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### Home-Start Wyre Forest

### Supporting families at Child Protection Conferences – the role of the volunteer

The child and his/her parents are able to bring a supporter with them, perhaps to prompt or encourage and feel they have someone there who knows them. They may request that their volunteer attends the conference as their supporter. This can be very helpful for the family, demonstrating the scheme’s continuing commitment to them in difficult circumstances.

The role of supporter is very different from that of the scheme’s representative, being that of a straightforward support for the family member and not as a contributor or voting member of the conference. It is only in this role that a volunteer will attend an initial/incident conference.

Whenever a volunteer is asked to attend in this capacity, there will need to be a discussion with the Co-ordinator about the appropriateness and their willingness to attend. If they agree to attend there should be further discussion which clarifies their respective roles.

Co-ordinators should provide effective guidance and support for the volunteer throughout the process.

### Child protection plans, core groups and review conferences

In England a child who has either suffered or is likely to suffer harm or significant harm will be subject to a child protection plan. The plan will be both the indicator of serious concerns and the statement of how these concerns are to be addressed.

The plan will state how the child is to be protected and his/her interests promoted. Parents and children will participate in developing this plan, so that they are clear about what steps need to be taken to reduce the risk of further harm. Parents in particular need to be clear about their role and responsibility in this process. A social worker will be appointed as a key worker/lead professional to co-ordinate the plan, and a ‘core group’ of professionals and others offering services and implementing the plan will be named to ensure everyone is clear about their responsibilities. The first meeting will be held within 10 working days of the initial conference.

A child protection plan will identify what is required to safeguard the child and what needs to change. It will include any services already being offered to the family which they find helpful (for example regular Home-Start involvement). It may also include new services, like the provision of a nursery place or a childminder. It may recommend the frequency with which certain professionals visit the home. It may emphasise particular aspects of the service someone offers, like recommending that a health visitor weighs a child more frequently. It may recommend, for example, that a parent attends for psychological or psychiatric assessment or that s/he attends a clinic for drug rehabilitation. Plans should be specific and focused on reducing the likelihood of further significant harm to the child. They should allow for clear measurements of progress which parents and professionals understand.

A key worker/lead professional from the statutory agencies will be appointed to develop the detail of the plan, act as the lead professional for inter-agency work, co-ordinate the contributions of the family and other agencies to make the plan work and review progress. The key worker/lead professional will have a specific role to communicate with the child(ren) and ascertain their wishes and views.

As Home-Start has regular, supportive involvement with a family, the Co-ordinator often becomes part of the Core Group.

The core group may meet from time to time, or on a regular basis as recommended in the protection plan, to share detailed information about progress, or to make or amend practical arrangements.

### The role of the Co-ordinator at conferences

Where the scheme is asked to attend a Child Protection Conference, it will be the Co-ordinator who attends on behalf of the scheme and **only with the knowledge of the family.** The Co-ordinator will produce a report detailing the scheme’s input, including information from the volunteer and the Scheme records and will discuss this with the family prior to attendance.

The Co-ordinator should be prepared to play a full part in the conference including the decision making process. It is by taking part in such conferences that Home-Start is able to contribute to effective plans to ensure the needs of the child(ren) are met in the best way to safeguard and protect their welfare.