Resolving Professional Differences
Adult Safeguarding

January 2026

1. Introduction

Effective working together depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies. Problem solving and resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard adults at risk.

Transparency, openness and a willingness to understand and respect individual and agency views are a core aspect of multi-agency / inter-agency working. However, there may be occasions where individuals / agencies disagree on how best to keep adults at risk safe and promote their welfare.

Disagreements can arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around:

- Perceived levels of risk
- Levels of need and whether a concern has met the threshold for a service or intervention
- Roles and responsibilities
- Level or quality of communication/ information sharing
- Provision of services
- Action or lack of action progressing plans
- Cases being / not being stepped up or down and / or closed
- Care Planning

The Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Executive Safeguarding Partnership Board is clear that there must be respectful challenge whenever there is a professional disagreement. The aim must be to resolve a professional disagreement at the earliest possible stage, always keeping in mind that the adult at risk's safety and welfare is paramount.

If an adult is thought to be at immediate risk of harm, all should respond as required by the SAB and individual agency policies and procedures.

Any worker who has concerns around a professional disagreement should consult their supervisor / manager to clarify their thinking and for advice and supervisory support. They should be able to evidence the nature and source of the concerns and should keep a record of all discussions. These records should be included on the person's individual record and all practitioners to adhere to their own record management policy and legislative guidance in relation to information sharing and people requesting access to their own records.

Concerns relating to decisions, suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work within an agency, should be raised in line with each agency's policies for dealing with such matters, including, but not limited to, those setting out the arrangements for 'whistleblowing'.

Where a dispute involves a complaint about the behaviour or professional conduct of a worker, this should be reported initially to their line manager to action under agency policy. For allegations against staff, the agency's whistleblowing / complaints procedure should be used and the People in Positions of Trust documentation.

2. Key Principles

- The adult at risk's safety and welfare should be the key focus at <u>all</u> times and any dispute between individuals / agencies should ***never*** leave an adult at risk unprotected

- It is the responsibility of all professionals to be assertive and to present a respectful challenge to the actions and decisions of other agencies where they believe there is evidence to suggest that the adult at risk's safety may be compromised

- A culture of professional challenge can be developed and facilitated through consistent communication and information sharing between agencies and within clear plans for adults at risk. Professionals should know who in the multi-agency network is involved with the adult and their family

- Individuals /agencies should not be defensive when challenged and must always be prepared to review decisions and plans with an open mind and revise decisions in light of the new information

- Differences of opinion should be resolved at the earliest stage and within the shortest timescale possible to ensure that the adult at risk is protected

NOTE: If an adult is thought to be at imminent risk of harm, the matter should be referred immediately to the Police/Adult Social Care to decide what action to take to safeguard/protect them whilst the dispute is being resolved.

Examples, where the concerns about an adult at risk should prompt action, are given below. This list is not exhaustive.

- Dispute at the point of referral made by one agency to another due to differing opinions about thresholds/eligibility for services,
- Concern about the action / inaction of another professional in relation to an adult at risk or family member or non-compliance with safeguarding procedures/statutory guidance,
- Professional difference about decision making and a course of action to be taken, for example following and adult at risk meeting, multi-disciplinary meeting (MDT) or Multi-Agency Risk Management meeting (MARM)
- Professional difference about the implementation of an adult at risk's plan or its effectiveness in bringing about the necessary changes, including drift or absence of multi-agency meetings,
- Professional difference about information sharing,
- Difference of professional opinion over the outcome of an assessment and/or differences about the analysis of information and associated decision making,
- Professional difference about the provision of services,
- Concern that the adult's lived experiences are not informing assessment, decision making or planning,
- Concern that there is drift or unreasonable delay in progressing a case,
- Concerns about the operation of adult safeguarding procedures.

3. Resolving Differences of Opinion; Stages of Resolution

Stage One: Discussion between workers

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 conversation 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. The discussion should be recorded in the adult at risk's records and a mutually agreed plan of action developed. Records should include the concern, action(s) taken to resolve, agreed actions from resolution process, timescales and the outcome. This should be clear, evidenced and factual.

Stage Two: Discussion between Line Managers

The line manager should contact their respective counterpart to try to negotiate an agreed way forward. This could involve a professionals meeting if deemed appropriate.

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.

The line manager should contact their respective counterpart(s) to try to negotiate an agreed way forward. This could involve a professionals meeting if deemed appropriate. The discussion should be recorded in the adult at risk's records and a mutually agreed plan of action developed. Records should include the concern, action(s) taken to resolve, agreed actions from resolution process, timescales and the outcome. This should be clear, evidenced and factual.

Stage Three: Discussion between Operational/Senior Managers

If the issue is not resolved at stage two, the supervisor/ line manager reports to their manager or named/ lead safeguarding representative. Those senior managers must liaise and attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion. The discussion should be recorded in the adult at risk's records and a mutually agreed plan of action developed. Records should include the concern, action(s) taken to resolve, agreed actions from resolution process, timescales and the outcome. This should be clear, evidenced and factual.

Stage Four: Resolution by Safeguarding Partners

a) Urgent resolution required-Resolution Panel Meeting

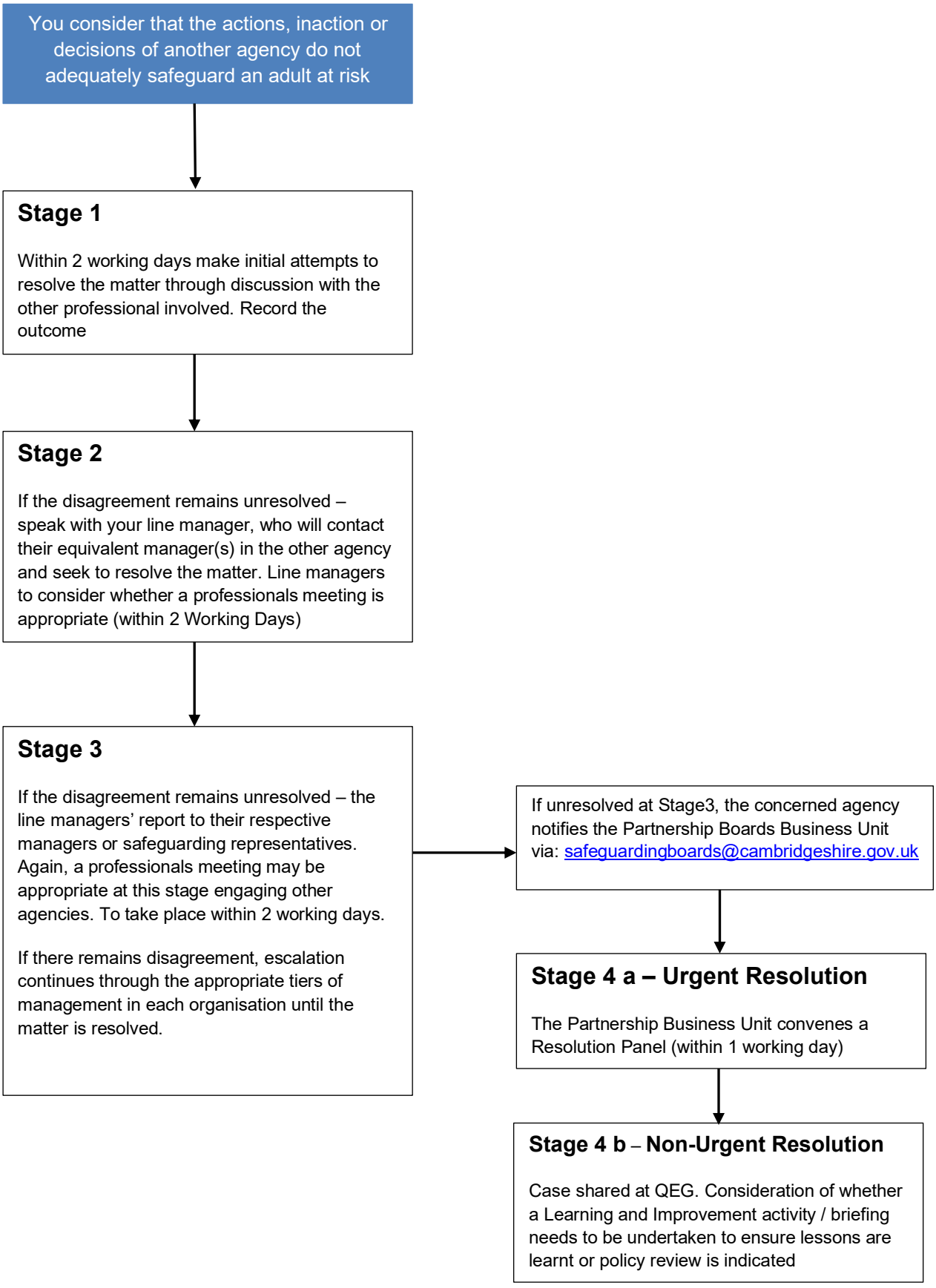
If there is no resolution, and having exhausted all other routes, the matter should be escalated to the Partnership Board Business Unit. A Resolution Panel Meeting will be convened by the Partnership Board Business Unit with the Director, where appropriate, who holds safeguarding responsibilities for each respective agency, if needed. The meeting will be a forum where the agencies can discuss the case and conflict issue in a chaired and minuted meeting, with resolution being agreed and recorded.

b) Non-urgent and / or lessons learned

Operational/senior managers can advise that the learning points from a non-urgent case should be referred to the Quality Effectiveness Group for interagency consideration. At this point the group may make recommendations for individual agencies to review performance and/or involvement, or for safeguarding partnership boards policy and procedural review and development.

Appendix 1

Escalation Procedure and Timescales Flowchart



Appendix 2 Adult Safeguarding Lead Roles within Agencies (October 2025)

Agency	Lead
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	Detective Superintendent, Head of Protecting Vulnerable People
Integrated Care Board	Designated Nurse Safeguarding Adults
Cambridgeshire Adults Social Care	Service Director Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement
Peterborough Adults Social Care	Service Director for Safeguarding and Adults
North West Anglia NHS Foundation Trust	Named Nurse/Professional Safeguarding Adults
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust	Named Nurse/Professional Safeguarding Adults
East of England Community Health and Care	Named Nurse/Professional Safeguarding Adults
Royal Papworth Hospital	Operational Safeguarding Lead
Cambridgeshire University Hospitals	Named Nurse/Professional Safeguarding Adults
Probation Service	Designated Safeguarding Lead
Cambridge City District Council	Designated Safeguarding Lead
East Cambridgeshire District Council	Designated Safeguarding Lead
Fenland District Council	Designated Safeguarding Lead
South Cambridgeshire District Council	Designated Safeguarding Lead
Huntingdon District Council	Designated Safeguarding Lead