**Core Group Guidance**

Core Group meetings are part of our Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency child protection planning process and allow us to work together to make a difference and keep children safe These meetings allow us to:

* work in partnership with parents and children
* coordinate our work across agencies
* communicate better between professionals

Following an Initial child protection conference the Core Group is responsible for developing the outline child protection plan as a detailed working tool.

**The purpose of a Child Protection Plan is to:**

* ensure the child is safe from harm and prevent him or her from suffering further harm
* promote the child’s health and development; and
* support the family and wider family members to safeguard and promote the welfare of their child, provided it is in the best interests of the child

All Core Group members are jointly responsible for setting up and putting the child protection plan into place, monitoring progress against plan objectives and making changes to the plan as needed.

The focus of the meeting is to review the plan and assess progress, any drift and the safety of the child. The record should show this and the details of the child protection plan – the things that need to change so the plan is no longer needed.

The plan will set out what each member of the Core Group is expected to do and what work will take place, including visits to the home and further assessments where necessary. There should be timescales set within the plan by which this action is to be achieved.

**An Outcome focused discussion to establish and then update progress against each element of the Child Protection Plan**

It is essential that the Core Group set out what needs to change, by how much and by when in order for the child to be safe and have their needs met. The Core Group should look to ensure that the outline Plan is developed into a clear working tool for the Core Group Members over the weeks and months ahead so that success can be judged clearly.

This means that each element of the Plan should be broken down into clear, straight forward statements which answers the following questions:

1. What stops this child being safe / achieving their potential?
2. What needs to be different for the child?
3. What needs to be done?
4. Who will do it?
5. When will it happen by?
6. How will we know?

**Core Groups should:**

* meet within 10 working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference and regularly thereafter to ensure the plan to keep the child safe is having a positve impact
* develop and set out the outline child protection plan produced by the Initial Child Protection Conference
* focus on what needs to change to ensure that there is no longer need a child protection plan
* acknowledge what has gone well
* consider what is stopping outcomes being met (such as a parent’s understanding) and how that can be addressed
* challenge inactivity
* decide what steps are needed, when and who by especially when a child may no longer need a protection plan
* update the plan to ensure actions completed are acknowledged and any new risks are addressed.

Charing a meeting and having responsibility for taking a written record can be a significant challenge. Any member of the Core Group can chair or record the meeting and members of the Core Group have shared responsibility to ensure that those chairing do not also have to take the record of the meeting.

The member of the Core Group with responsibility for taking the record is also responsible for ensuring that a typed copy of that record is forwarded to the social worker within 5 working days.

**Membership of Core Groups:**

If a Child Protection Plan is needed, the conference must find out what professionals and family members are needed for the Core Group. These will be people who will develop and set up the Child Protection Plan. The Core Group should include the child if they are of an appropriate age and understanding.

Members should decide who is the most appropriate to chair the meetings and then make arrangements for another member of the Core Group to take the notes.

During the course of a plan, new risks may emerge that will require new professionals to be invited to join the Core Group. The Social Worker is responsible for ensuring these professionals are invited.

**Venue:**

The venue of a Core Group Meeting should be subject to reasonable negotiation between all members of the Core Group. The accessibility, comfort and confidentiality of the venue for parents, the child and family carers should be important considerations. A Core Group Meeting may take place within the family home. It will be for the allocated Social Worker for the children, as Lead for Core Group activity, to resolve any disputes as to the appropriateness of a venue.

**Recording of Core Groups:**

Members should decide who is the most appropriate to chair the meetings and then make arrangements for another member of the Core Group to take the notes.

A written record of all Core Group meetings must be made and shared by the Core Group member who has taken the record of the meeting. This should be available within 5 working days. Once received, the Social Worker has responsibility for distributing these notes with the revised Child Protection Plan. This includes the parents and child where this is age appropriate.

The Social Worker has the responsibilty for ensuring that the child’s electronic record is updated.

The focus of the meeting is to review the plan and assess progress, drift and the safety of the child. The record should show this and the details of the child protection plan – the things that need to change so the plan is no longer needed.

If there is a significant disagreement at a Core Group meeting, this should be shared with the team manager and brought to the attention of chair of the conference.

**What if someone has not completed an action they committed to?**

If members are concerned that there are difficulties in implementing the child protection plan arising from profesisonal agencies or a Core Group member not carrying out agreed responsiblities this should be discussed within the Core Group as a professionals meeting to try and resolve without undermining the professional authority or confidence a parent of child may have in that profesisonal.

Where there are significant dififculties in carrying out the Child Protection Plan the Core Group should consider bringing forward the date of the review conference.

For additional information please see the Resolution of Professional Disagreemnt Porceedure: <http://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/local-content/4gjN/escalation-policy-resolution-of-professional-disagreements>

**Frequency**

After the first Core Group meeting which must be held within 10 working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference. The first Core Group should be arranged at the end of the

Initial Child Protection meeting and attendess are requested to bring their diary with them to facilitate this being arranged.

The subsequent Core Groups should take place at least every six weeks and within 14 working days of any Review Child Protection Conference.

**If you are asked to be part of a Core group it should be a priority meeting. Children can be protected from harm when professionals and families are working towards common goals and outcomes, and it is clear who is doing what.**

The Core Group will then continue to meet at least every six weeks until the chld is no longer subject to a child protection plan. Core Groups can meet more frequently if the members of the Core Group feel this is necessary.

**Other responsibilities**

If the Social Worker has difficulty obtaining direct access to the child, the Social Worker’s Team Manager and all Core Group members must be informed. In these circumstances formal agreement must be reached that a member of another agency carry out the face-to-face contact, or that a review conference is called. Such a decision must be recorded, authorised by managers of the agencies concerned and agreed in the child’s plan.