TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be **young**

Multi-Agency Child Protection Team: Strategy Discussions, Section 47 Enquiry Planning and Multi-Agency Review



Cheshire East Council

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This guidance describes what good safeguarding practice looks like from Strategy Discussion through Section 47 enquiry, review and statutory outcome.

1.2 It supplements:

- MACPT Operational Procedures.
- MACPT Practice Standards.
- MACPT Multi-Agency Huddle Practice Guidance.
- MACPT Roles, Responsibilities and Decision-Making Matrix.

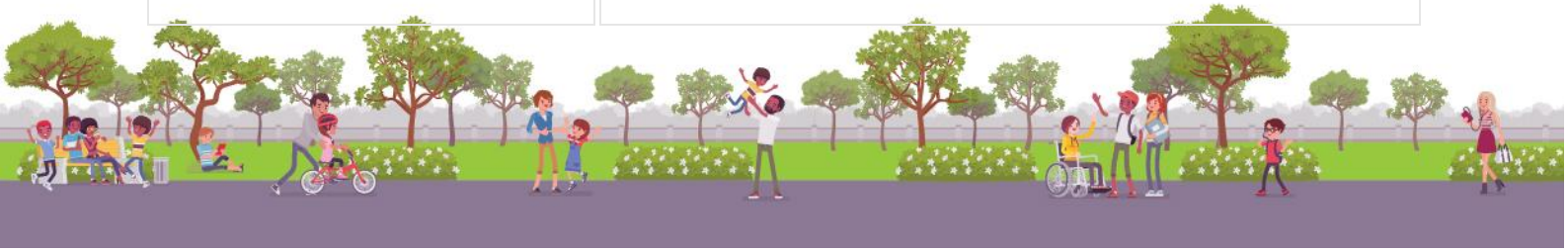
1.3 This guidance does not introduce additional forms, assessments, recording templates or statutory requirements.

1.4 Its purpose is to support:

- High-quality safeguarding analysis.
- Effective multi-agency working.
- Relational practice with children and families.
- Effective and defensible statutory decision-making.

2. DECISION-MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY SUMMARY

Function	Primary Accountability
Strategy Discussion Chairing	LCPP
Child Protection Threshold Decisions	LCPP under agreed delegated arrangements
Section 47 Enquiry Activity	FHLP / Social Worker
Direct Work with Child and Family	FHLP / Social Worker
Day-Five Initial Review	LCPP and FHLP
Structured Multi-Agency Review	FHLP presents findings; partners contribute analysis; LCPP provides scrutiny and challenge
Day-Ten Reassessment	LCPP
Progression to ICPC	LCPP under agreed delegated arrangements
Child Protection Conference Decision-Making	Multi-agency conference facilitated by the LCPP Chair
Legal Planning Decisions	Operational Head of Service under agreed arrangements



Function	Primary Accountability
Child Protection Plan Delivery	FHLP and partner agencies

2.1 Key Principle

2.1.1 MACPT provides safeguarding leadership, independent scrutiny and professional challenge.

2.1.2 The FHLP or allocated Social Worker retains responsibility for:

- Undertaking the enquiry.
- Direct work with the child and family.
- Assessment activity.
- Analysis and recommendations.
- Implementation of agreed actions.

2.1.3 The LCPP provides scrutiny, challenge and exercises the delegated child protection decision-making responsibilities defined within the approved MACPT Operational Procedures.

3. FIVE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SECTION 47 PRACTICE

1. Start with the Child's Lived Experience

Always ask:

- What is life like for this child today?
- What are they experiencing?
- What has changed?
- How do we know?

The enquiry should focus on the child's actual experience rather than adult compliance or professional activity.

2. Test Evidence, Not Assumptions

Good safeguarding practice distinguishes between:

- Facts.
- Professional analysis.
- Family accounts.
- Assumptions.
- Uncertainty.
- Alternative explanations.

The purpose of a Section 47 enquiry is to understand harm, impact, risk and protection, not simply investigate an incident.



3. Work Relationally

Children and families should understand:

- What professionals are worried about.
- Why enquiries are taking place.
- What support is available.
- What may happen next.
- How their views will be considered.

Practitioners should communicate clearly, respectfully and honestly whilst maintaining a focus on safety.

4. Think Family and Network

Consider:

- Family strengths.
- Protective adults.
- Trusted relationships.
- Wider family members.
- Community support.
- Existing sources of protection.

Where appropriate, consider whether family-network involvement could strengthen safety, support or sustainable change.

This may include a Family Network Meeting, but such meetings are not required in every Section 47 enquiry.

5. Use Professional Challenge

Ask:

- What are we missing?
- What evidence supports our view?
- What evidence challenges our view?
- What would change our analysis?
- Is the current response sufficient?

Professional challenge is a protective factor.

4. SAFEGUARDING PATHWAY OVERVIEW

Stage	Purpose
Strategy Discussion	Threshold consideration, safeguarding response and enquiry planning



Stage	Purpose
Section 47 Enquiry	Evidence gathering and analysis
Day-Five Initial Review	Progress review and enquiry direction
Structured Multi-Agency Review	Collective scrutiny and challenge where required
Day-Ten Reassessment	Review of continuing enquiries, risk, evidence and outstanding statutory decisions
Initial Child Protection Conference (where required)	Child protection decision-making and planning

4.1 Important Principle

4.1.1 The review points described within this guidance are local MACPT scrutiny arrangements designed to strengthen safeguarding analysis and prevent drift.

4.1.2 They do not constitute statutory timescales.

4.1.3 Statutory decisions and protective actions should be taken whenever the evidence requires them and must not be delayed pending a scheduled review.

4.1.4 Enquiries may conclude earlier than any planned review point where sufficient evidence is available to support a defensible safeguarding decision.

5. WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE: STRATEGY DISCUSSION

5.1 Purpose

5.1.1 To consider whether there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, determine whether Section 47 enquiries are required, and agree the necessary safeguarding response, enquiry activity and immediate protective arrangements.

5.2 Preparation

5.2.1 Before the discussion:

- The basis for reasonable cause to suspect significant harm is clear.
- Relevant chronology has been considered.
- Immediate safeguarding arrangements are understood.
- Information gaps are identified.
- Relevant agency checks have been completed where possible.
- Medical, forensic and evidential opportunities are not delayed.
- The child's lived experience is considered.

5.3 Key Practice Questions



- What are we worried about?
- What do we know?
- What do we not know?
- What are the competing explanations?
- What is the child experiencing?
- Who is protecting the child today?
- What information could change our view?

5.4 Good Strategy Discussions

5.4.1 Good strategy discussions:

- Involve relevant agencies.
- Distinguish fact from interpretation.
- Explore uncertainty.
- Test competing hypotheses.
- Consider cumulative harm.
- Consider contextual and extra-familial harm.
- Involve constructive professional challenge.
- Result in clear actions, owners and timescales.

5.5 Family and Network Considerations

5.5.1 The discussion should consider:

- Family strengths.
- Existing protective relationships.
- Trusted adults.
- Wider support networks.
- Whether family-network involvement could strengthen protection and support.

5.5.2 Immediate safeguarding action must never be delayed whilst network arrangements are explored.

5.6 Decision Points

- Is Section 47 enquiry required?
- Are safeguarding arrangements sufficient?
- Is immediate protection required?
- What evidence must be gathered?
- What multi-agency activity is required?
- What review arrangements are needed?

6. WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE: SECTION 47 ENQUIRY PLANNING

6.1 Core Planning Questions



Planning Question	Good Practice Expectation
What must be established?	Clear hypotheses and alternative explanations
How will we hear the child?	Meaningful direct work and observation
What evidence is required?	Multi-agency information, observation and analysis
Who will do what?	Clear actions, responsibilities and timescales
How is the child safe now?	Observable and tested safeguarding arrangements
How will improvement be recognised?	Changes in the child's lived experience
When will progress be reviewed?	Risk-led review points

6.2 Practice Prompt

Ask:

- What does safe look like?
- What does unsafe look like?
- What evidence do we still need?
- What are we expecting to change?
- How will we know?

6.3 What Good Looks Like: Enquiry Delivery

Good Section 47 enquiries involve:

- Direct work with the child.
- Consideration of siblings.
- Ongoing information gathering.
- Testing of safety arrangements.
- Professional curiosity.
- Multi-agency analysis.
- Escalation of emerging concerns.

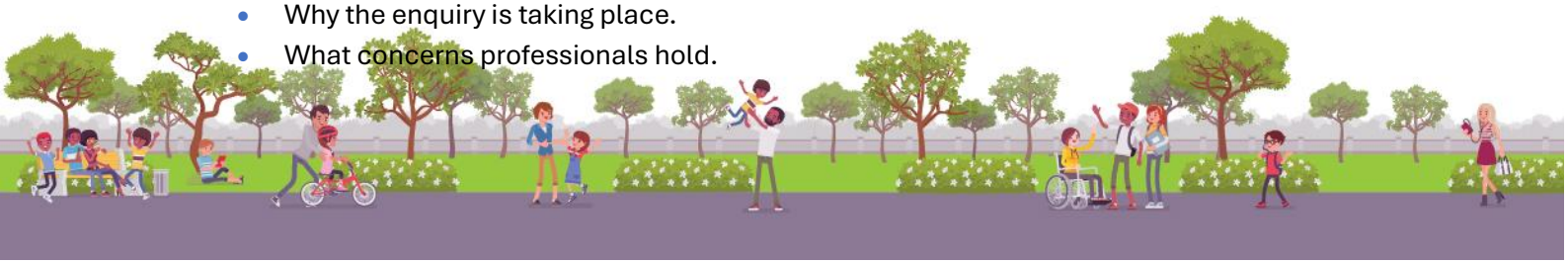
6.3.1 The enquiry should not become:

- A single visit.
- A collection of updates.
- An exercise in information gathering without analysis.

6.4 Relational Practice During the Enquiry

6.4.1 Children and families should receive clear information about:

- Why the enquiry is taking place.
- What concerns professionals hold.



- What happens next.
- What support is available.
- How their views will be considered.

6.4.2 Strengths should be recognised without minimising risk or harm.

7. SECTION 47 REVIEW ARRANGEMENTS

7.1 Important Principle

7.1.1 Day-Five Reviews, Structured Multi-Agency Reviews and Day-Ten Reassessment points provide opportunities for scrutiny and analysis.

7.1.2 They must not delay:

- Protective action.
- Statutory decision-making.
- Progression to ICPC where indicated.
- Conclusion of the enquiry where sufficient evidence is available.

7.2 Local Review Arrangements

7.2.1 The Day-Five and Day-Ten review points are locally agreed MACPT practice arrangements designed to strengthen safeguarding oversight and prevent drift.

7.2.2 They do not represent statutory timescales for Section 47 enquiries.

7.2.3 Review and decision-making must remain responsive to:

- The child's circumstances.
- The level of risk.
- The evidence available.

7.2.4 Enquiries may be concluded earlier, and urgent decisions must be taken whenever required.

7.5 Accountability During Review Activity

7.5.1 The FHLP remains responsible for:

- Progressing the enquiry.
- Gathering evidence.
- Analysing information.
- Presenting findings and recommendations.

7.5.2 The LCPP:

- Provides independent scrutiny.
- Tests the sufficiency of the enquiry.
- Tests safeguarding analysis.
- Exercises delegated child protection decision-making responsibilities in accordance with approved MACPT Operational Procedures.



7.6 Any disagreement regarding findings or proposed outcomes should be recorded and escalated through agreed professional challenge and escalation arrangements where necessary.

7.7 Day-Five Initial Review

Purpose

Review:

- Enquiry progress.
- Immediate safety.
- Evidence gaps.
- Direction of travel.

Participants

- LCPP.
- FHLP / Social Worker.

Decision Point

Is the enquiry progressing as expected?

7.8 Structured Multi-Agency Review

Purpose

To provide collective scrutiny of:

- Findings.
- Analysis.
- Safety arrangements.
- Recommendations.

Where professional challenge, complexity or uncertainty requires multi-agency review.

Convening a Review

A Structured Multi-Agency Review may be requested by:

- The FHLP.
- The LCPP.
- A relevant partner agency.

The LCPP determines whether a review is required, identifies appropriate participants and ensures that it is convened through existing MACPT arrangements.

Reviews should be proportionate to safeguarding concerns and must not delay:

- Urgent protective action.
- Statutory decision-making.
- Progression to ICPC where indicated.
- Conclusion of an enquiry where sufficient evidence exists.



Participants

Only relevant professionals should attend.

The original Strategy Discussion attendance list does not automatically apply.

Key Questions

- What is the child experiencing now?
- What evidence supports the concerns?
- What evidence challenges the concerns?
- What are we missing?
- What protective relationships exist?
- What is being recommended?

Possible Outcomes

- Evidence sufficient for a statutory outcome.
- Further enquiries required.
- Strengthened safeguarding measures required.
- Escalation required.
- Professional disagreement identified and recorded.

7.9 Day-Ten Reassessment

Purpose

Where the enquiry remains active, undertake a full reassessment of:

- Risk.
- Harm.
- Evidence.
- Child impact.
- Protection.
- Statutory outcome.

Decision Point

Does available evidence support:

- Closure of the enquiry?
- Progression to ICPC?
- Alternative safeguarding intervention?
- Further enquiry activity?

8. WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE: OUTCOME AND NEXT PATHWAY

8.1 Good decisions are based upon:

- Evidence.
- Analysis.



- Child impact.
- Safety.
- Sustainability.

8.2 Statutory Outcome and Rationale

8.2.1 At the conclusion of a Section 47 enquiry, the recorded outcome should clearly establish:

- Whether concerns regarding significant harm are substantiated and the evidence supporting that conclusion.
- The nature, severity and impact of harm or risk of harm.
- The child's lived experience and views, including any limitations in obtaining these.
- The analysis of protective factors, family strengths and remaining vulnerabilities.
- Whether an Initial Child Protection Conference is required.
- Any continuing safeguarding intervention, support or protective arrangements.
- The rationale for the decision, including relevant professional disagreement.
- Who is responsible for communicating the outcome and implementing next steps.

8.2.2 This should inform existing recording arrangements rather than create additional forms or templates.

8.3 Step-Down Decisions

8.3.1 Step-down should be based on evidence of improvement in the child's lived experience, not simply:

- Service engagement.
- Attendance at meetings.
- Reduced professional involvement.
- Absence of recent incidents.

8.4 Relational Outcome Test

8.4.1 Before concluding the enquiry ask:

- Does the child understand what is happening?
- Does the family understand concerns and next steps?
- Have their views informed planning?
- Have protective relationships been explored?
- Has family-network involvement been considered where appropriate?
- Is there evidence of sustainable safety?

9. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

9.1 The child's views, experiences and lived reality should inform decision-making throughout the enquiry process.

9.2 The LCPP may seek direct engagement with a child or family where this would:

- Strengthen understanding of the child's lived experience.



- Support independent scrutiny.
- Clarify safeguarding concerns.
- Inform conference or review activity.
- Strengthen safeguarding analysis.

9.3 Such engagement should complement rather than duplicate the direct work undertaken by the allocated practitioner.

10. RECORDING

10.1 Use existing:

- Strategy Discussion records.
- Single Assessment.
- Outcome of Enquiry records.
- Statutory decision records.

10.2 Do not create parallel recording systems.

Record:

- Analysis.
- Decisions.
- Rationale.
- Professional disagreement.
- Actions.
- Owners.
- Timescales.

What Good Looks Like Summary

A Good Strategy Discussion

- Identifies risk clearly.
- Distinguishes fact from analysis.
- Results in clear actions.
- Identifies immediate protection.
- Creates a purposeful enquiry plan.

A Good Section 47 Enquiry

- Hears the child's voice.
- Tests competing hypotheses.
- Uses multi-agency evidence.
- Explores family and network strengths.
- Results in defensible safeguarding decisions.

A Good Review



- Strengthens analysis.
- Challenges assumptions.
- Tests evidence.
- Clarifies next steps.
- Improves safeguarding outcomes.

Final Practice Questions

At every stage practitioners should be able to answer:

- What are we worried about?
- What is working well?
- What is life like for this child?
- What evidence supports our analysis?
- What remains uncertain?
- Who is helping to keep the child safe?
- What needs to change?
- What happens next?

If these questions cannot be answered confidently, further analysis, enquiry, scrutiny or safeguarding action is likely to be required.

Final Principle

The purpose of Strategy Discussions, Section 47 enquiries and review activity is to develop the clearest possible understanding of a child's lived experience, the nature and impact of harm, and the effectiveness of protection, so that timely, evidence-informed and defensible safeguarding decisions can be made.

