

**HARINGEY
LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
BOARD**

**PRACTICE GUIDANCE
FOR CORE GROUPS**



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Practice Guidance for Core Groups

CORE ASSESSMENT: PLANNING AND REVIEW

I. THE LEAD PROFESSIONAL

- I.1 *"Where a child is to be the subject of a child protection plan, it is the responsibility of the conference to consider and make recommendations on how agencies, professionals and the family should work together to ensure that the child will be safeguarded from harm in the future. This should enable both professionals and the family to understand exactly what is expected of them and what they can expect of others. Specific tasks include:*
- *Appointing the lead statutory body (either LA children's social care or NSPCC) and a key worker (the lead professional), who should be a qualified, experienced social worker and an employee of the statutory body"* Working Together to Safeguard Children 2006, paragraph 5.99].
- I.2 A named Lead Professional must be appointed by the child protection conference for each child who is the subject of a child protection plan. Where more than one child in a family or household has a child protection plan, a separate Lead Professional may be appointed for one or more of the children according to the circumstances of the case. In most cases, it will be best to appoint a single Lead Professional. The Lead Professional must be a qualified registered social worker, who holds a recognised social work qualification and is registered with the General Social Care Council.
- I.3 The Lead Professional is responsible for coordinating the Child Protection Plan, which is a multi agency plan. Each professional will continue to have their respective responsibilities for child protection in addition to the tasks designated in the plan. The Core Group will agree as part of the plan, which members of the core group will see the child every 10 working days. This responsibility does not lie with the Lead Professional alone and should be shared with the members of the group, according to the needs of the family and how best to meet the Child Protection Plan objectives.

The Lead Professional has specific responsibilities as set out below.

- I.4 The Lead Professional is responsible for:-
- Convening regular Core Group meetings. The frequency of these meetings may be recommended by the child protection conference.
 - Implementing the child protection plan, with the help of all members of the core group.
 - Developing the child protection plan into a co-ordinated inter-agency plan, which is reviewed against objectives in relation to progress made on its implementation at each core group meeting.
 - Submitting the updated child protection plan and report to the Conference Chair before each review child protection conference. The new plan and report should

highlight progress made on implementing the original plan and outline how the plan has developed through the Core Group.

- Maintaining regular and frequent visits to each child and their family/carers. With the exception of pre-lingual children who are not able to communicate with words, every child in the household must be seen and spoken to alone on each visit, using the child's preferred method of communication. This will occur unless recommended otherwise by the child protection conference and should be recorded on the conference minutes.
- Alerting their managers to any difficulties that are experienced in seeing and speaking to a child and agreeing the action necessary to resolve those difficulties.
- Co-ordinating the contributions of family members to required activities and ensuring that the parents know and understand how the need for a child protection plan can be reduced.
- To actively keep up to date with the case and to seek out new and additional information. This will require the reading of case files, updating chronologies and revising assessments where necessary.
- Acting as a Lead Professional for the inter-agency work as well as providing a focus and a contact for information about the child/ren. The Lead Professional should keep those involved up to date with new and additional information and inform those who become newly involved about the child protection plan/s (eg new school).
- Completing the Core Assessment of the child and family with contributions from the Core Group and others. Other assessment work may also need to be undertaken as recommended by the conference.
- Being involved in any further enquiries about the alleged or suspected abuse of any member of that child's previous and current households and extended family.

2. THE CORE GROUP

- 2.1 The Child Protection Conference will agree the membership of a Core Group consisting of the child, parent/carers and professionals drawn from relevant involved agencies. The work of the Core Group will address the risks in meeting the needs of the child and the capacity of the parents to protect and promote his/her welfare. It will focus on developing any existing strengths that the family are able to demonstrate.
- 2.2 *"Membership [of the Core Group] should include the key worker, who leads the Core Group, the child if appropriate, family members and professionals or foster carers who will have direct contact with the family. Although the key worker has the lead role, all members of the core group are jointly responsible for the formulation and implementation of the child protection plan, refining the plan as needed, and monitoring progress against the planned outcomes set out in the plan"* [Working Together to Safeguard Children, paragraph 5.110].

2.3 The function of the Core Group is to:

- Bring together all persons who are jointly responsible for making and implementing the child protection plan.
- Develop the child protection plan at the first meeting,, from the framework agreed at the initial child protection conference.
- Decide at its first meeting who will need to do what to complete the core assessment on time.
- Be jointly responsible for developing the child protection plan as a detailed working tool. The plan will change depending on the circumstances and achievements of both professionals and the family. Haringey Social Workers should be using the child young person plan on Framework I, indicating child protection as type of plan.
- Jointly monitor and report progress on implementing the Plan and/or any contingency plan) to the next child protection review conference.
- Allocate tasks identified in the Child Protection Plan to core group members and review their progress as required.
- Allocate responsibility for seeing the child/ren every 10 working days and for completing and circulating the Child Contact Sheet to other core group members (see template at Appendix 3) – “ *The core group must ensure the children are seen at least every ten working days by the key worker or by another member of the core group unless a different frequency is stipulated by the child protection conference. The interaction must be clearly recorded, analysis of the risk of harm to the child should be made and all the information should be shared with the key worker and the core group.*” London Child Protection Procedures (2007) 9.3.20
- Maintain a focus on strengths as well as areas that need to be improved in considering the needs and progress of the child and family.
- Meet as a group no less than monthly while the child protection plan is in place.
- Maintain a record of group discussions and decisions.
- Review its membership as and when necessary.
- Recommend to the conference Chair if the conference should be reconvened at an earlier date than that already agreed.

2.4 Although family members must be part of the core group, professionals should consider holding part of the meeting without them in the event that there are questions about their commitment to engage or capacity to manipulate outcomes. Family members should then be informed of the outcome of such professional discussions.

- 2.5 People who hold parental responsibility (PR) for a child but who are no longer part of the family household should be invited to contribute to core group discussions and informed of the outcomes of meetings, unless upon the advice of Legal Services this is deemed to be detrimental to the child. If this is the case it should be recorded as such in the minutes.
- 2.6 A core group meeting should never assume functions that are the responsibility of a review child protection conference. Consideration should be given, following consultation with a practice manager or team manager, to convening an earlier conference if the particular circumstances of the case suggest this would be appropriate. It is difficult to be prescriptive about specific criteria that may prompt such an eventuality, but the following are possible pointers. In these circumstances it is also advisable to consult with a Child Protection Advisor:
- A serious level of non co-operation with the protection plan and agencies implementing it.
 - Partial level of parental co-operation with some agencies; the core group would need to carefully evaluate whether the protection plan could be effectively delivered in these circumstances.
 - New knowledge emerging which means that the protection plan requires review.
 - When the level of chronic risk to the child is higher than the initial assessment revealed, reconvening an urgent review child protection conference is essential. For one-off incidents which place a child at risk of significant harm legal advice would need to be sought in order to give the child immediate protection.

3. ASSESSMENTS

- 3.1 The child protection conference is convened following a s.47 enquiry. It will consider the information that has been obtained in a Common, Initial or Core assessment about the child's developmental needs and the parents' capacity to meet those needs in the context of their wider family and environment. If a core assessment has been started but not completed, the Lead Professional and the Core Group will continue the assessment and formulate the details of the Protection Plan. A completed core assessment will be presented at the first review child protection conference.
- 3.2 *"A core assessment is defined as an in-depth assessment of which the central and most important aspect is the needs of the child and the capacity of his or her parents or caregivers to respond appropriately to these needs within the wider family and community context. While this assessment is led by a social worker, it will invariably involve other agencies, or independent professionals, who will either provide information they hold about the child or parents, contribute specialist knowledge or advice or undertake specialist assessments. At the conclusion of this phase of assessment, there will be an analysis of the findings, which will provide an understanding of the child's circumstances and direct the planning, case objectives and the nature of service provision. A core assessment is deemed to have commenced at the point the initial assessment ended, or a strategy discussion decided to initiate enquiries under S47..." [Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families, paragraph 3.11]*

- 3.3 It may be necessary to commission a specialist assessment (e.g. from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) which it may not be possible to complete within the same timescale as the core assessment.
- 3.4 Children from black and minority ethnic groups (and their parents) may have experienced harassment, racial discrimination and institutional racism. Although racism causes significant harm it is not, in itself a category of abuse. The experience of racism is likely to affect the responses of the child and family to the assessment and enquiry processes. Failure to consider the effects of racism will undermine efforts to protect children from other forms of abuse. The effects of racism differ for different communities and individuals and should not be assumed to be “uniform”.

4. THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN

- 4.1 An outline Child Protection Plan will be agreed by the child protection conference. The Lead Professional will draw up a full Child Protection Plan in consultation with the members of the Core Group. Each individual child will have a plan. The aim of the plan is to:
- Safeguard the child(ren) from further harm
 - Promote the child's health and development
 - Support the family and wider members to promote the welfare of the child, provided it is in that child's best interest for them to do so
 - Describe the activities that are necessary to ensure the protection of the child. Any agency that cannot meet its commitment to the plan must inform the conference Chair.
- 4.2 The Protection Plan should include the following:
- A description of the needs of the child and what services are required to help meet them
 - Identification of parenting strengths
 - Ethnic cultural and religious considerations
 - Issues arising from any disability
 - Clear and precise objectives which describe what needs to change to ensure the child's safety and well being.
 - Realistic strategies and specific actions to achieve these objectives
 - A timescale to bring about the required change which identifies the points in time at which progress will be reviewed
 - Who will do what to achieve the plan, including professionals and family members?

- A note of the resources required to achieve the plan and who is responsible for securing the authorisation for their use
- Specification of the agreed frequency of contact between the family and the agencies involved and the roles and responsibilities of the professionals who have routine contact with the child
- Measures by which the success of the plan will be judged
- Contingency plans
- The names and contact details for the Lead Professional and Core Group members and who should be contacted in their absence.

4.4 *Each Core Group member (including the parents/carers and if appropriate the child) should be given their own copy of the Plan. “It is good practice to produce a written agreement as part of, or in addition to the plan, which is negotiated between the child, the family and professionals regarding the implementation of the plan”*
[Working Together to Safeguard Children, paragraph 5.87]

4.5 *“The Plan should take into consideration the wishes and feelings of the child, the views of the parents, insofar as this is consistent with the child’s welfare. The Key Worker should make every effort to ensure that the children and parents have clear understanding of the objectives of the plan, that they accept it and are willing to work to it. If family members preferences are not accepted about how best to safeguard the child, the reasons for this should be explained. Families should be told about their right to complain and make representation and how to do so”.*
[Working Together to Safeguard Children, paragraph 5.23]

5.1 FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

5.2 The first core group will be arranged at the end of the Child Protection Conference: all participants are requested to bring their diaries to conference to facilitate the first Core Group Meeting to be arranged: The first Core Group will be held within 10 working days following the conference.

5.3 The first meeting of the core group will agree a Chair and a Vice Chair.

5.4 The Core Group will subsequently meet on a four weekly basis.

5.5 In the event that a child subject to a child protection plan should move school, a core group should be held at the new school within 10 working days.

6.1 VENUE FOR MEETINGS

6.2 The venue is subject to reasonable negotiation. The accessibility, comfort and confidentiality of the venue for parents and carers are important considerations.

7.1 CHAIRING OF MEETINGS

- 7.2 The first Core Group Meeting must be chaired by the social worker's Team Manager.
- 7.3 The social worker will usually chair subsequent meetings. It is recognised that contributing to and minuting such a meeting can be difficult for the social worker. The Core Group will ensure the aforementioned tasks are shared amongst the professionals in the core group.

8.1 ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

- 8.2 Attendance should be restricted to the family members, and those professionals actively engaged in implementing the Protection Plan. Where a family member's presence would prevent the Core Group from functioning, effectively, consideration may be given to excluding the individual. The team manager will make this decision.
- 8.3 The conference will designate who will be members of the Core Group. If the allocated professional cannot attend the Core Group Meeting they must ensure their line manager is informed. The line manager will endeavour to provide cover; if this is not possible a written report must be provided to the Core Group Meeting.
- 8.4 If the allocated professional changes, the agency must inform core group members within 5 working days.
- 8.5 The social worker or a representative must always attend the Core Group.
- 8.6 Every effort should be made to achieve the attendance of relevant family members at the Core Group Meetings and to invite contributions from persons who have parental responsibility but who no longer live in the family household (see 2.5 above). An interpreter must be invited if needed. Where applicable cultural advisors or representatives should be invited to support the parents. The Core Group is an essential working meeting and the parents/carers participation is necessary. Small meetings will be less overwhelming and intimidating for parents. Practical assistance around childcare and transport to facilitate their attendance should be encouraged where appropriate. It is reasonable for parents/carers to be accompanied by a friend or relative if they wish. It is an important task of the Core Group to encourage and welcome the parent/carer to the group to ensure they participate and contribute fully.
- 8.7 The absence of family members from the Core Group Meetings is unfortunate, but their non-attendance should not prevent the group from developing and implementing the Protection Plan. The effectiveness of the group will be diminished, but the prime consideration is the welfare of the child/ren.

Advice should be sought from child protection advisors where there is non-co-operation or superficial compliance. In some cases this may also result in the seeking of legal advice and orders being applied for.

- 8.8 The child/young person should be encouraged to attend the Core Group, where it is felt the child is able to understand the purpose of the group.

- 8.9 Where there is conflict between agencies the advice of the Child Protection Chair should be sought.

9.1 AGENDA FOR THE CORE GROUP

- 9.2 The agenda of the first Core Group, following the conference, is to develop the Child Protection Plan and plan the core assessment. A written agreement will also be drawn up. The Core Group thereafter will monitor progress of the Protection Plan and ensure the core assessment is written within time scales.
- 9.3 The first Core Group Meeting will also allocate tasks to be completed, within set time scales. Each agency will undertake their part of the core assessment ensuring that the social worker has all information in order to compile the core assessment.

10.1 RECORDING OF CORE GROUP MEETINGS

- 10.2 It is the task of the Core Group to record the main discussion and decision points of the meeting on a form designated for this purpose. The lead professional will be responsible for the distribution of updated plan/minutes, but the task of minute-taking can be shared by any professional member of the group.
- 10.3 The recording should be distributed to all parties involved in the Protection Plan, within five working days.

11.1 OTHER MEETINGS

- 11.2 The lead professional should inform Core Group members of the content and outcomes of other meetings held regarding the child/ren such as Looked After Children Reviews. Such meetings could inform the content and outcomes of core group meetings despite their different purpose and focus.

APPENDIX ONE: INITIAL CORE GROUP MEETING TEMPLATE

FAMILY COMPOSITION	CATEGORY OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT
BRIEF HISTORY	
AGENCIES INVOLVED	ATTENDEES/APOLOGIES
<p>DEVELOPMENT OF PROTECTION PLAN- At first core group after CPC outline how the plan will be developed <i>Tasks that need to developed</i> <i>Tasks that are now complete</i> <i>Tasks that need to be added</i></p>	

FAMILY GOALS	
SCALING QUESTION RE PROGRESS AND MOTIVATION	
WHAT PROGRESS DO WE NEED TO SEE BY THE NEXT CORE GROUP MEETING?	
WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN/CHANGE SO THE CHILD/REN NO LONGER NEED A PROTECTION PLAN?	
WHAT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS NEEDED?	WHO WILL BRING THIS TO THE NEXT CORE GROUP MEETING?
IF THERE IS NO CHANGE OR INCREASE IN RISK WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?	
DATES OF SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS	VENUE
CHAIR	MINUTE TAKER

**APPENDIX TWO:
NEXT CORE GROUP MEETING TEMPLATE**

<p>FAMILY NAME <i>Any changes to core details</i></p>	<p>CATEGORY OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT</p>
<p>AGENCIES INVOLVED</p>	<p>ATTENDEES/APOLOGIES</p>
<p>WHAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE SINCE LAST CORE GROUP MEETING?</p>	
<p>DETAIL ANY ADDITIONAL TASKS - BY WHOM AND BY WHEN</p>	
<p>SCALING QUESTION RE PROGRESS AND MOTIVATION</p>	

WHAT PROGRESS DO WE NEED TO SEE BY THE NEXT CORE GROUP MEETING?	
INFORMATION GATHERED SO FAR TOWARDS CORE ASSESSMENT	
WHAT ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IS NEEDED FOR CORE ASSESSMENT – WHO WILL GET IT AND BY WHEN?	
IF THERE IS NO CHANGE OR INCREASE IN RISK WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?	
DATES OF SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS	VENUE
CHAIR	MINUTE TAKER

Appendix 3

CORE GROUP CHILD CONTACT

At each core group meeting the group should plan ahead to ensure that the child is seen by a member of the core-group (not necessarily the key worker) every 10 days. Possible risk indicators should be identified in advance to help the core group member to focus their contact. (*London Child Protection Procedures, 9.3.20*)

CHILD'S NAME	CATEGORY OF CP PLAN
CONTACT WITH CHILD Date: Time: Place: What was your interaction?	
CHILD'S PRESENTATION (use Child Protection Plan as reference and be sure to identify any risk indicators) Child's Development: (Physical; emotional; learning) Parenting capacity: (Child's behaviour/dress etc) Any change in family and environmental factors:	
YOUR NAME/TITLE: SIGNATURE: DATE:	