1.3. Good communication is central to effective multi-agency working. This multi-agency working protocol is designed to make it as easy as possible for frontline practitioners to work together and build trusting relationships.
- 1.4. This protocol is therefore aimed at all professionals working with adults, children and their families.

2. Purpose of Multi-Agency Meetings to Support Professionals

- 2.1. There are currently many multi-agency meetings designed to allow professionals in partnership with the person, parents or carers to consider multi-agency information, identify the needs of the person and together formulate plans to meet these needs. In most circumstances these meetings should provide the appropriate context for multi-agency discussion and debate. However, there are times when a multi-agency meeting is required outwith these planning forums.
- 2.2. When considering which type of meeting is required it is important to distinguish between the different types of meetings.

Group Supervision

- 2.3. The purpose of Group Supervision is to draw upon collective resources to provide reflection opportunities and support. It can enable practitioners to be solution focussed regarding practice issues and can play an important role in building group cohesion and identity.
- 2.4. A Group Supervision might be held when it is identified that professionals would benefit from a reflective and supportive environment within which creativity and ideas can be fostered. Any practitioner can arrange a Group Supervision.
- 2.5. Group Supervision can be single or multi-agency and can help practitioners think 'into' the work and how best they can work with families. The aim is to bring out the best ideas from practitioners via shared analysis, creating an environment within which creativity and ideas can be fostered, thereby making it more likely for the group to make the desired improvements. Throughout the process participants learn from each other and are given the opportunity to 'think through' how they can work with risk and the uncertainty this brings.

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- 2.6. Group Supervision promotes organisational learning and creates parallel learning processes across the organisation. Group supervision is crucial to continuous improvement and ongoing learning. It underpins and supports all levels of an organisation to think about practice and to reflect. It promotes group cohesion and self/ organisational evaluation.
- 2.7. Group Supervision is not a planning forum. It follows a process to ensure the opportunities it creates are maximised. Group supervision offers many benefits as it provides an opportunity to discuss and reflect on challenges, encourages professional curiosity and helps relationship building within and across agencies.

Reflective Learning Practitioner Forums

- 2.8. The Reflective Learning Tool was initially developed to address those situations in Public Protection where there is learning to be drawn but does not require a formal Learning Review. However, it is not exclusive to this arena and can also be very much applied in other areas of practice where any staff and managers wish to draw learning about areas for improvement or strengths in practice.
- 2.9. The Reflective Learning Tool can be used in single or multi-agency practice where there is no requirement for a formal Learning Review, for which there is very distinct and separate formal guidance. Reflective Learning spaces are not planning forums. The tool supports improvement and encourages celebration of success through learning from good practice. Any practitioner, through consultation with their Line Manager, can arrange a Reflective Learning Practitioner forum.

Professionals’ Meetings

- 2.10. The purpose of a Professionals’ Meeting is to provide a forum for professionals to meet to discuss and debate complex practice issues specific to individual children and their families and adults in the community, in circumstances where the opportunity to do so does not fit into any existing forums or processes. The aim is to assist professionals to analyse information on a multi-agency basis and to form professional judgements taking account of multi-agency perspectives. A Professionals’ Meeting is a distinct process which has a different format and purpose to other multi-agency working forums.
- 2.11. A Professionals Meeting is not a planning forum and should not be confused with these but could be used to inform decision-making and planning within such meetings.

3. Professional Judgement

- 3.1. Professional judgment is a deliberate process occurring within a professional context guided by specific knowledge and skills. It is honed through reflective discussions with colleagues and managers, practice wisdom, training, and knowledge developed through use of research and evidence-based practice.

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4. Professional Curiosity

- 4.1. Multi-agency professional forums require the use of Professional Curiosity for best outcomes. Practitioners must be 'respectfully uncertain' and ensure they are actively listening and asking direct questions. Checking out the information that is being received and reflecting on all the information is important to avoid making assumptions or taking information at face value. Nurturing professional curiosity and challenge are fundamental to partnership working to keep adults and children safe. It is everyone's responsibility to 'problem solve'.

5. Holding a Professionals' Meeting

- 5.1. Where there are exceptional circumstances with particular complexities, an additional level of professional discussion and multi-agency analysis may be required. In such cases, a Professionals' Discussion should take place. This may be because communication amongst the key professionals is difficult or there is disagreement about levels of concerns, thresholds, or proposed action plans. It is important that professionals are able to explore the issues underlying these without professional disagreement having an adverse impact on adults, children or their parents or carers.
- 5.2. Where there is professional disagreement about concerns for children or adults, strong emotional issues may impact on judgement. In order to resolve professional disagreements or misunderstandings, communication is key. The aim must be to seek resolution as soon as possible, ensuring that the child or adult's safety and welfare are paramount. There must be respectful challenge whenever a professional or agency has a concern about the action or inaction of another.
- 5.3. It is important to highlight that disagreement can be healthy and generate constructive debate, which may ultimately lead to more robust assessment and action planning. 'Vulnerable competence', which does not expect workers to get it right all the time, given the complexity of practice, must be respected and understood.

6. Criteria for Professionals' Meetings

- 6.1. The criteria for convening a Professionals' Meeting are where a family/ individual is already known to agencies and there is an existing professional network and one or more of the following also apply:
- Where there is no existing forum or meeting structure to discuss and debate specific issues.
 - Where the issues are of a particularly complex or unusual nature.
 - If the professional network feels unable to progress in terms of future planning and concerns are increasing as a result.

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- d. If there is professional disagreement or confusion, for example, around thresholds or roles and responsibilities which cannot be resolved within existing forums.

7. Convening a Professionals' Meeting

- 7.1. Where possible, other forums should be considered prior to consideration of a Professionals' Meeting.
- 7.2. If a practitioner feels the above criteria for convening a Professionals' Meeting has been met, they should discuss this with their Line Manager.
- 7.3. If advice is needed, this can be sought from Public Protection Leads for example, Education Safeguarding Manager, Public Protection Team in NHS, Community Mental Health Team Manager, Social Work Line Manager or anyone in equivalent advisory roles within your own organisation.
- 7.4. When a single agency considers that the criteria has been met to convene a Professionals' Meeting, they should consult with partners in the relevant agencies to seek agreement. Once agreement is reached, discussion should take place in terms of who should be involved in the meeting and also identify who is best placed to chair the meeting.

8. Chair of a Professionals' Meeting

- 8.1. When considering who is best placed to chair the meeting, the following factors should be taken into account:
- The chair should have an appropriate level of seniority, for example, Senior Social Workers, Team Managers, Nurse Managers, Schools Senior Management Team, Health Visitors.
 - They should have appropriate levels of skills in chairing meetings and facilitating multi-agency discussion.
 - Any issues relating to power imbalances and required objectivity.

9. Who Should be Involved?

- 9.1. Generally, practitioners directly involved with the child or adult should be included, but consideration needs to be given to the relevance of individual roles and responsibilities and the requirement to participate.
- 9.2. When considering attendance, it is important to remember what research tells us regarding effective decision making: The optimal number of people to make effective decisions is 6. At that point, personal and group performance is highest. Every additional person reduces efficiency by 10%, therefore the number of professionals attending should reflect this.
- 9.3. There may be circumstances where it is important to consider whether to include or seek advice from additional professionals who have expertise in an area of practice which is particularly relevant to the area of concern (for example, substance misuse services). This would enable complex

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information to be presented and evaluated from a sound and objective evidence base.

- 9.4. It should also be noted that without explicit consent from adults, children and their families, Police Scotland will only be able to share information with statutory partners.

10. Escalation

- 10.1. It is expected that good practice when working together to support children and adults will include elements of professional constructive challenge.
- 10.2. Before escalation to formal dispute, professionals should always seek to resolve disagreements through discussion and negotiation. Professionals should always seek to resolve disagreements at the earliest stage before escalating to senior managers.
- 10.3. If an agreement cannot be reached with partners to proceed to a Professionals Meeting, escalation processes should be utilised which will usually involve discussion with Line Managers until the matter can be resolved and agreement reached about the way forward.
- 10.4. If an agreement cannot be reached where a Professional Meeting has taken place, escalation processes should be followed.
- 10.5. There are specific escalation protocols and guidance available within other policy and procedures and should be followed when working within other professional forums and legislation. For example, the [Dumfries and Galloway Children's Services Resolution and Escalation Protocol](#) and Dumfries and Galloway Multi-Agency Adult Support and Protection guidance.
- 10.6. As noted, it is every practitioner's responsibility to problem solve where there is disagreement and ensure that communication is clear and open, and that disagreement and escalation does not result in time delay in considering next steps for the adult or child.
- 10.7. If a child, young person or adult is considered to be at immediate risk of significant harm, you must ensure that your concerns are escalated on the same working day using established child protection and adult support and protection referral procedures.

11. Links to other Meetings/ Processes

- 11.1. The Professionals Meeting cannot be a substitute for existing meeting structures. If at any point during the Professionals Meeting, participants believe the child or adult is suffering from, or at risk of, immediate significant harm, then existing child protection or adult support and protection procedures should be implemented.
- 11.2. The Professionals Meeting needs to consider how the conclusion from this discussion will be taken into existing planning forums.

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12. Communication with Child, Parents, or Adults

- 12.1. Consent is not needed to proceed to a Professionals' Meeting, but good practice would be to inform adults, children and their families when one is taking place when appropriate. The only time it may not be appropriate would be when this could increase the risk to a child or adult by doing so. This requires the application of professional judgement and consensus from all professional participants.
- 12.2. Parents and children, where appropriate, should normally be informed in advance that a Professionals' Meeting is going to take place and why it is felt to be necessary.
- 12.3. With adults, clinical and professional judgement should be exercised in relation to informing the individual.
- 12.4. The meeting should agree who will feedback the outcome of the meeting to the adult, parent/ carer and child where appropriate. When sharing the outcome with parent/ carer, it is important to ensure that what is shared is reflective of what is recorded.

13. Outcomes

- 13.1. The outcome of the meeting should be a clear understanding of what the next steps are.
- 13.2. Whilst the Professionals' Meeting cannot produce a plan to meet the child or adult's needs, as this should be compiled with the adult, child and parent/ carer, any decisions or actions agreed should be clear and documented.

14. Recording

- 14.1. The Chair will be responsible for ensuring a brief note which summarises key points of discussion, including any recommendations or decisions, is produced and shared with those attending within 10 working days.
- 14.2. Agencies thereafter are responsible for ensuring that the record is securely stored in accordance with legislative and agency requirements, including the Data Protection Act 2018.

15. Other Tools Available to Support Professionals

- Step into Leadership – Group Supervision Group
https://stepintoleadership.info/assets/pdf/group_supervision.pdf
- Supervision – Reflective Case Discussion Model Using Group
https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PT_The-reflective-case-discussion-model-of-group-supervision_FINAL.pdf
- Supervision in Children's Social Care

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https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/KB_Using_group_supervision_in_childrens_social_care_Final.pdf

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