

North Somerset Safeguarding Boards



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Resolution of Professional Differences (Escalation Policy)

INTRODUCTION

The North Somerset Safeguarding Adult (NSSAB) and Children (NSSCB) Boards believe that continual feedback is an important part of self-improvement and raising standards. Listening and responding to concerns and complaints enables us to adjust and improve services and systems. Providing a formal but clear way for concerns to be expressed and taken seriously is one way in which we can demonstrate our respect for our partners and stakeholders. Challenge is a key part of effective and healthy inter-agency working cultures and partner organisations should therefore view and respond to challenges brought under this procedures in a positive manner.

PURPOSE OF PROCEDURE

To provide a clear mechanism for the resolution of professional differences in order to ensure a timely resolution that ensures that the needs of the child, young person or adult at risk are met. The local procedure is intended to augment the guidance provided by the South West Child Protection Procedures (www.swcpp.org.uk) and provides a local process to be followed.

AIMS OF PROCEDURE

1. It is designed to support the development of a shared understanding of thresholds within North Somerset and is supported by the multi-agency training delivered by the NSSAB and NSSCB.
2. It is for use among all staff working both in the statutory and voluntary sector, who work with children, young people and adults at risk.
3. All workers should feel able to challenge decision-making and to see this as their right and responsibility, in order to promote the best multi-agency practices, including safeguarding concerns.
4. This procedure provides workers with the means to raise concerns they have about decisions made by other professionals or services by:
 - Avoiding professional differences that may hinder the progress of the child/family or put children/adults at risk.
 - Resolving the difficulties within and between organisations quickly and openly. However, due regard must be paid to existing staff dispute management policies and procedures where appropriate.
 - Identifying problem areas, in working together, where there is a lack of clarity.
 - Promoting effective resolutions by considering required amendments to organisational protocols and procedures.
5. Resolution should be sought within the shortest timescale possible to ensure the child or adult at risk is protected and improved outcomes planned for. Concerns, and any outstanding disagreements, should be resolved at the lowest possible stage, however if a child or adult is thought to be at risk of immediate harm discretion should be used as to which stage is initiated, and outstanding disagreements should be taken to a higher stage of the procedure quickly.
6. The Strategic Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Leader, North Somerset Council will ensure that all relevant agencies are informed of pertinent issues.

TIMESCALES

Concerns should always be resolved quickly, and this will be determined by the complexity of the issues. In all cases, the matter will be resolved as speedily as possible, and the primary focus will be on ensuring that the safety and welfare of the child/adult at risk concerned is assured whilst discussions take place. From the outset of a concern being considered by any worker it should take no longer than **5 working days** for it to be either **resolved or, if not resolved, escalated** to stage 4.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- At all stages of the process actions and decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel, to include the worker who raised the initial concern.
- In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.
- Please use the "Monitoring form" (Appendix 2) at stages 3 and 4.
- It may be useful for a reflective debrief to be facilitated following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships.
- In order to find out who the appropriate manager or representative is of another service, please ask the practitioner, line manager or senior manager involved for who the next person would be and obtain contact details from them directly. ALL agencies MUST share this information with colleagues.

Procedure

Stage 1- Identifying the concern – worker to worker and where necessary line manager to line manager (Within 1 working day)

Initial attempts should be taken to resolve the problem at the **lowest possible level**. Any worker who feels that a decision or action is inappropriate, is not safe, or creates a significant issue, should initially attempt to resolve differences through discussion with the other practitioner(s) involved, unless the child, young person or adult is at immediate risk. This should be done within one working day. They should evidence the nature and source of their concerns, and should keep a record of all discussions in their case notes.

It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some workers to pursue this unsupported. They therefore may wish to consult with a supervisor or line manager to: clarify their thinking in order to identify the problem; be specific as to what the disagreement is about; and develop actions that need to be taken as a result.

Where the practitioners are unable to resolve differences through discussion, their disagreement must be reported by them to their line manager. Contact between the relevant line managers should take place within 24 hours. The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant managers involved and the detail of the conflict and agreements reached should be recorded on the case file.

Stage 2 – Discussing the concern between services or agencies – second tier manager to second tier manager (Within 2 working days)

Where it is not possible to resolve the matter at practitioner or front line management level, the matter should be referred without delay to second tier management level.

The issue will then be considered at second tier management level, with direct communication taking place at a second tier management level or with the designated professional or named professional for safeguarding within the individual agency. Every effort should be made to resolve the concerns at this level. Records still need to be kept and resolution communicated to all parties in writing.

Stage 3 – Raising concern between line management – senior manager to senior manager (Within 3 working days)

If unresolved, the problem should be referred to **an appropriate level of management** (see appendix one) within the organisation, who will discuss with the opposite or appropriate manager in the other organisation. These two managers must attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion.

At this level disagreements should continue to be recorded in the case file and supervision notes in addition to the completed **'Monitoring Form'** being completed by the senior manager (appendix 2). Disagreements at all meetings should be recorded by each respective organisation, and after the issue has been resolved the monitoring form must be

sent both internally to the stage 4 representative of your own agency and also to the Strategic Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Leader, North Somerset Council, who will ensure that it is distributed to all relevant agencies as required. This is Jo Baker, jo.baker@n-somerset.gov.uk.

Stage 4 – Refer concern to safeguarding board representative (NSSAB and NSSCB) (Within 5 working days)

If the problem is still not resolved, the matter should be referred to the agency's nominated NSSAB or NSSCB representative. They should discuss with their colleagues at NSSAB and NSSCB Board level, convening a meeting where necessary.

If the matter is **still unresolved**, contact must be made immediately with the Strategic Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Leader, North Somerset Council, and they must also be sent a copy of the monitoring form. (Jo Baker - jo.baker@n-somerset.gov.uk.)

Consideration will be given to referring the matter to the nominated board representative who will determine whether the matter can be resolved through mediation or should be considered by a purposefully convened panel invoked by the NSSCB / NSSAB.

Convening a Mediation Panel

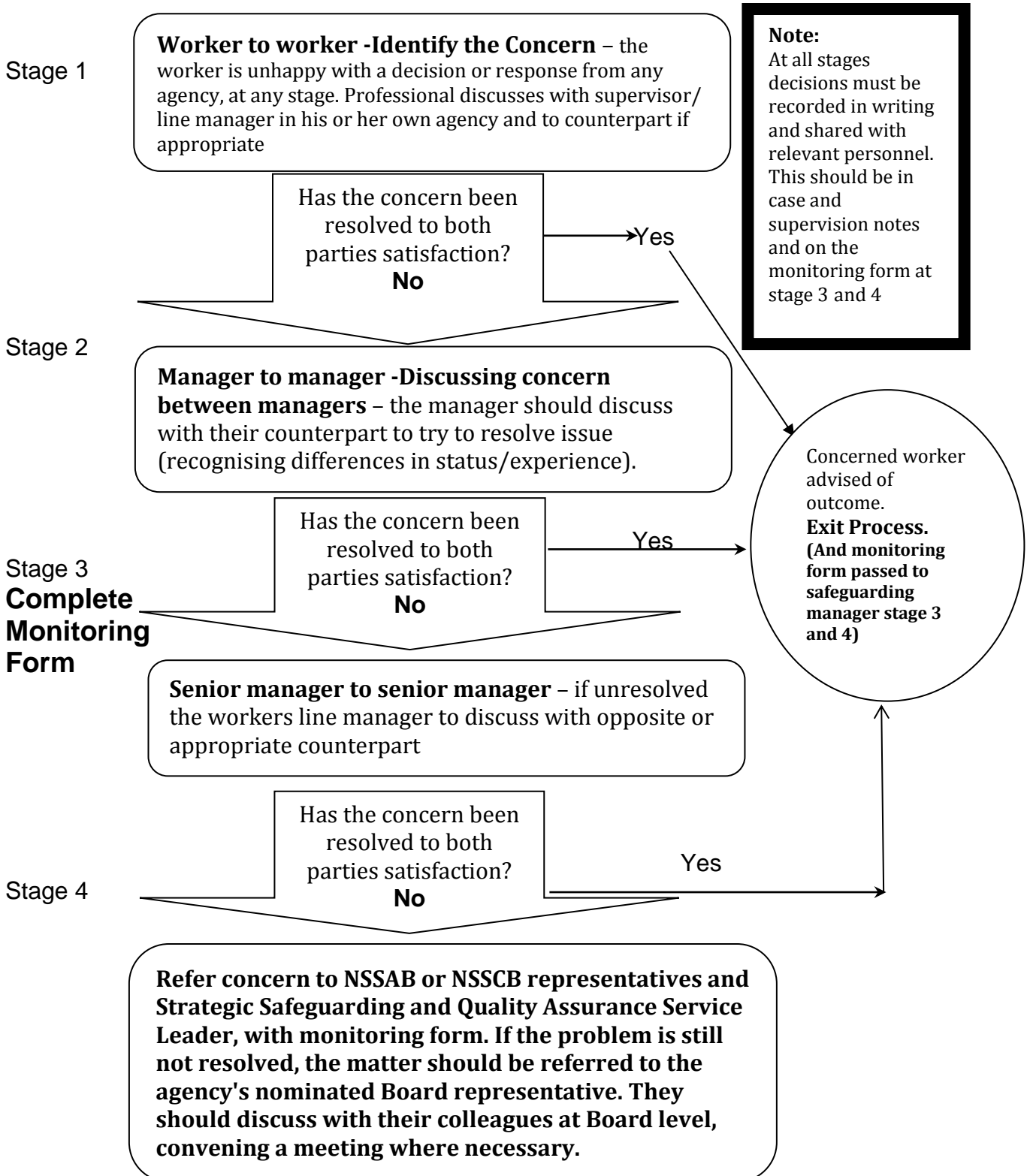
For more complex situations, where resolution may have been more elusive, a NSSAB or NSSCB Panel made up of a minimum of three statutory members and any other relevant partners will be convened. The Panel will receive representation from those concerned in the dispute and make a decision as to the next course of action.

The decision of the Panel is final and binding on all organisations involved.

Conclusion of procedure:

- It is important that professional differences do not impact on the **child's safety or the adult at risk** and/or **communication** between practitioners / agencies, or their ability to work in the best interests of the child, young person or adult at risk.
- We must promote a **"blame free" culture** that allows us to learn from our mistakes and so improve our services and their delivery.
- Use of the process for the resolution of professional differences should be seen as a **positive opportunity to learn**.
- When the issue is resolved, any general **safeguarding issues** should be identified and referred to the agency's representative on either the NSSAB or the NSSCB for consideration by the Board.

Appendix 1 Flowchart: Guidance for Resolution of Professional Differences



Some matters may be resolved very quickly, and this will be determined locally by the complexity of the issues. In all cases, the matter should be resolved as speedily as possible, and the primary focus will be on ensuring that the safety and welfare of the child or adult at risk concerned is assured whilst discussions take place.

Appendix 2 Monitoring Form - a tool to record decisions and to monitor the Resolution of Professional Differences policy

(Please return to The Strategic Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Leader, North Somerset Council Jo Baker, jo.baker@n-somerset.gov.uk)

Experience and outcomes of serious case reviews tells us how devastating professional disagreements can be to children and adults at risk, when concerns are raised but not addressed or when services are requested but not provided. Without an effective means to address concerns issues escalate, relationships between partner agencies deteriorate, problems drag on for weeks, months and years and, in the worse cases, children and adults at risk do not receive adequate services and are left exposed to harm.

This tool is a means to enable your service to record the agreed outcome of the use of the professional differences policy, and to aid NSSCB/NSSAB to monitor its use.

This form to be used at stage three and stage four of the resolution of professional differences policy to be stored on file and submitted to the Strategic Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Leader.

Child/Adult/Family name:	
Summary of reason for dispute – include views of all agencies concerned.	
Agreed outcomes or actions if satisfactorily resolved – includes escalation to next stage if unresolved	

Action Note:

Copy of this form to be held on child/adult/family file in all agencies involved in resolution of professional difference, if escalating to next stage use as basis of report to manager at next stage, send copy to your approved resolution audit manager or the NSSAB/NSSCB Board Manager for monitoring purposes.

Signature of initiating manager	Name:	
	Designation:	
	Agency:	
	Date:	
Signature of receiving manager	Name:	
	Designation:	
	Agency:	
	Date:	

Please complete for monitoring purposes

Stage at which Resolution achieved 3 4	Time taken to reach resolution- (no. of Days)	Please note how effective this policy was in resolving the issue and please make suggestions as to how the policy can be improved:
Additional Notes:		

