



Multi-Agency Guidance to Escalation and Professional Challenge

Safeguarding is Everyone's Business: Proportionate approaches to safeguarding children, young people and adults in Waltham Forest

Version Number	Purpose	Author	Implementation date	Approved by	Last Review Date	Next Review Date
1	Multi-agency escalation protocol	Strategic Adult Safeguarding Lead on behalf of the Safeguarding Partnership	2 February 2026	Waltham Forest Safeguarding Partnership via One Panel	N/A	August 2026

Introduction to multi-agency escalation and professional challenge guidance

This guidance has been developed to help professionals understand and apply our approach to working with children, young people and adults in Waltham Forest, underpinned by [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) and the [Care Act 2014](#). Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults with care and support needs is a responsibility shared by all agencies.

Professional disagreements will sometimes arise over another practitioner's decisions, actions or lack of actions in relation to a referral, an assessment or an enquiry, which may impact on a person's welfare. **Disagreements can be healthy and foster creative ways of working with children, adults with care and support needs and families. However, disagreements always require resolution.**

The process of resolution, where difficulties or disagreements arise between agencies, should be kept as simple as possible. The aim, where possible, is to resolve difficulties quickly and without delay at a peer-to-peer level, with details outlined within this guidance.

Civility, respect and kindness save lives

It is always important to demonstrate kindness and respect to others in all the work that we carry out, including areas of disagreement and escalation. Demonstrating professional disrespect, conflict and incivility to those we work alongside has widespread negative impacts, leading to unsafe cultures and ultimately takes our focus away from the service user. Being kind and civil to each other always ensures the best and safest care for those receiving our care.

The value of picking up the phone

Phone calls allow for quick, real-time communication, which is crucial for urgent or complex issues that need immediate attention. This immediacy can lead to faster problem-solving compared to written methods.

Escalation should ideally take place face to face or via telephone as opposed to e-mails, which are not viewed as effective or appropriate to resolve disputes. A phone call in the first instance allows for quicker, real-time discussion, and is crucial for urgent or complex issues that need immediate attention.

Discussing in real time not only helps to resolve problems faster and reduce misunderstandings, but the human element can help to build trust and increase rapport.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance applies to all practitioners and managers working with children, young people and adults with care and support needs in Waltham Forest. It sets out clear expectations for professional challenge, escalation and resolution across all partner agencies.

Where processes differ between children's and adults' safeguarding, this is explicitly stated.

Key principles for multi-agency information sharing, escalation and resolution

Practitioners should:

- Share key information appropriately and often
- Aim to resolve a professional dispute at the earliest stage and as swiftly as possible. A timeframe is detailed further in this guidance
- Ensure that telephone contacts are shared - go back to basics and attempt a telephone conversation in the first instance to discuss concerns
- Recognise that professional challenge can be facilitated through consistent communication and information sharing between agencies, and through clear plans for children, adults with care and support needs and families
- Always strive to know which other agencies / individual staff members are involved with the child or adult with care and support needs, and their family
- Avoid disputes which delay decision making which may place children or adults with care and support needs at further risk
- Liaise with each organisation's safeguarding lead at the earliest opportunity. Clarity is expected from all agencies in respect of designated roles and responsibilities
- Consider how to manage expectation. Sometimes resources are too limited to meet all expectations – this unmet need needs to be acknowledged
- Always keep the focus on the safety and welfare of the child or adult with care and support needs
- Familiarise themselves with the routes within their own agency for escalation and resolution
- Ensure that at all stages of the process, accurate actions and decisions are recorded on residents' file and shared with relevant personnel including the practitioner who raised the initial concern. This must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued
- Include their direct contact details and an alternative contact, such as their manager's name and telephone number, in their email signature to support stronger and timely communication, particularly during disagreement / escalation
- **Stay proactively involved; safeguarding is everyone's responsibility**

Protocol for escalation of concern and resolution: Each stage should be completed as quickly as possible and no later than 5 working days. Where there is immediate or escalating risk, escalation must occur without delay and outside of these timescales.

Timescales must never delay action needed to safeguard a child or adult.

What to do when a disagreement arises with another agency and you are unable to find a mutually agreeable way to resolve the issue:						
	Action	Who (from the escalating agency)	Who (from the receiving agency or partnership)	Resolution timescale	Instruction for communicating / escalating concerns	Next Step if unresolved
Step one	Initial concern	Professional	Appropriate line manager	Each stage should be completed as quickly as possible and no later than 5 working days.	Follow up telephone / face to face conversations with email correspondence clearly stating that this is step one of the Safeguarding Partnership’s Escalation Process	Move to step two
Step two	Concern follow-up	Professional	Next appropriate senior manager(s)		Follow up telephone / face to face conversations with email correspondence clearly stating that this is step two of the Safeguarding Partnership’s Escalation Process	Progress to step three
Step three	Escalate concern	Senior manager	Next appropriate senior manager(s)		Follow up telephone / face to face conversations with email correspondence clearly stating that this is step three of the Safeguarding Partnership’s Escalation Process	Take escalation to final step
Final Step	Review	Senior manager	Independent Scrutineer		Follow up telephone / face to face conversations with email correspondence stating clearly this is the final step of escalation as mutual agreement has not been found and support is required to reach appropriate resolution	N/A

The Safeguarding Partnership’s Independent Scrutineer provides independent oversight to support resolution when all other escalation routes have been exhausted. This role does not replace organisational accountability, complaints processes or statutory decision-making.

Safeguarding leads for children and young people across Waltham Forest

If you feel your concerns have not been acted on appropriately then please escalate your concerns to the relevant head of service:

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (Children's MASH)	0208 496 2310
Early Help	0208 496 3000
Corporate Parenting	07715 536869
Youth Justice	07776 660067
Housing	020 8496 5509

If you remain concerned following discussion with Head of Service, a senior member of staff in your service should speak to the relevant Corporate Director:

Children's Social Care	0208 496 3000
Education	0208 496 3646

If you remain concerned following the discussion with a Corporate Director, a senior member of staff in your organisation should then speak to:

Strategic Director Children's Social Care	07909 899199
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Details for other agencies:

Schools (LBWF)	0208 496 3646
Whipps Cross Hospital	07572 160538
Barts Health	07917 266621
Police	07772 521072
NELFT: Community Health Services	0208 430 7887
NELFT: Mental Health Services	07983 543206
North East London Integrated Care Board (NEL ICB)	07503 424 936
Tower Hamlets GP Care Group	0204 582 8004

If you have any general enquiries, please contact the Strategic Partnerships Unit, on 07968 693 191 or alternatively, you can email strategicpartnerships@walthamforest.gov.uk

Safeguarding leads for adults with care and support needs across Waltham Forest

If you feel your concerns have not been acted on appropriately then please escalate your concerns to the relevant head of service:

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (Adults MASH)	0208 496 2310
Early Help	0208 496 3000
Adult Safeguarding	07741 843474
Housing	020 8496 5509

If you remain concerned following discussion with Head of Service, a senior member of staff in your service should speak to the Corporate Director:

Adult Social Care	07345 767510
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If you remain concerned following the discussion with a Corporate Director, a senior member of staff in your organisation should then speak to:

Corporate Director Adult Care & Quality Standards	07386 958 098
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Details for other agencies:

Whipps Cross Hospital	07572 160538
Barts Health	07917 266621
Police – Detective Chief Inspector, North East Command	07772 521072
NELFT: Community Health Services	0300 555 1201
NELFT: Mental Health Services	07715 233550
North East London Integrated Care Board (NEL ICB)	07741 509426
Tower Hamlets GP Care Group	0204 582 8004

If you have any general enquiries, please contact Head of Strategic Partnerships Unit, on 07968 693 191 or alternatively, you can email strategicpartnerships@walthamforest.gov.uk.

A guide to thresholds and practice

The [London Threshold Document: Continuum of Help and Support](#) provides a framework for professionals who are working with children, young people and families.

Our Guide to [Thresholds and practice for working with children and families in Waltham Forest](#) (PDF) aims to help practitioners understand and apply our approach to working with children, families and communities locally.

It sets out our vision and values, and the role and responsibilities of all agencies to work together so that every child in the borough has the best possible outcomes. You can watch this video about the threshold guide using this link: [Bitesize video - Thresholds and practice for working with children and families in Waltham Forest](#)

[Adults' Threshold Guidance](#) (PDF) and [Threshold guidance adults](#) bitesize video set out the role and responsibilities of all agencies working together to ensure vulnerable adults are safeguarded in Waltham Forest.

Support for carers: When making decisions about someone's care, it's important to properly understand their family situation and support network. Simply having relatives nearby doesn't guarantee they can provide care. Some family or friends may be acting as carers without realising it and may not be getting the support they need. Any assessment should consider the wellbeing of both the carer and the person they care for.

Carers First is a service delivering Wellbeing and Independence Services for carers across Waltham Forest. Self-referral or professional referral for this service is possible via email. Please email referral@carersfirst.org.uk for more information.

Short definitions:

- **Professional challenge:** Constructive questioning of decisions or actions to improve outcomes
- **Professional disagreement:** A difference of professional opinion that requires resolution
- **Escalation:** A formal process used when professional disagreement cannot be resolved at the appropriate level