

# Shetland Child Protection Committee

## Information for professionals invited to Child Protection Case Conferences

### Key points:

- Professionals invited to a case conference are expected to attend.
- You should also provide a written report.
- If you cannot go, you **must** as a minimum:
  - Send your **apologies**
  - Send a **written report** (see below and FAQs for content – and even just to say you don't know the family, if that's the case, but please speak to the Chair as you may still have a role) and
  - Consider if **someone else should go** from your organisation, and tell the Chair if so by ringing 01595 744400.
- Detailed information is in **section 13** of the **Shetland inter-agency Child Protection Procedures** with a format for your report at **Appendix 7 (c)-(e) in Section 19**. GPs may also use their own report pro-forma. These are available on the CPC website at <http://www.childprotectionsketland.com/>

### Frequently asked questions:

See questions and answers attached.

**Thank you for your help in keeping Shetland's children safe.**

## **Child Protection Case Conferences FAQ's**

### **I've been asked to attend a Child Protection Case Conference. What's that about?**

A Child Protection Case Conference is a formal inter-agency meeting of professionals and others closely involved with a family, who meet with the family and help decide if a child's name should be registered on Shetland's Child Protection Register as being at risk.

Registration means that a child has a Child Protection Plan setting out who will do what to help keep the child safe. Similar arrangements are in place throughout the UK, so if a family move, a child being on the Child Protection Register means that agencies in the area to which they move are alerted quickly to the need to ensure the child's safety.

### **My letter came from Social Work – is this another social work meeting?**

Social Work arrange inter-agency meetings in various circumstances – a Child Protection Case Conference is specifically for where a child may be at risk of significant harm.

Child Protection Case Conferences are convened by Shetland Islands Council Social Work service on behalf of Shetland Child Protection Committee (CPC).

CPC is an inter-agency body with representation from NHS Shetland, Northern Constabulary, Shetland Islands Council's Education and Social Care and Housing Services, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, Shetland Children's Panel, Shetland Council of Social Service and Procurator Fiscal.

CPC and its main constituent bodies have agreed to operate the Shetland inter-agency Child Protection Procedures, which set out when a Child Protection Case Conference will be called. Detailed information is in the Shetland inter-agency Child Protection Procedures, particularly at section 13. There should be a copy available in your workplace or you can look it up on the CPC website at <http://www.childprotectionschetland.com/>

This leaflet is to give you some basic information to help you contribute confidently to safeguarding children through the Child Protection Case Conference process.

### **When does a Child Protection Case Conference take place?**

Child Protection Case Conferences can be arranged following a child protection investigation into a particular incident or allegation, or where agencies are already working with a family, but there are escalating or cumulative concerns. Child protection referrals do not necessarily lead to a Child Protection Case Conference. This is because once the circumstances are looked into, the initial concerns may prove to be less worrying than at first appeared, and it may be that providing the

parents with additional support will ensure that things do not reach the stage where their children might be placed at risk.

Experience shows that children are best protected when all agencies share information and work together. Child Protection Case Conferences are arranged where there are concerns that a child may have suffered or be at risk of abuse, and may need a Child Protection Plan. In these circumstances a Child Protection Case Conference is the main forum for sharing information and concerns, analysing risks, and deciding who will be responsible for which necessary actions to reduce those risks.

### **What sorts of case conferences are there?**

An **initial** child protection case conference will decide if a child's name should be put on the Child Protection Register. If so, a Child Protection Plan will be drawn up showing what is to be done to protect the child, and who will do each element of this. The plan will set out what is decided about whether the child can safely live at home, and what support and safeguards will be in place.

Occasionally, the concerns about a future parent's ability to safely look after a baby are such that a type of initial conference called a **pre-birth conference** will be convened, to decide whether the baby's name needs to go on the child protection register at birth, with a child protection plan in place immediately.

The plan made at an initial child protection case conference will be reviewed at a **review** child protection case conference, to see if it is working, or what more may need to be done. The review child protection case conference will decide whether the child's name needs to stay on the child protection register for a further period, and will adjust the Child Protection Plan if necessary.

### **Do I need to go?**

It is very important that you attend if you possibly can. Social workers consider carefully whom to invite. You may have been asked because you may be able to contribute to the protection plan as well as because you have information about the presenting concern. However, if there is someone else in your organisation who knows the child and family better, please feel free to contact the conference Chair in advance to discuss which of you should attend. You can ring social work on 01595 744400 to find out who the Chair will be. This is particularly important in a school, where social workers may address an invitation to the Head Teacher because they are not sure who is most involved.

Child Protection case conferences make vital decisions regarding children's safety, so **all agencies expect you treat attendance as a priority**. However, it is recognised that sometimes it will just not be possible for everyone invited to go. In those cases **you must as a minimum submit a report** setting out your involvement with the family and any information or concerns you have. (See below for more about reports.). **It is never acceptable just to send apologies.**

## **How long will it last?**

Child Protection Case Conferences usually last between one and two hours but could be a bit longer if there are a number of children to discuss. You may be invited up to half an hour before the conference is expected to start in order to read reports. There may be a number of reports to read; please remember this time is for reading only rather than discussion. It is important to make the time to do this, and it is not fair on family members to be kept waiting while professionals read reports about them. Please allow plenty of time, as there are critical decisions to be made, and it is unhelpful if conference members arrive late or leave early. However, attending for part is generally better than not attending at all, so if you have an insuperable difficulty, please let the Chair know as soon as possible.

## **Do I need to prepare a written report even if I'm able to attend?**

Yes, you are asked to put something in writing if you possibly can. Initial case conferences often have to be called at short notice, but even so a written report should be prepared if possible. Taking the time to prepare this will give you the opportunity to go back over your and your agency's records to see if there is any other information that may add to an understanding of the child's circumstances. You should include positive factors you know about as well as concerns. Your report should clearly distinguish between fact, observation, allegation, opinion and matters proven in court.

Your report should be expressed in a non-judgemental way and will be shared with others attending the conference, including family members. This is not a reason to omit material that may be relevant, or to minimise your concerns, but you should express yourself with accuracy and care, and be prepared to justify your opinions. **Further guidance and a format for your report is in Appendix 7 (c) to (e) in Section 19** of the Shetland inter-agency Child Protection Procedures. A specific pro-forma for the use of GPs has been circulated separately to them and will be included in the next edition. The forms can be downloaded from CPC website for ease of completion but should be printed off and signed, not sent electronically. If in doubt, consult a more experienced colleague.

If possible (eg for review child protection case conferences, where there is generally more notice) your report should be made available to the Chair in advance. Where this is not possible, please bring it with you, preferably with copies for other participants.

There are limited circumstances where 'restricted' information can be made available to a case conference. 'Restricted' information is information that is not shared with particular participants. You should discuss this with the Chair in advance if you wish to share information in this way. There should be a chance to do this at the start of the conference, but if the issue only arises during the conference you can ask the Chair for a short adjournment to discuss the need for this. Restricting information will be allowed only in exceptional circumstances eg where sharing information would prejudice a criminal inquiry.

*Sometimes professionals express concern about the impact of sharing reports with family members on working relationships, but openness and honesty are likely to promote working relationships better in the long run, and this is not a reason for a report to be restricted.*

### **What about sharing confidential information?**

Arrangements for the protection of children from abuse or harm, and in particular Child Protection Case Conferences, can only be successful if the professional staff concerned do all they can to work collaboratively, and share and exchange relevant information in a way that can be clearly understood. There are exceptions in the Data Protection Act and professional codes of conduct to permit the sharing of otherwise confidential information for child protection purposes. If in doubt about what you can share you should consult with relevant colleagues such as your organisation's Data Protection Officer, or the Caldicott Guardian for NHS Shetland staff, prior to the case conference.

It is important that the information you share is clearly understood, so please try and avoid using jargon, and explain any technical language you cannot avoid. You may be asked to clarify certain terms at the case conference and to explain how this affects the risk to the children.

At the conference you may well be asked to give your report in two stages – firstly the information you are sharing, and secondly the conclusions you have come to about the level of risk (see below under 'The Role of the...Chair'). You will have given some initial thought to this second question when preparing your report, and will give it further consideration based on all the information you hear at the Child Protection Case Conference.

### **Who will be at the Child Protection Case Conference?**

There is generally representation from the main agencies such as social work, education, health and the police. Others working with the family such as youth workers or voluntary groups may also be invited. Parents are invited and consideration is given to the attendance of children, depending on their age and understanding, their own wishes, and what would be in their best interests.

The Conference will also be attended by a minute taker, who will record what is discussed.

### **How are decisions made?**

Case conferences are multi-disciplinary and each agency carries responsibility for helping reach a decision and implementing recommendations. Social Work have a lead role in analysing the issues, but everyone's input is important. After all the information has been given, the Chair will summarise it and ask for your view on whether registration is needed. You will need to be clear about the criteria for registration as set out in the Shetland inter-agency Child Protection Procedures. A

child's name should be placed on the Register where he or she has suffered or is at risk of suffering significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect and a Child Protection Plan is needed.

When making decisions each relevant child will be considered in turn. You may have been able to contribute information relating only to one child of a family, with whom you have dealings, but you will be able to contribute your opinion on the other children discussed at the conference, on the basis of the information you have heard.

In giving your opinion about registration you must exercise your professional judgement about whether on the basis of the information that has been given by everyone, the criteria for registration are met. You must not allow yourself to be swayed by considerations of what you think the family will think, or whether they seem co-operative. Under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 'the paramount consideration is the welfare of the child'.

If you disagree with what others are saying you must be prepared to say so, and to explain why. The Chair will seek consensus, but if this cannot be reached the Chair will make the final decision. If you are not persuaded that the decision is correct you can ask for your dissent to be recorded in the minute. Whether or not you agree with the decision to register, you and your agency must stick to the Child Protection Plan that is drawn up (see below).

The decision to remove a child's name from the Child Protection Register is made at a review Child Protection Case Conference when an objective assessment indicates that the risk of abuse has been eliminated or reduced to a level where the child would not have been registered. For example, this could be because the child's parents' have been able, with support, to change those aspects of their lifestyle or behaviour that created the risk, or it could be because the child is now safely being brought up by alternative carers.

### **Role of the Child Protection Case Conference Chair**

The Chair of the conference will be a senior social worker or social work manager who is independent of the line management of the case. The Chair will ensure that the Shetland inter-agency Child Protection Procedures are followed at the conference and that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. The Chair will normally have met family members who are attending before the conference begins, to advise them how the conference will be run.

The Chair will follow the following broad **agenda**:

- Discussion of any restricted information (in the absence of those not entitled to it)
- Introductions
- Consideration of information in reports, and other fact-gathering
- Summarising the information and its relevance to the assessment of risk
- Seeking professionals views on risks and hence on registration

- Decision whether to register – the Chair will decide under which category
- Decision whether to refer to the Reporter

And if the child is registered:

- Discussion of an outline Child Protection Plan, to include major decisions such as whether it is safe for the child to live at home
- Appointing a Keyworker and a Core Group to develop the detail of the Child Protection Plan, and oversee its operation
- Fixing a date for a review case conference.

### **How can I be sure what has been decided?**

The Chair should clearly state the decisions reached, and you should seek clarification if you are not sure, as you may need to act on decisions reached at once. A minute signed by the Chair will be circulated within 10 working days. If you do not receive this, please ask Social Work. If you do not agree that the minute is accurate, you must tell the Chair at once (and in any event within 7 days), or it will be assumed that you agree it is accurate.

### **What is a Child Protection Plan**

A Child Protection Plan sets out what needs to happen to keep the child safe. It says who needs to do what. It can only work if everyone carries out what is expected of them. The plan may set out what needs to change in the family for the child to stay safe, and within what timescale.

If the plan provides for someone else in your agency to take action, it is your responsibility to make sure they know about it; do not rely on someone else to do this. For example, at a pre-birth conference it may be decided that social work should be informed when the mother is admitted to hospital to give birth. A health visitor attending such a conference, perhaps because of involvement with an older child, would need to ensure that the maternity department is advised of this.

It is your responsibility and that of your agency to carry out the Child Protection Plan, even if you did not agree with the decisions reached, and to let the keyworker know at once if it is not being carried out.

### **What if the child's name is not put on the register and I disagree with this decision?**

Services can still be offered to children as 'children in need' even if they are not in need of protection, so registration is not necessary to make sure a family gets help. However, if you believe that a child remains at risk but is not registered, you should record your dissent at the Child Protection Case Conference and discuss this with your line manager, who can ensure this is taken up with the Head of the Social Work service. You should also continue to monitor the situation and ensure that you

record any further incidents or concerns, and make a further child protection referral to Social Work if necessary.

### **Is that the end of my involvement?**

Almost certainly not. You may be asked by the Conference or by the keyworker to attend meetings of the Core group that will oversee the detailed operation of the Child Protection Plan. You may be invited to a review Child Protection Case Conference. Reports for and attendance at such a conference are just as important as attending the initial child protection case conference, as equally important decisions have to be made.

Whether or not you attend a Child Protection case Conference, if the Reporter decides that a Children's Hearing should be called, you may be asked to attend the Hearing. More information about what you need to do about that is available from the Authority Reporter (telephone 692436) or from the SCRA website [http://www.scra.gov.uk/partners\\_faq.htm](http://www.scra.gov.uk/partners_faq.htm)

If you have relevant information (eg you witnessed an assault, or a child spoke to you about their abuse) it is possible that you may be asked to attend court as a witness. This would be discussed with you by the Procurator Fiscal, who will advise what further support is available. However, many cases that require the child's name to be on the Child Protection Register do not lead to a prosecution or court appearance.

You can always expect and ask for support from your line-manager, since it is recognised that dealing with child protection work can be very challenging. Where you have been involved in a difficult child protection case, you can also ask for there to be an inter-agency debrief to discuss how things went.

**Thank you for your help in keeping Shetland's children safe.**