

Gloucestershire Safeguarding Adults Board

Escalation of Professional Differences Guidance April 2026



The safety of individual adults with care and support needs must always be the most important consideration in any professional disagreement and at no time must the professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the adult is safeguarded. This guidance has been developed for all practitioners working with adults and families in Gloucestershire. Its aim is to assist with developing a quick and straightforward means of resolving professional differences of opinion in relation to concerns about an adult.

If the disagreement is between you and your manager, then you should consider using your agency's internal procedures.

Introduction

Differences of opinion relating to an adult with care and support needs will exist and is an expected part of quality safeguarding practice. It is a sign of a healthy safeguarding system to have a culture of respectful, professional challenge both within and between organisations.

Staff are expected to discuss these differences in a professional and productive manner, using the restorative practice principles of 'high expectations', 'high challenge' and 'high support'.

These principles should be used in all work with adults and families, colleagues, professionals within other agencies and through strategic partnerships. Restorative practice describes a core set of beliefs, principles and a way of treating people that builds and maintains healthy relationships, a sense of community and a shared sense of accountability. It is about having high expectations, which enable high levels of challenge and support, to inspire people and communities to feel able to resolve their problems and shape their own futures. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that working with and alongside people can lead to significant and sustained positive change.

In order to be able to resolve difficulties within and between agencies quickly and openly in the best interests of the adult, there are a number of key principles that need to be adopted by all professionals:

- **Respond positively to feedback – it is not personal. Issues have been raised because there are concerns about the level of risk for an adult(s). Being able to positively accept challenge is equally as important as being able to rise to a challenge**
- **Seek to resolve any professional disagreements at the lowest possible level as part of everyday working practice and within the timescales laid out in this guidance**
- **Encourage others to challenge or question your own practice, to ensure healthy challenge becomes part of professional and learning cultures**
- **Wherever possible, discussions should take place face-to-face or by telephone. Try to avoid the use of email alone to raise a challenge. However, it is good practice to follow up your conversation by email to document the discussions that took place**
- **The tone of challenge should be one of respectful enquiry, not criticism – be curious and remain curious until you understand and accept the reasons behind the decision that has been made or an alternative decision has been reached**
- **Challenge should always be evidence based and solution focused**
- **Be persistent and keep asking questions**
- **Discuss your concerns with the named safeguarding lead within your organisation or through supervision arrangements**
- **Always keep a written record of actions and decisions taken in line with your own organisation's information governance and record keeping policies**
- **REMEMBER, you are acting in the best interests of the adult and they must always remain central to your discussions and decision making**

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

- Threshold for intervention
- Roles and responsibilities
- The need for action
- Communication

The safety of adults with care and support needs is the paramount consideration in any professional disagreement (where safeguarding children is not an issue) and any unresolved areas should be addressed with due consideration to the risks that might exist for the adult.

All workers should feel able to challenge decision-making and to see this as their right and responsibility in order to promote the best multi-agency safeguarding practice. This guidance provides workers with the means to raise differences they have about decisions made by other professionals or agencies by:

- a) avoiding professional disputes that put adults with care and support needs at risk or take away focus from the adult
- b) resolving the difficulties within and between agencies quickly and openly
- c) identifying problem areas in working together, where there is a lack of clarity and to promote the resolution, perhaps via amendment to protocols and procedures

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

Resolution should be sought within the shortest timescale possible to ensure the adult with care and support needs is protected. Disagreements should be resolved at the lowest possible stage, however if an adult is thought to be at risk of immediate harm discretion should be used as to which stage is initiated.

Additional Notes

At all stages of the process, actions and decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel (in line with your organisation's information governance and record keeping policies), to include the worker who raised the initial concern. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.

It may be useful for individuals to debrief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships.

It is the responsibility of each setting/agency/organisation to record the number of escalations that take place from Stage 1 onwards. These should be reported to the named safeguarding lead within your organisation. This should form part of your organisation's internal quality assurance processes.

If there are any disagreements regarding children, the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (GSCP) [Escalation Policy](#) should be used.

Stages of Escalation

Stage One – Discuss with Other Worker

Any practitioner who feels that a decision is not safe or is inappropriate should have an open and honest conversation with the other practitioner (whether this is a practitioner within their own agency or a different agency), highlighting the reasons or evidencing why they think the decision is not safe or inappropriate. They should be clear about the outcome they are seeking to achieve for the adult and the timescales they are working towards. A practitioner may consult with a supervisor to clarify their thinking in order to identify the problem and needs to be specific as to what the disagreement is about and what they aim to achieve.

Timescale for resolution: Within 5 working days or a timescale that protects the adult from harm (whichever is less)

Stage Two – Escalate to Line Manager

If the problem is not resolved at stage one the concerned worker should contact their supervisor or named professional within their own agency who should raise the concerns with the equivalent supervisor in the other agency. Again, this is part of expected everyday practice and is reflective of an open and honest culture of practitioners acting in the best interests of the adult and continuing to pursue their concerns until they are satisfied they have been resolved or understand why an alternative decision has been reached.

Timescale for resolution: Within 5 working days or a timescale that protects the adult from harm (whichever is less)

Stage Three – Escalate to Senior Manager

If the problem is not resolved at stage two, the supervisor or named professional reports the matter to their Head of Service or named safeguarding representative, to raise with the equivalent manager in the other agency.

The two managers must attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion. The GSAB Business Manager should be notified (gsab@gloucestershire.gov.uk) by the person who is escalating the matter and also advise of any outcome. The two senior managers should agree a clear plan of action, which includes timescales in the best interests of the adult.

Timescale for resolution: Within 5 working days or a timescale that protects the adult from harm (whichever is less)

Stage Four – Resolution by GSAB Chair

If professional disagreements remain unresolved, the matter should be referred to the Chair of the GSAB who may either seek to resolve the issue directly or convene a Resolution Panel.

Timescale for resolution: Within 10 working days or a timescale that protects the adult from harm (whichever is less)

Stages of the Policy

Stage One

Any worker who feels that a decision is not safe or is inappropriate should make initial attempts to resolve the matter through discussion with the other professional involved.

Stage Two

If the problem is not resolved at stage one, the concerned worker should contact their supervisor within their own agency, who should raise the concerns with the equivalent supervisor in the other agency.

Stage Three

If the problem is not resolved at stage two the supervisor should report it to their respective manager or named safeguarding representative. The two managers must attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion. The GSAB Business Manager should be notified (gsab@gloucestershire.gov.uk) by the person who is escalating the matter.

Stage Four

If it has not been possible to resolve the professional differences within the agencies concerned, a Safeguarding Adults Board Resolution Panel will be convened by the Chair of the Safeguarding Adults Board. The panel must consist of representatives from three agencies (including the agencies concerned in the professional differences).

The panel will receive representations from those concerned and make a decision as to the next course of action, resolving the professional differences concerned. The decision of the panel is binding on all agencies concerned. The panel will produce a brief report of the issues and decisions made, which is submitted to the Safeguarding Adults Board.

Additional Notes

At all stages of the process actions and decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel, to include the worker who raised the initial concern. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about any agreed outcome of the disagreement and how outstanding issues will be pursued.

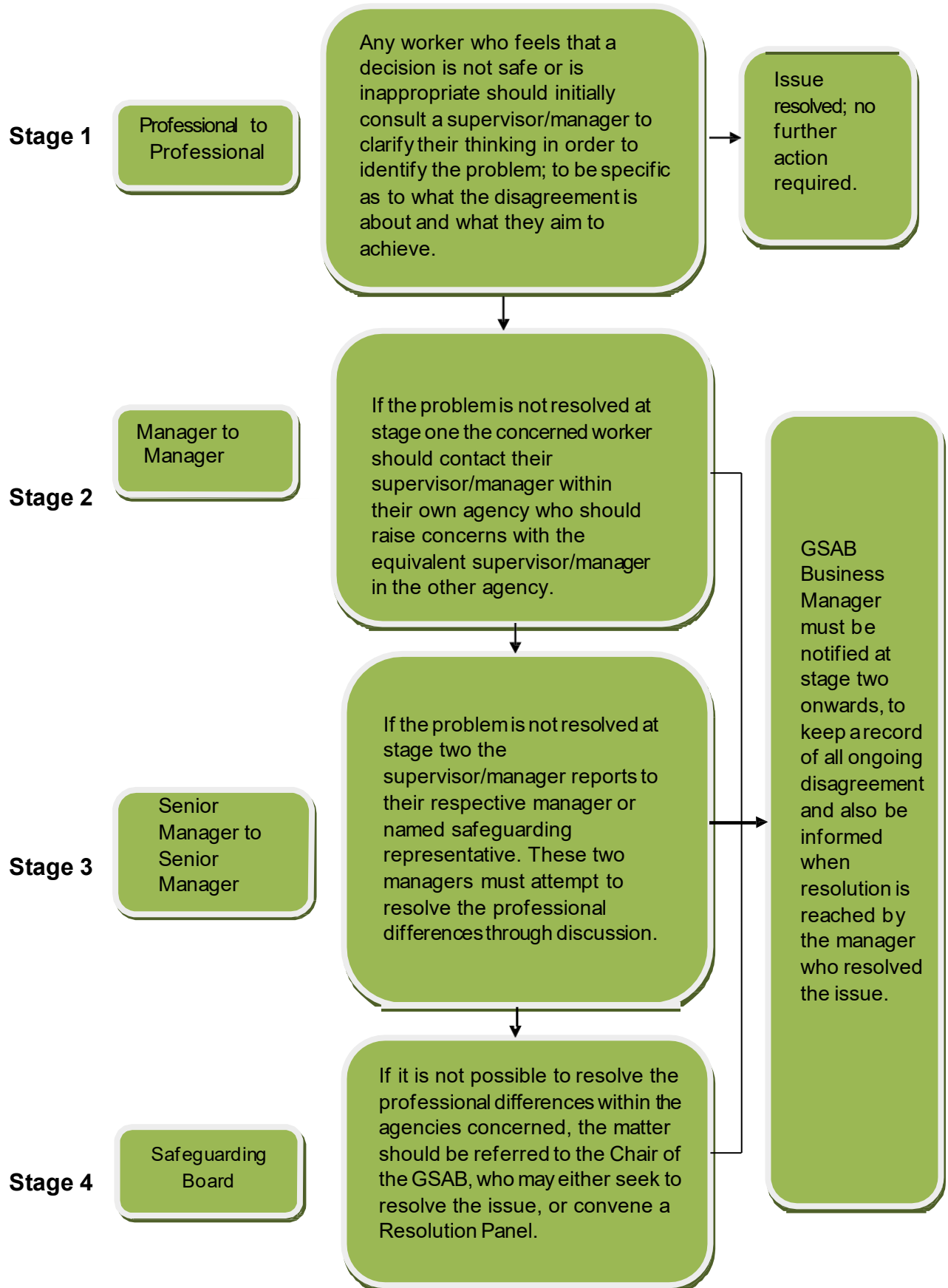
It may be useful for individuals to meet and debrief following some disputes, in order to promote continuing good working relationships.

If the Process highlights wider learning points or gaps in policies and procedures

Any general issues should be identified and referred to the agency's representative on the Safeguarding Adults Board for consideration by both the Policy and Procedure and Improving Practice sub-groups to inform future learning and possible changes to existing policies and procedures.

Gloucestershire Safeguarding Adults Board – Escalation Procedure

Website: www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gsab Email: gsab@gloucestershire.gov.uk



Gloucestershire Safeguarding Adults Board Escalation Policy - Monitoring Form



A tool to record decisions and to monitor the effectiveness of the Escalation Policy

Occasionally situations arise when workers within one agency feel that the decision made by a worker from another agency, about safeguarding an adult, is not a safe decision. Disagreements should be resolved at the lowest possible stage and resolution should be sought within the shortest timescale possible, to ensure the adult is protected. If an adult is thought to be at risk of immediate harm, discretion should be used as to which stage is initiated. **This form is to be used at stage two and at each further stage of the Escalation Policy.**

Checklist

- Have you consulted a supervisor/manager, to seek advice about resolving your concern?
- Have you made clear initial attempts to resolve the problem at the lowest possible level?
- Did the supervisor/manager raise the concerns with their equivalent in the other agency?
- If this did not resolve the concerns, has the Service Manager or Named Safeguarding Representative attempted to resolve the professional differences through discussion?
- If this did not resolve the professional differences, are you seeking a meeting between the agencies concerned and the GSAB Resolution Panel, convened by the Independent Chair?

Action note: a copy of this form is to be held on the adults file in all agencies involved in the resolution of professional difficulties. If escalating to the next stage, use this form as a basis for reporting to the manager at the next stage. Please send a copy to the GSAB Business Manager: (gsab@gloucestershire.gov.uk).

Adult Name			
Summary of reason for dispute – include views of all agencies concerned			
Agreed outcomes or actions if satisfactorily resolved – include escalation to the next stage if unresolved			
Signature of challenger’s manager		Name	
		Designation	
		Agency	
		Date	
Signature of challenged manager		Name	
		Designation	
		Agency	
		Date	
Stage at which resolution achieved, noting how effective the policy/practice was in resolving the issue			
Time taken to reach a resolution			

