

Resolving Professional Differences

- 1.1 This guidance explains how professional differences relating to the safety of adults at risk of abuse should be resolved. It is applicable to all individuals and organisations who have a role in the safeguarding of adults at risk of abuse and supports Somerset's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Adults policy.
- 1.2 It is expected that all agencies/ practitioners work with the interests of the individuals central to all they do- person centred approach. Appropriate use of the mental capacity act to ensure the individuals voice is heard and kept central to all decision-making processes is vital but this can sometimes be an area of work than create disagreements.
- 1.3 All professionals working with adults must be able to challenge each other appropriately and in a professionally respectful way when agencies are not working well together. Where the risk is elevated, there may be cause to escalate this concern among agencies.
- 1.4. Effective working relationships between professionals and organisations are crucial in supporting adults at risk. When differences arise, it is essential to address and resolve them as early as possible, ideally at the practitioner level. These discussions should include the individual concerned and/or their advocate, where appropriate, alongside the relevant professionals and organisations.

Every professional holds a responsibility not only to raise concerns but also to actively seek solutions. Open and respectful dialogue across agencies should be encouraged, with escalation to supervisors or managers if necessary.
- 1.5 The SSAB is clear that respectful challenge is a vital part of effective safeguarding practice.. Professionals and organisations must feel empowered to challenge decisions or actions when they believe these may not be in the best interests of the adult. Just as importantly, those on the receiving end of a challenge must not respond defensively. Instead, staff at all levels, including managers, should be willing to review decisions and plans with an open mind, acting proportionately and collaboratively.
- 1.6 At every stage, the safety, wellbeing, and rights of the adult at risk must remain the paramount consideration.
- 1.7 **Why this RPD may be needed:** Efficient resolution of differences requires the effective use of line management structures and courageous conversations in order that escalation is effective. Differences may arise in relation to:

- Perceived levels of risk

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- Application of the care act guidance e.g outcome of safeguarding referral, risk management
- Lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities and/or engagement by agencies
- Action or lack of action progressing plans
- Level or quality of Information sharing / communication
- Provision of services
- Where it is decided that there is no further involvement from key agencies / services

This list is not exclusive, and differences may arise about other matters.

1.8 It is expected that this escalation and resolution process should be used **first and foremost**. However, if at any stage it is felt necessary to make a formal complaint, each agency should follow the recognised complaints procedure and adhere to the timescales specified.

1.9 This guidance should not be used when there is a complaint about the conduct of an individual staff member. In such situations the relevant organisation's complaints procedure will apply. Where you believe a practitioner's conduct may have harmed an adult you will need to follow your agency's Safeguarding Adults, Staff allegations management and Freedom to speak up / Whistleblowing policies.

1.10 **At no time must professional differences detract from ensuring the adult is safeguarded.** The adult's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout. Professional differences are only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion.

2. Resolving Differences of opinion: stages of resolution

Stage	Action
	Consider at each stage, if not already done so, making a safeguarding referral to the Local Authority via Adults Social Care via Somerset Direct (0300 123 2224) or the Safeguarding Adults referral portal. If an adult is in immediate danger contact the Police on 999.
One	Early Resolution The people who disagree should have a discussion to try to resolve the problem. This discussion must take place as soon as possible and could be a telephone call or a face to face meeting. It should be recognised that differences in status and /or experience may affect the confidence of some workers to pursue this unsupported. This should be clearly and accurately recorded on the adult's record in line with each involved agencies guidance. If not resolved, move to stage 2

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Two	<p>Informal Resolution Procedure – discussion between line managers</p> <p>If the problem is not resolved and concerns remain, the worker should contact their supervisor/ line manager / safeguarding lead within their own agency to consider the issue raised, what outcome they would like to achieve and how differences can be addressed.</p> <p>The line manager should contact respective counterpart for discussion and negotiation, clearly setting out the issue that needs to be resolved and attempt to agree a way forward. This could involve a professionals meeting/ MARM (Multi Agency Risk Management) if appropriate.</p> <p>This should be clearly and accurately recorded on the adult's record in line with each agencies guidance.</p> <p>If not resolved, move to stage 3</p>
Three	<p>Discussion between Operational/Senior Managers</p> <p>If the issue is not resolved at stage two, the supervisor/ line manager reports to their manager or named/ lead safeguarding representative. These two senior managers of both individuals/organisations must liaise and attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion.</p> <p>If there remains disagreement, escalation continues through the appropriate tiers of management in each organisation until the matter is resolved.</p> <p>If not resolved, move to stage 4</p>
Four	<p>Resolution Through the Somerset Safeguarding Adults Board</p> <p>If there is still no resolution, and having exhausted all other routes, then the matter should be escalated to the SSAB Executive sub group via the SSAB mailbox providing details of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisations involved • The request that has been made, when it was made and why it was made • Action already taken to attempt a resolution • Any reasons given for refusal • Any other relevant information, including urgency <p>The relevant statutory SSAB partners will convene a resolution panel with membership consisting of a senior officer from the three agencies, LA, Police and ICB. Agencies will provide a suitable representative, who have decision making authority in relation to the organisation and its response to the person's circumstances.</p> <p>The SSAB Business manager will take responsibility for the coordination of the meeting.</p>

2.1 All involved need to be professionally satisfied that the differences have been resolved, with clear outcomes and plan moving forwards agreed and that each

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party has the relevant information to make that decision, with all parties given the opportunity to express their views and present any relevant evidence.

3. Escalation Principles

- 3.1 Differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some workers to escalate this unsupported. In these circumstances a third party should be consulted.
- 3.2 In the case of Independent Care Provisions unresolved disputes should also be raised with the relevant Commissioning contract and quality officer.
- 3.3 Stage 4 **must not** be used to escalate day-to-day safeguarding alerts in an attempt to inappropriately bypass normal processes, abdicate individual or organisational responsibilities or as a route to resolve personal differences between professionals.

4. Out of county RPD and escalation

When an adult safeguarding concern arises and the adult at risk resides in, or the incident occurred in, a different local authority area (i.e. out of county), it's essential to follow inter-authority protocols to ensure timely and effective response. Here's a practical breakdown of what to do:

4.1 Identify the Concern: Gather sufficient information to determine that a safeguarding concern meets the threshold under the Care Act 2014 (Section 42).

Check if the adult:

- Has care and support needs.
- Is at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Is unable to protect themselves due to their care and support needs.

4.2 Establish the Location of the Risk: Determine where the alleged abuse or neglect occurred. The host authority (where the incident happened) usually leads the safeguarding enquiry, not necessarily the authority where the person resides (placing authority).

4.3 Notify the Relevant Local Authority: Escalate the concern to the host local authority's safeguarding team without delay.

Provide:

- Summary of the concern.
- Known risk factors.
- Details of the adult at risk and the alleged perpetrator (if known).
- Your contact details and involvement.

4.4 Notify Your Own Local Safeguarding Adults Team: Even if the case is out of area, your own safeguarding team should be informed for oversight, especially if:

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- You are the placing authority (e.g. if the adult is placed in another county by your organisation).
- The adult has ties or services in your area.

4.5 Use National Guidance: Refer to: ADASS Out-of-Area Safeguarding Adults Protocol (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services)

- Clarifies roles and responsibilities when managing cross-boundary safeguarding concerns.
- Emphasises cooperation and clear communication between authorities.

4.6. Follow-Up and Record-Keeping: Maintain clear records of:

- The concern raised.
- Who was contacted (names, times, outcomes).
- Any actions taken.
- Follow up with the receiving authority if you don't receive an acknowledgment or action update.

4.7. Urgency and Risk: If the concern involves immediate danger:

- Call emergency services if necessary.
- Take interim protective actions regardless of local authority boundaries.

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Flowchart

