

## Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 – Summary of Changes

### Introduction

On 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023 the government published 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. Statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children'.

This statutory guidance 'sets out what organisations and agencies who have functions relating to children must and should do to help, protect and promote the welfare of all children and young people under the age of 18 in England. The 2023 edition replaces Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.

This new edition of Working together is central to delivering on the strategy set out in [Stable homes, built on love \(2023\)](#) which outlines the **Government's** commitment to support every child to grow up in a safe, stable and loving home.

#### Alongside the Working Together statutory guidance, 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.

Key updates introduced in [Working together to safeguard children 2023: a guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children](#) are around multi-agency expectations for all practitioners, working with parents and families, the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners the role of education and childcare providers, multi-agency practice standards, support for disabled children tackling harm outside the home.

### Summary of Key Additions to the Working Together 2023 Guidance

#### Chapter 1: A shared responsibility

The DfE identifies that this is 'A new chapter bringing together new and existing guidance to emphasise that successful outcomes for children depend on strong multi-agency partnership working across the whole system of help, support and protection including effective work from all agencies with parents, carers, and families. This includes principles for working with parents and carers to centre the importance of building positive, trusting, and co-operative relationships to deliver tailored support to families, and 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.'

#### 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 **Child-Centred Approach within a Whole Family Focus and Effective**

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

## Multi agency expectations for all practitioners

The guidance introduces a set of multi-agency expectations for all practitioners involved in safeguarding and child protection. These expectations aim to ensure that all practitioners:

**Collaborate** - share the same goals

**Learn** - with and from each other

**Resource** - have what they need to help families

**Include** - acknowledge and appreciate difference

**Mutual Challenge**

The expectations are structured at 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

The Director of Public Health, informed by the relevant ICB leads, should ensure that the needs of children are a key part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment developed by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

## Information Sharing

Effective sharing of information between practitioners, local organisations and agencies is essential for early identification of need, assessment and service provision to keep children safe. Practitioners should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children. Sharing information about any adults with whom a child has contact, which may impact the child's safety or welfare is also critical.

All organisations and agencies should have arrangements in place that set out clearly the processes and the principles for sharing information.

## Chapter 2: Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

This chapter contains 'Substantive changes to strengthen how local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (local authorities, integrated care boards and the police) work to safeguard and protect children locally, including with relevant agencies. Changes include clarifying the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners, distinguishing between Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) and Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs), introducing a partnership chair role, emphasising the role of education in safeguarding arrangements and strengthening accountability by clarifying expectations for information-sharing, independent scrutiny, funding, and reporting. Agencies are encouraged to consider the importance of voluntary, charity and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations within arrangements to improve oversight, engagement, and consistency.

This chapter also highlights the importance of considering naming and engaging voluntary, charity, social enterprise organisations and sports clubs in published local arrangements if they are not already. No statutory roles or functions have been removed from the guidance.'

## Lead safeguarding partner (LSP)

The LSP is the head of each statutory safeguarding partner agency. For local authorities, the LSP should be the Head of Paid Service, also known as the Chief Executive. For ICB's the LSP should be the Chief Executive and for police the LSP is defined as the Chief Officer of Police.

On behalf of their organisations The LSPs should be able to speak with authority, take decisions and commit them on policy, resourcing and practice matters.

The LSP is responsible for holding their own organisation to account, on how effective they participate and implement the local arrangements. They are responsible for discharging their own statutory duties. LSPs are jointly responsible for the proper involvement of and oversight of all relevant agencies, and should act as a team, as opposed to as a voice for their own organisation alone.

They should meet sufficiently regularly to undertake the following core functions: (Through what mechanism and how often is for local decision)

LSPs should be clearly named in the published arrangements.

The LSPs hold responsibility for the implementation of recommendations and learning from serious incidents, local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, although elements of monitoring these can be delegated.

Delivery of the multi-agency safeguarding functions and processes should be delegated to enable the LSPs to focus on their joint functions and maintain strategic oversight.

### Joint functions of lead safeguarding partners (LSP)

- 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, LCSPRs 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)

The LSP of each partner agency should appoint a delegated safeguarding partner (DSP) with sufficient seniority to take decisions on behalf of the LSPs and be responsible for operational delivery.

The DSPs should have oversight of quality and compliance of the delivery of agreed shared priorities.

The DSPs should have regular interaction with the LSPs to ensure that the LSPs have sufficient oversight and detail on key topics and issues.

Where a key decision needs to be made that impacts arrangements and/or services, this should involve the LSPs. Any issues that the DSPs cannot resolve should be escalated to the LSPs for resolution.

DSPs should meet sufficiently frequently to undertake the joint functions.

#### Joint functions of delegated safeguarding partners (DSP)

- 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 LCSPRs, 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.

#### Partnership Chair

LSPs should appoint one DSP within the partnership as partnership chair for the multi-agency arrangements. This role can be rotated between the DSPs if deemed appropriate by the LSPs.

The partnership chair should facilitate partner discussions, provide greater continuity, and act as a single point of contact for the partnership.

The role of partnership chair should not replace existing formal complaints procedures and does not provide independent scrutiny.

#### Functions of Partnership Chair role

- To develop strategic links, support and hold to account all LSPs in fulfilling their safeguarding duties for children.
- 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.
- 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.
- Offer appropriate challenge to ensure that the partners are accountable, and that the local arrangements operate effectively.

To strengthen accountability, local safeguarding arrangements should separate the roles of the partnership chair and independent scrutiny. There are three 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

## Independent Scrutiny

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

Safeguarding Partners must ensure that there are arrangements for effective independent scrutiny which should drive continuous improvement and provide assurance.

### 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.

## Relevant Agencies / Education Providers / VCSE's and Sports Clubs

It is recommended that LSPs have a representative from the education sector present at strategic discussions.

LSPs should create an environment which enables all education providers to be fully engaged, involved and included in the local safeguarding arrangements.

LSPs should set out in the MASA which organisations and agencies they require to work with them as **"Relevant Agencies"** 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 all voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE) organisations, childcare settings, and sports clubs in their arrangements.

DSPs and Relevant Agencies should be in regular communication about local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and their effectiveness.

## Information Sharing Requests

Sharing of information between organisations and agencies within a multi-agency system is essential to

improve outcomes for children and their families.

Safeguarding partners may require any person, organisation or agency to provide them, any relevant information for the area, a reviewer or another person, organisation or agency, with specified information which enables and assists the LSPs to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area, including local and national child safeguarding practice reviews.

Safeguarding partners should have an agreement in place which outlines how information is shared safely and effectively between themselves and other relevant agencies.

### **Accountability and transparency**

Strengthens wording on accountability by clarifying expectations around information sharing, funding and reporting.

Clarifies what is needed in published strategic plans and yearly reports and sets a date by for yearly reports to be submitted to encourage greater consistency and transparency across local areas.

Gives some examples of the types of costs that exist in multi-agency arrangements and places greater emphasis on the review and reporting of finances.

Safeguarding partners should have an agreement in place which outlines how information is shared safely and effectively between themselves and other relevant agencies.

Annual reports to be submitted by the end of September every year, starting from 2024, and should be reflective of work undertaken the previous financial year.

LSPs should agree on the level of funding needed to deliver the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including the costs of core functions. Funding should be equitable and reviewed regularly.

### **Chapter 3: Providing Help, Support and Protection**

This revision has a renewed focus on how organisations and agencies provide help, safeguarding and protection for children and their families. There are three sections: Early help, Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and Child protection. Early help strengthens the role of education and childcare settings in supporting children and keeping them safe, including information on a child's right to education and risk factors for practitioners to consider when identifying children and families who may benefit from early help. The approach to working with families has been strengthened throughout the guidance, outlining the role of family networks, including stronger guidance on the use of family group conferences to improve family network engagement in decision making and supporting children. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children clarifies a broader range of practitioners can be the lead practitioner for children and families receiving support and services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, and the requirements on local authorities and their partners to agree and set out local governance arrangements. It clarifies the role of children's social care in supporting disabled children and their families, children at risk of, or experiencing, harm outside the home, children in mother and baby units (in prisons) and children at risk from people in prison and people supervised by the probation service. Child protection introduces new national multi-agency child protection standards to set out actions, considerations and behaviours for improved child protection practice and outcomes for children. It clarifies the multi-agency response to all forms of abuse and exploitation from outside 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.'



## Section 1: Early Help

### Considering family needs in the context of early help

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.

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.

A Lead Practitioner should co-ordinate the activity around the family. The Lead Practitioner role could be held by a number of people, details about their roles and responsibilities along with additional guidance, are provided in the [Early Help System Guide](#)

## Section 2: Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children

### 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](#).

Where there are concerns that more than one child may be experiencing harm in an extra-familial context, practitioners should consider the individual needs of each child as well as work with the group. The

children in the group may or may not already be known to children's social care. Working with the whole group enables practitioners to build an understanding of the dynamics between those within the group and the extra-familial context.

Practitioners need to ensure communication with other partner agencies to help build an understanding of the context in which the harm is occurring and consider influence and patterns. This may include working across safeguarding and community safety partnerships to agree a plan for keeping children safe.

### Section 3: Child protection

#### National Multi-Agency Practice Standards for Child Protection

The updated guidance introduces new "**National Multi-Agency Practice Standards for Child Protection**" set out in the [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) for all practitioners working in services and settings that come into contact with children who may be suffering or have suffered significant harm within or outside the home. The standards relate to 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.

#### Chapter 4: Organisational Responsibilities

Changes to the Prison and Probation sections highlights the mutual benefits of exchanging timely information with children's social care which strengthen and clarify processes and responsibilities for child safeguarding.

#### Chapter 5: Learning from Serious Child Safeguarding Incidents

Clarifies the expectation for keeping in touch with care leavers over the age of 21, and the non-mandatory reporting of care leaver deaths up to age 25 to improve learning and outcomes for this group of young people.

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.

#### Chapter 6: 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.

#### Responding to working together to safeguard children 2023

Local areas should reflect on how to strengthen multi-agency working across the whole system of help, support and protection for children and their families, and children's social care, as part of a single system.

Leaders should review their current arrangements and identify what reforms need to be made to comply with statutory guidance. Local areas are expected to publish updated arrangements in December 2024.