

Newcastle Children's Social Care
Children's Safeguarding Standards Unit

Child Participation in Child Protection Conferences / Reviews & Protection Planning

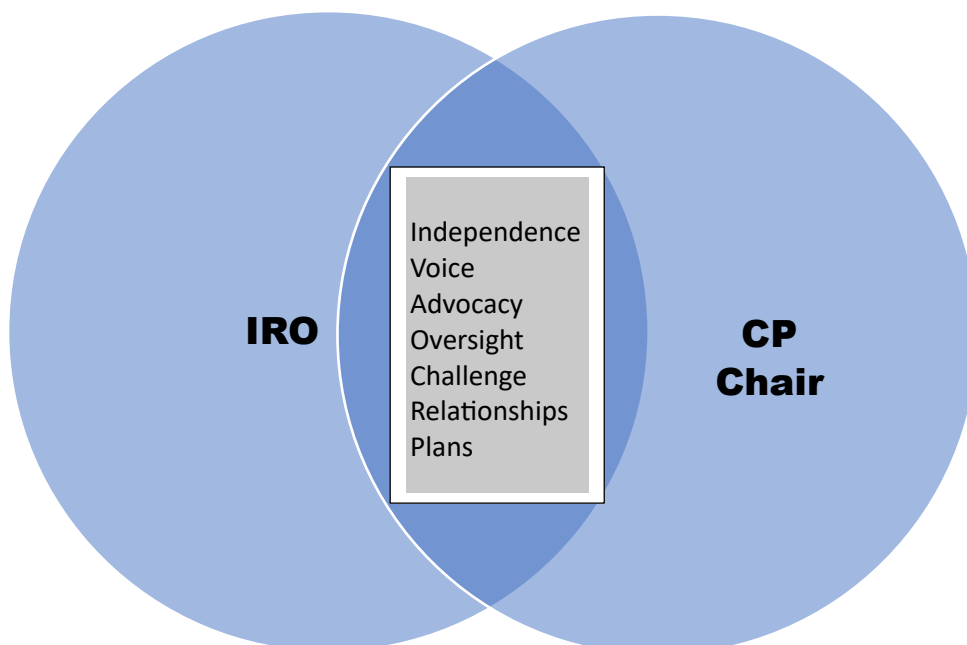
Policy & Guidance May 2024

Introduction

CSSU developed this document to set out its policy regarding the participation of children in child protection conferences / reviews and the establishment and implementation of child protection plans. This guidance is necessary because statutory guidance does not address the role of the CP Chair as fully as that of the IRO.

This guidance applies to staff employed as Independent Reviewing Officers, in their capacity as Child Protection Chairperson. Whilst the roles are not identical it is our aspiration to apply the value and strengths of each facet of the role across the whole achieving similarity in approach where this is compatible with statutory requirements, local policy, and resources.

Common Ground Between IRO / CP Chairperson



Participation - The CP Chairperson's Role & Responsibility

The need to support children to participate in the CP Process is stated in the IRO job description:

*To ensure that Child Protection Conferences and Reviews are conducted according to statutory and policy requirements and core standards and that **all children and young people, parents/carers and relevant professionals are supported to be able to fully participate.***

Participation is a broad term that should be interpreted in consideration of the child's age, understanding and context. Participation may look very different for one child compared to the next.

In most cases, the direct work completed by the child's social worker, or other professionals such as teachers, should highlight the child's views and experiences sufficiently. There might not be a need for any further work or information. But our understanding of a child's views and experiences might be strengthened by the child's direct involvement in the meetings, or by them submitting information or by them briefing an advocate who attends on their behalf.

Children have a right to be included in the meeting and decision making process. As such, CP Chairpersons must ensure that this has been considered, explored with the child and family and suitable efforts made to support this, should the child and parents wish it to.

Whether the child attends the meeting or not, the Chairperson is required to take a view on whether the degree of child participation in the Conference / Review is proportionate to the child's context. Where it is not, the Chairperson should address this with relevant professionals / managers and so that there is clarity about how this will be addressed going forward.

Where there are protracted difficulties in securing the child's views / experiences or participation the Chair Person *can* seek to speak directly with the child, subject to parental agreement and the consent of the child. It may also be pertinent to discuss any planned direct contact with the child's social worker, to ensure any decisions made are based on the fullest information.

A decision by the Chairperson to speak with a child is in line with statutory guidance. Working Together 2023 states:

The conference chair:

- ***should meet the child and parents in advance to ensure they understand the issues, the purpose, the process, and possible outcomes of the conference...***

Working Together does not stipulate how this meeting should take place. But as stated above this should be based on the child's needs, age, understanding and context. This maybe by speaking with a child directly before a CP Conference / Review or by meeting separately at the family home or any other suitable location.

Where a Chairperson is considering meeting outside of the conference / review process, they should speak with the manager to agree if this is necessary and how best it should be undertaken.

It is accepted that the option of an IRO visiting a child may not be achievable due to time and resource issues. As such, there is no requirement that this must happen. However, should the IRO identify a protracted barrier to securing the child's views and experiences, and should the option of speaking directly with the child not be achievable, the IRO must raise this with their manager at the earliest opportunity so that a solution can be found.

The absence of the child's voice and experience from the child protection process is not acceptable. The Chairperson has particular responsibility to ensure this is addressed and resolved. This may be via the Case Discussion and Escalation Process (CDEP).

The option for CP Chairs to visit or speak directly with the child should only be taken where this may add value or support effective intervention and decision making. It is essential the the Chairperson does not seek to take on the role of the social worker. The purpose and value of any visit should be explored with their line manager.

Local and National Social Care Values

The statutory expectations have been set out as above. But it is important that we link this with our local values and those set out in the National Social Care Framework.

Our Local Working Principles Include:

Child Centred

We are all about supporting children and young people. Children and young people are our priority.

Working Together

We work with children, young people, and their families to achieve positive change.

These go hand in hand with the principles set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework, which include:

- **Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to:** Children and young people's views should be sought and heard at every stage of support, and they should contribute to decisions made about their lives, wherever possible. Advocacy, advice, and assistance must be available to assist them in any representations they may wish to make to the authority (section 26A, Children Act 1989).
- **Children's social care works in partnership with whole families:** children, young people and families are heard, and practitioners build strong relationships with families based on respect. They acknowledge strengths within families and recognise that families, and family networks, will often have solutions to their own

challenges, and that holding a focus on the whole family is often the best way of improving outcomes for children and young people.

The National Social Care Framework is directed at all staff within CSC – it is not specific to any post. The expectations are general and apply to all. **This means securing the child's participation is not 'someone else's' job', it is everyone's responsibility.**

This is reflected in further comments within the National Framework:

- Practitioners amplify the voices and feedback from children, young people, and families in respect of services. Practitioners confidently raise issues and concerns with senior leaders and practice supervisors to identify improvements needed in how services are being delivered.
- Every area makes sure that practice is flexible and adaptive so that the perspectives of children, whatever their age or ability, can be heard, including, where required, through the provision of independent advocacy. This includes consideration of the wishes and feelings of children who are not yet old enough to talk or who, for reasons of disability, cannot communicate verbally or prefer other means of communication, as well as provision for children for whom English is not their first language.
- Every area supports children and young people to share their wishes and feelings freely and independently from the views of parents, carers, or other adults in their lives.
- Every area has mechanisms for seeking to understand the hopes and aspirations of children and young people so that this information can shape individual support and the design of local services.
- Practitioners use strength-based approaches to build trusted relationships that help children, young people, and families, working with them to identify what is working well in their lives and how their strengths could support them in other areas too.
- Practitioners adapt their practice to overcome barriers for individual children, young people, and families, taking account of their needs and preferences for how they receive support.
- Every area supports children and young people to share their wishes and feelings freely and independently from the views of parents, carers, or other adults in their lives.
- Every area incorporates the views of children and young people, families and family networks into assessments, plans and decision making.
- Every area has clear expectations and processes, so that children and young people receive regular information about the decisions being made about their

lives, so they are clear what is happening and why. Decisions are explained sensitively to children and young people and attention is paid to barriers that children with special educational needs and disabilities may face in receiving and understanding information and decisions being made about their lives.

- Every area supports children and young people to articulate their views, including through access to independent advocacy (with services available to support those with communication difficulties), so they are aware of their right to advocacy and know what to do and who to talk to if they are unhappy or if they do not feel listened to. Advocacy services meet the National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services.

Working Together 2023 also states:

Children have said that they need:

- understanding and action: to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon.
- respect: to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not.
- information and engagement: to be informed about, and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns, and plans.
- explanation: to be informed of the outcome of assessments, and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response.
- advocacy: to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views.
- **Collaborate:** practitioners working with the same child and family share information to get a complete picture of what life is like for the child. Collectively, they ensure the child's voice is at the centre and the right support is provided.
- Practitioners take care to ensure that children know what is being discussed about them and their family where this is appropriate. They ask children what they would like to happen and what they think would help them and their family to reduce the likelihood of significant harm, including where harm is taking place in contexts beyond the family home. Practitioners listen to what children tell them.
- Following section 47 enquiries, an initial child protection conference brings together family members (**and the child where appropriate**), with the supporters, advocates, and practitioners most involved with the child and family, to make decisions about the child's future safety, health, and development.
- At CP Review the Chairperson's role is to share the conference information with the child and family beforehand, where appropriate, and ensure that they understand the information provided.