



Inter–Agency Escalation Policy and Procedure

Resolution of professional disagreements and oversight of risk in work relating to safeguarding adults

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Contents

- 1. Introduction2
- 2. Aim of this policy2
- 3. Inter-Agency Escalation – Overview.....3
- 4. Key Principles4
- 5. Who this Policy applies to?4
- 6. Escalation Process – In detail5
 - Stages of Escalation5
 - Key Contacts5
 - Learning from the resolution of disputes:.....6
- 7. Risk Escalation.....8
- 8. Appendix 1 – Escalation Standard Form8
- 9. Document History.....8

1. Introduction

The Inter-agency escalation policy and procedure has been produced for all Surrey Safeguarding Adult Board (SSAB) member agencies and organisations that are commissioned by Board members.

This policy has been cross referenced with all other Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board policies and protocols as appropriate.

Safeguarding adults can provide extremely challenging and complex cases/situations that involve a number of different agencies all with diverse contributions to individual cases. Occasionally, one of two circumstances can occur that may cause confusion and are not easily resolved.

The first circumstance occurs when workers from one or more agencies do not feel that decisions made by a worker from another agency, with regard to safeguarding, are safe ones or adequately protect the individual from harm. The second circumstance can occur when agencies are working in a collaborative, person centred way to safely manage risks but have reached a point where elements of risk are unmanageable and beyond the operational group's level of accountability.

In the first case disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around:

- Level of risk and its assessment
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Interventions
- Communication
- Information sharing

Problem resolution is a core activity of many of the agencies involved in safeguarding adults and all agencies must work together with the adult at risk in order to achieve the outcomes that they desire however, it is recognised that at times there may be differences of opinion regarding how a case should best be progressed.

This policy seeks to identify how resolution can be achieved in the face of differences of opinion.

2. Aim of this policy

To ensure that any disagreements do not:

- Introduce unnecessary delay in implementing prevention plans.
- Detract from the focus on the adult at risk.
- Contribute to an increase in risk factors for the adult at risk.

To provide a series of steps for the escalation of complex cases with unmanageable risk.

3. Inter-Agency Escalation – Overview

STAGE ONE

DAY ONE: INTERNAL DISCUSSION

If any professional is unhappy with a decision or response from **any** agency following a decision made on a safeguarding issue.

Target: One Working Day

STAGE TWO

DAY TWO: INTER-AGENCY DISCUSSION

Discussion between the professionals from the different agencies to see if their disagreement can be resolved.

The job title and job description of the professional with safeguarding responsibility within an organisation will vary between partner agencies. Individual organisations should ensure that as part of their induction training, employees are made aware of who to contact to discuss safeguarding concerns or where to seek advice/supervision.

Target: One Working Day after competition of Stage 1

STAGE THREE

DAY THREE: LINE MANAGEMENT

Line Manager / Professional with responsibility for safeguarding in referring agency discusses concern or response with their peer in the other agency.

Target: One Working Day after competition of Stage 2

STAGE FOUR

DAY FOUR: SECOND-TIER MANAGEMENT

If concern continues the Manager/ Professional with Safeguarding responsibility in the referring agency escalates the concern/ response to the relevant senior professional with responsibility for Safeguarding within the other agency.

Target: One Working Day after competition of Stage 3

STAGE FIVE

DAY FIVE: HEADS/ DIRECTORS OF SERVICE

Professionals with responsibility for safeguarding will liaise with equivalent lead officer immediately on becoming aware of the situation, enabling the concern / response to be discussed at Senior Management/ Senior Leadership level and actions agreed.

Actions communicated between partners to be available to the SSAB Policy and Training subgroup to disseminate learning where appropriate.

Target: One Working Day after Stage 4

STAGE SIX

DAY SIX: SSAB LEVEL

Where the concern remains unresolved the issue should be escalated to the Surrey Safeguarding Board, to seek a multi-agency resolution.

Target: One Working Day after Stage 5

4. Key Principles

- 4.1 Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard Adults. All agencies must work together in the interest of the adult, and it is recognised that at times there are differences of opinion on how to progress a case. Every effort should be made to resolve disagreements as close to the point of origin as possible.
- 4.2 At all stages of the escalation process actions and decisions must be shared in a timely manner with appropriate staff who are directly involved with the service users.
- 4.3 Decisions should be recorded in writing and the referring member of staff should be kept informed of the escalation of their concern. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued. All records should be retained on the adult's case file/ agency database.
- 4.4 This policy is not intended to replace or prevent day-to-day liaison between professionals.
- 4.5 It is the responsibility of all agencies to ensure that their staff are supported to challenge and escalate appropriately when they have concerns or they disagree with another professional's practice which they believe places, or could place, an adult at risk of harm.
- 4.6 Effective working together depends upon:
 - An open approach and honest relationships between agencies; and
 - A belief in genuine partnership working.
- 4.7 Resolution should be sought within the shortest timescale possible to ensure the adult is protected. Some disagreements regarding safeguarding decisions will require especially speedy resolution.
- 4.8 It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience of individual staff may affect the confidence of some workers to pursue their concerns if unsupported and internal line management process should be in place to address this and to support the escalation of concerns.
- 4.9 In all cases where a professional believes an adult to be at imminent risk of harm, they should refer the case to the Surrey Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) .

5. Who this Policy applies to?

- 5.1 This policy applies to and is relevant for Safeguarding Partners as per the Care Act 2014 guidance.

Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board Key Partners:

- Practitioners, managers and leadership within the Local Authority, Health (Surrey's ICB's) and the Police.
- Any other key partner staff working with adults.

Partner organisations:

- Practitioners, managers and leadership within Community providers, Mental Health Services (CAMHS), the voluntary sector and any other agencies that work directly with adults.

- 5.2 To reflect the multi-agency, practice that this policy covers has been ratified by the Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board.

6. Escalation Process – In detail

- 6.1 This process is managed through an escalation procedure which is outlined in detail in the table below.
- 6.2 All disputes should be resolved in a timely way so that the welfare of the adult remains paramount. In some situations, it may be necessary to instigate all of the stages within a short period of time or to escalate the process so that the safety of the adult is not compromised.
- 6.3 All practitioners have a positive duty to facilitate the use of the escalation procedure by the other practitioners even where they do not agree that the use of the escalation procedure is necessary. For example, there is a duty to immediately provide relevant contact details for line management where this relates to the necessary next step in the escalation process.

Stages of Escalation

- 6.4 At all stages of the Escalation Procedure, actions and decisions must be shared in a prompt and timely manner with appropriate staff who are directly involved with the service users. Decisions should be recorded in writing and the referring member of staff should be kept informed of the escalation of their concern. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued. All records should be retained on the non-disclosure section of the case file / agency database.
- 6.5 Effective working together depends upon:
 - An open approach and honest relationships between agencies.
 - Resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies
 - A belief in genuine partnership working.
- 6.6 Professional disputes are reduced by clarity about roles and responsibilities and airing and sharing problems in networking forums.
- 6.7 The principles of effective dispute resolution are:
 - The process of resolution should be as simple as possible.
 - Resolution should be sought within the shortest timescale possible to ensure the adult is protected. Some disagreements regarding safeguarding decisions will require speedy resolution. In all cases where a professional believes that an adult is at imminent risk of harm and another agency disagrees, they should refer the case to the MASH who will be able to triage using the evolution tool. The MASH should then inform the referrer, in writing, of the outcome.
 - The aim should always be to resolve difficulties at practitioner level between agencies.
- 6.8 It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience of individual staff may affect the confidence of some workers capacity to pursue their concerns if unsupported and internal line management processes should be in place to address this and to support the escalation of concerns.
- 6.9 Most disagreements can be resolved between professionals by following the stages above.

Key Contacts

- 6.10 Agencies have provided contact details to be utilised for this escalation policy.
[SSAB Key Contacts V3 June 2023](#)

Learning from the resolution of disputes:

- 6.11 When the issue is resolved, any general issues should be identified and referred to the agency's representative at the Surrey Safeguarding Adults (SAB) Executive group for consideration by the SSAB Policy and Procedure subgroup to inform future learning and to identify the need for possible changes to existing policies and procedures.
- 6.12 It is useful for individuals to debrief following a dispute in order to promote continuing good working relationships and identify possible training needs and to ensure that the employee is satisfied with the outcome. A discretionary task and finish group will be set up at the discretion of the SSAB Independent Chair, Board Manager, and the Chair of the Policy and Training subgroup to allow those agencies involved to debrief this will be chaired by the SAB manager.

Inter-Agency Escalation – In detail

Stages	What	When
Stage 1: Internal Discussion	<p>Any professional who disagrees with a decision should initially consult with their line manager so that they can discuss the issue to clarify their thinking in order to identify the problem and be specific about what the disagreement is about.</p> <p>This discussion may help clarify the issues at this stage so that the professional in question no longer disagrees with the decision made by the other professional.</p>	The discussion should take place with a Target of one working day of the disagreement or concern arising.
Stage 2: Inter-agency Discussion	<p>Most disagreements can be resolved between professionals by discussing the reasons for the difference of opinion and without having to escalate further. The professional who has a concern should speak to the other professional to better understand the position and discuss the concern. These discussions should be conducted in an open and professional manner without the need for either party to be accusatory or defensive. At all times the needs of the Adult should be paramount.</p>	The discussion should take place with a Target of one working day of the completion of Stage 1 above.
Stage 3: Escalation to Line Management	<p>If the professionals are not able to resolve their disagreement at Stage Two their disagreement must be reported to their line managers or equivalent. In most cases the relevant line managers will be able to resolve the disagreement between them. The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant professionals and the detail of the dispute and agreements reached should be recorded on the adults file.</p>	The line manager should make contact with their opposite number in the partner agency with a Target of one working day of the completion of the Stage 2 above.
Stage 4: Escalation to Second-Tier Management	<p>Where it is not possible to resolve the disagreement at front line management level (Stage Three) the matter should be referred without delay to second tier management level.</p> <p>The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant professionals and the detail of the conflict and agreements reached should be recorded on the adults file.</p>	The second-tier managers should make contact with their opposite number in the partner agency with a Target of one working day of the completion of Stage 3 above.
Stage 5: Escalation to Heads/Directors of Service.	<p>Where it is not possible to resolve the disagreement at second-tier management level (Stage Four), the matter should be referred without delay to Heads/Directors of Service.</p> <p>The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant professionals and the detail of the conflict and agreements reached should be recorded on the adults file.</p> <p>The purpose of escalating the dispute to this level is to reach a position where differing professional opinions have been taken into account and efforts made to explore whether the dispute has arisen through lack of clarity or understanding in the professional dialogue. Ultimately a decision will need to be reached where agencies agree a way forward where the interests of the adult take precedence over a professional stalemate.</p>	The Heads/Directors of Service should make contact with their opposite number in the partner agency with a Target of one working day of the completion of Stage 4 above.
Stage 6: Escalation to the Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board ('SSAB')	<p>In the unlikely event that the professional disagreement remains, the disagreement should be escalated to the Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board to seek a multi-agency resolution. Contact will be made with the relevant organisations representative who sits on the ASE/ SSAB. The learning from this resolution meeting or review will be disseminated to all parties within one month of the meeting or review.</p> <p>Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the Heads of Service and Second tier management staff involved with details of the agreements reached.</p>	A referral should be made to the SSAB by or on behalf of the Heads/Directors of Service with a Target of one working day of the completion of Stage 5 above using the form annexed at Appendix 1.

7. Risk Escalation

Where there is general agreement regarding multi-agency involvement in a case but, it appears to those managing the case that there are unmanageable risks that cannot be mitigated then a meeting that involves the Safeguarding leads for all of the agencies should be convened, chaired by the Head of Adult Safeguarding for Adult Social Care (ASC). This meeting should establish the level of risk, audit the actions taken so far and ensure that the outcome of the meeting is communicated to the manager of the SAB. The manager can then ensure that the case is logged with the SAB risk register or determine further action that may need to be taken. This will ensure that the risk is acknowledged, and accountability held at a level appropriate to its severity and manageability.

Please note that this procedure does not apply to cases where there may be concerns about the conduct of another professional that may impact upon an adult's safety and/or wellbeing. In such cases, reference should be made to the agency's own Whistle-blowing Policy or the relevant Professional Standards for Conduct. Specific issues of concern relating to an employee's behaviour or actions towards an adult who may be vulnerable should follow the guidance in the 'SSAB Multi-Agency Policy and Procedures - 21 Allegations in the workplace.

8. Appendix 1 – Escalation Standard Form [Escalation Form to the SSAB](#)

9. Document History

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7	October 2023	Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board	Key Partners Contacts - Updated