Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership

Conference & Review Service Outcome Resolution Practice Guidance

Cared For Children, Child Protection and Multi-Agency Challenge



Cumberland Council

Cumbria Constabulary

NHS North East & North Cumbria

1. Purpose and context

All Local Authorities are required to have a Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the statutory guidance in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook 2010. In Cumberland we call this an Outcome Resolution Process (ORP). The IRO has a statutory responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the Local Authority's functions in relation to care planning for individual cared for children and to resolve problems arising through the care planning process.

Cumberland Council recognises that children supported through a Child Protection Plan can also experience drift, delay or poor practice that affects their safety, lived experience and outcomes. In Cumberland, the ORP framework is therefore used by IROs and Child Protection Conference Chairs (CPCCs) to challenge concerns about planning for both cared for children and children subject to Child Protection Plans.

The purpose of ORP is not simply to record professional disagreement. It is to resolve concerns quickly and make a positive difference for the child. The child's experience, safety, needs and outcomes must remain central throughout.

2. Core principles

- Keep the child and the impact of the concern on them at the centre of all challenge.
- Seek early, constructive resolution wherever this is safe and appropriate.
- Challenge drift, delay, unmet actions and ineffective planning promptly.
- Provide clear management oversight and accountability.
- Record the concern, response, resolution and the difference made for the child.
- Escalate without unnecessary delay where the seriousness or urgency of the concern requires it.
- Continue to challenge where staffing, resource or inter-agency difficulties are affecting the Local Authority's ability to meet the child's identified needs.

The formal ORP does not have to be followed sequentially. Depending on the seriousness and urgency of the concern, the IRO or Conference Chair may move directly to the level of management considered appropriate following discussion with the IRO Team Manager and Service Manager. The formal process should be completed within a maximum of 20 working days.

3. When to use Outcome Resolution

Key question: Is this issue affecting, or likely to affect, the child's safety, lived experience, progress or outcomes?

Planning, drift and delay

- A Care Plan or Child Protection Plan is not progressing.
- There is drift or delay in achieving permanence or agreed outcomes.
- Assessments are not completed in a timely way.

- Agreed actions are not completed or timescales are not met.
- There are delays in accessing services identified as necessary for the child.

Safety and safeguarding

- Safety planning is not robust enough or a child may be left at risk.
- A significant element of the Care Plan or Child Protection Plan has not been implemented.
- There are concerns about the suitability of the child's living arrangements or the standard of care.
- There are concerns about professional practice that are directly affecting the child.

The child's voice and lived experience

- The child's wishes, feelings or needs are insufficiently reflected in assessment or planning.
- The child has not been appropriately prepared for their Cared For Review or Child Protection Conference.
- Direct work or life story work is delayed or not taking place.
- Family-time arrangements do not adequately meet the child's needs.

Statutory and practice requirements

- No allocated social worker.
- Core Groups are not being held as required.
- No current assessment or quality Care Plan, Pathway Plan or Child Protection Plan.
- Statutory visits are not completed, or the child is not seen alone where appropriate.
- Required education or health planning is not up to date.
- The IRO or Conference Chair is not informed of a significant event or important change affecting the child.

This list is not exhaustive. Professional judgement should always be applied with the child's best interests as the focus.

4. When the process should not be used

ORP is intended to address practice concerns, non-adherence to the Cumberland Good Practice Standards, or delay in a child's plan where this is affecting the child. It should not be used to pursue a staff complaint or grievance. The appropriate HR or other procedure should be used for those matters.

5. Involvement of children and young people

The IRO or Conference Chair is responsible for activating challenge where they consider this necessary in the child's best interests. Where appropriate, the child should be told that the IRO or Conference Chair is seeking resolution to a problem on their behalf and should be kept informed about progress. Children should also be made aware of their right to use complaints processes and independent advocacy.

6. Informal challenge: resolve concerns early

Where appropriate, the first response should be a timely professional discussion with the social worker and their manager. Practice concerns should normally be raised within 24 hours, recognising that some concerns require immediate action.

- what the concern is;
- how it is affecting the child or their plan;
- what needs to change;
- who is responsible for taking action; and
- when the action needs to happen.

The challenge and outcome should be recorded on the child's record using the IRO/ Conference Chair - Informal Challenge case note. The Conference & Review Team Manager should have oversight through supervision or reflective discussion. Informal issues should be concluded within a maximum of 5 working days. Managerial absence must not delay resolution; nominated cover or the manager's immediate line manager should respond where necessary.

7. Formal Outcome Resolution Process

Formal ORP should be used when informal challenge has not achieved resolution, or where the nature or seriousness of the concern requires formal escalation. Each formal stage should clearly describe the concern and its impact on the child and family.

Stage	Escalation to	Response time	Key requirement
Stage 1	Team Manager	2 working days	Complete ORP Stage 1 on LCS.
Stage 2	Service Manager	3 working days	Complete ORP Stage 2 on LCS if unresolved or response is insufficient.
Stage 3	Senior Manager	4 working days	IRO Team Manager and IRO Service Manager oversight before submission.
Stage 4	Assistant Director	5 working days	IRO Service Manager and Quality & Safeguarding Assistant Director oversight before submission.
Stage 5	Director	6 working days	Final internal stage where the matter remains unresolved.

Important: The stages do not need to be followed sequentially. Formal stages 1 to 5 should take no more than 20 working days in total.

8. External agency challenge: a core part of independent oversight

Outcome Resolution is not solely an internal Local Authority challenge process. IROs and Conference Chairs provide independent scrutiny of the multi-agency planning around children. Where the action or inaction of a partner professional or agency is affecting a child's safety, wellbeing, progress or the effectiveness of their plan, this should be challenged, recorded and followed through to resolution.

Effective multi-agency planning depends on all agencies fulfilling their responsibilities. The IRO or Conference Chair should not simply record that an agency has not attended, provided information or completed an action. Where this is affecting the child or their plan, active professional challenge is required.

When to raise an external challenge

- Attendance and effective contribution to Child Protection Conferences or Cared For Reviews.
- Information required to support effective planning and decision-making is not provided.
- Agreed actions within a Care Plan or Child Protection Plan are not completed.
- There is delay in an agency providing its identified contribution to the child's plan.
- Any other inter-agency issue is creating drift, delay, increased risk or adversely affecting the child's outcomes.

How the external challenge should be managed

1. Raise the concern promptly and work collaboratively with the professional or agency to seek early resolution.
2. Record the discussion on the child's record and inform the social worker.
3. Complete the IRO/ Conference Chair External Challenge Case Note on the child's LCS record.
4. Clearly record the concern, the impact on the child or their plan, the change required, the resolution sought and the response received.
5. Maintain oversight until the issue is resolved. Raising the challenge is not the end of the process.
6. If the action is not completed, or the response does not adequately address the concern and its impact on the child, escalate to the line management of the relevant service.
7. Where resolution cannot be achieved, use the relevant Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership multi-agency escalation arrangements alongside continued Conference & Review Service oversight.

Professional relationships should support constructive challenge but should never prevent or delay escalation where an unresolved issue is affecting a child's safety, plan or outcomes.

Closing an external challenge

An external challenge should not be closed simply because a response has been received. The IRO or Conference Chair should be satisfied that the concern has been appropriately addressed and should record the outcome and impact for the child.

9. Referral to CAFCASS for cared for children

For cared for children, the IRO can refer a matter to CAFCASS at any point in the Outcome Resolution Process if the IRO considers this appropriate. This may be considered where internal attempts to resolve practice concerns have not secured a better outcome for the child, particularly where failure to implement aspects of the Care Plan may affect the child's human rights. Referral does not have to wait until every internal stage is exhausted where the circumstances require a different response.

10. Recording, management oversight and learning

The ORP process should provide a clear audit trail of the concern, challenge, response, resolution and impact for the child. The Conference & Review Service will use learning from informal challenges, formal ORPs and external agency challenges to identify recurring barriers, drift and delay and themes requiring wider service or partnership improvement.

Management oversight should consider not only whether an ORP has been closed, but whether the resolution achieved has made a demonstrable difference to the child's experience, safety or progress.