


Family's Views of Derbyshire Child Protection Conferences


Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Board agencies are committed to maintaining and continually improving services. Consulting with those who use the services is one important element of this process.


Parents, carers and young people who attended Child Protection Conferences during 2006 and early 2007 were asked for their views about these processes. The information they gave us will be used to inform Derbyshire Social Services' and other agencies' staff and managers about the good and not so good aspects of attending a Child Protection Conference.


123 parents, carers, young people or their representatives completed questionnaires between July 2006 and May 2007. A total of 852 Child Protection Conferences took place during this period. Therefore, these findings should be read with the low return rate in mind.

 The majority of people who responded felt the conferences were arranged at suitable times and places.


 Most people, almost **82%**, felt properly prepared for the conference. This represents a **4% decrease** compared to last year's survey.

 Almost **64%** of respondents stated that it was easy or very easy for them to take part in the conference. This represents an **11% decrease** compared to last year's survey.

 **78%** of people thought their views and wishes were listened to. This represents an **8% decrease** compared to last year's survey.

 Nineteen people, **15%** of the total number of participants, said that they had special needs or a disability. Of these, **35%** stated that they had been asked about any special arrangements they would need in order to participate fully in the conference and that these had been provided. Although this shows a **9% improvement** on last year's survey, pre-assessment of individuals' disabilities and needs for interpreters requires further attention.

 Most people received help from the social worker and / or chairperson to understand the purpose of the meeting.

 Suggestions for improvements included: seeing reports in plenty of time before the conference; ensuring reports are 100% accurate; consultation to ensure time, date and venue for conference are suitable; and to know who was going to be attending the conference in advance.

BACKGROUND

Between July 2006 and May 2007 there were **852** Child Protection Conferences in Derbyshire. At the end of each conference, parents, carers and young people who attended the conferences were each given a short questionnaire to complete and return.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

In total, **123** people completed and returned the questionnaires, representing a **14.5%** response rate. These comprised:

Respondents	No
Parents	94
Carers	11
Young Person	8
Other supporter	5
Not stated	5

From those that responded, **45%** attended initial case conferences and **55%** attended review conferences.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Overall, the feedback about the Child Protection Conferences was very positive and some helpful suggestions were made by participants.

Pre-conference arrangements

By far the majority of participants felt that the conferences were held at a suitable time and place. **91%** thought the place was satisfactory and **84%** thought the time was satisfactory.

Those who were unhappy with the time of their conference generally stated the reason as inconvenient for picking children up from school or that they had to have time off work.

“The meeting was held at a suitable place and time, however, the social worker was very late with no consideration for the fact that we have 4 young children and we had to extend the childcare arrangements at short notice due to his lateness”

Nineteen people, **15%** of the total number of participants, said that they had special needs or a disability. Of these, **35%** stated that they had been asked about any special arrangements they would need in order to participate fully in the conference and that these had been provided.

“I did not state that I needed information on green paper”

The remaining **65%** said that they had not been asked about any special arrangements they needed.

With reference to arranging appropriate childcare for the time of the conference, of the total participants, **4.5%** (5) were asked and help was provided, **1.5%** (2) were asked but no help was provided and **35%** (39) stated that were not asked.

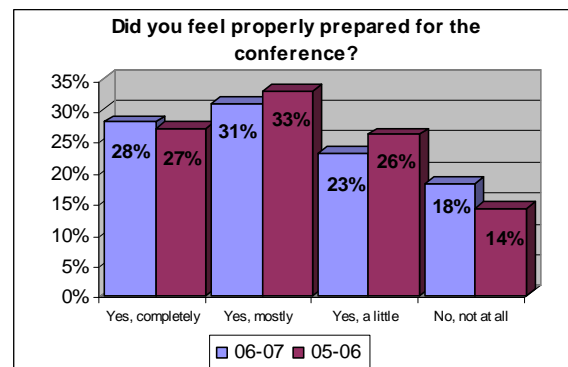
The remaining **59%** of participants did not need any help in arranging childcare.

Preparation for the conference

The following table shows how participants had been informed about the conference.

Method	No
During a visit	65
By letter	30
By phone	20
Other	24
More than one method	14

Despite there being leaflets available, many respondents said that they were unsure what the conference was about and what it was for and almost half (**48%**) of respondents stated that they were not given a leaflet explaining the process prior to the conference.



“Everything was prepared. I had read all the reports beforehand and felt very comfortable in entering the meeting”

Of the **18%** who did not feel prepared for the conference, suggestions were made about how they might have been helped. These included:

- 1. Having more information or time with the social worker before the conference so he/she can explain what would happen, 43%** (48% in 05/06)

“I was never originally informed by our social worker about the arrangements for a case conference or indeed the reason for convening it”

“I was given no information about the conference. It would have been good to have been spoken to about it beforehand.”

- 2. The opportunity to read the reports in advance of the conference, 31%** (32% in 05/06)

Many respondents stated that reports were given to them only half an hour before the conference or in some cases only ten minutes before.

“I didn't receive the reports from the social worker and the school on the date that I should have. They gave me reports just before the conference i.e. 10 mins before.”

“To read through reports beforehand not in front of the agencies involved, so I would have been able to make notes about items I disagreed with”

3. To be provided with a list of other people who would be attending the conference and their roles and responsibilities, 14%

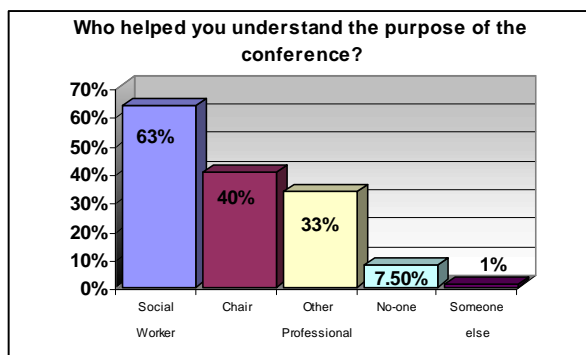
“Being informed beforehand who would be attending and what their role / input would be”

4. Ensuring all information contained in the reports is accurate, 12%

“We saw the report just before the 2nd case conference, however, the changes to the report that we had asked the social worker for, were not changed”

Understanding the purpose of the conference

Young people, parents and carers were asked who, if anyone, had helped them to understand the purpose of the conference.



“The social worker did explain things to me but I felt more relaxed after the chair had explained in more detail”

Most people received help from the social worker and / or the chairperson. Some people were helped by the social worker, chair person and another professional / someone else, while 10 people (6 parents, 2 carers and 1 young person) reported that they were not helped by anyone.

Contributing to the conference

Most participants, 64%, thought it was easy or very easy to take part at the conference, representing an 11% decrease compared to last year. However, 43 people reported it was difficult or very difficult to take part.

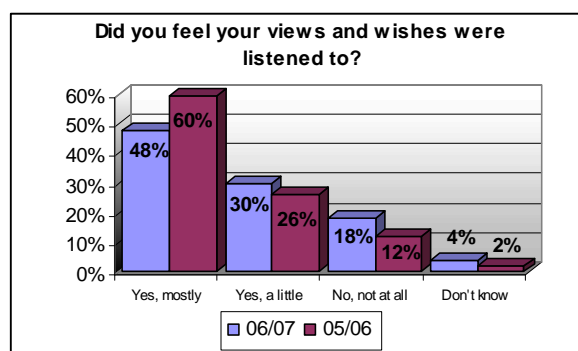
Of those who found it difficult or very difficult to take part, 29% (13) stated they had special needs or a disability of which 20% (9) had not been asked about any special arrangements they required and 2% (1) stated that English was not their first language and they had not been asked if they required an interpreter.

Respondents	Total No	No who found it difficult to take part
Parents	101	27
Carers	12	7
Young Person	8	4
Other supporter	5	3
Not stated	5	2

Additionally, 38% of those finding it difficult to take part did not feel at all prepared for the conference and 44% had brought someone with them to support them.

From the total of all participants in the survey, 47% of those who responded knew they could bring someone to the conference to help support them. 55 people (47%) brought someone to support them, 39 people knew they could but did not need to bring anyone, whilst 23 people (almost 20%) said they were not told they could have a supporter to help speak for them.

The majority, 78%, of participants thought their views and wishes were listened to during the conference whereas 4% (5 people) did not know.



“My partner and I were a little worried that if we were to dispute minor inaccuracies in reports it may be deemed as obstructive or avoiding the issue, this was not the case and the chair person allayed our worries and listened well”

“I feel that no matter what was said the decision was already made”

Parents, carers and young people were asked how they felt they had been treated during the conference. The results were very encouraging:



“I feel the meeting went very well, very professional, very well organised, people listening to one another and the outcome was right. Well done.”

“A horrible situation to be in but made to feel as comfortable as possible”

Some participants (17) felt they had been treated 'not very well' during the conference.

"I was not listened to; my own views were not taken into consideration at all. I was kept waiting for nearly quarter of an hour because the social worker turned up late for which there was no apology."

Additional comments

Participants were invited to make comments or suggest any improvements. Thirty two people took the opportunity to respond with comments that broadly fell into the following themes:

Reports to be made available in plenty of time so can prepare response and challenge/change inaccuracies	12
Better trained / more helpful social worker	7
All professionals to ensure their reports are accurate	6
Listen to and respect parents views	6
More opportunity for parents/carer's to respond to inaccuracies in reports during the conference	5
Consult with parents as to suitable time, date and venue for conference	5
To have same chair / team for each conference to ensure continuity and familiarity with the case	3
To be fully informed of everyone who will be attending and what their role is	3
Opportunity to speak when something comes to mind (otherwise forget) or under AOB	2
Opportunity to discuss who should / should not attend	2
To be informed of how long meeting is expected to last so can ensure appropriate childcare/arrange time off work	1
To be fully informed of issues arising / no surprises	1
More timely minutes	1
Make sure everyone arrives on time	1
Opportunity to leave the room when it might become upsetting to remain	1
Chairperson to put people at ease beforehand and explain the process fully	1
Provide reports in correct order to everyone on arrival so time is not wasted trying to find the right papers	1

RESPONSE TO YOUR VIEWS

Last year participants told us they wanted us to improve the experience of young people and families attending conferences by providing refreshments at all venues and by inviting parents and carers into the conference room both to meet the Chair and to read through reports prior to any professionals entering the conference room. It is now our policy to do this and we are now doing it except in a few places where the layout of the building makes it impossible.

It is also now a requirement of the new safeguarding procedures that, as participants ask, all agencies provide all reports to families and young people at least two days prior to the conference and that all agencies share with the Chair before the conference, any concern about the participation of parents, carers and young people.

OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS

These findings will be used to strengthen current good practice and to further inform improvements to the Child Protection Conference process in the following ways:

1. **Share the positive feedback with staff and involve them in seeking solutions by:**
 - a. Cascading findings and challenges
 - b. Including in child protection training for all staff
 - c. Developing social work skills via lead practitioners
 - d. Publicising and share findings with all relevant agencies via internet, posters, liaison groups and Safeguarding Children Board
 - e. Reviewing the action plan and publicising changes in Perspectives and Your Views
 - f. Monitoring compliance with customer care initiatives and standards through the Social Services internal audit on child protection services (ISO 9001:2000) and reporting to the chair of the Safeguarding Children Board.
2. **Inform participants of the survey by summarising the findings and actions in:**
 - a. 'Your Views' and distributing these at child protection conferences
 - b. Posters displayed at relevant sites including venues where conferences are held.
3. **Increase future participation in the survey by:**
 - a. Including a questionnaire and reply paid envelope in the pre-conference information pack as well as providing one after each conference
4. **Increase participation by young people and families in conferences by:**
 - a. Providing an information pack at least one week before the conference, to include:
 - details of the date and time of the conference
 - explanatory leaflets for parents, carers and young people
 - Take Part documentation for parents, carers and young people and
 - a self assessment regarding the need for interpreters, advocacy, child care, transport, special requirements due to disability or other exceptional circumstances

CONCLUSION

This summary provides positive and constructive information highlighting areas where the Child Protection Conference process is meeting the needs of a number of parents, carers and young people.

The results have provided information to develop an action plan to further improve the experience for parents, carers, children and young people and to inform future participation and consultation.