



Family-Led Review of Child Protection Conferences in Wiltshire

Wiltshire Council

Contents

1. Executive summary	3-5
2. Introduction	5
3. Recommendations	6-11
4. Project Team	12
5. Methodology	13-14
6. What families had to say	14-16
7. What social workers and managers in children's social care had to say.	17-21
8. What workers and managers from partner agencies that work with children and families had to say.	22-23
9. Conclusion	24



1. Executive Summary

In 2020, the service for Quality Outcomes for Children and Families was asked to use the principles of co-production to review the way in which Wiltshire Council conducts its child protection conferences. Co-production is a strengths-based, participatory way of working in partnership with people using services and is a key concept in developing services, policies and transforming practice. The 2014 Care Act's statutory guidance defines co-production as: When an individual influences the support and services received, or when groups of people get together to influence the way that services are designed, commissioned and delivered.

This report sets out how our family-led review has been undertaken and the recommendations that we and the families involved in this project would like to make to Wiltshire Council and the Safeguarding Vulnerable People's Partnership so we develop the most effective policies and practices in relation to child protection conferences that support families safely care for their children.

Listening to families and the professionals who attend child protection conferences and experience the child protection system, confirmed the importance of strong relationships between social workers and families informed by their experiences. This means working with families to find common ground, reaching a fuller understanding of the pressures they are facing and being responsive to them, while ensuring positive and timely change for children.

The families spoken to told us they valued the following:

- Being listened to and not being judged
- Having a consistent, reliable social worker who works alongside them to achieve positive change
- Being told clearly and compassionately what people are worried about
- Having enough time to read reports and knowing what to expect at a child protection conference.
- Being involved in their assessments and being asked to give their views
- Knowing exactly what they need to do to make things better
- Knowing what support they can expect and who will do what and when
- Social workers and partner agencies using good communication and people skills.

To demonstrate our ongoing commitment to co-production and to strengthen our culture of participation we propose the setting up of a Family Advisory Board, so families can hold the local authority to account in implementing the recommendations in this report and are an ongoing part of the Quality Assurance Framework to positively influence social work practice in Wiltshire.

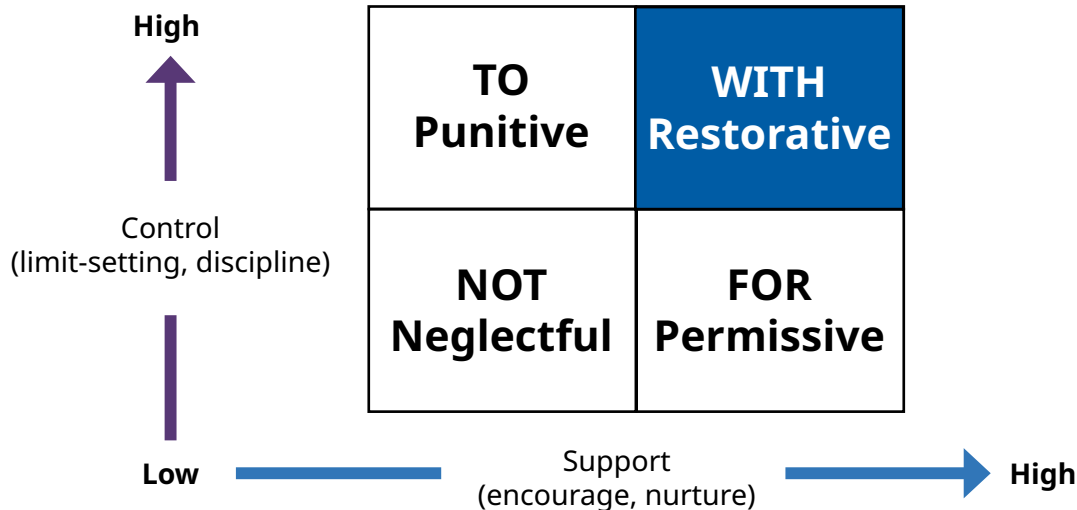
We also propose working with the Family Advisory Board and Youth and Child Voice Team, to create a pledge to families about what they can expect from Wiltshire's children's services so they can hold us to account if we fail to meet the high standards we set for ourselves.

The recommendations in this report focus on a restorative approach to practice being adopted by agencies across the partnership. Restorative practice is a term used to describe behaviours, interactions and approaches which help maintain positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict¹.

¹One Minute Guide (2016) www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Restorative%20Practice%20One%20Minute%20Guide.pdf

The Social Discipline Window

The Social Discipline Window² is a helpful way to explain and understand restorative practice. It describes four approaches that practitioners can use when working with children and families. The approaches are different combinations of high or low challenge and high or low support.



Adapted by Paul Mcold and Ted Wachtel

The restorative approach to working with children and families creates a culture of high support and challenge; working with people rather than doing things to or for them. It is a widely established and accepted approach both nationally and internationally of achieving better outcomes for children and families. Several local authorities have adopted this approach to practice and where this has been embedded at scale both within children's services, across the partnership and other local authority directorates (such as in Leeds) an environment has been developed in which families are supported to implement long-lasting changes³.

Leeds have taken steps to introduce a Restorative Early Support (RES) Service; a new tier of intervention between early help and the statutory social work service and have combined this with an extensive programme of restorative practice development across their workforce. The impact of this has been evaluated by the University of Bedfordshire and in the key findings CLA numbers had significantly reduced and has help save the local authority £406,466.60 per month compared to the period before RES was introduced⁴.

Based on this strong evidence we are recommending that Wiltshire Council and the SVPP consider adopting this model across the whole system to improve the way in which children's services and partners engage and work with children and families who need support and intervention.

It is widely recognised that children and families need systemic responses to their problems that focus on how their relationships and their social context shape their experiences and thinking. With this in mind we are also recommending that Children's Social Care consider

²Adapted from: McCold P and Watchel T (2001) 'Restorative Justice in Everyday Life' in Braithwaite J and Strang H (eds) Restorative justice and Civil Society. Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press

³leedsrpc.org.uk/restorative-practice/

⁴assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/932340/Leeds_Partners_in_Practice.pdf

developing its own family-based relationship model of practice that is adaptable, and flexible, strengths based, systemic, formulation driven (based on systemic family therapy⁵), relational and evidence-based, as this naturally aligns to working restoratively with families, focusing on problems in their social and relational context. This type of social work model is a feature in several other local authorities, most notably in Leeds and Camden who have also successfully implemented a restorative approach.

2. Introduction to the Family Led Review

To maximise co-production opportunities in children's services, we undertook this participatory method to review our approach to child protection conferences and involve families who have attended these types of meetings, by inviting them to tell us from their perspective, what they valued, what worked well for them and what they wanted to change.

It has been a privilege for the Quality Outcomes for Children and Families Service to lead on this thrilling and innovative project. We want to express our sincerest gratitude to the families; both parents and children who have participated in this project and the time they have taken to share their experiences both good and bad. We have listened to what they've had to say and really valued what they told us. We'd also like to thank the social workers, manager's and practitioners from across the different agencies working with families and children in Wiltshire who helped us to think about what we can do differently to improve how families experience this type of meeting.

The recommendations from this review focus on the following:

- A restorative approach to practice
- What does this mean in practice?
- How does a restorative approach promote positive working relationships?
- What does this mean in practice for initial child protection conferences?
- Recommendations for a restorative approach to assessments and reports
- Recommendations for a restorative approach to conference preparation and information provided to families
- Recommendations for a restorative approach to promoting participation
- Recommendations for a restorative approach to advocacy
- Recommendations for a restorative approach to child protection planning
- Recommendations for a restorative approach to core group meetings.

⁵www.ukstandards.org.uk/PublishedNos-old/SFHPT26.pdf



3. Recommendations

We recommend Wiltshire Council and partners consider adopting a restorative approach to practice and child protection conferences.

What does this mean in practice?

- Wiltshire Council and The Safeguarding Vulnerable People Partnership becomes committed to a restorative approach to working with children, young people and families and adopts this as a **whole system approach** with managers and leaders modelling this in their everyday work.
- Agencies in Wiltshire are required to ensure their relationship between themselves and families changes from doing things **to** and **for** families to doing things **with** them.
- Guides for restorative practice are created for agencies and families.
- Training on restorative practice is delivered across the Council and partnership
- Consideration is given to Wiltshire developing a family-based relationship model of practice informed by systemic and restorative philosophy.

How does a restorative approach promote positive working relationships?

- By social workers and partner agencies clearly explaining that they will work **alongside** families and **empower** them to make positive changes that will benefit their child/ren so that they are safe and have the level of care to meet their needs.
- Social workers and partner agencies acknowledging the stigma associated with a child protection conference and recognising the shame that families may feel.
- Social workers and partner agencies openly explaining to families they will always be treated with respect and they will spend time listening to parents and children, so they understand their history.
- Children and parents only needing to tell their story once and not having to repeat this if a new professional becomes involved in their case.
- Social workers and partner agencies practicing in a culturally sensitive way; considering the families cultural background, ethnicity, disability, sexuality etc. and what this means for them, as well as the barriers/discrimination they may have faced and how this has impacted on them.
- Parents are treated as experts about their family and encouraged to be part of the solution to their problems and the plan to address the issues of concern.
- Social workers and partner agencies, working together with the family to achieve positive change and swiftly resolving any disagreements about risk or intervention and support.

What does a restorative practice approach mean in practice for Initial Child Protection Conferences?

1. A restorative child protection conference aims to bring together the family affected by the harm that has been identified, with professionals who might assist with making things better. It is important that the family are at the centre of the meeting, taking a leading role in the discussion and the planning.
2. A restorative approach means avoiding blame and judgements whilst having high expectations of what can be achieved and people's contribution to make things better. This means understanding and appreciating the strengths in the system in and around the family, whilst honestly and openly exploring the challenges, to understand the support needed to deliver change.
3. The chair of the conference facilitates the meeting carefully to manage the confrontation of harm, the emotional impact of this and the potential healing as a result of addressing it. The chair ensures the conference considers:
 - What are the issues / harm that the conference needs to address?
 - How the family feel about what people are saying?
 - What has been the impact on the children?
 - How they feel about this
 - What would better look like?
 - What can they do about this?
 - What support do the family need from the people round the table?

Recommendations for a restorative approach to assessments and reports:

What should be happening already and needs to continue:

1. Reports and assessments are fair and based on facts. They are always checked with the family before they are finalised and any disagreements in information highlighted.
2. Facts are separated from opinion in the analysis of the situation.
3. Parents and children's views about the risks identified and the
4. proposed plan are recorded in their own words, as well as what they think would help improve the situation.

What we need to do differently:

1. Templates for social work and partner agency reports to conference are redesigned to reflect a restorative approach along with a new conference agenda, child protection plan and conference report.
2. Social workers, partner agencies and child protection chairs consistently write their reports in family-friendly, jargon-free language and in the second person, so the report is written to the family rather than about them.

Recommendations for a restorative approach to child protection conference preparation:

What should be happening already and needs to continue:

1. Reports by social workers and partner agencies must be shared with families 2 working days prior to an initial child protection conference and 5 working days prior to a review conference.
2. Social workers and partner agencies are expected to read all the reports prior to the conference that are circulated at least one day beforehand.
3. The child protection chair meets the family prior to the conference to help prepare them for the meeting and discuss how they will be involved and have their say.

What we need to do differently:

1. In situations where families have not seen the social worker's or partner agency reports prior to a conference the child protection chair will consider with the family and the social care team manager whether the conference should be postponed and what interim safeguarding measures may need to be put in place
2. Families are given the opportunity to provide their own written report to the conference (this may be with the support of the independent advocacy service) on a family report template.

Recommendations for a restorative approach to preparing families for a child protection conference and providing them with information about the meeting:

Currently, families do not receive any information about child protection conferences.

What we need to do differently

We need to design information packs about the child protection conference and what it means to have a child protection plan. These can then be provided to parents and to children prior to an initial child protection conference.

The packs need to include:

1. The purpose of a child protection conference and a child protection plan,
2. The role of the child protection chair and who will be involved in meeting,
3. The role of the social worker and the core group.
4. The categories of risk/harm the plan may be registered under
5. Children's rights and parents' rights and responsibilities,
6. Details about independent advocacy support
7. Information about Family Group Conferences
8. How to make a complaint

Recommendations for a restorative approach to promoting participation

What should be happening already and needs to continue:

1. Families who may struggle to attend due to child-care issues are supported to put in place suitable child-care arrangements.
2. Parents are encouraged to attend the conference in person wherever possible.
3. The chair contacts the family prior to the conference taking place as well as 30 minutes before the meeting starts. The family enter the meeting room before any of the other professionals arrive.
4. Parents who may present a risk at the conference are not excluded but are invited to join the meeting virtually so they can safely participate in the meeting.
5. Parents are provided with an interpreter if English is not their spoken language, or if they are hearing impaired.
6. Children and young people are invited to attend with the support of an advocate to share their wishes and feelings. The CP Chair will agree with the family and social worker beforehand the best way to involve the children.

What we need to do differently:

1. Families have a say in the venue of the child protection conference, and if they would prefer to have this in their children's school or another identified venue if possible.
2. Parents are routinely advised they can bring someone with them to the conference (another family member or friend) for support. Children are spoken to by the social worker prior to the conference so they understand why the meeting is being held.

Recommendations for a more restorative approach to advocacy

What should be happening already and needs to continue:

1. All children over the age of 5 are referred to the independent advocacy service for the opt out service.

What we need to do differently:

1. All social workers understand the importance of preparing families for advocacy; they explain to parents and children the purpose of independent advocacy and that Wiltshire Council provides an opt out service for children and young people to help them express their wishes and feelings to the conference and ensure their voice is heard.
2. The social worker also considers with parents whether adult advocacy is needed if they do not have capacity to engage in the conference because as defined by the Care Act (2014) they experience substantial difficulty in:
 - understanding relevant information

- retaining information
 - using or weighing information
 - communicating their views, wishes and feelings
3. A parent to parent peer advocacy service is developed to support parents who attend child protection conferences.

Recommendations for a more restorative approach to the child protection plan

Currently a detailed child protection plan is made at the initial child protection conference, A more restorative approach is needed to child protection planning so that families are empowered to plan and be at the centre of decision-making about their children and family life.

What we need to do differently:

1. The initial child protection conference creates an outline child protection plan that clearly states the risks that have been identified and the category of risk/harm the plan will be registered under.
2. The outline child protection plan sets out
 - what improvements are needed for the identified risk to reduce and the child/ren to have their needs met,
 - what needs to change and timescales, so that success can be clearly judged
 - the members of the core group
 - frequency of visiting by the lead social worker and partner agencies
 - a contingency plan
3. The child protection plan is created on a screen in the conference so that everyone can engage, and the family leave the meeting with the plan in hand.
4. Families are routinely offered a family group conference at the initial child protection conference and the contract is increased to accommodate this by offering approximately an additional 80 FGC's a year.

Recommendations for a more restorative approach to completing the single assessment and core group meetings

What should be happening already and needs to continue:

1. The core group takes joint responsibility for carrying out the agreed planned tasks, monitoring progress and outcomes and refining the plan as needed (Working Together 2020).

What we need to do differently:

2. The detailed child protection plan is developed at the 1st core group meeting, giving the family the opportunity to reflect on what they would like to see in the plan following the ICPC and the support they need to achieve the required outcomes and change needed.
3. The single assessment is completed with the family and decisions are made at the 1st core group meeting about what steps need to be taken and by whom, working with the family to complete the single assessment to inform decisions about the child's safety and welfare (Working together 2020) and any other specialist assessments that may be needed. Where the core group has not been able to resolve any disagreements these are escalated to the child protection chair to help resolve so everyone is working together cohesively and effectively to achieve positive and timely change



4. Project Team

Quality Outcomes for Children and Families:

- Sara James (Service Manager), Janine Newport (Operational Lead), Andrew Mullens (Admin Manager)

Systems Thinking Team:

- Heather Lovelock (Systems Thinking Lead), Adele Owens and Nikki Ward (Systems Thinking Practitioners)

Youth Consultants:

- Scott Kane, Tia Fear, Achaynnie Blake, Corey Durbridge, Charlotte Thorn, Maddie Adam Gates
- Katrina Watson (Manager)

Families:

- 31 families were consulted with individually by the System's Thinking Team in May 2020
- 11 young people were consulted with individually by youth consultants in June 2020
- 11 families engaged in 2 focus groups in July 2020 and 6 families engaged in focus group in January 2021 to review and agree the recommendations from this review to Wiltshire Council's
- Children's Services and the Safeguarding Vulnerable People's Partnership

People working with Families

- Social workers, managers, child protection chairs across children's services were invited to engage in focus groups held in September
- Workers and managers from partner agencies that work with families and children we also invited to engage in focus groups held in September.



5. Methodology

A project plan (Appendix A) was agreed by Lucy Townsend Director of Children's Services and Martin Davis Director of Families and Children's Services in June 2020

Phase 1 – Consultation with Families

- **Consultation with Parents.**

Wiltshire Council's System's Thinking Team were asked to contact families whose children were subject to child protection plans and consult with them on their experiences of attending child protection conferences and the process leading up to these. The team contacted 80 families and attempted to engage with families from a range of backgrounds and demographics across the county. They spoke with 31 families; this included 15 families with children under 10 and 16 families with children over 10.

- **Consultation with Children and Young People.**

As well as talking to parents we asked Community First's Youth Consultants to speak with children and young people about their experiences of attending child protection conferences. We gained the agreement from the families contacted to speak with 19 young people. At the time the consultation took place, the country had gone into lockdown due to the global pandemic; this impacted on the youth consultant's ability to engage with these young people, however, they were able to speak with 11 young people (see appendix for full report).

Phase 2 – Focus Groups

- **Family Focus Groups (July 2020)**

Following the individual consultations, we invited families to engage in 2 focus groups to discuss the themes highlighted in the individual consultations. The themes from the issues discussed were collated and shared with the social workers, workers from other agencies and managers who were part of the follow up focus groups held to consider what families were telling us.

- **Social Worker's Focus Groups (September 2020)**

2 focus groups were well attended by social workers and managers from across children's services. The themes highlighted in family focus groups were shared and we discussed how social workers work with families who need to have a child protection conference and what good practise looks like.

- **Partner Agencies Focus Groups (September 2020)**

Managers and workers from across the partnership were invited to take part in 2 focus groups set up to consider the feedback from parents. There was good representation from Health, Relate, Splitz, Children's Centres, Advocacy, Turning Point, Adult Services,

Adult Mental Health, Health Watch, Youth Action, Family Group Conference Service, and Motiv8. Police and Education were involved in separate consultations as they were unable to attend the focus groups

Phase 3 - Recommendations

The feedback from all the focus groups was collated into a set of recommendations including:

- Actions needed to strengthen practise
- How to improve our approach child protection conferences in Wiltshire so that families have the support they need to safely care for their children
- The recommendations were shared and endorsed by a family reference group on 12 January.
- The recommendations have been shared at the Children and Families SMT and with Senior Police, Health and Education colleagues.

Phase 4 – Plan of Action.

- Once the recommendations have been agreed by the children’s services Performance and Outcomes Board (POB) and the Safeguarding Vulnerable People’s Partnership (SVPP) a plan of action will be developed and presented to families who have been involved in this review for approval as well as to the POB and SVPP.
- A Family Advisory Board will be created with parents who have lived experience of the child protection system in Wiltshire. This Board will hold the local authority and partners to account for implementing the recommendations from this review and will become a part of the Quality Assurance Framework.

6. What Families had to say.

Following the initial individual conversations with families the Systems Thinking Team were able to collate the following themes (see appendix B for detailed report):

- The importance of the relationship with the SW – trust and honesty and the perception of the support being offered.
- The importance of good communication and clarity both written and verbal – being listened to without blame or stigma – the need to have a voice.
- The issues that arise when multiple agencies are involved with families – duplication and conflicting advice.
- Recognition of the improvements made within the families – also understanding parental issues and the number of issues they can address at any one time.
- The need for clear plans with achievable goals.
- The benefits of an advocate.

These themes were explored in more detail at the Families Focus Groups and the following is what the families said they wanted.

1.	SW's that are accessible, turn up on time, can be trusted to provide support and build a relationship with me and my family so that we can work together. When this works, it changes the whole family's lives in a positive way. Be open-minded, treat me with respect and spend time getting to know me and my children.
2.	Make it simple so that I can understand. Be clear about what I need to do so that I can do it – talk to me – build great 2-way communication. I would like to have a voice and be listened to.

3.	Support me to do the right thing and make this more family focussed. It's not just about the child. Follow up on that support.
4.	Make me feel comfortable so I can talk to you and tell you my story. Don't dismiss my past experiences. (Don't ignore the power of shame – Safeguarding Annie)
5.	Help to remove the stigma. Do your assessments with me not to me, remember I'm the expert about my family. Make sure information recorded is accurate and check this with me.
6.	Involve me, believe me and listen to me. Recognise the achievements that I am making and the strengths of my family.
7.	Make sure that the Social Worker is the right person for me, right person, right place, right time. Give me one Social Worker to see me through the process – I can't build a relationship when they keep changing. If this isn't possible then please ensure that the new SW gets a good handover.
8.	Cultural – understand our community, our customs. Don't put me in a box because of my ethnicity, background or history.
9.	Understand my mental health issues and my children's mental health issues. Structure the process to take this into account.
10.	Get my children the support they need – diagnosis or not.
11.	I wouldn't need an advocate if my relationship with my Social Worker was a positive experience.
12.	If the relationship is good at the start, the entire process is generally good. If the relationship is bad at the start, the entire process is generally bad. Do it with me – don't do it to me.
13.	Ensure I'm fully prepared for the conference and that I understand my rights and that my children will be offered advocacy to be supported to have their say. I might also like to be offered advocacy to help me have my say.
14.	I'm likely to think you're going to remove my child. Choose your language carefully. Please be clear about what you intend to do and explain the process to me (acknowledge the power dynamic). Remember I don't know what comes next.
15.	I need all paperwork (including all the reports professionals submit) earlier so that I have time to understand it and feel able to influence the outcome. Give me the opportunity to submit my own report – having a template for this would help.
16.	Make meetings fit around our lives if possible. Meetings can be intimidating so great communication with our SW and meeting the CP Chair beforehand helps us get through the process.
17.	Tell me if there is any additional help that would suit my needs and my family's needs.
18.	I don't want to be a bad parent, it's just bad things have happened, I'm trying my best, but the threat of losing my children just makes it worse. Don't be judgemental regarding any aspect of the process. An issue may seem trivial to you but may be important to me.

We received the feedback from the youth consultants about what young people had to say after the focus groups had taken place. The detailed report can be found in Appendix A. In summary the 11 young people spoken stated as follows:



- 6 young people felt the relationship they had with social workers was good, e.g. 'The social worker helps me to understand and keep safe', 4 young people suggested it was mixed and 1 young person
- said it wasn't so good. e.g. "She was never on time; she was always at least an hour late and so would never really have any time for a deep conversation. Whenever we would get part way into a deep conversation, it would then be time to go and so it meant we never really fully spoke about things."
- 9 young people felt the social worker explained their role and that their involvement was helpful e.g. "Our social worker explained her role really well to ensure we all understood, she said she would help the family out, also to help us understand what is happening in our family at the moment and that she is there to support us, she did make us understand really well. I think my 10-year-old sister understood too, which is really important."
- The 2 young people who had access to independent advocacy found it very helpful e.g. " She told us we could have someone speak for us, we could tell them and write it down, and anything we say, they will say it for us, to ensure our voices, concerns are heard, I felt really confident that this would happen. I didn't want to attend the meeting, so having someone else to attend for me and speak for me was great."
- 5 young people said they felt listened to by their social worker when discussing the child protection conference.
- 6 young people said they were not made aware of how an advocate works E.g. "Nobody spoke to me before the conference and I was not made aware of my ability to have an advocate".
- Only 3 of young people said they felt prepared to attend
- the Child Protection Conference, with a further 3 who said they did not feel prepared. The remaining 4 did not answer this question, thought likely because they did not attend the conference in person (or were not given the opportunity to attend).
- 4 young people said that they understood the plan that was made at the conference, 2 were unsure, 1 did not understand the plan and the remaining 4 did not give a definitive indication of this



These consultations highlight the importance of social workers' explaining their role to children and young people and taking the time to listen to them to ensure their wishes and feelings are heard. The consultation has confirmed that there is a lack of consistency in social worker's explaining to children and young people how the independent advocacy service can ensure they have their say at the conference. It also highlighted a lack of consistency in children and young people having the plan explained to them in a way they could understand.

7. What social workers and managers in children's social care had to say.

1. Relationships work well when:

1.	Social Workers take a non-judgement approach, whilst being open honest with families about issues of concern. The family's history is given the seriousness it deserves whilst recognising strengths the family can build on Social Workers take a non-judgement approach, whilst being open honest with families about issues of concern. The family's history is given the seriousness it deserves whilst recognising strengths the family can build on to reduce risks identified to the children's safety or wellbeing.
2.	Social Workers show compassion, empathy and acknowledge feelings of shame and guilt that parents may be feeling to help build a relationship based on trust. They need to use collaborative and participatory practice skills and involve families in decision- making.
3.	Social Workers ensure families are well prepared for a CP Conference, so they know exactly what to expect. This includes sharing reports in good time and explaining the purpose of the ICPC, who will be there and possible outcomes. CP Chair's also have a role in preparing families for a conference by pre-meeting them beforehand.
4.	Social Workers acknowledge the power imbalance in their relationship with a family and demonstrate their intention to act as agents of change by working alongside parents to support and empower them to make changes that will impact positively on their children' safety and wellbeing and reduce risk.

2. Challenges social workers face in developing relationships with families involved in the CP system

1.	Social Worker's can find hostile and aggressive behaviour from parents challenging. They should try and agree with parents' expectations for respectful behaviour and be mindful that unacceptable behaviour may be triggered by feelings guilt and shame as well as feelings of anger and frustration. It's important that the risks are not minimised; acknowledging a parent's difficult feelings may help reduce aggressive and hostile behaviour.
2.	Building a trusting relationship with families is a significant challenge for SW's investigating families for suspected child abuse; particularly when they go straight to CP without any intervention under CIN.
3.	Participatory practice can feel an unachievable goal in situations of high risk.
4.	Having the right SW for the right family. It needs to be acknowledged when the relationship isn't working, and when a change of SW may be beneficial.
5.	Being too busy to spend the time needed with a family so they feel properly supported and not just part of tick box exercise.
6.	Ensuring everybody is on board (family and partner agencies) with the plan and working together cohesively to support the family make the necessary changes to reduce risk. Where agencies don't agree on the level of risk or the plan this needs to be resolved by the core group or by escalating to CP Chair if necessary.

7.	Families can find the formal format of the CP conference daunting and the meeting rooms currently used are too large for what is needed.
----	--

3. What helps develop effective relationships?

1.	SW's feeling confident in trauma-informed practice and having training on this.
2.	Having time to spend with families, giving parents time to talk about their history, acknowledge their past and act on what is needed.
3.	Allowing time to debrief with parents after a conference to see how the family is feeling and if they have understood the concerns and what needs to change. Preparing parents for the category of risks the plan could be registered under so this doesn't come as a shock in the conference and parents understand what this means.
4.	Acknowledging when parents are feeling over-whelmed and allowing time for breaks in meetings.
5.	Recognising what may be going well and finding strengths and positive factors that can be built on.

4. How SW's prepare to introduce themselves and their role to parents

1.	It's important not to assume that a family understands the role of a SW and remember that most families will assume you are there to take their children away. Acknowledge the imbalance of power.
2.	Using visual aids to help explain the process and what will happen and explain what the single assessment will need to explore.
3.	Schools may be a less daunting place for meetings/CP conferences to take place as families will be used to having meetings in school.

5. How SW's take account of individual families' circumstances when working with families

1.	Let the family tell their story and don't make assumptions; show you are listening and taking their experiences into account.
2.	Explore where people are from; their cultural background, ethnicity, disability, sexuality etc, and what this means for them as well as what barriers/discrimination they may have faced.
3.	Treat parents as experts in their own family lives.
4.	Families who originate from outside the UK may not understand the role of children's social care.

6. How do SW's give families the opportunities to question information held about them in a non-confrontational way?

1.	Spell and pronounce (and ask if unsure) parents and children's names correctly and ensure DOB's are correctly recorded.
2.	Being transparent and sharing information and talking about things so families are not shocked in a conference. Going through documents with them and giving them chance to ask questions. Seeing something as a document can be more distressing than just hearing it. Going through these reports with them helps them to feel more prepared. Dropping reports through the door the evening before a conference is poor practice.
3.	Check information recorded is correct, making any necessary changes following feedback and ensure parents and children's views are accurately recorded

7. How SW's describe good social work practice

1.	Going above and beyond to help families make progress – e.g. sending books on certain subjects such as Domestic Abuse can be helpful for some families.
2.	Most people with ADHD have a lower level of concentration and it can help to have regular breaks during conferences.
3.	Recognising and explaining that people can get upset is powerful and can be reassuring to families as it is a normal response in a CP conference.
4.	Talking to the family about the possible plan before the conference so the families can participate in the planning and decision-making. It's important for families buy into the plan as this gives it the best opportunity to be successful.

8. What are some of the gaps in services available to help families involved in the child protection system?

1.	Advocacy for parents; some parents need support to express their views so they can be heard without getting distressed or aggressive.
2.	Support for children and young people who have suffered sexual abuse.
3.	Mental health support for parents who don't meet threshold for MH services but struggle to access IAPT.
4.	Mental health and psychological support to children who don't meet CAMHS thresholds.
5.	Support for parents with learning difficulties – having information packs that are accessible.
6.	The persistence of agencies to engage with the families who don't engage first time round. This way, it gives the parent more than one opportunity to engage. Professionals need to be creative in reaching out to families as the many people will not answer the phone if they don't know the number appearing on their phone.

9. How do SW's ensure family's and parents understand the CP process and their rights?

1.	Sharing reports before a conference and giving families the opportunity to provide feedback. Making sure information is accurately recorded and allowing parents and children to have their say and noting their views.
2.	Recognise the anxiety and fears that parents and children may have and that some families may feel unfairly judged if the SW hasn't had time to get to know the family.
3.	Ensure families know what to expect at the conference and if a child protection plan is made. i.e. the aim is for children to be safely looked after in their family, not to remove them. Families need to know that children are only removed where they are in immediate danger of significant harm or where they are seriously harmed or plans to reduce risk of significant harm are unsuccessful, children continue to suffer ongoing harm and/or risk of significant harm remains unacceptably high.
4.	Avoid using jargon as this can be confusing for families. It is important to be extremely clear and specific about risks and what needs to change. For example, rather than saying "there are concerns with the home conditions", explain what the concerns are i.e. give an example, the impact on the child and suggest meaningful action to remedy it.

10. Do you provide information about advocacy and if not, what are the barriers to providing these details?

1.	Social Workers can struggle speaking to children and young people about advocacy and this is an area for development. Information leaflets would be helpful.
2.	Children and Young People may not want independent advocacy support if they feel overwhelmed by speaking to another adult. Parents need to agree to younger children having access to an independent advocate.

11. Key recommendations suggested by SW's to improve Wiltshire's child protection system

1.	Information leaflet/pack or on-line video about the CP Conference and what it means to for children to have a child protection plan. This should include details of parent's rights and responsibilities.
2.	Support for children and young people who have suffered sexual abuse.
3.	Mental health support for parents who don't meet threshold for MH services but struggle to access IAPT.
4.	Mental health and psychological support to children who don't meet CAMHS thresholds
5.	Support for parents with learning difficulties – having information packs that are accessible
6.	Holding conferences in schools or other suitable venues rather than in the council offices.
7.	Training for social workers and CP Chairs to write reports in a family friendly way and to the child/young person concerned rather than about the family in the 3rd person.

8.	Allow parents to take notes in a conference and if they want to make an audio recording make provision for this.
9.	Social Workers would like more training on identity and culture so they can practice in a culturally sensitive way whilst fulfilling their statutory obligations.
10.	Social Workers should have the opportunity to shadow someone to give them the confidence to know how to prepare a family for a CP Conference.
11.	Identifying the key risks on a screen so everyone is clear and can engage.
12.	Parents leave the conference with the plan in hand.
13.	Seeing the parent's views in the minutes is helpful in terms of knowing their thoughts on the process.
14.	Positive outcomes are more likely when parents attend the CP conference and are clear about what they need to do and support available.
15.	Change the way the reports and single assessments are written so they are directed at the child and family rather than about them.
16.	Advocacy for parents and info around this for children so they know exactly what their role is.
17.	Refer to advocacy for the second meeting so the child's voice can be heard.



8. What workers and managers from partner agencies that work with children and families had to say.

1.	Building good relationships with families, being open and honest is important so there are no surprises at conferences. It's important to ensure the families have seen reports and had the opportunity to comment on them before the meeting. Communication and preparation are key before going into a conference.
2.	Parents often ask for a change of Health Visitor when the case enters the CP Process. This can be parent's way of avoiding facing things that have been discussed with them. We tend to deny the requests and encourage families and Health Visitors to work together to sort their issues, otherwise they will keep wanting to change Health Visitor because they don't like hearing the challenges they're facing. It is important the professional stays consistent.
3.	It is important we have time to get to know the families and where required getting to know the wider family as there is often a lot of support available, although some families don't want their wider family involved because of the shame.
4.	Children Centres generally work with families at a universal level and may identify concerns which need higher tier services. The professionals are always open and honest and explain their expectations, policies and processes they must follow. It's important to make sure families understand that it's not shameful so they can gain support. Joint (virtual) visits may be beneficial to see professionals working together with the families.
5.	Families sometimes find it difficult to hear the words from professionals and view them as criticism. It is difficult for the parents to hear the words of the children and to hear the child's own experience, it's not something a child or parent can escape from listening to.
6.	The advocacy service is going to be training the adult advocacy service to advocate for children as well so there will be more advocates available for CP Conferences. Engagement is often improved for parents when they have advocacy because their voice is being heard.
7.	It can be a challenge when professionals reports are not shared with the family prior to the conference. Recently, there are a lot of reports that have not been shared with families because of the difficulties of COVID-19. When parents hear things for the first time it can be damaging, and it is unfair to put a family in this situation during a conference. Parents are more likely to be defensive and minimise the concerns if a professional has not gone through it with them properly before the conference.
8.	Writing the report directly to the family rather than about them may be more effective. Current reports and the style they're written in can be hard for families to understand.
9.	Families are not getting the written document and they are not always shared with the family on time by the agency. Training on how to write the reports directed to the family may also be useful.
10.	There are sensitivities about what can and cannot be shared with certain family members, so training around this may be useful.

11.	Holding a Family Group Conference straight after a CP conference may be useful to see what input other family members can have and would help to work with the family to find their own solutions.
12.	Information sharing is good and consistent, but professionals should not rely on the Conference and Reviewing Service to share their reports with other professionals and family members as a data breach is more likely to happen.
13.	Location is considered when preparing for a Family Group Conference, such as if the family are hard of hearing or use a wheelchair, they make sure the venue is suitable for them.
13.	Preparation is key in allowing the family the time to take on board all the information and concerns being raised.
14.	Professionals can struggle with the short timescales to write a CPC report and share this with a family prior to a conference (This is more of an issue with ICPC's).
15.	Consensus amongst professionals that it wasn't fair on a family to proceed with a CPC if the family had not had sight of the SW or other professional reports prepared for this meeting. However, postponing a conference could lead to delay in risk being addressed. Could CP Chairs take more responsibility for checking with the family what reports they have seen or if they need translating?
16	If an interpreter is needed, they are booked 30 minutes before hand to discuss the reports. This is not ideal, as the family needs more time to process what the reports mean.
17.	Some families would benefit from independent advocacy. AWS can provide this in some cases for army families and where there isn't a conflict of interests
18.	Family feedback is done 1-2 times a year, however a suggestion was raised to do this for every conference, as it will help to pick up themes and trends from conferences?
19.	Families are often positive about the actual conference; however, it is the preparation which needs to be improved.
20.	Most families have responded more positively to the virtual conferences, as they are in their own environment. Having both families and professionals on camera can help with engagement as well. Technology is however a concern; how do we ensure families have the tools to take part?

9. Conclusion

There will always be way in which we can do things better and the recommendation of setting up of a Family Advisory Board has already been agreed as an action we can take forward to support the continuous improvement of children's services by involving families in collaborative reviews of practice and holding us to account if we fail to meet the high standards of practice we set for ourselves.

As this report shows, we have put those with lived experience of child protection at the heart of this review of child protection conferences. We have incorporated the voices of the families we listened to, as well as the views of social workers and other professionals into the recommendations in this report, which we believe will support a restorative practice approach and meaningful relationship-based practice by everyone working with children and families, to help them achieve the best possible outcomes.

Family-Led Review of Child Protection Conferences in Wiltshire