

FIFE MULTI-AGENCY CHILD PROTECTION ESCALATION AND DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESSES



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Purpose of Protocol

This Protocol is for statutory third sector services. Every service is accountable for escalating concerns in relation to children where necessary and justified.

The Fife Multi-agency Child Protection Escalation and Dispute Resolution Process is designed to uphold the shared responsibility of all partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It supports the effective implementation of the [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 \(updated 2023\)](#) by setting out clear, structured processes for resolving professional disagreements and disputes relating to concerns about significant harm, protection planning, and interagency decision-making.

Disagreement between professionals and between agencies is an expected and sometimes necessary part of a dynamic child protection system. Differing interpretations of risk and thresholds are not uncommon. It is essential that such differences do not delay action to protect a child, and that they are addressed respectfully, transparently, and in a timely manner. This document outlines the formal mechanisms available to ensure that professional concerns can be raised, escalated, and resolved in the interests of child safety.

Key Procedures Where Escalation and Dispute Resolution May Apply

- Pre-birth and Child Protection Interagency Referral Discussions (IRD)
- Child Protection Planning Meetings (CPPM)
- Care and Risk Management Meetings (CARM)
- Contextual Safeguarding Processes (CXSP)
- VYP Processes including Transition Planning
- Any Adult Concern Referral Assessment where significant harm to a child may be under consideration.

In line with National Guidance this protocol provides routes for:

- Escalating concerns where an individual practitioner or agency does not believe that appropriate or sufficient action has been taken in response to risk of significant harm
- Raising concerns by parents, carers, and children where they wish to dispute decisions made through these processes or raise complaints about service responses
- Challenging decisions made at a Child Protection Planning Meeting (CPPM), Care and Risk Management Meeting (CARM), Contextual Safeguarding Process (CXSP) including the decision to register a child on Fife's Child Protection Register (CPR) or the content of the Child's Plan, IRD, VYP Processes including Transition Planning and at any Adult concern referral assessments where significant harm or risk of significant harm to a child is considered.

This process encourages reflection and learning, with a commitment to capturing themes from escalations and disputes to inform single agency and partnership improvement activity. Consideration will be given to referring unresolved disputes to an Independent Reviewer,

appointed from within the Public Protection leadership structure but not involved in the original decision-making. The Independent Reviewer will be appointed by the Heads of Service from Police, Health and Social Work. This mechanism provides assurance that complex disagreements are given impartial and senior oversight.

Throughout, practitioners are encouraged to use their own agency's internal dispute processes in the first instance and to seek resolution through line management where possible. Escalation should not be seen as adversarial but as a professional responsibility where concerns about a child's safety remain unresolved.

This document must be read alongside the National Guidance and other local protocols, including Interagency Referral Discussion Procedures, the Fife Child Protection Guidance, and the CPC Quality Assurance Framework. It applies to all agencies and practitioners involved in the protection of children and unborn babies across Fife.

When concerns arise about a child being at immediate risk of harm:

- Serious harm (or accumulation of concerns which together may amount to serious harm) to others (CARM procedures apply)
- Significant harm (Child Protection Procedures)
- Harm (property, self or others Adult Support and Protection procedures)

A referral to a Core Agency should be made. This includes circumstances where there has been an accumulation of lower-level concerns which now indicate the threshold of significant harm has been met.

Out-of-Hours concerns should be directed to Out of Hours Social Work or Police Scotland.

Escalation of Concerns about Immediate Protection (and Referral Thresholds when concerns are referred to a Core Agency (Police, Health or Social Work) and an IRD is not raised)

In emergency or life-threatening situations, the Police should be contacted via 999 immediately.

If, following the contact with a Core Agency, a practitioner does not feel that the response or decision is sufficient to protect the child, they must initiate the escalation process.

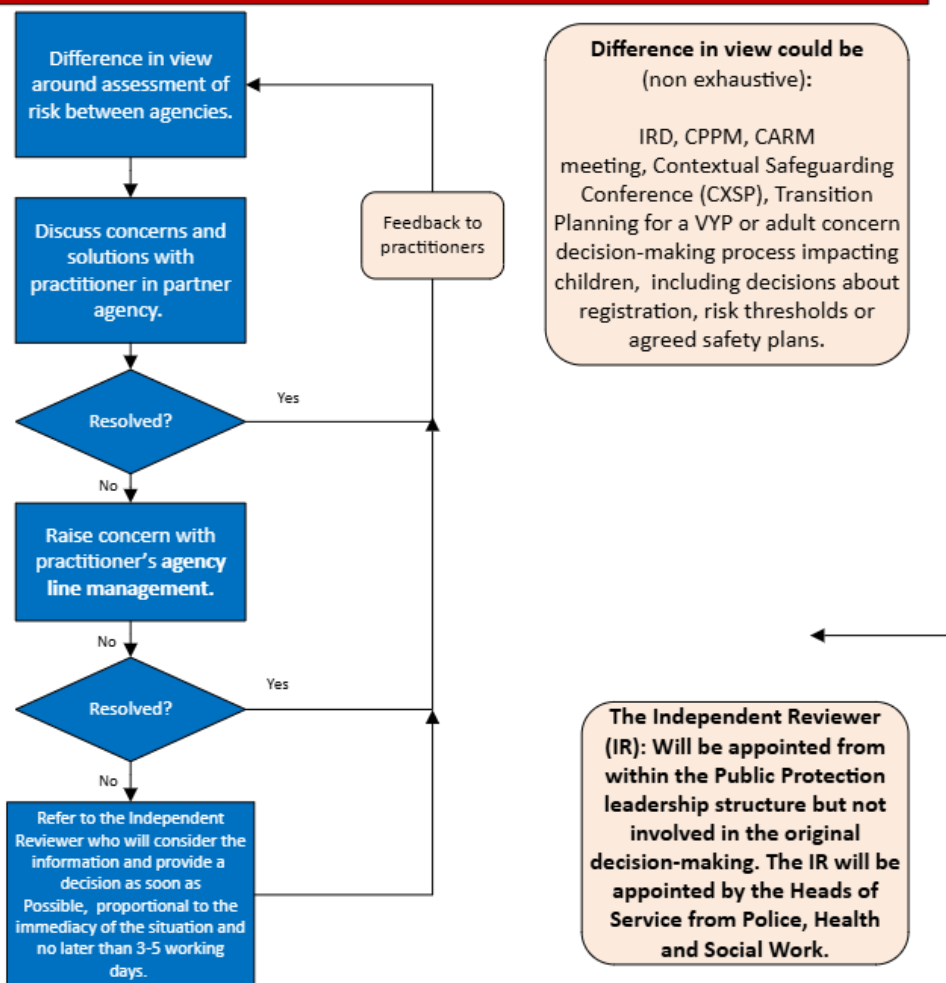
This process includes decisions relating to whether a case proceeds to IRD, CPPM, CARM meeting, Contextual Safeguarding Conference (CXSP) VYP processes including Transition Planning or adult concern decision-making process impacting children. It is designed to support professional dialogue, facilitate shared decision-making, and ensure that concerns about risk are taken seriously and responded to proportionally.

Escalation and Dispute Resolution Process Map

Fife's Multiagency Child Protection Escalation & Resolution Process

Updated April 2025

If you consider a child or young person to be in **IMMEDIATE** danger then call Police Scotland on 999 or SW Contact Centre (03451 551503).



There will always be difference in professional opinion around risk/harm and interventions. The process ensures that in the event of a difference in opinion around immediate protection/ significant harm, professional concerns can be escalated.

Address concerns through openly and through respectful dialogue.

Application of Escalation and Dispute Process

The Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD) Stage

Disagreements at the IRD stage may include:

- Whether the threshold for an IRD is met
- The need for immediate protective action
- Whether to proceed to child protection investigation
- Whether referral to CPPM, CARM, Contextual Safeguarding or Adult Concern processes is appropriate.

Disputes Raised by Parents, Carers, or Children (Including CPPM, CARM, CXSP, Adult Concern Referrals involving risk to children, Vulnerable Young People processes including Transition Planning)

Where such disagreements arise:

- The agency raising the concern should escalate via their line management structure
- Disagreement should be discussed with the **Senior Manager (or equivalent) from the relevant agency**
- If unresolved, the matter should be referred for urgent senior multi-agency discussion
- An **Independent Reviewer** may be involved if consensus cannot be reached, particularly where there is a risk of delay to protective action.

Other Procedures

Protective planning should continue while resolution is sought, ensuring the child is not left at risk during the process.

If a practitioner disagrees with the outcome of an IRD, CPPM, CARM meeting, Contextual Safeguarding processes (CXSP), VYP processes including Transition Planning or adult concern decision-making process impacting children, including decisions about CPR registration, risk thresholds or agreed safety plans:

- Concerns should first be raised through the practitioner's agency line management
- If unresolved, the matter should be referred in writing to the nominated Independent Reviewer
- The Reviewer will consider this alongside agency records and provide a decision as soon as possible, proportional to the immediacy of the situation and no later than 3 to 5 working days.
- The outcome will be shared with the referring professional, relevant agencies, and the family. A review meeting (CPPM, CARM, CXSP, IRD, Wellbeing meeting or Transition Planning etc) may be convened if required or deemed appropriate.

Safety planning and interventions will remain in place throughout the dispute resolution process. Please see *IRD Protocol* for more information on the IRD process and safety planning.

Parents, carers, and children have the right to raise concerns or disputes in relation to decisions made at a CPPM, CARM meeting, CXS meeting, or within Adult Concern Referral Assessments impacting children or Vulnerable Young Persons transition process.

- Concerns should be submitted in writing to the nominated Independent Reviewer
- The Reviewer will consider this alongside agency records and provide a decision as soon as possible, proportional to the immediacy of the situation and no later than 3 to 5 working days
- The outcome will be shared with the parent, carer, child (as appropriate), and professionals involved. A review meeting may be convened if required or appropriate.

Where the concern relates to a complaint about a specific service or professional, the appropriate agency complaints process should be followed.

Information on this process is provided in the Child Protection Planning Meeting leaflets and published on the CPC website.

Review and Learning from Disputes

The CPC Quality Assurance and Data Group will oversee anonymised reporting of escalations and disputes, in order to:

- Identify recurring themes
- Support reflective learning across agencies
- Improve future practice and interagency collaboration.

Agency Escalation Contacts

This will contribute to Fife's continuous improvement approach and ensure that learning from professional challenge is embedded into system development.

The following contacts are provided for use in line with the escalation and dispute resolution processes set out in this guidance. There may not be four for every service. Fife Voluntary Action are the point of contact for third sector agencies.

Agency	First Manager Contact	Second Manager Contact	Third Manager Contact	Head of Service
Health	Health Service Locality Team Leader/Senior Charge Nurse • Tel: VHK Switchboard 01592 643355	Health Service Lead Nurse/Midwife • Tel: VHK Switchboard 01592 643355	Lead Nurse Child Protection/Lead Paediatrician Child Protection • Tel: 01592 648114	Children's Services Senior Manager/Health Service Senior Manager • Tel: VHK Switchboard 01592 643355
Social Work	Social Work Team Manager • Tel: Contact Centre	Service Manager (For Respective Area) Children and Families • Tel: Contact Centre	Service Manager (For Respective Area) Children and Families • Tel: Contact Centre	Head of Education & Children's Services (C&F/JSW and CSWO) • Tel: 03451 555555 - Ext 441189
Education	First Manager contact: • Tel: • Email:	Development Officer • Tel: 03451 555555 • Ext 430257 • Email:	Quality Improvement Officer • Tel: 03451 555555 • Ext 430292 • Email:	Head of Service, Education & Children's Services • Tel: 03451 555555 • Ext 480217. Email:
Police	Detective Inspector Public Protection Unit • Email: FifeIRD@scotland.police.uk	Detective Chief Inspector Public Protection Unit • Email: FifeIRD@scotland.police.uk		Detective Superintendent • Email: FifeIRD@scotland.police.uk
Third Sector	Triage Manager • Email: triage@fva.org • Tel: 0800 389 6046	Children's Services Development Manager • Email: childrens.services@gva.org • Tel: 0800389 6046	CEO Fife Voluntary Action • Email: ceo@fva.org • Tel: 0800 389 6046	