

**London Borough of Bexley and Bexley Metropolitan Police Service
Joint Operational Procedure: Child Protection**

Date of publication: 6 February 2017
Date for review: February 2018

Responsible Manager:
Head of Child Protection and Family Support
Detective Inspector, CAIT

Electronic file location: tbc

Associated statutory guidance and regulations:

Pan London Child Protection Protocols, available on the Bexley Local Safeguarding Children Board website at: http://www.bexleyscb.org.uk/page.php?section=section_5&id=311

Working Together to Safeguard Children, a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, Department for Education Statutory Guidance March 2015:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

Children Act 1989: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents>

Children Act 2004: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents>

Children and Young Persons Act 2008: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/23/contents>

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1984/60/contents>

Ministry of Justice, Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings Guidance, 2011:
http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/best_evidence_in_criminal_proceedings.pdf

Key Objectives (including Signs of Safety principles to apply)

1. The safety and welfare of the child is the paramount concern and where needed, immediate action will be taken to safeguard the child.
2. To provide a proportionate response to the presenting risks and worries, drawing on the strengths and safety in the family.
3. To work respectfully with the family and our partner agencies to develop a safety plan for the child which involves the child being cared for in the extended network wherever possible.
4. Perpetrators will be held to account using proportionality and professional judgement.

Detailed advice:

- i. If professionals or members of the public are concerned about the safety or welfare of the child, a referral is to be made to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).
- ii. All contacts into the MASH are processed within 24 hours.
- iii. If there are concerns about immediate risk to a child or evidence of a crime, the social worker will send a referral form, known as an 87a (child abuse investigation to police form) within 24 hours to the child abuse investigation team (CAIT) to request a strategy meeting.
- iv. Where other concerns such as domestic abuse, gang related activity, missing children or CSE are evident, the CAIT officer will ensure that the 87a is shared so that the relevant police department is involved in the strategy discussion.
- v. Referrals to children's social care and to CAIT contain sufficient information to enable a decision to be made.
- vi. The police risk assessment matrix is used to assess the presenting concerns and determine whether

- a Merlin is passed to children's social care. Merlins include sufficient and correct detail to allow them to be triaged by children's social care.
- vii. Decisions are made on contact/referrals within 24 hours. The referral process will not delay immediate safeguarding action or the likely loss of evidence in a serious criminal matter.
 - viii. Strategy discussions are multi-agency meetings or discussions and the threshold for s47 enquiries is clearly understood across all agencies. Multi agency working means that key partners are involved in decision making, the minimum requirement being health, police and social care to comply with *Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2015*. Other agencies may include education, probation, housing, mental health services, probation and CAMHS.
 - ix. The decision to progress a referral to s47 enquiries is based on identified risks and safeguarding principles and is a multi-agency decision with children's social care being the lead agency.
 - x. The children's social care team manager conducts the initial strategy meeting with the CAIT referral desk officer, health and other professionals as appropriate. If the decision to proceed with a joint police and social care s47 enquiry is made, the case will be passed to the CAIT investigation team.
 - xi. The allocated CAIT officer will contact the social worker to make arrangements to carry out the joint enquiries on the basis of the decisions made at the strategy discussion with the CAIT referral desk officer.
 - xii. Professional disagreements about the decisions made in the strategy meeting held should be discussed with the relevant senior managers in each agency. If there is disagreement that cannot be resolved, a further discussion should take place between the CAIT sergeant and the children's social care service manager to determine how to proceed. Details of this discussion will be recorded on the child's file.
 - xiii. Best practice when undertaking Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews means they are conducted jointly by police and children's social care as part of s47 enquiries.
 - xiv. Medical examinations of children may take place before or after an Achieving Best Evidence interviews, depending on the circumstances. Any course of action must be agreed with the involvement of the police, social care and paediatric staff, taking into account the welfare of the child and the nature of the police investigation.
 - xv. The social worker leads on the safety planning with the family in consultation with the police and other agencies. A family safety plan must be in place for all cases open for social work help and support. Written agreements/working together agreements are not acceptable.
 - xvi. A multi-agency strategy meeting can be held at any point during the social work involvement with the family if there are changes in child's circumstances that mean the risk has increased or there is a disclosure of harm.
 - xvii. If a child is at risk of actual or likely significant harm, a child protection conference must be considered. In order to progress a case to initial child protection conference, a multi-agency strategy meeting must be convened to inform the decision.
 - xviii. This document does not replace the Pan London Child Protection Procedures or statutory guidance but is a shared statement of joint working protocols.