What preparation is needed for Initial Child Protection Conferences?

An initial child protection conference (ICPC) is a meeting that is held when agencies believe that a child may be at risk of significant harm; the aim of the conference is to discuss and decide what will ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children and young people where these concerns exist.

Parents, carers, children and young people should be well prepared for the ICPC. This is a very important meeting and the process should be as restorative as possible. This relies on the parent / carer being able to fully participate in the ICPC and they can only do this if they have had access to all the information and understand what is being discussed. Care should be taken to include all parent carers including fathers not living with their children where this is appropriate.

All agencies involved are responsible for being fully prepared for the ICPC by providing their reports in a timely fashion and attending the conference when invited. This guide sets out how agencies should do this.

Agencies or practitioners that are regularly invited to ICPCs include (but not restricted to): the Police, social work, schools, housing, GPs, Health Visitors, Midwives, mental health workers, drug and alcohol workers, third sector support services and probation.

What are the timescales for an ICPC?

The timescales for convening an ICPC following a strategy discussion is 15 working days. This is a national timescale set by the government and all local authorities in England are judged on this. The urgency of the situation however, may dictate that the timescale is shorter.

It is recognised that this can put a lot of pressure on practitioners to meet these timescales both in terms of producing a report prior to ICPC and actually attending the ICPC.

What should practitioners or agencies do when invited to an ICPC?

When practitioners or agencies are invited to an ICPC, this is because it has been identified that they have a valuable contribution to make to safeguarding arrangements for the child(ren) and family.

It is expected, in accordance with Working Together guidance, that they will attend the ICPC and provide a report.
When should agencies share their reports?

Sharing reports with parents and carers
All agencies must share their reports with parents and carers before the day of the ICPC to give them time to consider what has been said, highlight any mistakes and talk to other family members or an advocate about what the reports say.

If the first time a parent sees a report is at the meeting they have no chance to absorb the information and are placed at a significant disadvantage. They will feel less able to participate, less able to contribute to the plan and may feel angry and upset by the process. If English is not a family’s first language or they do not have good literacy skills, they will be further disadvantaged.

If the reports have been submitted on time and shared with the family before the day of the meeting, the conference is more likely to start on time with all participants being clear about the information. This enables the discussion to be more focused and analytical and for plans to be more specific and effective.

Sharing reports with Child Protection Chairs
Reports should be sent to the Child Protection Conference Chair (guide) no fewer than three days before the meeting. This then allows the chair to consider what has been submitted and establish if any key information is missing. From September 2015, Leeds Chairs offer to meet with families (including dads) before the day of the conference with the aim that if families have seen all the reports beforehand they are able to be clearer about the concerns expressed and are prepared for what the ICPC will be like.

What should reports include?
Reports prepared for the ICPC should include:

The voice and views of the child and family including how they feel their needs might be met;
Details of the agency’s involvement with the child and family;
Information concerning the agency’s knowledge of the child’s developmental needs;
The capacity of the parents to meet the needs of their child within their family; and
Any other wider environmental factors.

Reports should be clear and consider the strengths / protective factors and concerns within the family and extended family networks. Clear reports ensure that the ICPC has the necessary information to properly understand the needs of the family which in turn enable the development of effective plans that the family can understand and fully contribute to.

Key contacts and for more information
For more information about the importance of quality agency preparation for ICPCs, you can contact Ophelia Rix – Service Delivery Manager Safeguarding ophelia.rix@leeds.gov.uk, David Gammage -Team Manager david.gammage@leeds.gov.uk or ring the Integrated Safeguarding Unit tel: 0113 2478652.

You can also consult the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board (guide) website

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