

Strategy Discussion/Section 47 Practice Guidance.

When should a strategy meeting be convened?

Where information is gathered during a referral or an assessment which indicates the child may be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, a strategy discussion should be held to decide whether to initiate enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989. Strategy discussions should be convened as soon as practicable bearing in mind the needs of the child, for example...

- For allegations/concerns indicating a serious risk of harm to the child (e.g. serious physical injury or serious neglect) the strategy discussion should be held on the same day as the receipt of the referral;
- For allegations of penetrative sexual abuse, the strategy discussion 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 must be held within one working day;
- Where the concerns are particularly complex (e.g., fabricated/induced illness/organised abuse/allegations against staff) 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.

In summary where there has been a significant event or critical incident which is considered to put the child at significant risk of harm the strategy discussion should be held in 1 working day.

Where there are accumulative events such as in cases of neglect or accumulative concerns around parental engagement or other, once identified a strategy meeting should be held no later than 3 working days. This should also include children who have been missing for 72 hours or longer. For children who are at risk of complex safeguarding matters and exploitation, a worker from the complex safeguarding team should always be in attendance.

Where professional abuse is suspected the LADO should be notified within 1 working day.

The strategy meeting

This might take the form of a multi-agency meeting or phone calls and more than one discussion may be necessary. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral to Children's Social Care (CSC) or at any other time, including during the assessment process and when new information is received about child/ren already open to CSC. In line with best practice strategy discussions are more effective when carried out face to face or virtual and should always be convened where possible. However, this should not delay a strategy discussion taking place at the earliest opportunity.

A local authority social worker, health practitioners and a police representative should, as a minimum, be involved in the strategy discussion. Other relevant practitioners will depend on the nature of the individual case but may include:

- the practitioner or agency which made the referral
- the child's school or nursery
- any health or care services the child or family members are receiving

All attendees should be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their organisation.

A CSC team manager will chair the strategy meeting, alongside the social worker attending. The team manager will record the meeting and ensure that all relevant information is shared. All professionals should be prepared to ensure all the relevant and key information known at that point is shared to aid effective decision making to safeguard the child.

The meeting will need to consider the information shared and then consider if section 47 enquiries are required, as the information supports the ongoing risk of the children being at risk of significant harm. If a section 47 enquiry is agreed the following actions may need to be considered.

- What immediate actions may be needed to protect the child or provide interim services and support
- The need for medical treatment/examination
- The conduct and timing, if initiated of any criminal investigation
- The scope of the enquiry, including siblings and other children at possible risk of harm
- Name of social worker who will visit the child and a timescale for any visits
- Whether an ABE interview will take place with the child
- How the child's wishes, feelings and lived experience will be ascertained
- Who other than the family should be interviewed, by whom, when and for what purpose
- What information may be shared, with whom and when
- Any legal actions required
- Whether an assessment should be initiated or continued if it has already begun
- How the parents will be involved

All actions will include timescales, agency and individual responsibility for each agreed action. It may be that a follow up strategy discussion is required during the section 47 enquiry to review actions prior to agreeing the outcome of the section 47, this can be held at any point of the section 47 enquiry and the same group of professionals or any others that are key to the enquiry or to the child, will be expected to attend with the same principles applying sharing relevant new and updated information and agreeing any further actions required to ensure the safeguarding of the child.

2. Purpose of Section 47 Enquiries

A Section 47 Enquiry is initiated to decide whether and what type of action is required to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child who is suspected of, or likely to be, suffering significant harm.

A children and family assessment will be required and will have commenced at the point of referral and must continue whenever the criteria for Section 47 Enquiries are satisfied. While the timescale within which the assessment will be set by the team manager and will be no longer than 45 working days, the outcome of enquiries under Section 47 must be available in time for an initial child protection conference which (if required) must be held within 15 working days of the Strategy Discussion where the enquiries were initiated.

Local authority social workers have a statutory duty to lead Section 47 Enquiries. The police, health professionals, teachers and other relevant professionals should support the local authority in undertaking its enquiries. The Children's Social Care Manager has responsibility for authorising a Section 47 Enquiry following a Strategy Discussion.

The Section 47 Enquiry and assessment must be led by a qualified social worker from Children's social care, who will be responsible for its coordination and completion. The social worker must consult with other agencies involved with the child and family to obtain a fuller picture of the circumstances of all children in the household, identifying parenting strengths and any risk factors. Enquiries may also need to cover children in other households with whom the alleged offender may have had contact. All agencies consulted are responsible for providing information to assist.

3. Conducting Section 47 Enquiries

Social workers with their managers should:

- Lead the Assessment in accordance with this guidance;
- Carry out enquiries in a way that minimises distress for the child and family;
- See the child who is the subject of concern to ascertain their wishes and feelings; assess their understanding of their situation; assess their relationships and circumstances more broadly;
- Interview parents and/or caregivers and determine the wider social and environmental factors that might impact on them and their child;
- Systematically gather information about the child's and family's history;
- Analyse the findings of the Assessment and evidence about what interventions are likely to be most effective with other relevant professionals to determine the child's needs and the level of risk of harm faced by the child to inform what help should be provided and act to provide that help; and
- Follow the guidance set out in [Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures](#), where a decision has been made to undertake a joint interview of the child as part of any criminal investigation.

The social worker, when conducting a Section 47 Enquiry, must assess the potential needs and safety of any other child in the household of the child in question. In addition, Section 47 Enquiries may be required concerning any children in other households with whom the alleged abuser may have contact.

In determining which professionals should be involved in a Section 47 Enquiry, consideration could include who are the family most likely to cooperate with. In all cases where there is a

known propensity to violence within the family household, consideration should be given to the strategy to be adopted, with Police advice or assistance if appropriate, about how to reduce the risks before any visits take place.

The child must always be seen and communicated with alone in the course of a Section 47 Enquiry by the Lead Social Worker, unless it is contrary to his or her interests to do so. The Strategy Discussion Meeting will plan any interview with the child. The Record of Section 47 Enquiry and Reports to Child Protection Conferences should include the date(s) when the child was seen alone by the Lead Social Worker and, if not seen alone, who was present and the reasons for their presence.

Before a child is seen or interviewed parental permission must be gained unless there are exceptional circumstances that demonstrate that it would not be in the child's interests and to do so may jeopardise the child's safety and welfare. Relevant exceptional circumstances would include:

- The possibility that a child would be threatened or otherwise coerced into silence;
- A strong likelihood that important evidence would be destroyed; or
- That the child in question did not wish the parent to be involved at that stage, and is competent to take that decision.

In such circumstances, the social worker must take legal advice about how to proceed and whether legal action may be required, for example through an application for an emergency protection order or a child assessment order.

The police should:

- Help other agencies understand the reasons for concerns about the child's safety and welfare;
- Decide whether or not police investigations reveal grounds for instigating criminal proceedings;
- Make available to other professionals any evidence gathered to inform discussions about the child's welfare; and
- Follow the guidance set out in [Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures](#), where a decision has been made to undertake a joint interview with the child as part of the criminal investigations.

Health professionals should:

- Undertake appropriate medical tests, examinations or observations, to determine how the child's health or development may be being impaired;
- Provide any of a range of specialist assessments. For example, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and child psychologists may be involved in specific assessments relating to the child's developmental progress. The lead health practitioner (probably a consultant paediatrician, or possibly the child's GP) may need to request and coordinate these assessments; and
- Ensure appropriate treatment and follow up health concerns.

All involved professionals should:

- Contribute to the Assessment as required, providing information about the child and family; and

- Consider whether a joint enquiry or investigation team may need to speak to a child without the knowledge of the parent or caregiver.

4. Outcomes of a Section 47 Enquiry

Local authority social workers are responsible for deciding what action to take and how to proceed following Section 47 Enquiries. The outcome of a Section 47 Enquiry must be endorsed by the team manager.

A Section 47 Enquiry may conclude that the original concerns are:

- Not substantiated; although consideration should be given to whether the child may need services as a Child in Need;
- Substantiated and the child is judged to be suffering, or likely to suffer, Significant Harm and an initial child protection conference should be called.

4.1 Concerns not substantiated

Social workers with their managers should:

- Discuss the case with the child, parents and other professionals;
- Determine whether support from any services may be helpful and help secure it; and
- Consider whether the child's health and development should be re-assessed regularly against specific objectives and decide who has responsibility for doing this.

All involved professionals should:

- Participate in further discussions as necessary;
- Contribute to the development of any Plan as appropriate;
- Provide services as specified in the Plan for the child; and
- Review the impact of services delivered as agreed in the Plan.

Outcomes may be:

- i. **No Further Action**
Enquiries have revealed that there are no causes for concern. The child may be a child in need but the family do not wish for services to be provided, in which case the case will be closed;
- ii. **Family Support to be provided**
Enquiries have revealed that there is no evidence that the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm but there are needs that could be met by the provision of services either under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 or by signposting the family to another agency. The family are willing for a package of support to be provided, or continue to be provided.

Where services are to be provided under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, the social worker/team manager should convene a Child in Need Planning Meeting within 7 working days to agree a Child in Need Plan – see [Child in Need Plans and Reviews Procedure](#);

4.2 Concerns Of Significant Harm Are Substantiated And The Child Is Judged To Be Suffering, Or Likely To Suffer, Significant Harm

N.B. Where immediate protective action is required, the advice of Legal Services should be sought.

Social workers with their managers should:

- Convene an initial child protection conference. The timing of this conference should depend on the urgency of the case and respond to the needs of the child and the nature and severity of the harm they may be facing. It should take place within 15 working days of a Strategy Discussion, or the Strategy Discussion at which Section 47 enquiries were initiated if more than one has been held. The request to convene the conference must be supported by a team manager;
- Consider whether any professionals with specialist knowledge should be invited to participate;
- Ensure that the child and their parents understand the purpose of the conference and who will attend; and
- Help prepare the child if he or she is attending or making representations through a third party to the conference. Give information about advocacy agencies and explain that the family may bring an advocate, friend or supporter.

All involved professionals should:

- Contribute to the information their agency provides ahead of the conference, setting out the nature of the agency's involvement with the child and family;
- Consider, in conjunction with the police and the appointed conference Chair, whether the report can and should be shared with the parents and if so when; and
- Attend the conference and take part in decision-making when invited.

For the detailed procedure in relation to Child Protection Conferences, see the [St. Helens Child Protection Procedures](#).

5. Recording Section 47 Enquiries

The social worker should record the information gathered and actions during the course of the enquiry and its outcomes on a Record of Section 47 Enquiries, which should be approved by the team manager.

6. Dispute Resolution

If the local authority decides not to proceed with a Child Protection Conference then other professionals involved with the child and family have the right to request that a conference be convened, if they have serious concerns that a child's welfare may not be adequately safeguarded. In the event of a continued difference of opinion, the [St. Helens Child Protection Procedures, Complaints in Relation to Child Protection Conference Procedure](#) should be followed.