

Escalation Policy

Isle of Man Safeguarding Board

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Resolving Professional Differences (Escalation Protocol)

Contents

1. Introduction

2. Potential Areas of Disagreement

3. Stages of Disagreements

Stage One: Direct Professional to Professional Discussion

Stage Two: Direct First Line Manager to First Line Manager

Stage Three: Senior Manager to Senior Manager Discussion

Stage Four: Isle of Man Safeguarding Board Resolution Panel

4. Appendix

Please note that this policy replaces the Multi-Agency Reflective Discussion process, which is no longer to be used.

1. Introduction

This policy and guidance focusses on all organisations who work with children, young people and vulnerable adults. It aims to assist multi-agency practitioners to resolve significant differences of opinion or difficulties that may arise as a result of working together collaboratively to safeguard children and adults at risk, who could be in a vulnerable position as a result of an unresolved professional disagreement.

Protecting children and vulnerable adults will always be an area where differences of opinion about the best course of action arise. It is important that practitioners feel able to air their views and constructively challenge the views of others, by embracing the effectiveness of partnership working that is built on the principle of resolving differences and restoring relationships at the earliest opportunity. All parties who work together should do so with the greatest transparency to understand why there is a difference of opinion and should seek to clarify what the difference of opinion is; Otherwise this could result in conflict and lead to poorer outcomes, particularly for the children and adults at risk who are involved.

Nurturing professional curiosity and respectful challenge are fundamental aspects of working together to keep children, young people and vulnerable adults safe. Organisations should promote a no blame culture and encourage constructive, professional challenge between individuals and other organisations. Different professional perspectives should always be respected and their views should be welcomed and given serious consideration by others in the best interests of those we work with.

Professional curiosity often refers to the capacity to explore and understand what is happening in all aspects of a child, young person, adults and families lives rather than just taking things at face value and accepting what you see or are told. Being professionally curious does require practitioners to think differently about ways that they can engage with those they work with and other practitioners such as:

- Keeping an open mind and not presume you know what is happening;
- Not being afraid to ask questions;
- Explain why you are asking, without wanting to judge or criticise;
- Be open to the unexpected that does not support your initial assessment of the situation;
- Be respectful to one another.

When receiving a challenge, practitioners should remember that it may have taken courage for another person to raise their concern. Recipients should receive it in the spirit it is given. Nevertheless, at no time should a professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child or vulnerable adult is safeguarded. Their welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.

2. Potential Areas of Disagreement

There may be a number of reasons for a professional disagreement. The following are some examples of potential areas where practitioners may disagree with another agency's views/decisions:

- A referral made by an agency was not considered to meet the threshold criteria for assessment by Children and Families Division or Adult Social Care;
- Issues of managing power and authority between staff, other agencies and families, particularly when this is having an impact on overall decision making.
- There is disagreement between agencies about the need to convene a Strategy discussion
- There is disagreement between agencies about the need to convene a Child Protection Case Conference – where one agency believes that a child's welfare may not be otherwise safeguarded.
- There is disagreement between agencies about the need to convene an Adult Protection Case Conference – where one agency believes that a vulnerable adult's welfare may not be otherwise safeguarded.
- Where there is an interagency role and there is dispute and strong disagreement about decision making;
- An agency considers that the plan for the child/vulnerable adult is inadequate to meet their needs.
- Perceived levels of risk;
- Roles and Responsibilities;
- There is a disagreement over the sharing of information and/or provision of services or when one agency holds more information than another and it is not shared;
- There is disagreement over the outcome of any assessment and whether the appropriate action plan is in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child or vulnerable adult;
- Where there are serious general issues between two agencies.

This is not an exhaustive list and disagreements may arise in a number of areas.

Note: In all situations the overriding consideration as to whether to share information should be the safety and welfare of the child, young person or vulnerable adult at risk. See Information Sharing and Confidentiality Protocol for further information.

Areas falling outside of this Procedure

There are situations, sometimes unrelated to a particular child, vulnerable adult or family, where more general concerns emerge about an individual's professional practice which has impaired or inhibited an effective working relationship between two agencies, for example when there is a need to make a direct complaint about an individual's poor practice within another agency. To respond appropriately this should be managed outside of the escalation procedural process and be dealt with formally through the complaint or grievance process.

When an individual wishes to raise concerns about poor practice within their own organisation this should be initially dealt with by them making their complaint known to their manager. Should the individual feel that they are unable to raise the issue with their manager or if there is no resolution to the concern that was raised then they may wish to pursue their complaint and raise their concerns by considering the Whistle-blowing policy.

See Whistle-blowing policy.

Whenever there is a disagreement between agencies about the functioning and/or outcome of a child protection case conference or of the overall decision making within conference there is a specific process to follow to make a complaint.

See Child Protection Conference Procedure for guidance.

Resolving Professional Differences

Practitioners should be encouraged to seek advice from their line manager particularly when any professional differences arise that require resolution. The very nature of professionally challenging or escalating can be a difficult and worrying process for practitioners to be a part of. It is important that they are aware of the support mechanisms in place within their organisation. These may include using their own internal management structure to seek emotional support, supervision, network of staff and access to their professional regulatory bodies or union.

There should be no deviation by any organisation with following the resolution process unless information indicates that a child or vulnerable adult is at immediate risk of significant harm and only then must the process be urgently expedited to ensure the protection of the child or vulnerable adult.

Any escalation of concern should be carried out in the spirit of achieving better outcomes and where possible efforts should be made to address differences as they happen or soon after.

Where professional curiosity or challenge has not resolved professional differences then the unresolved dispute should be escalated using the escalation pathway. The pathway has three stages prior to escalation to the Safeguarding Board.

Stage One: Direct Professional to Professional Discussion.

With respect to most day-to-day issues, the practitioners should be able to resolve the disagreement, either through face to face or telephone discussion. Where any indication of risk or need that demonstrates a threshold has been met for urgent intervention, this should be clearly set out including any supporting evidence. The aim is to achieve a shared understanding and agree a resolution and a plan. If practitioners are unable to resolve differences the disagreement should be escalated to stage two.

Stage Two: Direct First Line Manager to First Line Manager Discussion.

If stage one fails to resolve the issue, then each practitioner should discuss this with their line manager and or Designated Safeguarding Lead within their own agency to consider the issue raised, what outcome they would like to achieve and how differences can be addressed. The first line manager (or designated safeguarding lead) should contact their representative counterpart to try to negotiate an agreed way forward, highlighting any risk or need, for example why a professional believes a situation meets the threshold for intervention in their professional opinion. This could involve a professional's meeting if deemed appropriate. If the resolution cannot be reached, the disagreement should be escalated to stage three.

In agencies or organisations where the management chain has already been exhausted, the most senior staff member should escalate their concerns to the next tier of management in the other agency. This principle applies to all escalation sections within this policy.

Stage Three: Senior Manager to Senior Management Discussion.

If concerns remain unresolved at this stage a senior manager to senior manager discussion, (either face to face or telephone) must take place to attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion. This could involve a professional's meeting if deemed appropriate.

Stage Four: Isle of Man Safeguarding Board

In the unlikely event that the issue is not resolved by the steps described above and/or the discussions raise significant policy issues, the matter should be urgently referred to the Safeguarding Board for resolution.

The escalation to the Safeguarding Board should be made via the Senior Manager responsible for raising the concern in respect of their agency by using the 'Resolving Professional Differences Escalation Referral Form' which should be emailed to the Safeguarding Board email



address safeguardingboard.co@gov.im for the attention of the Director of Multi-agency Safeguarding for the Safeguarding Board.

It is important when completing the referral form that it contains sufficient relevant information for the Director to be able to liaise with the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Board to advise of the issues that have arisen.

The Independent Chair will then consult the relevant service Senior Manager and agree the next steps that should be taken.

The outcome of the discussion and any agreed actions should be recorded on the 'outcome of agreed actions section' of the referral form and returned back to the responsible agency who made the referral.

Appendix 1 Process and Timescales:

PROCESS AND TIMESCALES

