

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023

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INTRODUCTION

This 2023 edition replaces Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, which underwent a limited factual update in 2020. The guidance outlines what organisations and agencies must and should do to help, protect and promote the welfare of all children and young people under the age of 18 in England.

This revision to the guidance focuses on strengthening multi agency working across the whole system of help, support and protection for children and their families, keeping a child-centred approach while bringing a whole family focus, and embedding strong, effective and consistent multi-agency child protection practice.

The update includes:

Principles for working with parents and carers that centre the importance of building positive, trusting and co-operative relationships to deliver tailored support to families

Expectations for multi-agency working that apply to all individuals, agencies and organisations working with children and their families, across a range of roles and activities

New national multi-agency child protection standards that set out actions, considerations and behaviours for improved child protection practice and better outcomes for children

LINKED GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

This new edition of [Working Together statutory guidance](#) is central to delivering on the strategy set out in [Stable Homes, Built on Love](#) (2023)

Alongside Working Together, the Government published:

- an updated [Working Together Statutory Framework](#), which sets out the legislation relevant to safeguarding
- the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#), which sets out expectations for senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners in local authorities
- guidance on [Improving Practice with Children, Young People and Families](#), which provides advice for local areas on embedding the Working Together guidance and the Children's social care national framework in practice.

1

A Shared Responsibility

This is a new chapter that highlights the importance of a multi-agency approach to achieve positive results for children. It highlights the need for effective collaboration with parents, caregivers and families, and outlines principles and expectations for individuals, agencies, and organisations in achieving this.

The guidance introduces a set of multi-agency expectations for all practitioners involved in safeguarding and child protection. Specifically: police, local authorities, health services, probation services, youth offending services, education providers and childcare settings, and voluntary and third sector organisations.

These expectations aim to ensure that practitioners:

- share the same goals
- learn with and from each other
- have what they need to help families
- acknowledge and appreciate difference
- challenge each other.

They are structured across three levels:

- Strategic leaders (such as Chief Executives, Chief Constables etc)
- Senior and middle managers (such as Directors of Children’s Services, Heads of Services, Designated and Named professionals, Headteachers etc)
- Direct practice (such as frontline social workers, police constables, teachers etc).

ICB’s are required to have Executive Lead roles for children, children with SEND and for safeguarding (combined as one role or separate)

Director of Public Health, informed by the ICB Leads, should ensure that the needs of children are a key part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) developed by the Health and Wellbeing Board

Working with parents and carers

The updated guidance sets out four principles that professionals should follow when working with parents and carers:

Effective partnership and the importance of building strong, positive, trusting and co-operative relationships

Respectful, non-blaming, clear and inclusive verbal and non-verbal communication that is adapted to the needs of parents and carers

Empowering parents and carers to participate in decision making by equipping them with information, keeping them updated and directing them to further resources

Involving parents and carers in the design of processes and services that affect them.

The importance of **Effective Information Sharing** is highlighted with practitioners being proactive in sharing information as early as possible.

2

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

This chapter includes substantive changes that aim to strengthen how local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements work in protecting and safeguarding children. No statutory roles or functions have been removed from the guidance.

Key changes include:

Defining roles and their responsibilities

Distinguishing Lead Safeguarding Partners from Delegated Safeguarding Partners

The introduction of a partnership chair role

Highlighting the role of education in safeguarding arrangements

Clarified expectations for information-sharing, scrutiny, funding, and reporting, to enhance accountability

The updated guidance outlines new roles and responsibilities relating to the three safeguarding partners (the local authority, the police and the health service) who each have a **“joint and equal duty”** to make arrangements to:

- work together as a team to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area
- include and develop the role of wider local organisations and agencies

The head of each statutory safeguarding partner will be referred to as the ‘lead safeguarding partner’ (**LSP**), who will in turn appoint a ‘delegated safeguarding partner’ (**DSP**).

Lead safeguarding partner (LSP)

- The LSP is the head of each statutory safeguarding partner agency i.e. Chief Officer of Police and Chief Executives of the LA and ICB
- The LSP is responsible for holding their own organisation or agency to account, speaking and making decisions on behalf of their agency, and meeting the statutory and legislative duties of their agency.
- LSPs from different agencies are jointly responsible for the proper involvement of all relevant agencies, and should work as a team, as opposed to as a voice for their own organisation.
- They should meet sufficiently regularly to undertake the following core functions: Through what mechanism and how often is for local decision.
- In cases where the boundaries of the police and ICB extend over multiple LA areas, LSPs may decide to meet at a more regional level so they can discuss all arrangements within their remit and ensure consistency of funding and resources.

Joint functions of LSPs

1. Set the strategic direction, vision, and culture of the local safeguarding arrangements, including agreeing and reviewing shared priorities and the resource required to deliver services effectively.
2. Lead their organisation's individual contribution to the shared priorities, ensuring strong governance, accountability, and reporting mechanisms to hold their delegates to account for the delivery of agency commitments.
3. Review and sign off key partnership documents: published multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including plans for independent scrutiny, shared annual budget, yearly report, and local threshold document.
4. Provide shared oversight of learning from independent scrutiny, serious incidents, local child safeguarding practice reviews, and national reviews, ensuring recommendations are implemented and have a demonstrable impact on practice (as set out in the yearly report).
5. Ensure multi-agency arrangements have the necessary level of business support, including intelligence and analytical functions, such as an agreed data set providing oversight and a robust understanding of practice.
6. Ensure all relevant agencies, including education settings, are clear on their role and contribution to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Delegated safeguarding partner (DSP) and partnership chair

- The LSP of each partner agency should appoint a delegated safeguarding partner (DSP), with sufficient seniority to take decisions on behalf of the LSP, responsible for operational delivery.
- DSPs and LSPs should have regular interaction to ensure the LSP has sufficient oversight and detail on key topics.
- One DSP within the partnership should be appointed partnership chair for multi-agency arrangements. This role can be rotated between the DSPs if deemed appropriate by the LSPs. This is intended to mirror the joint and equal responsibility for the arrangements and increase shared understanding of the system.
- The partnership chair should facilitate partner discussions, provide greater continuity, and act as a single point of contact for the partnership, working in conjunction with independent scrutiny which provides rigour and challenge.
- The role of partnership chair should not replace existing formal complaints procedures and does not provide independent scrutiny.
- This arrangement removes the need for a local area to maintain another chair or independent chair.

Joint functions of DSPs

1. Delivery and monitoring of multi-agency priorities and procedures to protect and safeguard children in the local area, in compliance with published arrangements and thresholds.
2. Close partnership working and engagement with education (at strategic and operational level) and other relevant agencies, allowing better identification of and response to harm.
3. The implementation of effective information sharing arrangements between agencies, including data sharing that facilitates joint analysis between partner agencies.
4. Delivery of high-quality and timely rapid reviews and local child safeguarding practice reviews, with the impact of learning from local and national reviews and independent scrutiny clearly evidenced in yearly reports.
5. The provision of appropriate multi-agency safeguarding professional development and training.
6. Seeking of, and responding to, feedback from children and families about their experiences of services and co-designing services to ensure children from different communities and groups can access the help and protection they need.

Functions of Partnership Chair role

1. To develop strategic links, support and hold to account all LSPs in fulfilling their safeguarding duties for children.
2. Ensure that local arrangements are designed to work collaboratively and effectively by encouraging and supporting the development of partnership working between the LSPs, DSPs, independent scrutiny role and MASA subgroups.
3. Chair the meetings of the DSPs, including any additional meetings convened as a response to specific and exceptional circumstances, with the help of the business manager and independent scrutiny role.
4. Offer appropriate challenge to ensure that the partners are accountable, and that the local arrangements operate effectively.

There are 3 distinct functions within effective local safeguarding arrangements:

The partnership chair has authority, is decisive and enables resource allocation, with risk escalation to lead safeguarding partners at the executive

A business management function with adequate resources and capacity to support the partnership chair

A rigorous and effective independent scrutiny function providing challenge to the safeguarding partners

Education providers and voluntary sector

- It is recommended that LSPs have a representative from the education sector present at strategic discussions, making sure that the views and contributions of education and childcare providers are articulated.
- It is expected that all local education and childcare providers working with children up to the age of 18 will be included in local arrangements.
- LSPs should consider including voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE) organisations, childcare settings, and sports clubs in their arrangements.

Functions of independent scrutiny role

1. Provide safeguarding partners and relevant agencies with independent, rigorous, and effective support and challenge at both a strategic and operational level.
2. Provide assurance to the whole system in judging the effectiveness of the multiagency safeguarding arrangements through a range of scrutiny methods.
3. Ensure that statutory duties are being fulfilled, quality assurance mechanisms are in place, and that local child safeguarding practice reviews and national reviews are analysed, with key learning areas identified and effectively implemented across the safeguarding system.
4. Ensure that the voice of children and families is considered as part of scrutiny and that this is at the heart of arrangements through direct feedback, informing policy and practice.
5. Be regarded as a 'critical friend' and provide opportunities for two-way discussion and reflection between frontline practitioners and leaders. This will encourage and enable strong, clear, strategic leadership.
6. Provide independent advice when there are disagreements between agencies and safeguarding partners and facilitate escalation procedures.
7. Evaluate and contribute to multi-agency safeguarding published arrangements and the annual report, alongside feeding into the wider accountability systems such as inspections.

Funding

- The LSP should agree on the level of funding needed to deliver the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. This includes consideration of business and analytical support, independent scrutiny, infrastructure, and core functions.
- Funding contributions from the statutory safeguarding partners should be equitable and agreed by the LSP. Funding for the arrangements should be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they can meet the financial needs of the arrangements.

Reporting

- Annual Reports should be published by the end of September every year, starting from 2024, and should be reflective of work undertaken the previous financial year (April to March).

This chapter renews focus on how organisations and agencies provide help, safeguarding and protection for children and their families, within three distinct sections: Early Help, Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children, and Child Protection

Section 1: Early Help

This section strengthens the role of education and childcare settings in supporting children and keeping them safe, including details on a child's right to education and the risk factors for practitioners to consider when identifying children and families who may benefit. It also underpins the importance of working with families and outlines the role of family networks.

- Assessments for early help should consider how the needs of different family members impact each other. This includes needs relating to education, mental and physical health, financial stability, housing, substance use and crime.
- Specific needs should be considered such as disabilities, those whose first language isn't English, fathers or male carers, and parents who identify as LGBTQ.
- Early help services may focus on improving family functioning and developing the family's capacity to establish positive routines and solve problems. Where family networks are supporting the child and parents, services may take an approach that enables family group decision making, such as family group conferences.

The role of education and childcare settings - Safeguarding professionals should work closely with education and childcare settings to share information, identify and understand risks of harm, and ensure children and families receive timely support.

Section 2: Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children

There is further clarification included on the broad range of practitioners who can be the lead for children and families receiving support and services under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (the Act that places duty on local authorities to safeguard children in need), and requirements for local authorities and their partners to agree and set out local governance arrangements.

The role of children's social care is also clarified in relation to supporting disabled children and their families, children at risk of, or experiencing harm outside of the home, children in mother and baby units, and children at risk from people in prison and people supervised by the probation service.

Children's social care assessments

- Assessments should consider the parenting capacity of both resident or non-resident parents and carers, as well as any other adult living in the household that can respond to the child's needs.

- Assessments should also consider the influence of the child's family network and any other adults living in the household, as well as the impact of the wider community and environment.

Lead practitioners

- A lead practitioner will be allocated by the local authority and their partners once a referral has been accepted.
- The lead practitioner role can be held by a range of people, including social workers. For child protection enquiries, the lead practitioner should always be a social worker.
- The lead practitioner will have the appropriate skills, knowledge and capacity to carry out assessments, undertake direct work with families and co-ordinate services.

Supporting disabled children and their carers

- Assessments of disabled children should focus on the specific needs of the child and family, be strengths-based and gather effective information to support the best outcome for the child and family.
- Local authorities should implement a Designated Social Care Officer (DCSO) role to improve links between the social care services and the special educational needs and disability (SEND) system.

Harm outside the home

- Practitioners should consider the needs, experiences and vulnerabilities of the individuals or groups who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home – including from criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation or serious violence.
- Practitioners should work with relevant partner agencies to consider the influence of groups or individuals perpetrating the harm.
- Professionals should assess whether a child who is experiencing, or is at risk of experiencing, harm outside the home is in need under section 17 or 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Section 3: Child protection

The child protection section introduces **new multi-agency child protection standards**, including actions, considerations and behaviours for improved child protection practice and outcomes for children. It also clarifies multi-agency responses to all forms of abuse and exploitation outside of the home, consideration of children at risk of experiencing extra-familial harm in all children's social care assessments, and includes resources to support practitioners understanding of the response to online harm.

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Organisational Responsibilities

Chapter four includes changes to the Prison and Probation section that highlight the mutual benefits of exchanging information with children's social care in order to strengthen and clarify processes, and responsibilities for child safeguarding.

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Learning from Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents

A new addition in this chapter clarifies the expectation for keeping in touch with care leavers over the age of 21, and, although not a statutory requirement, the guidance notes how local authorities should **“notify the Secretary of State for Education and OFSTED of the death of a care leaver up to and including the age of 24.”** [See factsheet on this.](#)

If local partners think there may be learning to be gained from the death of a looked after child or care leaver even if the criteria for a serious incident are not met, they may wish to conduct a local safeguarding practice review.

There is detailed guidance on undertaking local and national reviews and publishing recommendations.

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Child Death Reviews

Changes to the final chapter of Working together to safeguard children contains only factual changes, to reflect the latest legislation and guidance.