

Quality Standards and Practice Guidance on Strategy meetings/discussions

Quality Standards

1. Wherever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer, significant harm, a strategy discussion/meeting must always be held.
2. The strategy discussion should take place as soon as possible after the information is first received. This is a professional judgement having due regard to the assessed urgency of the information presented.
3. Unless the presenting risk is of an immediate nature, it is always preferable to conduct the strategy discussion through a meeting, rather than phone calls.
4. In all circumstances the strategy discussion must be chaired by a Deputy Team manager or Team manager and involve the Police and one or more relevant health professionals as a minimum. Other professionals to be invited according to the contribution that they can make to an assessment of the risks identified.
5. The Chair should be clear with those in attendance that the **only** decision that can be made at a strategy discussion is whether to undertake S47 enquiries within a Single Assessment, and if so to plan those enquiries. The plan should include the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation and the timing and process for communication with parents/carers and children/young people.
6. When a S47 assessment is going to be carried out, the SD must include and record the planning of the S47, identifying the areas of risk to be assessed.
7. The record of the strategy discussion should be succinct and clearly focused on the reason for and purpose of the discussion. The risks to the child, which have informed the decision as to whether or not to conduct S47 enquiries, should be clearly identified. The plan for conducting S47 enquiries should be clearly outlined.
8. The strategy discussion record should be distributed to all those in attendance within one working day wherever possible.
9. As a minimum, the referrer and other relevant agencies who have not attended, should be notified of the outcome within one working day.

Additional practice guidance

Effective chairing of the strategy discussion is important for a number of reasons.

- It is the only forum to which parents/carers are explicitly not invited, in order to be able to share all available information regarding the risks to the child/ren subject to the discussion.
- It is important, therefore, that the purpose of the strategy discussion is made

clear; to determine whether or not S47 enquiries within a Single Assessment should be carried out, to which parents/carers will make an important contribution.

- Other professionals may lose sight of the purpose of the strategy discussion and regard it as simply a passport to holding an Initial Child Protection Conference.

The strategy discussion should therefore have a clear structure and focus.

1. The first stage of the discussion should be the sharing of all available information **pertinent** to determining whether S47 enquiries should be undertaken into whether a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.
2. A decision should then be reached regarding whether the threshold for undertaking S47 enquiries has been reached and the **reasons** for this decision clearly identified.
3. Sufficient time should be allocated to planning the S47 enquiries, where these are to be undertaken, including actions, timescales and communication with parents/ carers and children/young people. This must include identifying any immediate or short term action required to support and safeguard the child, including any legal action.

Further strategy discussions and timescales

Working Together 2013 states that an Initial Child Protection Conference should be held within 15 working days from **the strategy discussion at which it was decided to undertake S47 enquiries**

This is a good discipline in ensuring that;

Firstly, the decision to undertake S47 enquiries is made on clear evidence that there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm

Secondly, that where, following S47 enquiries, these concerns are substantiated, the situation is not allowed to drift before being addressed within the framework of an Initial Child Protection Conference.

This process therefore allows for a strategy discussion deciding that further assessment and analysis of risk is required within a Single Assessment, before determining if the threshold for S47 enquiries has been reached. In these circumstances, the outcome from a strategy discussion should be 'Single Assessment' and a date set for a reconvened strategy discussion at the end of this assessment.

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