

## PRACTICE GUIDE FOR STRATEGY MEETINGS

The full guidance for s.47 procedures and strategy meetings is set out in the [Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children \(BBSCB\) Procedures Child Protection Enquiries Procedure](#).

The purpose of this guide however, is to emphasise some key approaches from the BBSCB procedures, to undertaking a strategy meeting.

### **Strategy Discussion / Meeting**

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Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, there should be a strategy discussion/meeting. The strategy discussion/meeting should be co-ordinated and chaired by a Children's social care manager. The purpose of the strategy discussion is to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid future action if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

#### **WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?**

The strategy discussion/meeting should involve Children's social care and the police, health (named/designated nurse and/or named/designated doctor) and other bodies as appropriate (for example, early help workers, Youth Offending worker, children's centre, school and, in particular, any referring agency.) In the case of a pre-birth strategy discussion/meeting this should involve the midwifery services.

Professionals participating in strategy discussions/meetings must have all their agency's information relating to the child available to be able to contribute to the discussion/meeting, and must be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their agencies.

Some examples of circumstances where a strategy discussion/meeting should be considered:

- Any new referrals in respect of a child where there are concerns that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, Significant Harm;
- When new information on an existing case in Children's Social Care indicates that a child is likely to suffer Significant Harm;
- When an adult or young person assessed as presenting a risk to children has moved into or is about to move into the child's household or such a person is regularly visiting or about to have sustained contact with the child;
- When the risks of Significant Harm to an unborn child may be such as to indicate the need to develop a Child Protection Plan before birth;
- When the death of a child in family, in which abuse or neglect is suspected, is confirmed and there are other children in the household;



# BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

- When a child lives in, or is born to, a household in which resides another child who is currently the subject of a Child Protection Plan;
- When a child who is currently the subject of a Child Protection Plan in another area moves into Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton unless the other authority is to retain responsibility for the case;
- When a child is alleged to have sexually assaulted another child or there is a risk of such an assault occurring to another child in the same household or in regular contact with the household (in which circumstances a Child Protection Conference should be held on both children).
- When a child has gone missing from home or care and there are concerns about the child's safety.

(This is not an exhaustive list.)

**THE STRATEGY MEETING SHOULD CONTAIN TWO MAIN PARTS. FIRSTLY, THE ASSESSMENT OF RISK AND SECONDLY, THE PLAN FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS (IF APPROPRIATE).**

***The assessment of risk should include the following:***

- Each agency shares available information;
- Consider any risk assessments that have already been undertaken, e.g. DASH, CSE or other risk assessments.
- Identify the cause for concern, its seriousness, any recurring events and the vulnerability of the child;
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the family;
- Evaluate the risks to the child/ren and the context in which they are living;
- Consider the child's needs for protection;
- If known, consider the capacity of the parents and wider family and social networks to safeguard and promote the child's welfare - this must include both parents, any other carers, such as grandparents, and the partners of the parents;
- Risk factors that may suggest a higher level of risk of significant harm (e.g. parental mental health difficulties, parental substance misuse, and domestic violence or immigrant family issues such as social isolation);
- Consider the assessment and the key action points, if already in place;
- Consider whether a referral should be made to MARAC or MAPPA. The MARAC link is through the Assessment team and the MAPPA link is through MASH.
- Consider whether an intelligence form should be submitted (see links below).

**Consideration of all these risks should be clearly documented in the minutes of the meeting.**



# BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MAKE A PLAN, WITH CLEAR TIMESCALES, AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING A CONTINGENCY PLAN.**

***The plan should reflect the reasons for the strategy meeting and should include the following considerations:***

- Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation; *be explicit about how you discuss and record this.*
- Agree what action is required immediately to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, and/or provide interim services and support. If the child is in hospital, decisions should also be made about how to secure the safe discharge of the child;
- Decide whether an assessment under **Section 47 of the Children Act 1989** (Section 47 Enquiries) should be initiated, or continued if it has already begun;
- Plan how the Section 47 Enquiry should be undertaken (if one is to be initiated), including the need for any medical assessment, and who will carry out what actions, by when and for what purpose – *again, ensure that this is all agreed and recorded clearly;*
- Agree, in particular, when the child will be seen alone, if appropriate for the child, by the social worker during the course of these enquiries and agree the methods by which the child's wishes and feelings will be ascertained so that they can be taken into account when making decisions; *Be clear that if an ABE interview is required, who will undertake this, how this will be related to the family and what the practical arrangements around this will be.*
- In the light of the race and ethnicity of the child and family, consider how these should be taken into account and to establish whether an interpreter will be required; and
- Consider the needs of other children who may be affected (e.g. siblings and other children, such as those living in the same household, and/or in contact with alleged abusers).
- Determine what information from the strategy discussion/meeting will be shared with the family, unless such information sharing may place a child at increased risk of significant harm or jeopardise police investigations into any alleged offence/s;
- Determine if legal action is required.
- If the school or another agency are holding onto the children pending the strategy meeting outcome, involve them in the next steps plans.
- Determine whether a review strategy meeting should be held and if so within what timescale.
- Determine whether an Initial Child Protection Conference should be held and make the arrangements accordingly.

**The minutes should clearly document the plans and timescales.**



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It is the responsibility of the chair of the strategy discussion/meeting to ensure that the decisions and agreed actions are fully recorded using an appropriate form/ record. All agencies attending should take notes of the actions agreed at the time.

## Timescales:

Strategy discussions/meetings should be convened as soon as practicable bearing in mind the needs of the child and must take place within three working days of child protection concerns being identified, except in the following circumstances:

- For allegations/concerns indicating a serious risk of harm to the child (e.g. serious physical injury or serious neglect) the strategy discussion/meeting should be held on the same day as the receipt of the referral;
- For allegations of penetrative sexual abuse, the strategy discussion/meeting should be held on the same day as the receipt of the referral if this is required to ensure forensic evidence;
- Where immediate action was required by either agency, the strategy discussion/meeting must be held within one working day;
- Where the concerns are particularly complex (e.g. fabricated/induced illness/ organised abuse) the strategy discussion/meeting must be held within a maximum of five working days, ***and should be chaired by a Head of Service***, but sooner if there is a need to provide immediate protection to a child.
- Where allegations against staff or other professionals working with children, the strategy discussion must be held within a maximum of five working days, but sooner if there is a need to provide immediate protection to a child.
- Minutes of strategy meetings should be written up, entered on the child's record and distributed to all involved agencies within 2 working days.

## Outcomes:

The plan made at the strategy discussion/meeting should reflect the requirement to convene an initial child protection conference within 15 working days of the strategy discussion at which it was decided to initiate the Section 47 Enquiry (if there was more than one strategy discussion / meeting). In exceptional circumstances, enquiries may be more complicated and may require more than one strategy discussion/meeting. If the strategy discussion / meeting concludes that a further strategy discussion / meeting is required, then a clear timescale should be set and be subject to regular review by the social work manager bearing in mind the safety of the child at all times.

If the conclusion of the strategy discussion/meeting is that there is no cause to pursue the Section 47 Enquiry then consideration should be given to continuing a multi- agency assessment to meet the needs of the child for any early help support services or to provide family support services to them as a child in need.

Where there are unresolved differences of opinion about the outcomes of a strategy discussion / meeting, these should be resolved by senior managers in the respective agencies in liaison with each other. This should be



# BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

actioned within a timescale commensurate with the need to safeguard the child and in accordance with the **Escalation Procedures**.

See: [CSE Intelligence Reporting Form](#)