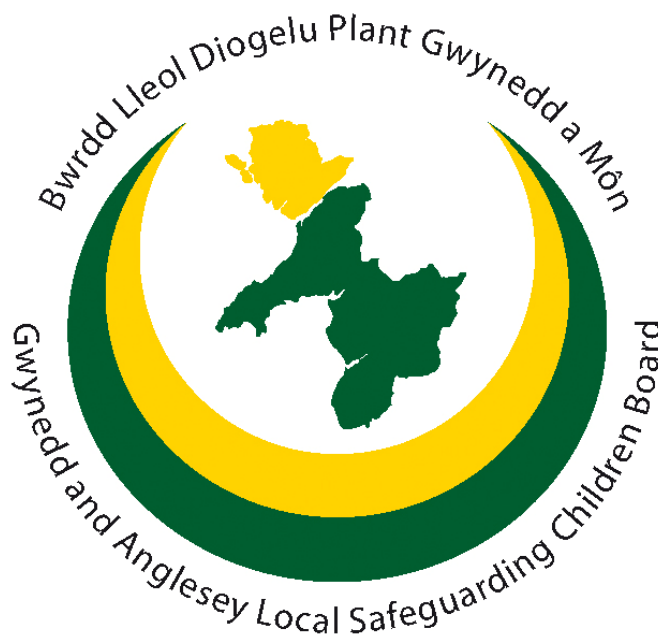


Gwynedd & Anglesey Local Safeguarding Children Board

Child Protection Core Group Protocol



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At every stage of the child protection process consideration must be given as to whether a child is at serious and imminent risk of significant harm and whether emergency protective action needs to be taken.

1. Introduction.

1.1 The Gwynedd and Anglesey Local Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Core Group Protocol is based on the Welsh Assembly Government guidance, 'Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004' (2006), and the All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008, which should be read in conjunction with it.

1.2 This protocol is issued by Gwynedd and Anglesey Local Safeguarding Children Board and is intended for all professionals and staff members, who attend Child Protection Core Group meetings. The purpose of the protocol is to provide good and effective practice guidance for professionals and staff members who are working with a child whose name is on the Child Protection Register, and his/her family. Core Group members must at all times regard the welfare and safety of the child as the first priority and also prioritise their attendance in Core Group meetings.

1.3 When the name of a child is placed on the Child Protection Register at an Initial Child Protection Conference the following actions are required:

- ✓ An outline Child Protection Plan to be made;
- ✓ A Registered Social Worker to be appointed as the Key Worker to coordinate all aspects of the Child Protection Plan;
- ✓ Core Group members to be nominated. They are agency professionals/staff members who have direct contact with the child, and, the child's parents and/or carers. For example, Health Visitor, Education Welfare Officer, representative from the child's school, Social Worker, Adult Mental Health Team, Substance Misuse Service.

1.4 The Core Group is an integral part of the child protection process. It is responsible for developing a detailed Child Protection Plan from the outline plan made at the Initial Child Protection Conference, and, for monitoring its implementation. The Core Group develops the plan by discussing its content, clarifying roles and tasks of its members, setting timescales, building narrative with the child and family members about what has happened; and, identifying the changes that are required to reduce harm and risk of abuse and/or neglect for the child. It is therefore imperative that all agency professionals and staff, who are nominated members of the Core Group, make a firm commitment to full participation in the meetings.

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1.5 Disagreements between the agency professionals/staff members will be managed in accordance with the North Wales Safeguarding Children Forum Protocol for the Resolution of Professional Differences.

2. Core Group Membership

2.1 Core group members are nominated at the Initial Child Protection Conference. It is also decided at this stage whether the Core Group requires to be held in two parts. This should take place if one parent feels threatened by another parent and prefers this option.

2.2 Core Group members must include: -

- ✓ The Key Worker (Social Worker) who coordinates the Child Protection Plan;
- ✓ The child, if appropriate dependent on age and level of understanding (secondary school age children are invited to child protection conferences and core groups if they have an appropriate level of understanding);
- ✓ All known parents and carers and any extended family identified in Child Protection Conference, unless a decision was made to exclude them;
- ✓ Professionals and agency staff involved with the child and/or parent.
- ✓ Foster carers/residential care staff, who will have direct contact with the family;
- ✓ The child/young person's advocate.

2.3 The sharing of information and working in partnership are fundamental components in effectively safeguarding and promoting a child's welfare.

2.4 When it is planned for a child to attend the Core Group the Key Worker will ensure that he/she receives advice and guidance in order to prepare for the meeting. The child (from 8 years upwards) will be given the opportunity to have the service of Tros Gynnal advocacy service. The Core Group Chair and other members will enable the child's views to be heard and taken into account.

2.5 All known parents/carers are routinely nominated as Core Group members in order to be informed about the concerns and consulted about plans. The Core Group provides an important opportunity for effective working with parents, relevant family members and children. However in exceptional circumstances the exclusion criteria, which apply to Child Protection Conferences, will also apply to Core Groups. A decision to exclude a parent will normally be made at the Initial Child Protection Conference when the Core Group is nominated, and can also be made by the Core Group Chair if the exclusion criteria are

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met at a later date. In the event of exclusion the Core Group Chair should make every effort to ensure that excluded parent/carer is consulted and their views are available to the meeting.

- 2.6 The family members may decide to bring a legal representative to the Core Group. The family legal representative is not a nominated member of Core Group, and their role in the meeting is to support and advise their client, not to advocate on their behalf.
- 2.7 Where there is a conflict of interest between family members the safeguarding and welfare needs of the child must always take precedence.

3. Arrangements for Core Group Meetings

- 3.1 The first meeting of the Core Group takes place within a maximum of 10 working days of the Initial Conference. The Core Group meets at no more than 6 weekly intervals thereafter.
- 3.2 A Core Group meeting will be convened within 10 working days if the child changes school. A representative from the child's new school will be included in the core group and be informed about the child protection plan by the child's Key Worker.
- 3.3 The meeting will take place in the family's language of choice. If there will be a need for an interpreter to be present this will be discussed between the family and the Key Worker. This should not lead to a delay in holding the meeting.
- 3.4 In the event of parents/carers, family members and/or the child refusing to engage in the Core Group meetings, the meetings will continue to be convened and attended by nominated professionals and agency staff. Every reasonable effort to ensure that parents/carers do attend the Core Group will need to be made by professional members. The child's Key Worker will inform the child and/or family members about the outcome of the Core Group meeting if they were absent.
- 3.5 Good practice would suggest that a minimum of three agencies or professional groupings will normally need to be present before the meeting can be called a Core Group. However, situations may arise whereby only two agencies are working with the child and family, for example the Key Worker and Health Visitor with pre-school age children. The Core Group will proceed under those circumstances.
- 3.6 The Team Manager/ Senior Practitioner responsible for the supervision of the Key Worker will chair the first Core Group. In the event of a Team Manager/Senior Practitioner being unavailable, he/she will make arrangements for another Team Manager/Senior Practitioner or other

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senior professional or line manager of a Core Group member to chair the first meeting. The Team Manager/Senior Practitioner chairing the meeting will make arrangements for the record of the meeting to be made and that each member receives a copy of the detailed Child Protection Plan within 5 working days. The Key Worker will not chair or take minutes in the first meeting.

3.7 The first Core Group will nominate a Chair and Vice Chair for subsequent Core Groups. They need to be chaired effectively and can be done by any professional member of the Core Group. Good practice separates the role of the Key Worker and Chairing the Core Group.

3.8 A minute taker from professional members will be nominated at the beginning of every meeting. It is this member's responsibility to ensure that the minutes are typed, confirmed by the Chair and circulated to all Core Group members within 5 working days.

3.9 Although the Key Worker has the lead role, all members of the Core Group are jointly responsible for preparing and implementing the child protection plan, and members of the Core Group can undertake specific work as part of the plan. It is good practice to proceed with the Core Group in the absence of the Key Worker as discussion regarding the child's welfare needs to take precedence. Core Group should not be cancelled if the Key Worker is unable to be present.

3.10 The venue for meetings is subject to negotiation and availability. It is important to consider the accessibility, comfort and confidentiality of the venue for children, parents and professionals. It is not good practice to hold a Core Group at the family home as this would be considered too informal.

3.11 The date and the venue of the following Core Group is decided at the end of every meeting. Each member has a responsibility to prioritise their attendance in every Core Group. If they are unable to attend they may send a deputy in their place if this person has a contribution to the Core Group. Members will notify the Key Worker if they are unable to attend a meeting and to request the date of the following meeting. The Core Group needs to work as a multi agency team in promoting children's welfare and safeguarding them from harm.

4. Core Group Responsibilities

4.1 The main task for the first Core Group meeting following the initial conference is to develop the detailed Child Protection Plan. This includes the planning and allocation of tasks within specified timescales to meet the identified needs of the child and achieve the planned outcomes. The plan is a comprehensive, multi agency working

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tool developed from the outline Child Protection Plan developed at the Initial Child Protection Conference. Where a Core Assessment requires completion, the initial Core Group meeting may also assist the Key Worker in the completion this assessment.

- 4.2 All professionals and agency staff, who are members of the Core Group, share responsibility and ownership of the plan and must cooperate in order to achieve the planned outcomes for the child. The detailed Child Protection Plan also constitutes a written agreement between Core Group members.
- 4.3 At subsequent meetings the responsibilities of the Core Group includes monitoring the implementation of the plan, deciding if changes are required, and evaluating whether planned outcomes have been achieved.
- 4.4 Although the Key Worker has the coordination role, all professionals and agency staff, who are Core Group members, will attend the meetings and are responsible for the following: -
- ✓ Ensuring that the child’s voice is heard and his/her needs are prioritised and addressed;
 - ✓ Developing the detailed Child Protection Plan at the first meeting, and making agreed changes at subsequent meetings in accordance with the circumstances;
 - ✓ Accepting and carrying out their agency’s part of the Plan;
 - ✓ Monitoring the implementation of the Protection Plan and ensuring that there is no unnecessary delay and/or drift;
 - ✓ Providing written information, where possible in electronic format, to assist the Key Worker in completing the Core Assessment;
 - ✓ Monitoring progress against specified outcomes in the Child Protection Plan;
 - ✓ Ensuring that any denial of access to the child/home by the parents/carers, and/or failure to keep appointments or a change within the household or the family’s circumstances is reported to the child’s Key Worker, and/or the Team Manager responsible for the child’s safeguarding arrangements;
 - ✓ Making recommendations in subsequent Review Child Protection Conferences about registration and future plans.
- 4.5 The Core Group should not assume the functions that are the responsibility of the Review Child Protection Conference. If circumstances arise that suggest a Review Conference should be convened earlier than planned, the Key Worker should discuss their concerns with their Team Manager, and convene a Conference in liaison with the Child Protection Conference Chair and Administrator. Some examples of circumstances that might lead Core Group members to request an earlier Review Conference are as follows:

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- ✓ A further allegation/suspicion of abuse leading to Child Protection Section 47 Enquiries;
- ✓ A serious level of non cooperation with the Child Protection Plan by parents and/or carers;
- ✓ Significant changes in the child and/or family's circumstances;
- ✓ Parents and carers refusing and/or failing to engage with professionals and agency staff implementing the Child Protection Plan;
- ✓ New information indicating the Child Protection Plan requires a review;
- ✓ The level of risk to the child is significantly higher than assessed at the Initial Conference and an urgent review is essential

4.6 The Social Services Team Manager will respond to any reported incidents of harm/suspected harm to the child in accordance with the All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008, and take any action required to safeguard the child.

5. Completion of Core Assessment

5.1 The Core Assessment commences when a decision is made to undertake Child Protection Section 47 Enquiries. The Core Assessment is required to be completed within 35 working days and is therefore may not always be available for the Initial Child Protection Conference. If the Core Assessment is not available for the Initial Child Protection Conference, the Core Group should assist the Key Worker to complete the assessment for the first Review Child Protection Conference. When the Key Worker undertakes a Core Assessment and there are safeguarding concerns about a child, it should focus in the analysis section on a risk assessment. This would include aspects of the child's needs which are sufficiently unmet to indicate likelihood of significant harm and summarise the assessed capacity of the parents to meet these needs and protect the child from harm. The Core Assessment will conclude with an analysis and identify the needs of the child across the domains and dimensions of the Assessment Framework. This will inform the development of the detailed Child Protection Plan.

6. The Child Protection Plan

6.1 The purpose of the Child Protection Plan is to facilitate a coordinated, multi agency approach in order to: -

- ✓ Ensure that each child is safe, and prevent him/her from suffering abuse and/or neglect;
- ✓ Promote the child's health and development; and,
- ✓ Support the family and wider family members in promoting and safeguarding the welfare of the child.

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6.2 The family members should be included in the Core Group planning process. The wishes and feelings of the child, and the views of the parents, should be taken into account insofar as this is compatible with the child's safety and welfare.

6.3 The detailed Child Protection Plan developed in the first Core Group is the working document that the Core Group members use to monitor and review the outcomes of actions and services.

6.4 The plan must clarify in detail for parents/carers: -

- ✓ The assessed needs of the child, the planned outcomes and planned services to meet these needs.
- ✓ The causes of concern and risk of significant harm to the child that have resulted in the child's name being placed on the child protection register;
- ✓ The changes that are required;
- ✓ Their responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of their child, and particular actions that they need to undertake.

6.5 The actions required of parents/carers must be specific, realistic, achievable, and, where possible, measurable.

6.6 The Core Group should develop the detailed Child Protection Plan, within the context of the outline Child Protection Plan, and cover the following areas: -

- ✓ Identify the assessed needs of the child across the domains and dimensions of the Assessment Framework.
- ✓ Identify 'planned outcomes' and the services designed to meet the child's needs
- ✓ Clarify the responsibilities of different agencies/services in delivering the planned services.
- ✓ Describe the identified risks to the child;
- ✓ Identify what changes are required to reduce the risk of harm to the child;
- ✓ Establish the nature and frequency of contact with the child and parents/carers by Core Group professionals in accordance with the All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008, section 3.20;
- ✓ Consider additional specialist resources and adult services, including Family Group Conferences (CWLWM);
- ✓ Identify measurements for evaluating progress and change, that is, how will Core Group members and parents know there has been a change;
- ✓ Consider a contingency plan if circumstances change quickly, or insufficient change occurs;
- ✓ Consider the views of the child and parent insofar as it is consistent with the child's welfare;

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- ✓ Take into account ethnic, cultural, religious and language considerations, such as the requirement for an interpreter, avoiding appointments on significant cultural or religious occasions;
- ✓ Take into account issues arising from any disability;
- ✓ Report shortfalls in resources to the respective agency managers.

6.7 All Core Group members should sign off the Child Protection Plan on behalf of their agencies. It is recognised that some members will require authorisation from their agency managers before committing resources. This needs to be obtained at the earliest opportunity, and the Key Worker informed of the outcome.

6.8 In a Review Child Protection Conference the Child Protection Plan is reviewed based on the Core Group recommendations. The subsequent Core Group can develop and revise another detailed Child Protection Plan depending on significant changes noted in the Case Conference. This is the new working document that the Core Group members use to monitor and review the outcomes of actions and services.

7. The Detailed Child Protection Plan as a Written Agreement

7.1 It is good practice for the detailed Child Protection Plan to constitute a Written Agreement between all parties, including parents and/or carers, and to be signed. It is permissible to rely on electronic signatures or emails confirming acceptance of an agency's responsibilities. The signatures and emails should be placed on the child's case record.

7.2 In order for the detailed Child Protection Plan/Written Agreement to be effective it should be written in clear and straightforward language, taking into account the parents/carers level of literacy and comprehension. The Key Worker should make every effort to ensure that the child and parents/carers have a clear understanding of the plan, accept it and are willing to work to it.

7.3 The completed plan should be explained to the child by members of the Core Group or the Key Worker in a manner that is in accordance with his/her age and understanding.

7.4 In the event of the family members disagreeing with the plan or parts of the plan and unwilling to sign up to it, it will continue to be implemented. It will be circulated to members and each family member who are part of the Core Group specifying the areas of disagreement.

8. Seeing the child and difficulties maintaining contact with the child

8.1 The Key Worker (Social Worker) must:

- ✓ See the child within every 10 working days,

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- ✓ Seen the child at home at least every 4 weeks.
- ✓ The child should be seen alone whenever possible, and every 6 weeks at a minimum, taking into account their age and level of understanding. However, when planning to see the child alone the Key Worker should be sensitive to the circumstances of the alleged abuse and seek the child's views about any support he/she requires.
- ✓ The child's bedroom should be seen on at least one occasion between conferences.

8.2 If the child is looked after or living away from home the standards for visiting looked after children will apply.

8.3 In the event of the Key Worker's absence the responsibility for visiting and seeing the child is delegated to the supervising Team Manager/Senior Practitioner.

8.4 It is the responsibility of the Key Worker and their supervising Team Manager/Senior Practitioner, to ensure that clear cover arrangements are in place when the Key Worker is absent from work. This includes checking the Key Worker's emails, correspondence and other contact records.

8.5 If the Key Worker or any other involved professional has difficulty obtaining direct access to the child, the Social Services Team Manager and Core Group members will be informed. In these circumstances a plan of action should be agreed between Core Group members, the Team Manager, and the Detective Inspector/ Sergeant in the North West Wales Police Public Protection Unit. One or more of the following actions may be agreed:

- ✓ Another appropriately qualified and experienced Core Group member carries out the direct contact with the child and family, and reports directly to the Key Worker;
- ✓ A Review Child Protection Conference is convened;
- ✓ A Legal Planning Meeting be convened by Social Services including a Senior Manager and County Solicitor;
- ✓ Emergency action is required to protect the child.

9. Action when an agency professional / staff member considers a child on the register is not being protected

9.1 The home circumstances for children at risk of abuse and/or neglect can change over time. If an agency professional and/or staff member believes that a child is no longer being safeguarded from harm by the Child Protection Plan he/she should inform the following:

- ✓ Key Worker;
- ✓ Social Services Team Manager/Senior Practitioner;

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✓ The line manager and/or named child protection professional in their own agency.

9.2 The Team Manager or Senior Practitioner will arrange a meeting in order to share and discuss the concerns, and, if it is agreed that the Child Protection Plan does not manage the risk of significant harm to the child, the Key Worker will convene the Core Group or Child Protection Conference.

9.3 If the response of the Social Services Team Manager does not address the concerns, the manager/named designated child protection officer for the agency should inform the Social Services Service Manager responsible for safeguarding children. The Social Services Team/Service Manager will discuss the issue with the agency manager, and agree a way forward.

9.4 In exceptional circumstances an agency may have to take unilateral action to safeguard a child that departs from the agreed plan. For example, a police officer might exercise police protection powers and remove a child out of office hours. The agency must always inform the Key Worker and Social Services Team Manager about any actions taken at the earliest opportunity.

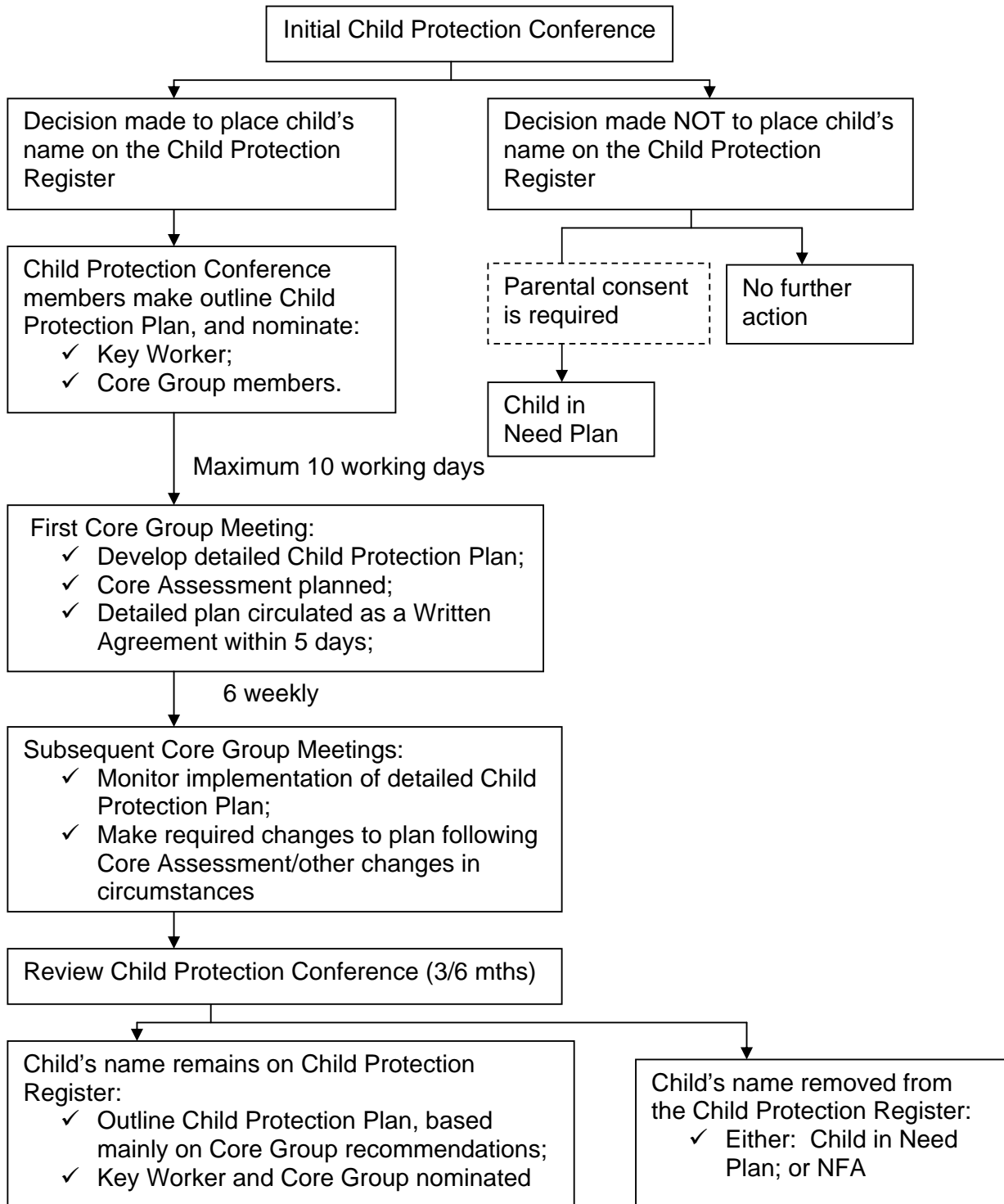
9.5 In addition, if a Core Group member's agency is not able to deliver on their commitments to the Child Protection Plan and their attendance at Core Group meetings the Key Worker will be informed and the Team Manager/Senior Practitioner will seek to renegotiate the arrangements with the agency, and ensure Core Group and family members are informed of any changes.

10. Conclusion

The effective functioning of the Child Protection Core Group is essential to ensure robust child protection arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children whose names are on the Child Protection Register. In the event of new legislation, guidance and advice the protocol will be reviewed and updated by the Child Protection Coordinator and relevant agency representatives.

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Appendix 1: Child Protection Core Group Flow Chart.



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Appendix 2: Child Protection Plan.

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Appendix 3: Recording form for Core Group Meeting

Date of meeting:		
Date of last core group meeting:		
1. Name of Child(ren), date(s) of birth.		
2. Attendance and Apologies		
3. Purpose of Meeting		
4. The Current Child Protection Plan		
Identified Need	How need to be met (including visiting frequency)	Outcome expected (and how will change be measured)
5. Updates from Agencies, Parents and Child		
6. Is the Plan working – are we achieving the outcomes expected?		
7. Does the current Protection Plan still apply? YES / NO		

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