Safeguarding Swindon's Children

Swindon LSCB Guidance: Multi-Agency Professionals Meetings

Purpose

A multi-agency professionals meeting is a tool to support practitioners in all agencies who have a genuine desire to work openly with families, but who may need the opportunity to talk with other professionals without the family being present. This may be important where there is a concern that the family is undermining attempts to understand potential risks to children in the family; or where there is uncertainty amongst professionals about the necessary steps to protect children.

A professionals meeting may be helpful where professional disagreements are impacting on effective work with the family, or where professionals need an opportunity to reflect on the plans for working with a family when progress is not being made.

Scope

A multi-agency professionals meeting can take one of several forms, but only some are covered by this guidance.

What is covered:

- A professional planning meeting;
- A meeting to resolve professional disagreements regarding the management of a case with respect to a child or young person.

What is NOT covered:

- A child protection Strategy Discussion (Children's Social Care, Police, Health, and others, as required);
- Professional advice and management meetings where the child/family name isn't shared;

Criteria for convening a multi-agency professionals meeting

This type of meeting would not be intended as a routine element in practice, since wherever possible professionals should aim to work in partnership with families, but could be considered in the following situations:

- an agency or agencies working with a family need to share information to clarify a concern or address difficulties in working with a family and to involve the family would inhibit discussion;

- to resolve concerns within the professional group, such as understanding of the degree of risk, meaning given to information, the approach and priority actions and the reasonable expectations of other professionals;

- an agency or group of professionals feels that the work with a child or young person and their family is not resulting in improved outcomes for children
- to resolve disagreements regarding an agency's response to a referral request, or concern raised regarding a child or young person;
- the family/child/young person's needs cannot be met from within the agency's own resources and the need or concern remains unaddressed;
- sharing of information by phone or email is not considered adequate to facilitate discussion and decision-making.
- when there are concerns about Fabricated or Induced Illness and there is a need to clarify the nature and extent of the health concerns

Who can call a Multi-Agency Professionals Meeting?

If any agency feels that there is a need for a meeting that is covered by the above criteria should discuss the rationale with the relevant key worker/lead professional. The lead professional, if they agree, should seek the sanction of their manager and convene.

In the case of a disagreement about the need for a professionals meeting, or concern about the lack of engagement from any invited party, the Swindon LSCB Escalation Policy applies.

Chairing the multi-agency meeting

This should be someone who is used to chairing meetings of a similar type (supervisory level), and must ensure that the meeting focuses on the needs of the child or young person. The Chair should have sufficient knowledge of the Child Protection procedures.

Administration and Recording

The convening agency is responsible for initiating the meeting and should ensure that arrangements are in place to ensure the minutes of the meeting and the 'Actions arising' are distributed to all attendee's and where appropriate the family. The minutes should capture the main areas of need and the action plan developed to address them.

Where there is an existing plan for the child/family, this should be reviewed. Each meeting should end with agreed actions (or updated Action Plan) to address the needs and concerns that have been raised. Where these relate to the child or family they should be discussed with the family. The meeting should agree dates of further meetings to ensure progress on outcomes.

Attendance

The meeting needs to bring together all those who can provide relevant information about the child/young person and family. After the meeting, a member of the meeting should be appointed to inform the child and family of the outcome.

Venue

The venue should be the most convenient and comfortable place to meet for a confidential discussion.

Permissions / Family Involvement / Confidentiality

The agency who is requesting the meeting should consider whether the parents should be informed of the meeting beforehand. However, professional judgment may need to be brought to bear on whether this is appropriate in all situations. If the parents have not been informed of the meeting, then agreement should be sought from invited agencies that the meeting will take place without the family being informed.

If the parent(s)/Carer(s) raise an objection to the meeting taking place, consideration should be given to whether concerns are sufficient to require a different approach (i.e. a Strategy Discussion)

Where the issues to be discussed relate to difficulties with engagement with the parents, then seeking permission for the meeting to take place is unlikely to yield the desired result.

Where the meeting is to discuss complex matters and to develop a fuller picture of the family's circumstances it is not necessary to gain consent for the meeting to take place.

Where appropriate, a record of the meeting will be sent to the parents and children/young people that are subject of the meeting. Consideration should be given by agencies to the child's age for the most appropriate method of feedback.

Normal rules of confidentiality apply in that only information relevant to ensuring the safety and welfare of the children in the family should be shared. Any action plan developed as a result of the meeting should address how the issues discussed are then raised with the parents, unless to do so would potentially place the children concerned at risk of further harm.

In some situations it may be appropriate to conduct the meeting in two parts involving the relevant professionals in the first part and inviting the parent(s)/Carer(s) to the second part of the meeting. This could be the case where the professionals are in disagreement and airing these issues in a frank discussion would not be appropriate with the parent(s)/ Carer(s) or child present.

Where the parents have not been directly involved in the meeting the Lead Practitioner will be expected to feedback the outcomes of the meeting and to discuss the plan with the parent(s)/Carer(s) after the meeting.

If the Action Plan is not implemented as agreed, or fails to meet the needs or address the concerns, the Lead Practitioner will consult and decide whether to reconvene another multi-agency professionals meeting before the agreed review date.

Appendix One

Suggested Meeting Format

The following format for the multi-agency meeting is suggested:

- Date, time and venue
- Introduction (who is in attendance and why)
- Attendance / Apologies
- Aim of meeting (what is the issue to be addressed)
- Needs, Strengths and Risks identified by convening agency prior to meeting
- Additional or new information shared at meeting (from all agencies)
- Other Needs, Strengths and Risks identified during the meeting
- How to address these needs? What has already been tried?
- Plan to support the family, identifying clearly who is responsible for which actions, with timescales clearly defined
- Has a Family Group Conference been considered?
- Agreement about who is to continue as Lead Practitioner, if a change is deemed appropriate
- Date of next review (if the meeting agrees that this is required).