



Child Protection Strategy Meeting Protocol

Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster

Introduction

1. This purpose of this protocol is to provide multi agency guidance on strategy meetings to agencies involved in safeguarding children. This should be used in conjunction with existing protocols relating to safeguarding procedures. The Local Safeguarding Children Board has designed this protocol drawing from the requirements set out in the London Child Protection Procedures, 2015 and Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2015.
2. The joint working practices and shared responsibilities of both the Police, Children's Social Care and other agencies, are essential to safeguarding children who have suffered or are likely to suffer significant harm.
3. At the initial stages of an enquiry the sharing of information, the quality of the communication and willingness to jointly respond, are essential in deciding how child protection enquiries should be conducted, in particular, the circumstances in which joint enquiries are appropriate. The enquiries should be child focused as well as addressing the parallel priorities of agencies, e.g., the focus of the assessment by Children's Social Care regarding the safety and welfare of the child and the need for the Police to investigate any criminal offence in relation to child abuse. The input of other relevant agencies also needs to be considered to ensure a full picture is obtained.
4. It is appreciated that it is not possible for guidance to cover all eventualities. The over-riding principle must be the safeguarding of children and compliance with the law and good practice guidance. It is essential that the key personnel in each agency maintain a frequent dialogue and agree any departure from this guidance, which is necessary in relation to individual children. Any departure must be endorsed and documented by a manager or someone with delegated responsibility in each agency.

Responding to Child Protection Concerns:

5. Whenever Children's Social Care have a case referred to them which constitutes, or may constitute a criminal offence against a child, they should always discuss the case with the Police at the earliest opportunity in order to protect the child or other children from the risk of suffering significant harm. If the referral indicates a risk to the life of a child or a likelihood of serious immediate harm, CSC must initiate a strategy discussion with the Child Abuse Investigation Team immediately to discuss planned emergency action, or as soon as possible afterwards if an agency has had to take immediate protective action.
6. In other cases, where a child is suspected to be suffering, or likely to suffer significant harm, Children's Social Care must contact the Police and relevant agencies on the same working day to share information about the concerns and/or allegations in order to reach an agreement in relation to whether a strategy meeting is necessary. Equally in both of these scenario's, the Police

must refer by telephone any children they believe to be at risk of harm to CSC within similar timescales followed by a multi agency referral form.

7. The following matters will always be investigated by the Police:
 - All alleged sexual assaults;
 - Allegations of physical abuse amounting to offences of actual bodily harm (*s47 Offences Against the Person Act 1861*) and more serious assaults;
 - Allegations of serious neglect / cruelty;
 - Allegations and concerns involving minor offences where there are aggravating features.

8. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) states that *'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 involving local authority children's social care (including the fostering service, if the child is looked after), the police, health and other bodies such as the referring agency. 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 or at any other time, including during the assessment process.'*

The purpose of the strategy meeting is *'to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid action if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.'*

9. Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) also outlines that strategy discussion attendees at a minimum should include a local authority social worker and their manager, health professionals and a Police representative. The use of conference calling should be considered to increase the contributions of relevant agencies. When considering the competing demands on services this is an important option. Across these three boroughs, a strategy discussion will likely be the norm and a meeting held for more serious/complex concerns. Locally, the CAIT team have advised the following will be prioritised for strategy meetings:
 - Serious GBH and unexplained injuries
 - Rape and serious sexual assaults involving penetration
 - Serious neglect
 - Female Genital Mutilation

- Honour Based Violence

Increasing the use of conference calling will support agencies shared understanding of safeguarding concerns.

Other relevant professionals will depend on the nature of the individual case but may include:

- The professional or agency that made the referral;
- The child's school or nursery; and
- Any health services the child or family members are receiving.
- All attendees should be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their agencies.

10. A strategy meeting / discussion should be used to:

- Share available information;
- Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation;
- Decide whether an assessment under **s47 of the Children Act 1989** (s47 enquiries) should be initiated, or continued if it has already begun;
- Where it is decided that there are grounds to initiate a s47 enquiry, decisions should be made about whether this is a single or joint investigation. Protocols in place in local areas should be followed.
- Consider the assessment and the action points, if already in place;
- Plan how the s47 enquiry should be undertaken (if one is to be initiated), including the need for medical treatment, and who will carry out what actions, by when and for what purpose;
- Agree what action is required immediately to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, and / or provide interim services and support. For example, if the child is in hospital, decisions should also be made about how to secure the safe discharge of the child or if an EPO is in place or the child is subject to Police powers of protection, who will do what by when etc.;
- Determine what information from the strategy meeting / discussion 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.

11. Relevant matters include:

- Agreeing, or reviewing how the assessment under s47 of the Children Act 1989 will be carried out - what further information is required about the child/ren and family and how it should be obtained and recorded;
- Agreeing who should be interviewed, by whom, for what purpose and when. The way in which interviews are conducted can play a significant part in minimising any distress caused to children, and in increasing the likelihood of maintaining constructive working relationships with families when a criminal offence may have been committed against a child, the timing and handling of interviews with victims, their families and witnesses can have important implications for the collection and preservation of evidence;
- Agreeing, in particular, when the child will be seen alone (unless to do so would be inappropriate for the child) by the social worker during the course of these enquiries and the methods by which the child's wishes and feelings will be ascertained so that they can be taken into account when making decisions under section 47 of the Children Act 1989;
- In the light of the race and ethnicity of the child and family, considering how these should be taken into account and establishing whether an interpreter will be required; and
- Considering the needs of other children who may be affected (e.g. siblings and other children, such as those living in the same establishment, in contact with alleged abusers).
- Where issues have significant medical implications, or a paediatric examination has taken place or may be necessary, a paediatrician should always be included. If the child is receiving services from a hospital or child development team, the meeting / discussion should involve the responsible

medical consultant and, in the case of in-patient treatment, a senior ward nurse.

- A professional may need to be included in the strategy meeting / discussion who is not involved with the child, but who can contribute expertise relevant to the particular form of abuse or neglect in the case.
- The timescale for the assessment to reach a decision on next steps should be based on the needs of the individual child, consistent with the local protocol and certainly no longer than 45 working days from the point of referral into Children's Social Care.
- The strategy meeting / discussion should be co-ordinated and chaired by the LA children's social care first line manager.
- The Police should discuss the basis for any criminal investigation and any relevant processes that other agencies might need to know about, including the timing and methods of evidence gathering; and
- The Police should lead the criminal investigation (Children's Social Care have the lead for the section 47 enquiries and assessment of the child's welfare) where joint enquiries take place.

It is essential the Social Worker and Manager arrange a follow up meeting to review the impact and outcome of the implementation of the actions initially agreed.

12. For sharing information between the local authority and criminal justice professionals, see the 2013 Protocol and good practice model: Disclosure of information in cases of alleged child abuse and linked criminal and care directions hearings. (CPS, ACPO, DfE, LGA, ADCS et al).

13. Strategy meeting / discussion record

- It is the responsibility of the chair of the strategy meeting / discussion 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 of the meeting/discussion.
- A copy of the record should be made available for all those, who had been invited, as soon as practicable by LA children's social care.
- For telephone strategy discussions, all agencies should make a record of the outcome of the telephone discussion and actions agreed at the time. The record of the notes and decisions authorised by the LA children's social care manager should be circulated as soon as practicable to all parties to the discussion.

14. Timing of strategy meeting / discussion

15. Strategy meetings / discussions should be convened 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 meeting / discussion should be held on the same day as the receipt of the referral;
- For allegations of penetrative sexual abuse, the strategy meeting / 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 meeting / discussion must be held within one working day;
- Where the concerns are particularly complex (e.g. organised abuse / allegations against staff) the strategy meeting / 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.

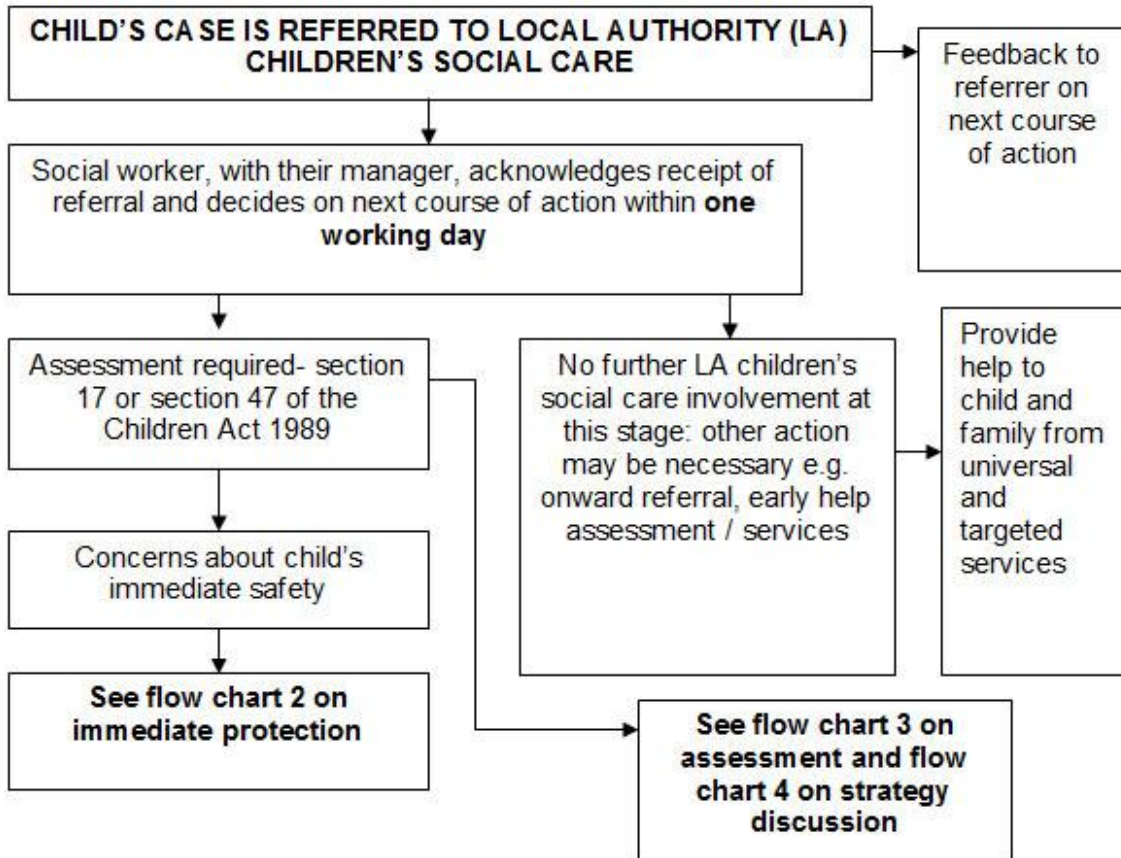
16. The plan made at the strategy meeting / discussion should reflect the requirement to convene an initial child protection conference within 15 working days of the strategy meeting / discussion at which it was decided to initiate the enquiry (if there were more than one strategy meetings). In

exceptional circumstances, such as Fabricated and induced illness for example, enquiries will be more complicated and may require more than one strategy discussion. If the strategy meeting / discussion concludes that a further strategy meeting / discussion 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.

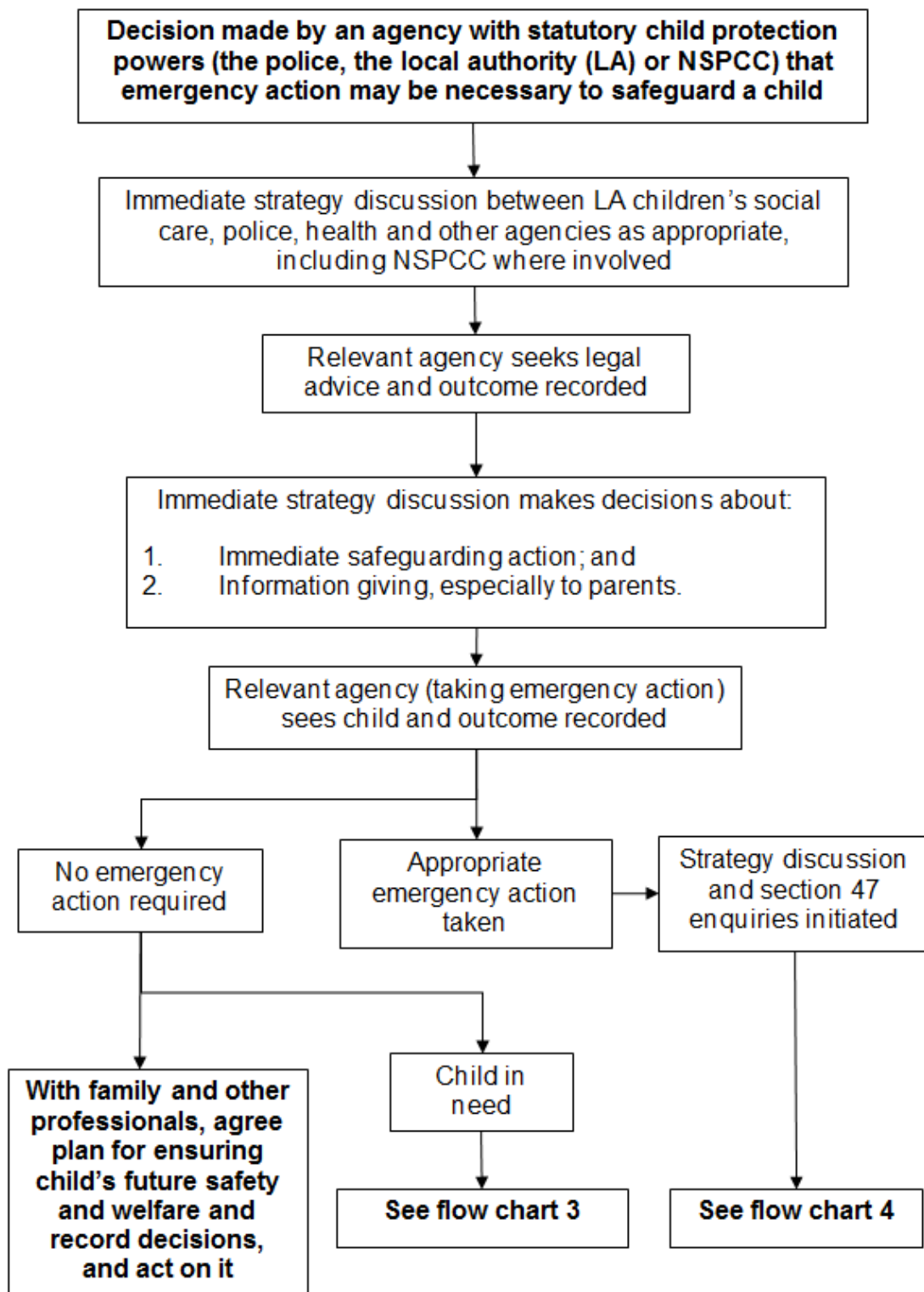
17. If the conclusion of the strategy discussion is that there is no cause to pursue the s47 enquiry then consideration should be given to the needs of the child for any support services or services as a child in need.

Appendix One:
Helpful Flow Charts from [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015](#)

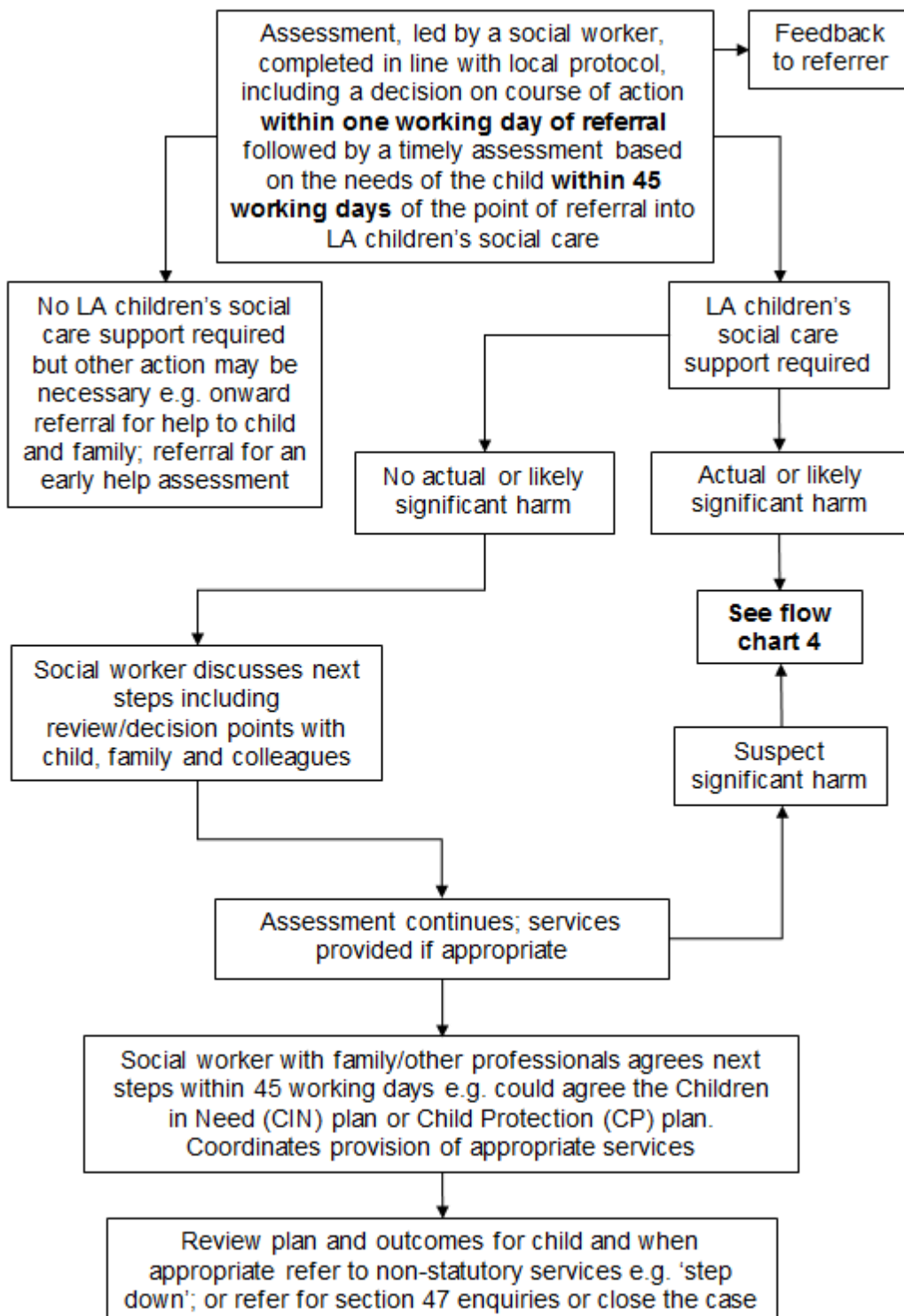
Flow Chart 1: Action taken when a Child is Referred to Children’s Social Care



Flow Chart 2: Immediate Protection



Flow Chart 3: Action taken for an assessment under the Children Act 1989



Flow Chart 4: Action to be taken following a Strategy Discussion

