



# Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership

## Escalation: Resolving Professional Differences

2021

## 1. Introduction

Safeguarding children and adults is a complex process that requires collaborative working across a range of professions and disciplines. At times there may be disagreement about the best course of action to take, and the need to resolve professional differences through proportionate use of escalation. The purpose of this protocol is to provide an escalation framework for practitioners and managers across all relevant agencies within Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership.

Professionals providing services to children, adults, their carers and their families should work co-operatively across all agencies, using their skills and experience to make a robust contribution to safeguarding and promoting welfare within the framework of discussions, meetings, conferences and case management.

Reviews of serious cases frequently identify the need for practitioners to make use of escalation. All agencies are responsible for ensuring that their staff are competent and supported to escalate appropriately intra-agency and inter-agency concerns and disagreements about a child or adult's wellbeing.

## 2. What is Escalation?

Concern or disagreement may arise over another professional's decisions, actions, or lack of actions in relation to a referral, an assessment, or an enquiry. Professionals should attempt to resolve differences through discussion and/or meeting within a timescale that protects the child/adult from harm.

If the professionals are unable to resolve differences within the timescale, their disagreement must be addressed by more experienced / more senior staff.

Effective working together depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies. Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children and adults.

Disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around:

- Levels of need
- Roles and responsibilities
- Actions taken, or not taken
- Care planning
- Communication and information sharing

Ensuring the safety of individual children and adults is the paramount consideration in resolving any professional disagreement. Any unresolved issues should be addressed with due consideration to the risks that might exist for the subject child or adult.

All professionals should be encouraged to be curious about why decisions are made and question if they do not feel this is right. Staff from any agency should feel confident and able to challenge decision-making; they will have a professional responsibility to promote the best multi-agency safeguarding practice and therefore raising such concerns is an entirely legitimate activity.

Those receiving any professional challenge should be encouraged to see this as an opportunity to reflect and give their rationale which supports good decision making.

### 3. Resolving Professional Differences

This protocol provides professionals with the means to raise concerns they have about decisions made by other professionals or agencies by:

- Encouraging professional curiosity
- Avoiding professional disputes that put children and adults at risk or obscure the focus on safeguarding
- Resolving the difficulties within and between agencies quickly and openly
- Identifying problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity and to promote the resolution via amendment to protocols and procedures

Resolution of the issues raised should be sought within the shortest possible timescale to ensure the child/adult's safety and best interests are safeguarded. Disagreements should be resolved at the lowest/earliest possible stage. However, if it is thought that there is a risk of immediate harm, discretion should be used as to which stage is initiated.

Most day-to-day inter-agency differences of opinion will be resolved between the professionals that are directly involved or, at most, require a social care manager to liaise with their (first line manager) equivalent in the relevant agencies, e.g.:

- A police detective sergeant
- A lead/named safeguarding health professional
- Designated safeguarding children teacher

These first line managers should also seek advice from their agency's designated safeguarding children professional.

Where a resolution cannot be reached within an appropriate timescale the issue must be escalated through appropriate safeguarding/line management structures.

- Children's/Adult's Social Care – Head of Service
- Police – Detective Inspector in relevant service
- Health – Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Education – Child Protection Lead for Education

The professionals involved in the resolution process must contemporaneously record each intra- and inter-agency discussion they have, approve and date the record and place a copy on the child's record held by their agency, together with any other written communications and information. Where a designated professional does not have access to a child's record, they should ensure that a written report is provided to the relevant professional who can add it to the record.

## 4. Stages of Escalation:

At all stages conversation should be specific and evidence based as to what the difference in opinion is about and what is in the best interest of the subject of the escalation.

### **Stage One**

Any professional who feels that a decision is not safe or is inappropriate should initially consult a supervisor/manager to clarify their thinking in order to identify the problem and be specific and evidence based as to what the difference in opinion is about and what they aim to achieve.

Initial attempts should be taken to resolve the problem as soon as possible. This would normally be between the people who hold the differing views and ideally be a conversation to discuss followed by email confirming the resolution or ongoing concern.

It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some professionals to pursue this unsupported.

### **Stage Two**

If the problem is not resolved at stage one the concerned professional should contact their supervisor/manager within their own agency who should raise the concerns with the equivalent supervisor/manager in the other agency.

### **Stage Three**

If the problem is not resolved at stage two the supervisor/manager reports to their respective operations manager or named/designated safeguarding representative. These two managers must attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion.



## **Stage Four**

If it is not possible to resolve the professional differences within the agencies concerned, the matter should be referred to the Safeguarding Partnership Implementation Unit, by email using the form in the appendix. The Implementation Unit may seek to resolve the issue directly, convene a Resolution Panel, or refer to the relevant Chair of the child or adult Safeguarding Boards.

The Resolution Panel must consist of Safeguarding Partnership representatives from three agencies (Local Authority, Police and CCG), including those agencies directly concerned in the professional difference. The Panel will review the concerns and the escalation chronology up to that point and will discuss the issue with the agencies involved who will be represented at the Panel. A written response outlining the agreed method to resolve the matter will be sent to the referrer, with copies provided to other involved agencies.

Where the matter remains unresolved, or speaks to fundamental issues within the safeguarding system, it can be escalated to the Executive Leadership Group.



## Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership Request for Dispute Resolution

Please complete this form and send by email to:  
[safeguardingpartnership@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:safeguardingpartnership@hillingdon.gov.uk)

<b>Referrer</b>			
<b>Agency</b>			
<b>Contact details</b>			
<b>Subject</b>		<b>Dob</b>	
<b>Address:</b>			
<b>Ethnicity</b>		<b>Disability</b>	
<b>Gender</b>		<b>Religion</b>	
<b>Family/carer details</b>			
<b>Case Summary:</b>			
<b>Reason for Escalation:</b>			
<b>Summary of actions taken:</b>			
(Please provide details of involved agencies/professionals and action taken to resolve the differences as per stages 1-3)			