

Shetland Child Protection Committee

Safeguarding Children and Young People in Shetland

Child Protection Case Conferences - Information for family members

There is going to be a meeting because there are concerns about your child's safety and welfare.

This is called a Child Protection Case Conference.

We realise this is a stressful time for you and hope that this leaflet will answer most questions you may have about the Child Protection Conference. Please contact your social worker if you want more information.

What does a Child Protection Case Conference do?

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- share information about the matters which have caused concern
- ensure relevant family details are known
- consider whether or not the safety and well-being of your child is at risk and, if so, to consider how best to protect your child
- decide whether to place your child's name on the child protection register
- consider whether a referral should be made to the Reporter to the Children's Panel
- consider areas of strength within your family and decide on a plan to support you and your child

Professionals attending the Conference will decide whether your child's name needs to be on the Child Protection Register. Going on the register does not necessarily mean your child has suffered abuse. It means that professionals think there is a significant risk of this.

Who will be there?

- **The Chair**

The person who runs the child protection case conference is called the Chair. The Chair is an independent senior social work manager. If you have any questions about the case conference process, you can ask the Chair before the meeting. The Chair has the final say on who can be there. The Chair will have an administrative assistant attend the conference to take notes.

- **Family members**

Usually both parents are invited to a Child Protection Case Conference. Other family members may also be invited where they are closely involved.

If you are worried about who might be there, please tell your social worker. We want to make it as easy as possible for you to share your views and recognise it can be hard. Your contribution is very important and your views will be listened to.

You can have someone attend with you to help you put across your own point of view. This is called a 'supporter'. It could be someone from Advocacy Shetland (telephone 01595 743929) or a friend, provided this is agreed in advance with the Chair. Please tell your social worker if you would like to bring a supporter.

Occasionally there may be a part of the meeting that you cannot attend. This is to allow people to discuss any information they cannot share with you. If this happens, the Chair will explain it to you at the time.

Your social worker will consider whether your children should be there. This will depend on their age and understanding of the issues, their own wishes and whether they would be likely to be too upset by the meeting. Often they will not be asked to the meeting, but their wishes will always be considered if they are old enough to express them.

- **Professionals**

Your social worker will be there and often their supervisor (a senior social worker). Other people with knowledge of your child and family may be there.

Depending on circumstances, this could be teachers, a health visitor or a GP, or someone providing a service to you as an adult. They are there to consider what is best for your child.

A police officer will usually attend. This is because the police have a responsibility to provide any relevant information, where there are concerns about a child's safety and welfare.

Those invited usually bring a written report of their knowledge and involvement with your family and how they see any risks.

Everyone has a responsibility to make sure children are safe and well cared for. People will be sympathetic to how you are feeling, but they have to put your child's needs first.

Before the case conference

Before the case conference the social worker should go through their written report with you and answer any questions you may have.

You will be invited to a meeting with the Chair. This usually takes place just before the case conference. You, any supporter you are bringing, the Chair and your social worker will be there.

The Chair will make sure you had a chance to read reports or have someone go through them with you, and will make arrangements for this to happen if not.

The Chair will explain what will happen at the conference and make sure you know who will be there. After this meeting the conference will start.

At the case conference

The Chair will explain the reason for holding the conference and check factual information such as names and dates of birth are correct.

The Chair will ask people to share the information they have. If you think the information is wrong you should say so. The Chair will give you an opportunity to do this, and to add any additional information you want to share. There will be a full discussion about why there was a need for a child protection case conference.

The Chair will ask the professionals for their views about the risks and whether your child's name should be on the register, and will record the decision made.

If your child is registered a child protection plan will be agreed. This sets out what everyone including you is expected to do to keep your child safe. The conference will arrange for a 'core group' of those most closely involved to meet regularly to work out the details and make sure everyone keeps to the plan. A 'keyworker' will be named so that everyone knows who is the main contact.

There will be also be a decision made about whether there should be a referral to the Reporter. A date will usually be fixed for a review case conference to check how things are going, and if your child's name still needs to be on the register. The review must be within 6 months but could be sooner.

After the child protection case conference

You will get a letter telling you about the decisions made. You will also get a note summarising what was said at the meeting and the decisions made. This is called the 'minute'.

You will be invited to meetings of the core group, which usually meets about once a month. The core group will look at the Child Protection Plan and progress being made. Everyone will be working towards a situation where your child is safe and does not need to be on the child protection register. Your contribution is important to ensure the successful progress of the plan. Progress will be reported to the review Child Protection Case Conference. If you have any concerns about the progress of the plan these should be raised with the Chair of the Core Group meeting or the Chair of the review Child Protection Conference.

What happens to information shared at the meetings?

Minutes of Child Protection Case Conferences and Core Group meetings are highly confidential documents. Copies will be sent to all those who were invited to the meeting, who will share information only with those who need to know in order to ensure that your child is made as safe as possible. The information can be used in court including any criminal proceedings.

A copy of Child Protection Case Conference Minutes will be sent to the Reporter for information, even where there will be no formal referral. If anyone else who should get a copy, this will be discussed at the meeting and the Chair will decide.

Further information

Full information about the procedures followed by organisations are in the Shetland inter-agency Child Protection Procedures. These are accessible on the internet at <http://www.shetland.gov.uk/socialwork-health/services/child-protection.asp>. Anyone can access the internet at the Shetland Library, Hillhead, Lerwick, or ask your social worker if you would like to look at a paper copy.

If you want more information, you can speak to your social worker or ask the Chair.

If you feel you need legal advice about your and your child's rights, you can contact a solicitor. Legal aid may be available. The Law Society of Scotland (telephone 0131 2267411) can provide a list of solicitors and information about Legal aid.

We hope that even if you disagree with the decisions made, you will agree to work with professionals in the best interests of your child. However, if you think the case conference has not been run properly, or you are unhappy about the way professionals are doing their job, you can ask any professional for information about making a complaint.