

#### **5.1.4 The Strategy Meetings**

A Strategy Discussion takes place at the early stages of referral or Section 47 Enquiry to discuss the immediate safeguarding issues and the progression of a case. Where a strategy discussion takes place in the first instance, this must be agreed between the responsible managers, that is the social work team manager and the Police (PPIU) (Detective Sergeant or Detective Inspector).

It will always involve managers from the social work team and the Police. It should be followed by a strategy meeting if necessary. The contents of the discussion and the decisions made should be recorded by both parties. The discussion does not have to be face-to-face.

A Strategy Meeting should involve all agencies (including agencies in adult services that provide services to adults in the family) that are able to provide information in relation to the child or children and the family and carers that are the subject of the referral or section 47 Enquiry. The social work team manager or senior practitioner and the Police PPIU will always attend the meeting and should ensure that Health related information is made available to Strategy Meetings to provide a full picture of the child's presenting needs and any safeguarding related / child protection concerns. Where parents or adults in the household are facing problems such as domestic abuse, substance misuse or mental illness, it will also be important to consider involving the relevant adult services professionals (*Working Together*, 5.56). This is a face-to-face meeting and any agency that is unable to attend must provide the chair of the meeting with information in another form. The agenda for the meeting must be followed.

A Strategy Meeting may also be convened when a number of initial assessments have been undertaken during a period of time, and issues continue to be raised as a matter of concern for agencies involved with the child(ren). It is the first stage of any multi-agency investigation.

A strategy meeting is the preferred option when planning how to respond to concerns relating to children being at risk of significant harm however this is not always possible.

A social work team manager or senior practitioner, who is experienced in child protection work and familiar with the particular case, must always chair strategy Meetings.

Any Strategy Meeting or Discussion should consider all children in the family, the household, or who may have contact with the person(s) who may pose a risk of harm, with regard to possible safeguarding concerns and record decisions on the file. It should be noted on the file where there are no safeguarding concerns and the reason, for example where a sibling lives with, and is being adequately cared for by, a grandparent.

The purpose of the Strategy Discussion/Meeting is to:

- Share available information about the family, other individuals linked to the child/family and causes for concern.
- agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation
- decide whether a Section 47 Enquiry should be initiated or continued, at which point a Core Assessment should be initiated.
- plan how the Section 47 Enquiry should be undertaken, including the need for medical treatment , and who will carry out what actions, by when and for what purpose.
- agree what action is required immediately to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, and/or provide interim services and support. If the child is in hospital, decisions should also be made about how to secure the safe discharge of the child.
- determine if legal action is required
- determine what information from the Strategy Meeting or Discussion will be shared with the family, unless such information sharing may place a child at increased risk of Significant Harm or jeopardise police investigations into any alleged offence(s)
- determine the need for, and timing of, any further Strategy Meeting or Discussion

In planning the Section 47 Enquiry, the Strategy Meeting or Discussion should:

- consider what further information is required, how it should be obtained and recorded

- consider and plan any immediate steps that may be required to protect the child, following appropriate legal advice
- consider the need to protect other children in the same household or elsewhere
- consider the timing and sequence of interviews of family members
- consider any cultural, linguistic or disability needs which may need to be planned for in the investigation
- consider who should conduct the enquiries, i.e. two social workers, a social worker and representative of another agency, such as a health visitor, or a joint investigative team of social worker and police officer.
- When the child will be seen alone by the Social Worker, consider how the child's wishes and feelings will be ascertained so that they can be taken into account when making decisions
- Consider whether a medical examination of the child is required, and the timing of any examination. A consultant paediatrician should always be consulted where a medical examination is required.
- consider what information, how and when this should be shared with the parents (normally any interview of a child should be undertaken with the knowledge and agreement of those with Parental Responsibility unless such information sharing would itself place the child at increased risk of harm)
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The Chair of the Strategy Meeting must ensure that:

- A list of action points is drawn up, each with an agreed timescale and the identity of the person responsible for carrying it out.
- A clear record of the meeting is made and circulated to all those present and all those with responsibility for an action point within three working days

- The record of the meeting must also include the views of those unable to attend the meeting

The information shared, decisions reached and the reasons for those decisions should be clearly recorded on the Record of Strategy Meeting Form by the social work team manager or senior practitioner present at the meeting. They should circulate copies of the form to all relevant parties within three working days of the Strategy Meeting. The handwritten notes will be signed by those present at the Strategy Meeting and photocopied. The original will be kept by the Team Manager and placed on the child's file and the copy used to type up the document.

In the event of a Strategy Discussion taking place over the telephone, the Children's Social Care representative should record the discussion on the appropriate template and provide a copy to those involved in the discussion as soon as possible.

In complex cases more than one Strategy Meeting may be necessary. The chair is responsible for recording any information shared, all decisions reached, and the basis for those decisions, and circulating copies to all relevant parties within one working day of the Strategy Meeting. Any decisions about taking immediate action should be kept under constant review.

In some cases a Strategy Meeting will decide that no further action is required. However the Strategy Meeting may confirm that further assessment under Section 17 is required and may recommend that a Core Assessment is undertaken to further explore the identified issues. The decision should be recorded on the Record of Strategy Meeting.