

# **Internal Escalation Procedure for Practitioners, Managers, and the Principal Social Worker**

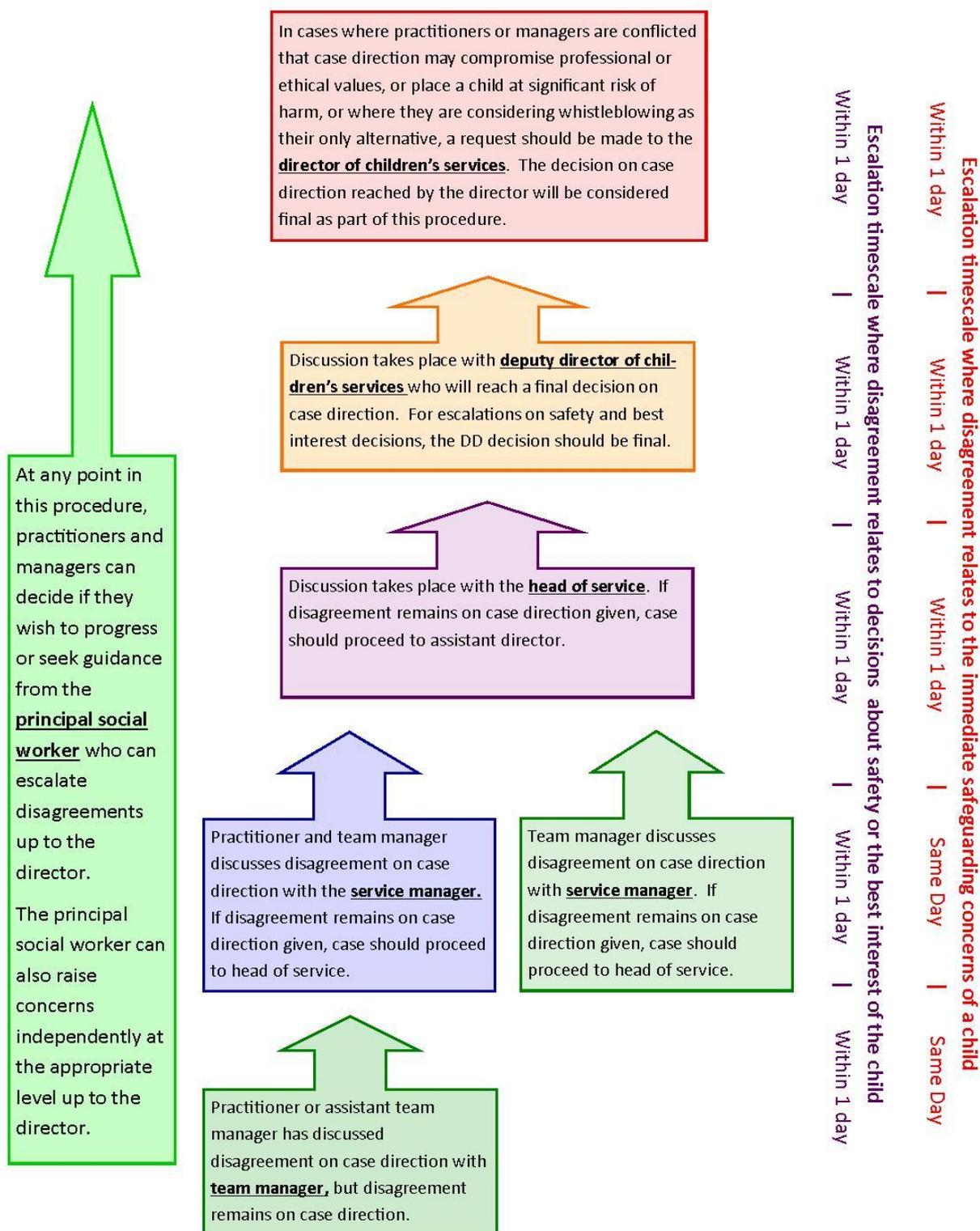
Children's Social Care

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### Bexley Internal Children's Services Escalation Procedure Flowchart

This flow chart is to be used in conjunction with the escalation procedure. It outlines the process and the expected time-scales for when an escalation should be resolved within (on the right side of the chart) according to the level of concern to the child. This does not replace the whistleblowing or employee resolution procedures for matters within their remit.



## Purpose of Policy

Making decisions around the safety and well-being of children are difficult, especially when there can be varying views on what is in a child's best interest. It is why as much assessment, planning, and collaboration as possible should always be done in order to try to achieve the safest and best outcomes for the children and families we serve.

It is expected that disagreements will arise from time to time and these will be explored in various ways such as in supervision, review meetings, and in decision making panels. The vast majority of these can usually be resolved when managers and practitioners foster a culture of respectful challenge and reflection on cases. Occasionally, significant areas of disagreement can arise and often leave practitioners and some managers feeling conflicted between acting in what they believe is in the best interest of a child versus not wanting to "rock the boat" or upset their line managers.

This procedure was developed based on the Principal Child & Family Social Work (PSW) Network agreed procedure to support PSWs in escalating issues in a proactive manner. It has been expanded to include all social care practitioners. The aim is to provide a means for the PSW, practitioners or managers to escalate issues in order to ensure they are carefully considered to avoid drift and delay or compromising the safety and well-being of the children we support.

### 1. Aims of this Policy

- 1.1 To encourage a culture where the PSW, managers and practitioners feel confident in raising concerns or question case direction where they believe it may compromise the safety or well-being of a child;
- 1.2 To provide every possible opportunity for case decisions to be carefully considered before decisions on a child's plan are carried out;
- 1.3 To ensure decisions are carried out in a timely manner and are always focused on the best interest of the child's safety and well-being;
- 1.4 To protect the PSW, practitioners and managers from any potential negative repercussions that may arise from challenging their line manager's decisions.

### 2. Application and Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all practitioners (including those not social work qualified) and managers within Bexley Children's Services. It is intended to cover disagreements on case direction where there is a belief it may compromise the best interest of a child's welfare and/or unduly place them at risk of significant harm.
- 2.2 This policy also covers the role of the principal social worker in supporting their role in respectful challenge and raising concerns brought to their attention to the appropriate levels of management for resolution.
- 2.3 The aim is to promote a safe culture where respectful challenge can take place and is encouraged, but where management direction can also be robust and respected. Although it is hoped this policy would avoid the need for, it does not however replace the right for anyone to raise issues as appropriate through the Whistleblowing or Employee Resolution procedures.

### 3. Procedure for Practitioners and Managers

- 3.1 All escalations should be done in accordance with the timescales outlined in section five of this policy.
- 3.2 Where a practitioner or assistant team manager (ATM) has a disagreement on a case direction given, they should request a meeting with the team manager (TM).
- 3.3 If the practitioner ATM still disagrees with the case direction given, they should escalate and request a meeting with the service manager.
- 3.4 If the practitioner ATM still disagrees with the case direction given, they should escalate and request a meeting with the head of service.
- 3.5 If the practitioner ATM still disagrees with the case direction given, they should escalate and request a meeting with the Deputy Director. The Deputy Director's decision should be considered final.
- 3.6 If significant concerns for the safety and well-being of a child remain following the decision of the Deputy Director, or if a consideration is being made to initiate Whistleblowing procedures, a meeting should be requested with the Deputy Director of children's services. The Deputy Director will make the final decision on the matter under these procedures.
- 3.7 If a decision is agreed at one management level, but is later overturned at a higher level which leaves a practitioner or manager of the belief it compromises the safety or well-being of a child, they can escalate the matter to the next highest management level in this procedure.
- 3.8 Where there are disagreements with decisions reached at a decision making panel where it is believed it to have an undue and significant impact on the safety and/or well-being of a child, the practitioner and TM should inform the service manager with a view of discussing these concerns with the head of service. If the matter remains unresolved, the practitioner or manager should escalate the matter from section 3.5 of this policy.
- 3.9 Where there are issues of dispute regarding the outcome of legal planning meetings then legal advisors need to escalate matters to the team manager in the first instance. If the meeting does not produce a satisfactory outcome then the matter must be escalated to the service manager or head of service in his/her absence.
- 3.10 At any stage in this procedure, the practitioner or manager can arrange to discuss the disagreement with the principal social worker in order to assist in a resolution or provide support with the escalation process.

### 4. Procedure for Principal Social Worker

- 4.1 Where an issue or concerns has come to the attention of the principal social worker (PSW), the PSW should arrange to meet with the relevant people who have raised the concern or have information that may assist the PSW with how to best proceed with the matter.
- 4.2 The PSW will seek to resolve any disagreements or issues relating to the safety or well-being of a child at the lowest management level that maximises the resolution of the matter in a timely and effective way.
- 4.3 The PSW will make themselves available to advise, assist and support any practitioner or manager who wishes to raise a concern within these procedures. The PSW may also make their own decision to escalate a matter independently even if the person originating the escalation does not wish to do so

themselves if the PSW is of the belief that not doing so will unduly impact the safety or well-being of a child.

- 4.4 The PSW is also responsible for raising systemic issues that may unduly impact on practice and delivering an effective service to children and families. Such issues may include: obstructive bureaucratic processes, IT problems, environmental constraints of the workplace, and ineffective or toxic communications or working relations within the service. The PSW will seek to resolve these issues at the lowest management level that maximises the resolution of these matters in the most timely and effective way.
- 4.5 The PSW can exercise professional judgement in whether any matters are deemed significant enough to be raised at the Deputy Director or Director of children's services.

## 5. Timescales for Escalation

- 5.1 It is expected that all issues of disagreement should be resolved in the timeliest manner possible. Avoidable delays may expose a child to unnecessary risk of harm to their safety or well-being.
- 5.2 For areas of disagreement where it is not believed the child is being exposed to undue risk of significant harm, the maximum timescale for resolution should be **one working day** for each level up to the level of Deputy Director (or Director if necessary).
- 5.3 For areas of disagreement where it is believed a child is being exposed to undue or immediate risk of significant harm, the escalation should proceed at minimum to the level of service manager on **the same day**. If there is no successful resolution, the matter should progress to each successive level of management within **one working day** for each level.
- 5.4 If meetings are not arranged within these timescales, the person making the escalation can decide to proceed to the next level.
- 5.5 **If a practitioner or manager is of the belief that a child may be at imminent risk of significant harm, they should seek the assistance of the PSW and/or escalate the matter to the highest management level possible on the same day (up to the level of director if necessary) in order for a timely and appropriate decision to be made that adequately safeguards the child.**
- 5.6 Practitioners and managers can refer to the escalation flowchart on page three of this policy as a quick reference for the timescales for progressing escalations at each management level.

## 6. Supporting Those who Escalate Disagreements

- 6.1 It is expected that all persons who raise or hear concerns raised through this procedure will do so in a manner that fosters respectful challenge and supports professional disagreement.
- 6.2 No repercussions or disciplinary action should be considered against those who raise concerns in line with this procedure who are acting in good faith with the best interests of a child's safety and well-being in mind.
- 6.3 Where there are concerns that relate to a culture of unsafe or unprofessional practice, or where a person believes they are being treated in an unfair or discriminatory manner, they may consider raising those matters concurrently to this procedure under the Bexley's Whistleblowing or Employee Resolution procedures.