



HM Government

# **Changes to statutory guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children**

**Government consultation response**

**December 2023**

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## Ministerial Foreword

Nothing is more important than children's welfare. Children who need help and protection deserve high quality and effective support from every individual, agency and organisation that comes into contact with them. All those involved should work well together to make sure children have the best possible chance to thrive.

In February 2023, Government published *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, which set out an ambitious plan to transform children's social care, committing to support every child to grow up in a safe, stable, and loving home. For most children this means growing up within their family. Where families do face challenges, meaningful and effective help from child and family focused services is essential. And where children need protection whether that's inside or outside the home, there must be strong and effective multi-agency action that is decisive.

Updating *Working Together to Safeguard Children* is central to delivering the first phase of this transformational journey. We know that frontline workers and practitioners across every agency that works with children and their families rely on *Working Together* to guide them in their everyday practice. Our shared ambition is for a system that centres the needs of children and works with them and their families to ensure they receive the help, support, and protection they need. That's why we have focused on getting to the heart of effective multi-agency working across the whole system in this update.

Safeguarding and protecting children is a shared and joint responsibility. We are absolutely committed to a sharp focus on child protection across government which is why we established the Child Protection Ministerial Group to bring us together and hold ourselves and each other accountable for protecting our most vulnerable children. In this update of *Working Together*, we have also focused on supporting local areas to be clearer about what they must do at a strategic and operational level to make sure those on the frontline can work together to deliver effective services and quickly identify children who need protection from harm.

We want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent work of professionals across social work, health, policing, education, and other agencies to support and protect our most vulnerable children and help families in need. We would also like to thank all of you for taking the time to share your views through the formal online consultation and at a range of meetings and events during the consultation period. We are particularly grateful to the hundreds of parents, carers, family members and children who took the time to provide their thoughtful, honest, and insightful views to help us get this right.



**David Johnston OBE MP**

**Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing  
(Department for Education)**



**The Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP**

**Minister for Primary Care, Start for Life and Public Health  
(Department of Health and Social Care)**



**Laura Farris MP**

**Minister for Victims and Safeguarding  
(Home Office & Ministry of Justice)**

## Executive summary

Alongside legislation<sup>1</sup>, Working Together to Safeguard Children (“Working Together”), is the statutory guidance that sets out expectations for the system that provides help, support and protection for children and their families, giving practitioners clarity about what is required of them individually and how they need to work in partnership with each other to deliver effective services. Working Together applies at every level from senior leaders to those in direct practice with families, and across all agencies and organisations that come into contact with children.

Updating Working Together is part of the wider reform programme across children’s social care, in response to the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care (the Care Review), the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s report ‘Child Protection in England’ (the National Panel Review) and the Competition and Markets Authority’s study of children’s social care<sup>2</sup>. This programme includes revising the Non-statutory Information Sharing Advice for Safeguarding Practitioners, publishing a new Children’s Social Care National Framework<sup>3</sup>, Data Strategy and Dashboard<sup>4</sup>, and publishing a new Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy<sup>5</sup>. The reforms will incorporate learning from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings as well as findings from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse<sup>6</sup>.

The government response to the Children’s Social Care National Framework (National Framework) and Dashboard consultation was published in September 2023<sup>7</sup>. The response set out the feedback we received and the changes we will make to the National Framework. We set out that the National Framework, when issued as statutory guidance, will include an increased focus on multi-agency working and will clarify expectations between senior leaders, practitioners, and the new ‘tier’ of practice supervisor. In the National Framework, we have also sought to make it easier to navigate and to understand what the National Framework means in practice. The National Framework is published alongside Working Together to Safeguard Children guidance.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidance is underpinned by the [Children Act 1989](#) (and associated Regulations) and the [Children Act 2004](#) (and Regulations), as amended by the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#), which placed new duties on key agencies to make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children locally

<sup>2</sup> [The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care \(May 2022\)](#), [Child Protection in England: National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson \(May 2022\)](#), [Competition and Markets Authority’s Children’s Social Care market study 2022](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Children’s Social Care National Framework](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Data Strategy and Dashboard](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy](#)

<sup>6</sup> [The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Children’s social care national framework and dashboard: consultation response](#)

In parallel to this revision of Working Together, we are also delivering the Families First for Children Pathfinder, working with a small number of local areas to implement the new Family Help reforms alongside reforms to child protection and family networks. The Pathfinders include multi-agency partners and will be important in shaping how the future system develops and how this informs revisions to the statutory guidance.



## Introduction

This is the first substantive update to Working Together, since 2018, following a limited factual update in 2020. It has been co-ordinated jointly by Department for Education, Home Office and the Department for Health and Social Care. In addition to this formal public consultation, we have collaborated with other Government departments and stakeholders, to ensure that updates reflect multi-agency and multi-sector safeguarding duties, responsibilities and approaches and align with other relevant statutory guidance.

To support us to implement an integrated multi-agency approach to safeguarding, child protection and family help, we established a National Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Child Protection working group<sup>8</sup>. This group provided expert advice from both a practice and multi-agency perspective, on the proposed changes to Working Together ahead of the consultation and publication.

Following this publication, we aim to review the guidance on an annual cycle, informed by evidence and learning from wider children's social care reform work.

On 21 June 2023, the government launched a public consultation on Working Together. Through the formal responses and engagement events, we heard from thousands of practitioners, managers, front line professionals across sectors, and importantly from parents, children, and young people with personal experience of the children's social care and the wider safeguarding system. We want to say a massive thank you to everyone who took the time to share their thoughts, views, and personal experiences to help shape how we make the guidance work better for everyone. Your views really do matter and have been central to the changes we have made to the guidance.

## Consultation exercise

The consultation launched on 21 June 2023 and closed on 6 September 2023. It consisted of a total of 35 questions. Of the 28 main questions, 22 contained a quantitative response format (Yes/No, Option A/Option B). At the end of each section, there was a question that invited respondents to provide any further comments, with a qualitative, text-based comments section. The initial six questions asked for the respondents' details, such as job role, and which organisation (if any) on whose behalf they were responding. We also developed a separate consultation for children and young people, which had four specific questions related to their experiences.

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<sup>8</sup> [National multi-agency safeguarding and child protection working group](#)

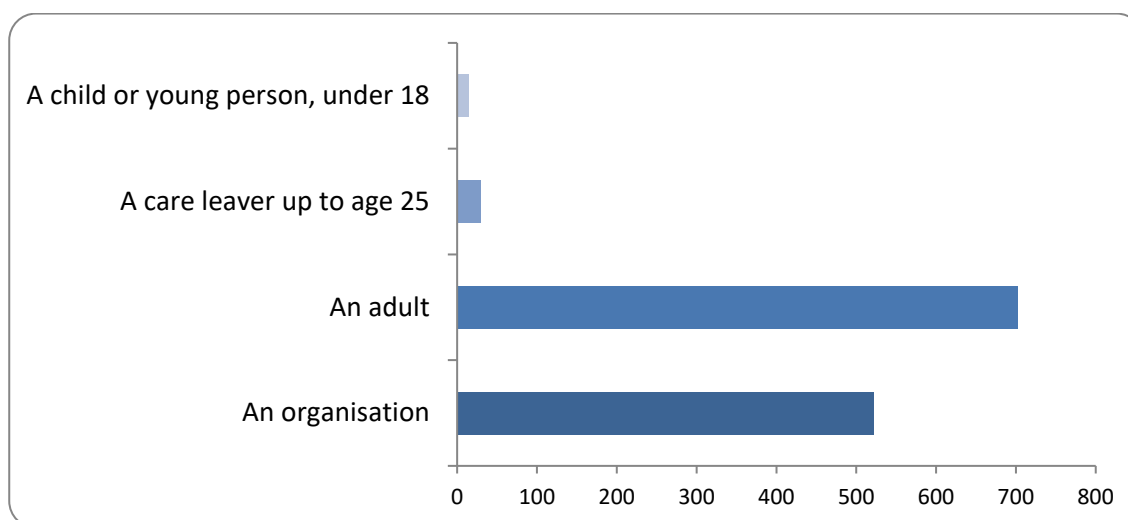
## Structural format of this response

This document summarises the responses received to the public consultation via the online questionnaire, email responses, and topics raised at stakeholder events during the consultation period (21 June – 6 September). Percentages reflect responses in the written consultation to multiple choice (quantitative) questions. We also received significant responses to text-based (qualitative) questions, where respondents were invited to share their views on a range of propositions. We have taken a thematic approach to the analysis of these text-based responses.

## Profile of respondents

The consultation received 1269 formal responses via the online consultation questionnaire. We also received feedback via email which was considered as part of our analysis. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of respondents by respondent type. Of the 1269 responses, 41% provided responses on behalf of an organisation, 55.5% were received from individuals (adults), 2.5% of respondents were care leavers up to age 25, and 1% identified as a child or young person under 18.

Figure 1: Respondent type



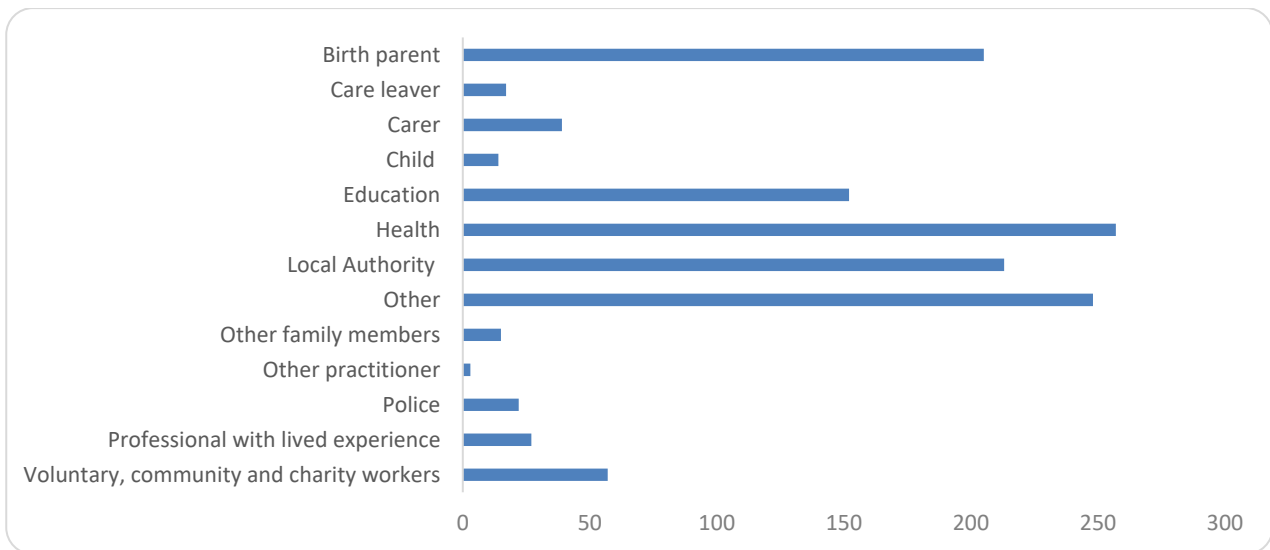
Of the 15 respondents who identified as a child or young person under 18, 11 provided responses to the children and young people's consultation. We received 30 responses from care leavers up to the age of 25, who had the option to complete the child and young person questions or the full consultation. The majority (28) completed the full consultation.

Respondents were able to choose multiple options when stating in what capacity they were responding to the consultation. For the analysis, we grouped responses into the following categories:

**Table 1: Main consultation respondent groups**

<b>Respondent group</b>	<b>Respondent type</b>
Child	Child or young person under age 18
Care leaver	Care leaver up to the age of 25 Care leaver over the age of 25
Birth parent	Birth parent
Other family members	Adoptive parent Family member of a child who is in care Family member of a care leaver
Carer	Foster carer Kinship carer Special guardian
Local Authority	Director of children's services Chief executive of a local authority Local authority practice leader Local authority principal social worker Local authority – other Social worker Social work team member Family support worker Residential children's home worker Substance misuse worker Youth worker Substance misuse worker
Health	Health practitioner
Police	Police Officer
Education	Educational institution (e.g. early years setting, school, alternative provision setting, college, university) Academic
Voluntary, community and charity workers	Independent domestic violence advisor Voluntary, community and charity workers
Other practitioner	Youth justice worker Probation officer
Professionals with lived experience	Includes those that have identified themselves as both a professional/practitioner and family or carers.
Other	Prefer not to say Other

Figure 2: Breakdown of respondent groups



There were 104 respondents who ticked multiple options on the respondent type question. In order to aid the analysis and to stop any duplication, we allocated these respondents to a single respondent group:

- where respondents identified as a birth parent, carer or other family member and a profession (within health, education, local authority settings, for example) we grouped these as professionals with lived experience
- if individuals were responding on behalf of an organisation and provided an organisation name, but had also identified as a birth parent, carer, or other family member, we grouped these based on their profession
- the remaining respondents were placed into the best fitting respondent group, inferred from their responses to the text-based questions

248 respondents selected the 'Other' category, on analysis we think this is due to the limitations of the category options. For example, we received lots of respondents noting they were a safeguarding lead or from a safeguarding partnership, which was not offered as an option. We will use this information to further develop the respondent type categories in future updates.

It is important to note that feedback provided by email was not included in any percentage breakdown of questions or counted in the respondent type/group breakdown figures.

## Methodology

Respondents did not have to answer all the questions, and could focus on questions relevant to them, which accounts for the differences in the number of respondents for each question. The consultation generated a high level of interest, with a variety of

opinions expressed. Some questions produced a higher response rate than others. For the multiple-choice questions, percentages are based on those that responded to the question, to provide a more accurate account of views.

The analysis of responses included:

- **reviewing the quantity of closed responses to each question**
- **thematic analysis of text-based responses:** all comments were initially read by the Working Together consultation team and allocated to a specific policy area. The thematic analysis was conducted by policy leads who identified the key themes. Where responses related to more than one proposition, each policy lead reviewed and accounted for the comments in considering next steps. We have therefore not provided percentages for text-based responses to avoid double counting. We have been mindful to acknowledge, as far as possible, where similar responses were shared by a range of respondents this was balanced with responses that were held by only a few respondents
- **feedback from consultation events:** at the end of each event, key themes, and any areas to follow up were identified. Notes from events were shared with policy leads to consider in their thematic analysis

Quality assurance was supported by data scientists at the Department for Education, from the Children's Social Care Analysis and Research team. The approach was discussed and agreed with the National Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Child Protection working group and policy officials from other government departments. This quality assurance targeted risks of misclassification and subjectivity in theme identification.

Analysts used a technique called Natural Language Processing to label responses with the correct policy areas and sent mismatches for a second review by policy officials.

Topic modelling was used to group responses into themes and generative AI was used to create theme labels using anonymised data in a secure environment. These outputs were reviewed by policy officials, who compared to the original thematic analysis and discussed any differences with policy leads.

Analysts reviewed all percentages calculated for the multiple-choice response questions.

Feedback received by email typically combined responses into areas of specific interest. We considered this feedback as part of our overall analysis, however, it wasn't included in any percentage or respondent group breakdowns.

It is important to note the limitations in analysing responses from the consultation. For example, in responding to the questions, some individuals provided detailed responses to earlier questions, addressing subsequent questions in their initial answers. Similarly, some individuals reiterated their views across the questions.

## Stakeholder engagement

During the consultation period, the government held 12 stakeholder events, including:

- two open consultation events
- thematic events focusing on propositions including in the following chapters: a shared endeavour, multi-agency expectations, help and support for families, and multi-agency child protection
- single agency roundtables for police, health, local authorities, and education
- targeted sessions on support for disabled children and their families, for parents with personal experience of the system, and for the National Network of Designated Health Professionals

The consultation events were chaired by government officials, along with sector representatives from the National Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Child Protection working group. The events were well attended with over 1000 people joining from a range of organisations and agencies which included local government, the NHS, police, education settings, NSPCC, Barnardo's, Children's Society, Mencap, Birmingham Children Trust, Carers Trust, and Church of England.

We have selected quotes from both written responses and event feedback. Respondents had the option to give consent for quotes to be published and attributed individually, as an organisation, or anonymously. We have noted this throughout when attributing quotes to individuals and organisations.

## Engaging with inspectorates

Safeguarding partners are inspected by their respective inspectorate bodies, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services, and jointly through Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs). There are two types of JTAs, either evaluating the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk (or the 'front door' of child protection) or looking at a particular theme or cohort of children. These inspections evaluate the impact of local systems, share learning about what is working well and identify where partners can improve their multi-agency practice in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children. Government will continue to work with Ofsted and the other inspectorates to ensure the joint and single inspection frameworks take account of the clarified roles of safeguarding partners as outlined in revised guidance. The inspectorates will take full account of the changes in their single inspection programmes, where relevant, and strengthen as needed.

## Views of children and young people

We invited children and young people to share their views on the consultation by providing an overview of the consultation themes and asking 4 questions. We specifically wanted their views on how adults and services could work together to support them and their families, and so provided space for them to answer in their own words. We asked:

- what is the most important thing everyone working with families can do together to support parents, carers, and children?
- there are lots of people who work with children to help them stay safe, who is the most important person that works with you and why?
- if your friend told you they don't feel safe, what is the most important thing that the adults who help them can do?
- is there anything else you would like to tell us about the changes we want to make in Working Together?

15 respondents who were under 18 submitted a consultation response, however not all respondents provided answers to all the questions. Two respondents didn't complete any questions. Two respondents who identified as care leavers up to the age of 25 also answered these questions.

In response to what is most important for people working with families to do, most felt that clear, effective communication was incredibly important. This included listening, sharing information openly and being clear about what would happen next. One respondent explained:

“Understanding each individual case is very important as everyone has different needs and actually listening to us of what we need otherwise the help you are trying to provide is pointless. Researching and understanding what we need is vital otherwise if you don't have [a] clue of our needs you will just mess around and cause us more distraught.”

Respondents also said that it was important to be friendly, honest, respect individuality without being presumptuous and accept accountability when professionals get it wrong. They felt that practitioners didn't always understand the challenges families were facing which can result in a lack of trust.

When we asked respondents who was the most important person that worked with them, most said someone that knew them well and saw them regularly, including people like tutors, teachers, social workers, or therapists. They explained that it was:

“The person who knows me and sees me regularly and knows what's going on in my life because they are there in the moment.”

When asked, “If your friend told you they don't feel safe, what is the most important thing that the adults who help them can do” respondents explained again that it was important

to listen, feel heard and have their views taken seriously. They explained that this would help to make a child feel safe, provide reassurance, and feel like the adults who were offering help were reliable.

Respondents also explained that the most important thing is to listen to the child and/or their family, particularly when requests are made by the child or young person. From their experiences, respondents sometimes felt that the people working with them didn't make much effort and that requests for support had been left ignored. Respondents expressed feeling that there can be a lack of understanding of their specific needs, including medical needs, neurodiversity and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Children, their families, and other people with personal experience of the system have a vital part to play in shaping how we transform children's social care. We want their voices to be at the heart of our how we approach change at a national and local level.

To support implementation of the commitments set out in *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, we are working with Barnardo's and Coram Voice until Spring 2024, who are facilitating engagement sessions and focus groups with care experienced young people. We have heard a wide range of views and valuable feedback from children and young people aged 15 to 25 from across the country and reflecting a range of care experiences. The feedback from these sessions reflects what we have heard through the consultation responses. Children and young people want to be listened to, kept updated and be supported by a consistent and capable professional.

To build on this work, we are also setting up a Children and Young People's Advisory Board to help shape the future of children's social care. Following a recruitment process, launching later this year, the Board will begin meeting in 2024.



## You said, we will – Views of children and young people

### **You said that:**

- clear, effective communication to share information openly and being clear about what would happen next was important
- practitioners should seek to understand challenges facing families and aim to build trust through respectful and meaningful interactions
- speaking to someone who knows you well helps build trust and better relationships
- feeling heard helps make a child feel safe

### **Following your feedback, we will:**

- consider when to update the children's version of Working Together
- consider developing principles for working with children for a future update of Working Together
- include principles for working with parents and carers that reflect the importance of the voice of the child and consider whole family needs to ensure engagement is meaningful
- test the family help offer through the Families First for Children Pathfinder to ensure the right people, with the right knowledge, skills and relationships, provide families with support whilst keeping children safe and well

## General feedback from the consultation

We have been encouraged by the consultation feedback and the support for the changes to Working Together. Along with the policy areas we consulted on, we also received more general feedback from respondents, which we have taken into consideration when making revisions.

### Voice of the child

A number of respondents commented on how the guidance must retain its focus on the voice of the child and offered views on how to ensure greater emphasis on children's views throughout. Some respondents also felt there was a risk that the guidance could become more focused around the needs of adults and risked 'losing the centrality of the child'.

"There should be a stronger message across the guidance about the imperative of focusing decision-making on the needs of children and what life is like for them. It is right and proper that new guidance articulates principles for working with parents and carers, but this must not be at the cost of ensuring that decisions are made in the best interests of children." [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel]

A few respondents raised the need to have a separate set of principles for working with children and young people.

"We would also welcome consideration of principles of 'the voice of the child' similarly to those developed in the principles for working with parents. Failure to listen to children and to make sure their views are taken into account in child protection cases has been a recurring theme of numerous reports throughout the years. Despite the current Working Together guidance containing a section titled 'Focusing on the needs and views of the child', these three paragraphs make no mention on the specific way which the views of children are heard and taken into account within multi-agency working arrangements nor do they rise to the level of principles underpinning the entirety of the guidance." [Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT UK)]

We agree that the voice of the child is paramount when helping, supporting, and protecting children. We are confident the guidance continues to reflect this. In chapter 1 the guidance outlines the child-centred approach within a whole family focus to be adopted as a core principle underpinning all work with children and their families.

We recognise we could do more. We are considering updating the Children and Young Person's guide to Working Together, not updated since 2015 and want to explore developing principles for working with children, to be included in future updates.

## Strengthening expectations for practice

Many respondents acknowledged that the statutory guidance could be strengthened to clarify how practitioners, agencies and organisations should work with families in a way that takes into account their economic and social circumstances, a child and family's ethnicity, circumstances and strengths.

We are confident that we have strengthened the guidance throughout including introducing new principles for working with parents and carers which focus on building strong relationships with children, their families and carers and are responsive to their needs and circumstances, new expectations for multi-agency working which challenge leaders to create an inclusive culture and a renewed focus on effective multi-agency child protection where local safeguarding partners create an understanding environment.

We are committed to learning from evidence of good practice and will include a focus on this in future updates.

## Framing the guidance in a more multi-agency way

A strong theme in this update of Working Together is strengthened multi-agency working. Some respondents noted that the guidance still feels strongly framed for a local authority audience and that this could lead to others not recognising their role in safeguarding and protection. An example was the use of the term practitioner rather than referring to "frontline professional" which might feel more relevant to a police officer, for example, or a nursery worker for example.

"The language used in Working Together throughout is very local authority centric. For example the use of "practitioners" rather than "frontline professionals" as there are many professional roles covered by Working Together that would not consider themselves to be practitioners." [Local Authority]

Whilst we recognise that the term practitioner is not commonly used by all agencies and sectors, we do need a way to refer to all frontline workers throughout the guidance consistently. We have settled on practitioner as the most appropriate term as some of the key people who will be working with children and their families won't be affiliated to professional bodies and would therefore not consider themselves a professional. To strengthen how readers understand the term practitioner, we have moved the rationale from the footnote into the main text and acknowledged that whilst some professionals would not usually use this term it is intended to be interpreted broadly in the guidance. We have also strengthened references throughout to make clear that the term practitioner refers to all individuals who work with children and their families in any capacity.

## Resourcing and funding

While there was broad support for many of the proposals in the consultation, we heard clearly how important it is to ensure resourcing and funding are in place nationally to support effective implementation. Respondents to the consultation, and attendees at events also raised the question of resourcing and funding at a local level and how this needs to be more equitable across partners.

We have provided implementation funding of c£6 million to support local authorities and the other safeguarding partners to embed the changes set out in Working Together (primarily chapter 2) and the National Framework. Further information on how we will support implementation can be found under 'Next Steps'.

## Child death reviews

For this update of Working Together we made factual changes to chapter 6 Child death reviews to align with guidance and legislation published since 2018. We received some valuable comments about further changes we could make, for which we are really grateful. These were mostly related to Joint Agency Response, Sudden Unexpected Death in Childhood and specification that it should be a paediatrician as the medical lead, and incorrect links within the document. As a result, we have made a small number of further factual changes to the guidance including updating the link to the parent's leaflet and amendments to the Child Death Review flowchart. We will consider the additional feedback, as part of the next steps relating to the Child Death Review guidance more broadly.

## Information Sharing

Improving information sharing within and between agencies when working with children and families is a key part of reforming children's social care. Alongside this consultation, we ran a separate consultation on updating non-statutory information sharing advice (ISA). This advice is for practitioners to support decision-making about when to share information and to make clear when and how information should be shared to safeguard children. We were due to publish the updated ISA in December 2023. However, the consultation process has raised some fundamental issues which require further legal and policy consideration and, as a result, we can no longer meet this timetable. We will continue to engage cross government and with key stakeholders to finalise the ISA. We expect the delay to publication to be short and the updated advice to be published in early 2024. Many respondents commented on the importance of information sharing in providing help, support, and protection for children. We will use the feedback on the non-statutory advice to inform future revisions of Working Together.

## Main findings from the consultation

For this update to Working Together, we consulted on proposed changes to strengthen the guidance in five key areas:

- ‘a shared endeavour’ introduces expectations for effective multi-agency working and practice principles for working with parents and carers.
- ‘multi-agency safeguarding arrangements’ clarifies roles and responsibilities, introduces a partnership chair, and deepens accountability and transparency.
- ‘help and support for children and their families’ includes stronger expectations on Early Help and family networks, clarifies permissions on working with children under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and emphasises support for disabled children. It also strengthens the role of children’s social care in supporting babies to stay with their mothers, where the mother is serving a custodial sentence, as well as strengthening and clarifying processes and responsibilities for child safeguarding within prison and probation services.
- ‘decisive, multi-agency child protection’ introduces new national multi-agency child protection standards for practitioners and approaches to harm outside the home.
- ‘learning from serious child safeguarding incidents’

### Section 1 – A shared endeavour

We introduced a new chapter at the beginning of Working Together bringing together new and existing guidance to emphasise that successful outcomes for children depend on strong multi-agency and partnership working across the whole system of help, support, and protection in effective work from all agencies with parents, carers and families. This included new principles for working with parents and carers, and multi-agency expectations for practitioners at all levels.

### Renaming the subtitle for Working Together

We proposed revising the subtitle for the statutory guidance to Working Together to Safeguard Children: a guide to multi-agency working to help, safeguard, protect and promote the welfare of children. The intention was to centre the importance of providing help for children and their families, and the need for decisive action when children need protection from harm, alongside the existing references to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

In the consultation we asked, ‘**Do you agree that we should change the title of Working Together to reflect help and protection for children and families?**’ There were 1034 responses, and respondents were largely supportive with just over two-thirds (69%) agreeing/strongly agreeing to the change. Just under one fifth of respondents

(19%) disagreed/strongly disagree, and around one tenth (12%) neither agreed or disagreed.

We received 182 comments relating to the proposed change of title. A significant number commented that the current title is clear and well-known and couldn't see the benefit of updating the subtitle. They said most people will still refer to the guidance as Working Together, and the changes won't make a difference. Others felt the new subtitle was too long and wordy and may not resonate with children and parents.

“I think those working in a safeguarding role are familiar with the term 'Working Together' and changing the name may lead to confusion. I think the title already embraces the aim of partnership working.” [Parent]

Revising the term 'inter-agency' to 'multi-agency' was welcomed. We also received comments suggesting removing the reference to “safeguarding” as this is included in the main title, reducing the length, and changing the order of the wording. Multiple respondents questioned whether it was important to also reflect working with families in the title and make references to young people alongside with children.

Finally, there was some confusion, with a number of respondents misunderstanding the proposed change, believing 'A Shared Endeavour' was the new name for the guidance rather than the title of chapter 1. Respondents commented that the language of 'endeavour' reads like it's an option, rather than having a statutory responsibility to do something together. Respondents suggested shared responsibility or shared approach would be more accurate and clearer.

### **Government response**

We will continue with the proposed change to the title. However, we will remove the word 'safeguarding' from the subtitle as this is already used in the main title. This will avoid duplication and reduce the length, without losing the addition of 'help' and 'protect'. We have considered adding 'families' to the title to reflect the emphasis on families throughout the document, however in consultation with the Working Group, we have decided not to, to ensure the focus remains on the child. For consistency, we will retain the meaning of child throughout the document including all children and young people up to 18 years of age and have therefore not added 'young people' to the title.

We have considered the feedback relating to the title of chapter one and agree that 'A Shared Responsibility', better reflects the intention to emphasise the way we want all individuals, agencies, and organisations to work together with children and their families.

### **Principles for working with parents and carers**

We want all individuals, agencies, and organisations to work with children, parents, carers, and wider families so that they feel supported, heard and are given the information to understand what is happening and be part of finding solutions that improve

outcomes. However, we know from analysis of serious incidents and findings from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care that parents' experiences, particularly of the child protection process, can be negative, intimidating and feel like there is a lack of collaboration between parents or carers and practitioners.

In the consultation, we proposed new principles for working with parents and carers focused on creating cultural change through building positive, trusting, and co-operative relationships, using language that is clear and respectful, enabling parents and carers to be part of decision-making and involving parents, carers, families and communities in designing the services that they use. The aim of the principles is to bring consistency in the way families receive help and support, children are protected and practitioners across agencies develop effective and meaningful relationships with parents and carers.

In line with the principles, we also strengthened existing references to working with parents and carers in child protection.

In the consultation we asked, **'To what extent do you agree that the four principles are the right ones to drive better practice and engagement with parents and carers?'** There were 1017 responses, including 94 from birth parents, with the vast majority (83%) agreeing/strongly agreeing that the principles will drive better practice and engagement with parents and carers. A small percentage (6%) disagreed/strongly disagreed, with a similar number (11%) neither agreeing or disagreeing.

We received 271 comments relating to the principles for working with parents and carers. Overall, the majority of respondents supported and welcomed the principles highlighting the importance of effective and meaningful engagement. Respondents spoke about these principles being fundamental in achieving the best outcomes for children and their families.

"We are pleased to see the principles of working with parents or carers set out clearly within the draft document, we feel the importance of working with parents and carers in a strength-based manner is essential and therefore outlining the need for this by all professionals is an important aspect of the working together document." [Local Authority practitioner]

Linked to this, some respondents emphasised that this already happens in practice in their local area and stressed the importance of partnership working with parents and carers.

"As a partnership we recognise that hearing and acting on the voice of the child and their family is pivotal to moving practice to the next level, and we are actively embedding this in our revised arrangements." [Solihull Safeguarding Children Partnership]

While the majority of responses were supportive, a common concern amongst respondents was that an overfocus on working with parents and carers could reduce the

focus on the voice of the child. Respondents felt strongly that any change should not undermine this focus in any way.

Some respondents raised concerns around how the principles will be implemented. Lack of resources, work pressures and capacity to build meaningful relationship with parents and carers to effectively engage with them were among the concerns. Respondents suggested the need for training to ensure all practitioners embed practice and highlighted that to truly embed change there is a need for leaders to create a culture that supports this.

A few respondents, raised the importance that the personal experiences of children and parents is understood, considered, and captured. Others wanted the principles to emphasise the importance of understanding adversity and trauma in working with families. Respondents also highlighted the need for more focus and references to working with particular groups including fathers and male carers as well as recognising barriers for engagement including neurodiversity. A small number of respondents also highlighted how parents and carers should be considered as partners when the harm is outside the home. Similar responses were seen for parents and carers of disabled children.

A small number of respondents asked for the offer of advocacy to be included within the principles. In *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, we outlined the importance of strengthening the system to better support and engage parents and carers in child protection. We know effective engagement in child protection is an important part of creating change and increasing safety for children. We committed to test approaches to parental representation in the *Families First for Children Pathfinder*, to understand how this impacts outcomes for children and improves parent's experiences. We will update future guidance where appropriate. Similarly, the principles which underpin the National Framework recognise the importance of advocacy in helping to understand the wishes and feelings of children so that their views are heard at every stage of support.

## **Government response**

Nothing is more important than children's welfare and safety. We heard that making sure parents and carers know what to expect from services, how to get help and support and understand what is expected of them will mean they have the best chance of providing stable, loving homes, and making changes to improve outcomes for their children, where this is needed.

Following consultation, we have strengthened the principles to reflect:

- the importance of the voice of the child, which is already covered extensively throughout the guidance
- the need to tailor responses to the specific challenges faced, including where harm is outside the home



- the importance of identifying and understanding the impact of adversity and trauma on children, parents, and carers
- specific reference to working with fathers and male carers and strengthened references to working with parents and carers of disabled children

## Expectations for multi-agency working

The lives of children and families are complex, requiring different agencies to work together and provide a holistic offer of help, support, and protection for those who need it. When it comes to keeping children safe, no individual service or practitioner has all the knowledge, information or expertise needed to make the right decisions on their own. We consulted on introducing expectations to underpin multi-agency working focussed on collaboration, learning, resourcing, inclusion, and mutual challenge. The expectations apply to all individuals, agencies and organisations who come into contact with children and their families across a range of roles and activities. The expectations are split in to three levels of responsibility: strategic leaders, senior and middle managers, and those in direct practice. The intention is to model how partnership working should underpin the vision and culture from a strategic level through to direct practice with everyone understanding and taking responsibility for their role within multi-agency working.

In the consultation we asked, **‘To what extent do you think the new expectations for multi-agency working will support leaders and practitioners to work together more effectively and improve outcomes for children and their families?’** There were 998 responses, with half of the respondents (50%) thinking it was likely/very likely that the expectations will improve partnership working and outcomes. The remaining responses were split, 22% said it was unlikely/very unlikely, and 28% said they thought the effect would be neutral.

We received 226 comments relating to the multi-agency expectations with the majority of respondents welcoming the focus on effective multi-agency working with children and families, the opportunity to improve how agencies work together and the clarity provided at each level.

“The expectations for multi-agency working are clear and useful. In particular, the clarity around the expectations of different level of professional are useful. It is positive that there is clarity on who the ‘strategic leaders’ should be within local safeguarding partnerships.” [Action for Children]

Some respondents recognised these expectations as current practice and welcomed their inclusion in statutory guidance to emphasise their importance.

“We agree that strong multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working is vital to identifying and responding to the needs of children and families. The changes will make it clear that safeguarding and supporting children and families is everyone’s responsibility.

The principles outlined reflect good practice. As identified these principles need to be implemented at all levels of the partnership and the joint responsibility for agencies. The guidance will assist agencies in supporting and challenging each other.” [Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership]

Respondents also suggested the guidance should include information on how to embed the expectations in practice including through implementing multi-agency training.

“The ALC welcomes the clarity around expectations on professionals at various levels of seniority, however this must be embedded in order to be effective. The ALC would recommend proposals on how this might be achieved in practice, which might include an expectation that safeguarding partnerships ensure that multi-agency training is available within their local area. Arranging training should be prioritised by all safeguarding partnerships, and each agency should be encouraged to ensure that the training is disseminated throughout their own agency.” [The Association of Lawyers for Children]

Other respondents commented on the importance of education as a multi-agency safeguarding partner. This is covered in more detail in the following section, which reports on the specific proposals we made to achieve this.

On implementation, respondents expressed concerns about the funding and resource needed.

Respondents also provided suggestions for including additional roles under each of the three levels to make clear the range of practitioner’s examples included Directors of Children’s Services, Head Teachers, Designated Professionals, and youth workers. There were also suggestions for adding language around professional respect and providing clarity on escalation routes when professionals disagreed.

## **Government response**

We will take forward the changes proposed to include new multi-agency expectations in Working Together, making small changes to the wording. Changes will include, adding the professions identified as missing from the lists of examples, and adding wording to clarify this list is not exhaustive, however we acknowledge that having a list is helpful.

We agree that introducing expectations for multi-agency working will only improve outcomes for children and their families if they are implemented well in practice. Statutory guidance sets requirements and parameters for the way in which individuals, agencies and organisations operate and deliver their legislative duties. Working Together is clear about the requirements for clear multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (chapter 2) and the role of local safeguarding partners to oversee how help, support and protection is delivered in practice. We expect local safeguarding partners to reflect how they achieve effective multi-agency working in the published arrangements and in the annual report (see chapter 2) to monitor progress and develop learning.

## You said, we will – Section 1 A shared endeavour

### **You said that:**

- the term 'endeavour' does not accurately reflect this chapter and does not resonate with many people
- that a focus on working with parents could reduce the focus on the voice of the child
- the principles for working with parents and carers should say more about understanding adversity and trauma and should include more references to working with particular groups in different contexts
- the multi-agency expectations should include more references to specific practitioners in the example list under each category

### **Following your feedback, we will:**

- rename chapter 1, 'A Shared Responsibility'
- strengthen the principles for working with parents and carers to bring out the importance of; the voice of the child, tailoring responses to the specific challenges faced when harm is outside the home, awareness of the impact of adversity and trauma when working with parents and include specific reference to working with fathers and male carers
- add more examples of practitioners at each level in the multi-agency expectations, and clarify that the list is not exhaustive

## Section 2 – Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA)

Protecting children from harm is a shared responsibility and requires effective join-up and coordination. We consulted on substantive changes to the chapter on Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements<sup>9</sup> with the aim of strengthening how safeguarding partners (local authorities, integrated care boards (ICBs) and the police) work together, and with relevant agencies, to safeguard and protect children locally. These changes reflect that, despite the progress made by the reforms of 2017<sup>10</sup>, guidance could be strengthened.

We have clarified the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners, introduced a partnership chair role, emphasised the role of education in safeguarding arrangements, and strengthened the wording on accountability by clarifying expectations around information sharing, independent scrutiny, funding, and reporting. These changes aim to ensure the right people are making the strategic decisions, and there is clear accountability, especially around funding and resource decisions.

### Clarifying roles and responsibilities of lead and delegated safeguarding partners

In the consultation we asked 3 questions relating to the roles and responsibilities of local safeguarding partners, including the distinction between lead and delegated safeguarding partners, and how responsibilities are delegated. We asked, **‘To what extent do you agree that these proposed changes provide greater clarity on what the expectations are of safeguarding partners?’** Unfortunately, there was a data error for this question so we cannot provide a detailed breakdown of responses. However, drawing on the themes from comments and consultation events, it is clear that respondents were supportive of the overall proposed changes to this chapter and the greater clarity it provided. We asked a question about clarifying the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners, **‘To what extent do you agree with the list of joint functions of Lead Safeguarding Partners and Delegated Safeguarding Partners?’** There were 960 responses, with over half of respondents (54.5%) agreeing/strongly agreeing with the list of joint functions. Close to a fifth (17%) disagreed/strongly disagreed, and just under a third (28.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

We received 128 comments relating to clarifying the roles and responsibilities of lead and delegated safeguarding partners. Overall, respondents agreed with the proposed changes to introduce a distinction between those who are responsible for providing senior, strategic leadership (Lead Safeguarding Partners - LSPs) and those responsible

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<sup>9</sup> Previously Chapter 3 in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)

<sup>10</sup> [Children Act 2004](#) (as amended by the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#))

for leading operational delivery (Delegated Safeguarding Partners - DSPs) including the functions we expect to be undertaken at each level. This was further supported at consultation events.

We also asked respondents about delegation and what this would look like in practice, **‘In your local area, how would delegation from the lead safeguarding partner to delegated safeguarding partner be interpreted and delivered in practice?’** There were 618 responses, the majority of which commented on the structure of operational and strategic functions within MASA, with many examples of how this currently works in practice and how it could be delivered in local areas.

Of those supporting the proposed changes, including the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, Ofsted and Association of School College Leaders, respondents valued the increased accountability of the two layers and pushing responsibility to the top of the organisations, the clear distinction between the roles, and the value of the joint functions, with a number of local areas and practitioners saying they operate in this way already. Some respondents did recognise the delivery challenges of actioning these roles such as workforce capacity across the sectors and differing geographical footprints of partner agencies (for example, police forces across more than one local authority area). Ofsted noted that they would want to see more explicit expectations of accountabilities.

“The clarification through the proposed changes is welcomed providing greater clarity on the expectations of partners concerning safeguarding, especially at strategic leadership level. We agree with the descriptions of LSP and DSP functions at strategic and delivery levels.” [Bath and North East Somerset Partnership]

A small number of respondents called for greater clarity on where accountability lies and making the link between the LSP and DSP more explicit. There was an emphasis on the need for assurance and escalation processes, clear communication and internal governance between roles, and the recognition that the LSP would therefore not have the same level of detail than the DSPs.

“There needs a strong connection from lead partners to delegated partners and whilst this can be managed locally, direction and expectations should be more explicit” [Local Authority practitioner]

Of those disagreeing, the main concern was about the applicability and practicality of the LSP and DSP layers, particularly in relation to the police and ICB structures which are more complex and have a wider geographical footprint. There were also wider concerns raised about funding and workforce challenges, as well as perceived additional bureaucracy, and how this would then impact on the deliverability of these changes. Some respondents said that the delegated safeguarding partner for health and the police needed to be specified whilst others cautioned against being too prescriptive in this area to allow for local variation and need.

## Government response

We are confident that the LSPs should remain those ultimately accountable for their organisations, pushing responsibility and accountability to the highest level. We want LSPs to be assured that children are appropriately safeguarded and for the right people who hold authority to be making strategic decisions on their behalf. We have purposefully used existing structures and roles, drawing on those already named in legislation, to make sure our changes do not place new burdens on local areas. We recognise concerns about capacity and expertise within the system and have allowed for a degree of flexibility locally in terms of delegation, structure, and organisation of the MASAs to get the balance right between aspiration and local deliverability. We have clarified the relationship between the LSPs and DSPs, to be more explicit about accountability and what this means when there is delegation and provide greater recognition of wider geographical footprints. We have worked closely with other government departments and key stakeholders in all three agencies to agree the updated wording in guidance to ensure it is applicable for police, health, and local authorities.

## Partnership chair

In the consultation we asked, **‘To what extent do you agree that having a mutually agreed representative from a safeguarding partner agency will increase ownership and accountability of partners?’** There were 968 responses, and overall, respondents were largely supportive of the proposed changes despite the volume and variety of opinions expressed. Over half of respondents (52%) agreed/strongly agreed to having a mutually agreed partnership chair, with the remaining respondents almost equally split, 23% disagreed/strongly disagreed and 25% neither agreed nor disagreed.

We received 177 comments relating to the partnership chair, and opinions were more polarised. Of those agreeing, respondents identified the benefits as being able to escalate to those accountable in their organisation (LSPs) and encouraging greater buy-in and collaboration from all three agencies. A number of local areas commented that they are already working in this way, and that where previously there had not been a partnership chair, the independent chair held too much authority and held a leadership role, thus the role helped to remove additional bureaucracy.

“We support the introduction of the new role of partnership chair. Our evidence indicates that this will better support collective ownership of the need for effective system oversight, of learning and improvement to enhance outcomes for children. Whilst we recognise the value added of independent chairs in some areas, it has, in our view, sometimes constrained the capacity of local safeguarding partners to exercise their duties well.” [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel]

Of those disagreeing, those who were independent chairs or where independent chairs reportedly worked well, were more reluctant to have this role removed. The issues of

independence, capacity of the partnership chair and creating hierarchy and an imbalance of power depending on who held the chair role were also expressed. A number of respondents were concerned that the responsibility for this role would likely fall on the Director of Children's Services.

"The proposal that there should no longer be an independent chair and that role of the chair should be played by one of the partners is unhelpful. The steer towards this being the DCS will distort the intention to create more equal responsibilities across the lead safeguarding partner organisations. Having said this, it would be difficult for Police and ICB colleagues who work across multiple geographic areas to take on this role, irrespective of the detail in the section regarding independent scrutiny." [Local Authority practitioner]

## Government response

We will take forward the proposal to introduce the partnership chair role. It is clear from the responses to the consultation that this role is seen as a way of ensuring greater accountability and buy-in from the statutory partners. We recognise concerns about capacity and independence and have addressed this through the revised drafting. With the help of expert stakeholder groups, we have clarified:

- that we are not removing any statutory roles or functions (including independence) from guidance
- the difference between the partnership chair and independent scrutiny roles by adding a functions list for both. We also outline where these two roles should collaborate and work together, alongside the business support function, alleviating concerns of bias within the MASA
- that we are mitigating the risk of single agency control and increased hierarchical structures over partnership working by including the option of have a rotating chair if/ where deemed appropriate by the LSPs
- that we continue not to name a specific individual as partnership chair for example, the DCS, to allow safeguarding partners to decide who is best placed to take on this role, encouraging a truly multi-agency approach to local arrangements

## Role of relevant agencies and education providers

In the consultation we asked two questions about the role of education settings in MASAs. We asked, '**To what extent do you agree that these proposed changes will strengthen the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements?**' There were 976 responses, with over half of respondents (58%) agreeing/strongly agreeing that the role of education will be strengthened. The remaining respondents were equally split, 20% disagreed/strongly disagreed and 22% neither agreed nor disagreed.

We also asked, **‘To what extent do you agree that making education a statutory safeguarding partner is the only way to secure the right level of collaboration in multi-agency arrangements?’** There were 978 respondents, with the majority (69%) agree/strongly agreeing that education being a statutory safeguarding partner was essential for collaboration. The remaining respondents were again evenly split, 17% disagreed/strongly disagreed and 14% neither agreed nor disagreed.

We received 264 comments and considerable feedback through the consultation events. There was notable consistency in the feedback with individuals and organisations across education, health, policing, and local authorities supporting the proposed changes to guidance and wanting us to make education a statutory safeguarding partner.

Of those agreeing, there was strong support for strengthening and formalising education’s role in local arrangements. The recognition of the importance of education settings in children’s daily lives and in safeguarding resonated with many. Respondents recognised that education needed to be both at the strategic and operational levels of decision-making.

“Education establishments have more direct contact with children and young people than any other agency. Their ability to influence safeguarding practice at a strategic and operational level is pivotal. This would also strengthen their safeguarding accountability as well, especially for settings such as Early Years.” [NHS Greater Manchester]

“I think it is crucial that education becomes a statutory partner, but recognise that this would require structure, guidance, support and funding/capacity in order to make it happen.” [Education practitioner]

A number of respondents wanted minor changes or additions to the wording to better reflect the range of practitioners and settings across the education system. Respondents felt this would better represent the diversity of education and childcare settings involved in safeguarding and supporting children. For example, some respondents noted that the guidance could make greater reference to the importance of early years settings, whilst others commented on the need to spotlight settings such as Further Education and unregistered Alternative Provision. A number of responses reflected a concern about the role and engagement of multi academy trusts (MATs), as either a pre-existing issue or as a possible barrier to education becoming a statutory partner.

“There needs to be greater clarity about the role and responsibilities of academy schools and trusts given their different governance arrangements and that they may straddle more than one LSP.” [Ofsted & HMCI]

Where respondents were less supportive or raised concerns, this was often because they wanted guidance to reflect the intention to make education a statutory partner, with greater detail about who and how this would be delivered in practice. Some respondents recognised that this would require legislative and/or careful consideration and might be an option to consider in the longer term.



“BASW... members see the value education staff bring to children’s lives daily. However, ... education providers are not a statutory partner nor is their status at Local Safeguarding Partnerships formalised. Further detail is needed to ensure this strategic recommendation is applicable to practice.” [British Association of Social Workers (BASW)]

“While the new guidance goes some way in addressing these issues...education needs to be a statutory safeguarding partner to enable the right level of collaboration in multi-agency arrangements. Clearly this would be a medium-term aim, given the work that will need to be done to translate the statutory principle into proportionate and workable arrangements.” [Ofsted & HMCI]

There were also concerns about the impact and potential burden on the safeguarding partners and on education providers to deliver these changes, as well as concerns around practicality. These often focused on the key themes of funding, representation, training, infrastructure, and resource. Some respondents questioned whether legislative changes would lead to the required change and highlighted the complexity in putting this into practice given the education landscape.

“Role of education is vitally important, whilst making schools a fourth statutory partner appears to offer a solution, there is no longer a clear or single space to locate the duty.” [Association of Directors of Childrens Services (ADCS)]

“Effective multi agency working requires adequate recruitment, retention, resourcing, and staff training. These arrangements help with clarifying roles, but they stipulate expectations of education professionals that can only be met with additional resource. Education professionals offer effective safeguarding support; there is no evidence that being a statutory partner will strengthen current provision.” [Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)]

## **Government response**

We will update guidance to highlight and strengthen the role and responsibilities of education and childcare providers in MASAs. We have been clear that any formalisation of their role as a statutory partner would require legislative changes and only then could this position be strengthened in statutory guidance. We are committed to exploring this following consultation feedback and are confident that the changes to guidance will strengthen collaboration now. We will review the terminology used in the chapter, and where needed make additional reference to education and childcare settings not appropriately included. We will also strengthen language to emphasise the importance of education leaders being at the strategic discussions, making this more explicit throughout the chapter.

We are exploring possible legislative changes alongside the publication of guidance, but like many respondents, we agree that careful consideration needs to be given to how this would be delivered in practice and what the impact and potential burdens would be on education settings and other partner agencies. We want to be certain that making

schools a fourth partner would bring about the desired change in MASAs and that this could not be achieved via other routes. Therefore, we plan to test out how a strengthened role of education would look in practice through the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme and have established a Task and Finish Group of multi-agency and education leaders to develop our proposals.

## **Role of voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and sports clubs**

Many VCSE and sports clubs provide education and activities for children. The staff and volunteers in these settings are often seen as trusted and influential adults by the children they work with, and so may be the first adult that a child reports abuse to. Therefore, VCSE have an important role to play in protecting children from harm.

To better reflect this role, we suggested changes to the section on relevant agencies within the guidance. This would emphasise the importance of considering naming and engaging these organisations in published local authority safeguarding arrangements to improve oversight, engagement, and consistency in the local safeguarding approach.

In the consultation we asked **‘Do you agree with the proposed changes to encourage more engagement with VCSE and sports clubs as part of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements?’** There were 967 respondents, with responses fairly mixed as to the extent these changes would encourage more engagement. Under half (40%) agreed it would encourage further engagement, with slightly more people (47%) disagreeing, and the remainder (13%) didn’t know whether it would make a difference.

Of those that disagreed, almost a quarter of respondents (22%) disagreed saying VCSE and sports clubs needed to be provided with guidance or other support to engage, 15% disagreed thinking more resource would be needed for safeguarding partners and a further 7% disagreed thinking that safeguarding partners needed additional guidance. A very small percentage (3%) disagreed stating other unspecified support would be needed. However, whilst a number of the respondents disagreed, many, in their written responses, recognised the value of VCSE in safeguarding children from harm, and how engaging them as part of local plans could be beneficial. Their concerns were largely linked to the need for VCSE to have more training, guidance, and support to help them engage with local MASAs and to protect children in their care.

We received 170 comments relating to the role of VCSE and sports clubs. The majority of these comments were supportive of including VCSE in local safeguarding arrangements, highlighting the wide and differing make-up of both VCSE and local communities. They felt VCSE could offer specific insights and unique potential for in-depth engagement, where local authorities might otherwise struggle.

However, almost all of those who commented thought that additional, simpler guidance and support was needed. This would be both for VCSE directly and for local authorities,

focusing on best practice for engagement given the wide variety of organisational capacity and provider types in the sector. Frequently, respondents requested this outreach and engagement be tailored to specific VCSE and their relationship with users. Many respondents also went beyond further advice or guidance, requesting further investment to help enable engagement.

Finally, a minority of respondents suggested that VCSE were not best placed to pick up any further burden in efforts to improve safeguarding standards.

## **Government response**

We noted that respondents were more positive towards VCSE's inclusion in local safeguarding arrangements, on the proviso that further support, guidance and/or funding be made available. We also noted that the answers to the specific question, on whether the proposed changes would encourage more engagement with VCSE and sports clubs as part of MASAs, did not allow for respondents to indicate their support, for the guidance encouraging greater engagement with VCSE, whilst also highlighting further adjustments that may be needed. Some of the comments suggested respondents may have been confused by the options to the question or proposed changes, believing that schools and/or VCSE would become statutory safeguarding partners, alongside local authorities, police and health, rather than being named as relevant agencies.

We believe that the proposed changes to encourage greater engagement of VCSE as part of local safeguarding arrangements would be beneficial. However, we will make some minor clarifying amendments, to set out their exact role more clearly as a relevant agency. Equally, we acknowledge the need for further guidance, support, and resources to support VCSEs to safeguard children, and for supporting their engagement as part of a local approach. On 19 September, we updated existing safeguarding guidance for out-of-school settings<sup>11</sup>, of which many will be VCSE organisations, to improve their understanding of the importance of safeguarding and what is expected of them. We are currently developing free-to-access e-learning to sit alongside this and make it more accessible to a wide range of practitioners. We are also reviewing existing guidance for local authorities on supporting safeguarding in out-of-school settings, and, as part of this, we will aim to include advice on tailored approaches for engaging VCSE when named as relevant agencies in local arrangements.

The role of VCSE was also addressed in the National Framework consultation government response. Relevant agencies, such as educational settings, the youth justice system and voluntary and community groups, have a critical role in supporting local

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<sup>11</sup> [After-school clubs, community activities and tuition: safeguarding guidance for providers](#)

authorities, along with police and health, to achieve the outcomes in the National Framework.

## Accountability and transparency

In the consultation we asked, **‘To what extent do you agree that these proposed changes will make multi-agency arrangements more accountable and transparent?’** There were 974 responses, with the majority (52%) agreeing/strongly agreeing multi-agency arrangements will be more accountable and transparent. A fifth of respondents (19.5%) disagreed/strongly disagreed, with just under a third (28.5%) neither agreeing or disagreeing.

We received 131 comments on these proposals. Overall respondents agreed with the proposed changes, however, there was consensus that guidance could be strengthened on accountability across safeguarding arrangements. Comments on funding local safeguarding arrangements and independent scrutiny generated significant feedback.

Of those agreeing, the majority of respondents said that funding from statutory safeguarding partners should be equitable to support MASAs. Some respondents commented that there was a need for greater clarification in guidance around funding contributions and a definition of what ‘equitable’ means. This also included finding the word ‘proportionate’ unhelpful, too vague, and open to interpretation. A number of respondents, across different agencies, requested a more directive approach on funding such as a national funding formula.

‘It will be clearer to children, young people, parents, and people living in local communities who are the key practitioners and organisations. The publication of information about local arrangements is potentially a powerful way of communication the range and depth of those involved in supporting and protecting children.’ [Safeguarding Partnership]

“There remains a lack of clarity into what is meant by the term ‘equal partner’. This is particularly relevant when considering funding contributions from statutory partners where it says contributions should be “equitable and proportionate” but does not further define these terms and can therefore be a point of contention and potentially hinder the continued development of the partnerships.” [Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent ICB]

Respondents also commented on independent scrutiny, reflecting the feedback on the introduction of the partnership chair role and what this meant for scrutiny and chairing. Some respondents asked for a clearer distinction between the different functions of the partnership chair and scrutiny arrangements to improve the effectiveness of accountability. Additionally, several respondents raised concerns about whether there would be sufficient independence and capacity within the system to deliver a scrutiny function that does not involve an independent chair role. Other respondents commented on the lack of clarity in the wording on independent scrutiny and who could deliver it.

Respondents requested further guidance on how to use the voice of children and families, the use of data and the contents and effectiveness of the yearly report in reviewing learning from scrutiny arrangements.

“We think the section on independent scrutiny is somewhat ‘loose’ and vague. We welcome the requirement for LSPs to publish annual reports which include learning from scrutiny but think stronger guidelines on the scrutiny process and a requirement to publish scrutiny reports would improve the effectiveness of the process.” [National Association Special Schools (NASS)]

## **Government response**

We have heard feedback that greater clarity is needed on independent scrutiny. We will strengthen the wording and add a list of functions for independent scrutiny. We are confident that this will mitigate concerns on the place for scrutiny and chairing within the partnerships by focusing on functions rather than roles. By distinguishing between independent scrutiny, partnership chairing and business management, we are confident that this arrangement removes any need for a local area to maintain another chair or independent chair. Outside of the guidance update, we will be working with key stakeholders to develop research and case studies looking at what good scrutiny looks like.

We will also clarify the wording on funding arrangements in guidance, but we will not direct statutory safeguarding partners on how to fund arrangements or introduce a funding formula, as this is for local decision. We will look to promote best practice in relation to effective local funding arrangements by developing guidance on equitable funding. We aim to conduct a research project over the coming months and aim to have this published in 2024.

## You said, we will – Section 2 Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

### You said that:

- there needs to be greater clarity on lines of accountability and the relationship between the LSP and DSP, including what delegation means in practice
- the expectation and relationship between the partnership chair, independent scrutiny and business management office could be strengthened
- education should be included in operational and strategic decision-making
- additional, simpler guidance and support was needed for VCSE and sports clubs directly and for local authorities, focusing on best practice for engagement
- there needed to be more clarity and direction on how to achieve equitable funding arrangements locally

### Following your feedback, we will:

- clarify links between roles and be explicit about delegation and what this means for all three agencies
- clarify the difference between the roles of partnership chair and independent scrutiny by including a functions list for both and including the possibility of a rotating partnership chair
- explore possible legislative changes to include education as a safeguarding partner, and test out how a strengthened role of education would look in practice through the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme
- ensure that education settings are appropriately referenced in guidance
- develop free-to-access e-learning to sit alongside existing safeguarding guidance for out-of-school settings and make it more accessible to a wide range of practitioners
- develop guidance on equitable funding to promote best practice in relation to local funding arrangements

## Section 3 – Help and support for children and their families

We want children and their families to receive the right help at the right time, from practitioners with the right knowledge, skills and relationships working with families to keep children safe and well. We also want a renewed focus on family-led solutions where other family members and family friends can play an invaluable role in supporting parents, enabling children to live safely at home.

### Early help

While many families have good experiences, there is too much variation in the amount and quality of support families receive in what is currently known as the early help system.

In *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, we outlined our strategy for whole system reform including family help which will provide effective and intensive support to any family facing significant challenges. The Families First for Children Pathfinder will test new approaches to delivering family help. It will be important to test how to implement family help effectively before revising the statutory guidance to set out the expectations for moving from the current system of early help to family help.

In this revision of *Working Together*, we made changes to strengthen language around whole family working and risk factors that practitioners should be aware of when identifying children and families in need of help including changes in behaviour, persistent absence, children missing education. We included guidance on the role of social media and the importance of recognising harm outside the home as reasons that children might need early help support. We also strengthened the guidance on the role of education and childcare settings in supporting children and keeping them safe.

In the consultation we asked, **‘To what extent do you agree that these changes will strengthen whole family working and tailored support for children and families ahead of wider system reforms?’** There were 991 responses, with the majority (57.5%) agreeing/strongly agreeing this would strengthen whole family working and support children and families. Close to quarter of respondents (23%) neither agreed or disagreed, with a fifth (19.5%) disagreeing/strongly disagreeing.

We received 153 comments relating to changes to early help, with many respondents valuing the stronger emphasis on support and early intervention. Respondents supported the clarification of early help as a system rather than a series of services, with this going some way in supporting a consistent approach to early help across the country.

“This section provides a good starting point for what early help is and it is particularly welcome that it emphasises early help as a “system of support” rather than a service.” [Barnardo's]

A significant number of respondents welcomed the focus and strengthened language relating to whole family working. Respondents spoke about a range of therapeutic approaches to early help including relational practice and working that recognised the importance of understanding adversity and trauma. Linked to this, a few respondents highlighted the need for more focus and references to teenagers as their needs often differ to those of younger children and a different approach may be required.

“Early help is often mistaken for help provided in early childhood. Families can often cope well until the child(ren) reach teenage years when the challenges and issues are very different.” [Education practitioner]

Some respondents supported the extension of the range of risk factors that practitioners need to be particularly aware of. A few respondents specifically mentioned the inclusion of children who are persistently absent and those at risk of exclusion as a welcome addition. Some of these respondents felt that we could go further to clarify that practitioners should be aware that the range of risk factors identified in the guidance are not exhaustive and a child can be experiencing multiple challenges at the same time.

A number of respondents highlighted concerns about partnership roles and responsibilities. A common concern amongst respondents from the education and health sectors was that increasing responsibility for the provision of early help would overburden practitioners, conflict with the other core responsibilities of their roles and may not align with their professional competence. Linked to this, several respondents asked for more clarification on partnership responsibilities to ensure all partners understood their role in the provision and oversight of early help.

## **Government response**

We will take forward the proposed updates for early help. We have made small changes which include strengthening language around teenagers, the range of risk factors practitioners need to be aware of and ensuring that partnership working aligns with professional competencies, accountabilities, and resources.

As outlined in *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, we want to establish locally based, multi-disciplinary family help teams that work collaboratively with partners to provide welcoming, intensive, and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families. The Families First for Children Pathfinder will test new approaches to delivering family help including how local authorities and their partners (such as police, health, education) can share information to identify need early and best work together to provide an integrated family help offer.

## **Family networks**

We want a renewed focus on family-led solutions from within the ‘family network’, and to prioritise every child’s right to a family life wherever possible. We want to create a culture



where families, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, and non-related people connected with the child, are actively involved from early help and at every stage throughout the children's social care system.

In the consultation, we asked **'Do you agree that the features outlined for Family Group Conferences will improve family network engagement in decision making and supporting children?'** There were 976 responses, with the majority of respondents (64%) supportive of the features outlined for family group conferences. Over a tenth (15%) didn't agree, and a fifth (21%) said they didn't know.

We received 130 comments relating to changes to family networks, and the majority of respondents were broadly supportive of engaging the family network at an early stage, highlighting that this would be beneficial to families.

"The changes to the section on Family Group Conferences is welcome as it can often be a missed opportunity to identify support within the family and having challenging conversations at an early stage, which can reduce the likelihood of a child being placed in care." [The Association of Lawyers for Children]

However, many respondents also identified cost and resourcing considerations associated with delivering family group conferences and ensuring these are implemented widely and consistently. Another issue raised was the need for sufficient training and guidance for practitioners delivering family group conferences for them to be fully effective.

"Working with family networks is a very positive principle, to be effective family group conferences needs to be resourced and delivered by a knowledgeable and skilled workforce." [Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust]

Several respondents also noted potential safeguarding concerns when using family group conferences. There were specific concerns raised in relation to domestic abuse, coercion, and intra-family sexual abuse, and whether the use of family group conferences is appropriate in this context.

"It is essential that practitioners have the skills, confidence and knowledge to both identify domestic abuse and domestic abuse perpetrators to be able to make safe and informed decisions on the situations in which Family Group Conferences would be appropriate – which will require additional guidance, workforce development and training, and investment and funding." [The Drive Partnership]

Some respondents identified data protection law as a potential barrier to successfully implementing family group conferences with a concern about practitioners being unable to share relevant information without parental consent. A small number of respondents also noted some concerns regarding the capacity of the family to make sustained

change. Some respondents queried the use of the term family group conferences over the broader term family group decision-making.

## Government response

We will take forward the proposals for the renewed focus on family solutions from within the family network and outlining the features of family group conferences.

We have made changes to clarify language around family group conferences, including using family-led decision making as the umbrella term for these forums, while clarifying that family group conference is one particular model. We have also clarified that at pre-proceedings stage, successful family group decision-making or family group conference involves an independent coordinator, in line with other existing statutory guidance. We will explore good practice within local authorities on how to engage birth parents and family networks safely and successfully around safeguarding issues and consent. We want to empower families to create family-led solutions which are achievable and sustainable, and the guidance sets out how this approach should be embedded in all work with children and their families. Practitioners are best placed to monitor progress, assess the needs, risks and outcomes for each child when considering how to use family group conferences.

We note the concerns raised around cost and resourcing regarding family group conferences. The changes made to Working Together are aligned with the existing responsibilities of local authorities as set out in statutory guidance. The changes place a renewed focus on family-led solutions to encourage further prioritisation of this approach, but do not place any new burdens on local authorities. We will use the learning from the Families First for Children Pathfinder and Family Network Pilot to inform future updates to this guidance.

## Support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989

Our ambition is for children and families to receive the support they need, from the right people, with the right skills, at the right time to achieve the very best outcomes. Providing support and services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 is a local authority duty<sup>12</sup>,

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<sup>12</sup> [Children Act 1989 Section 17](#):

- a) is a general duty. In practice, local authorities apply the threshold for receiving support and services under section 17 differently depending on their local needs profile and how they organise their services
- b) was designed to be flexible, enabling local authorities to determine the level of support and how this is provided
- c) is intended to promote welfare, alongside safeguarding, but in practice has predominantly been focused on children with the highest levels of need
- d) applies where a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm
- e) is a general duty on the local authority and does not specify which practitioners should carry out specific functions/provide services

designed to be flexible, enabling local authorities to determine both how they provide help and who they determine to be in need of support.

We took the opportunity in this update of Working Together to reflect that the primary legislation does not require a social worker to be the lead practitioner for the family. We sought to clarify that children and families supported under section 17 have a range of needs including, those who receive support due to child disability, those where there are complex needs, those who need safeguarding and those who need protection. We proposed replacing references to social workers in section 17 assessment, planning and review with the term 'lead practitioner' to indicate where a broader range of practitioners with the right skills, knowledge, competence, and capacity can undertake direct work with families, holding the primary relationship with the family and co-ordinating support and services. These changes aimed to reduce the number of handovers where a child's needs change, help strengthen the relationship between families and the lead practitioner (who may or may not be a social worker) thereby improving the quality of support that children and families receive. We set out the role of social work qualified practice supervisors or managers in making decisions and providing support to the lead practitioner and that all lead practitioners should receive supervision from within their line management chain.

In the consultation we asked, **'Do you agree that the proposed changes will help to improve the outcomes of children and their families who receive support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989?'** There were 1007 responses, and respondents were almost equally split. 36% of respondents said yes, the changes will improve outcomes, 38% said no, with the remaining 26% stating they don't know. Respondents from health and family members including birth parents, were more likely to believe the proposed reforms would not improve outcomes, responding no 61% and 54% respectively. Respondents from police, local authorities and education generally viewed the reforms more positively responding no in minority at 21% (police), 23% (local authorities) and 33% (education).

We also asked, **'Do the proposed provisions for the role of the social worker qualified practice supervisor or manager ensure appropriate social work oversight?'** There were 993 responses, and responses were again mixed. A third of respondents (30%) said yes these changes would ensure appropriate social worker oversight, another third (35%) said they wouldn't, and the remaining third (35%) said they didn't know.

We asked **if there were practitioners who should not be lead practitioners**, which received 607 comments. Health and education were the two largest identified groups referenced in around a fifth of responses (18%). Some responses suggested that guidance should be clear that they cannot take on the role. Other groups mentioned included the police and the voluntary sector.

Many respondents agreed with the proposals to broaden the range of practitioners stating reasons including increased flexibility in the design and delivery of support, benefits in identifying practitioners with the right skills and relationships with families, supporting local authorities already working in this way and reducing stigma in accessing services.

“It will depend on each particular case. For some, the lead will be social services, for some, it will be police and for some education so taking each case and allocating the right department/organisation will be beneficial”.  
[Police officer]

A significant number of respondents expressed concerns stating that only social workers hold the skills to effectively work with children and families accessing section 17 support and services. Respondents also raised concerns that harms could be missed where social workers were not the lead practitioner or, alternatively, practitioners may unnecessarily escalate to child protection to ensure social work oversight.

“In the area I work, when we step down, it is hard to get another person to act as lead practitioner, and I can see this stepping so many families up to CP [child protection], as practitioners will be worried about the legal implications around missing something.” [Social Worker]

Other respondents raised questions about how social work oversight would work, particularly where practitioners were from other professional backgrounds, and how accountability would be managed across agencies and at a strategic level with more practitioners involved.

“I feel strongly that changing the lead professional within section 17 is extremely concerning and will have significant impact on other teams and ultimately be a risk.” [Health practitioner]

Many responses identified implementation factors which would be essential to ensure the reforms were effective. These included ensuring adequate resourcing and capacity, suitable training to develop skills of the lead practitioner and understanding better how accountability would work.

“It is important to note that it is not just about the role or skills/experiences of the individual acting as lead practitioner, but also the wrap around support and supervision/oversight structures around them – how would this be provided, and quality assured if the lead practitioner is from a different agency than the supervisor/manager?” [Connect Centre for International Research on Interpersonal Violence and Harm, University of Central Lancashire]

## **Government response**

We will take forward the proposed changes to the guidance which clarify that a broader range of practitioners can be the lead practitioner for children and their families under section 17. We will make clear that the lead practitioner should hold the right skills and relationship with the family and that the decision about how lead practitioners will be

allocated will be for the social work qualified practitioner or manager and include agreement from the multi-agency team and the lead practitioner, where this is appropriate.

We have clarified in guidance that the local authority continues to be accountable for section 17 support and services and made clear where decisions should be taken by a social work qualified practice supervisor or team manager, for example in accepting a referral, deciding on the type of assessment needed, and holding responsibility for children in need of immediate protection. We have clarified the role of the social work qualified practice supervisors or managers in supporting the lead practitioner alongside the wider multi-agency team working with the family. This includes attending joint visits and developing and reviewing plans.

In removing references to social workers, we did not want to imply that social workers would no longer be lead practitioners under section 17. We anticipate that social workers will continue to provide highly skilled and expert support whilst holding this role with many of the families receiving support and services under section 17. The intention is to confirm that local authorities have the flexibility to structure their local support and services to meet the needs of these children and their families in the way that is most effective and fits with their local service delivery. This may include using a wider group of practitioners. Guidance is clear that where there are child protection concerns, the lead practitioner will be a social worker.

We note that some respondents wanted guidance to be clear about certain practitioners, such as health and education, who should not hold the role of lead practitioner. We have strengthened expectations for local authorities, together with their partners, to set out their local protocols for assessment and support. Local protocols should set out governance arrangements, roles, and responsibilities, and take account of the resources, commissioned service requirements, and professional competences when considering who can act as a lead practitioner with these children and their families. We are confident that maintaining flexibility nationally reflects the primary legislation and that local partnership decisions should be taken about which practitioners can act as the lead practitioner and should not be a decision for national guidance. Local areas will implement any change in approach within existing resources.

## **Support for disabled children**

We have heard from families about the difficulties they face when trying to access social care support for their disabled child's needs. We recognise that caring for a disabled child is not always easy and that sometimes parents and carers need additional help and support. We also recognise that some children with complex needs require specialist care and support, which must be joined up across children's social care, education, and health.

In Stable Homes, Built on Love, we made a commitment to strengthen and improve the support children’s social care provides for disabled children. This includes the Working Together consultation and its stronger focus on support and protection for disabled children and improved multi-agency working. The National Framework will also set out expectations for practice which include supporting disabled children.

In the consultation we asked, **“Do you agree with the proposed changes to strengthen assessment and support for disabled children?”** There were 1156 responses, with a significant majority (65%) of respondents saying yes the changes would strengthen assessment and support, almost a fifth (18%) said no and the remaining 17% said they didn’t know.

We received 349 comments relating to changes to support for disabled children. A theme that came through strongly is the importance of practitioners having knowledge and understanding of disabilities, especially about the impact of autism and neurodivergence, and the need for more training.

Some respondents also called for practitioners to receive training on the law and non-discriminatory practice. Respondents welcomed the role of Designated Social Care Officer<sup>13</sup>. This role highlights the importance of co-ordinating social care input to the SEND system and statutory process so both systems are better aligned leading to families experiencing a more streamlined, joined up approach.

Many of the respondents, including a high volume of parents highlighted that they feel the assessment process is not fit for purpose, is frequently conducted through a safeguarding lens, and does not consider the genuine practical support the child and family needs. The fact that support is often delivered under section 17 is cited as being unhelpful as the framework for how help is offered, as this often results in a safeguarding lens. Parents have said they often feel as if they are being blamed for their child’s disability.

“Section 17 needs to change in my opinion.....The approach given to families with children with disabilities is not acceptable because the same view is taken as it is for those families who are under investigation for abuse” [Parent]

While these views from parents came through strongly, other respondents highlighted the vulnerability of disabled children and the need to ensure practitioners continued to adopt a safeguarding lens when appropriate.

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<sup>13</sup> The Designated Social Care Officer is a role within the local authority designed to coordinate social care input to the SEND system and statutory process. It is intended to mirror the functions of the Designated Medical/Clinical Officer (DMO/DCO) role in health but covering children’s social care services

A significant number of respondents, of which many are parents or carers, requested a bespoke assessment better tailored to the needs of disabled children and their families. Parents reported experience of previous assessments to have been stressful and upsetting and felt such assessments did not reflect their distinctive needs.

“Separate assessment documentation and guidance should be developed for situations in which parents of disabled children approach children's services to seek support. Currently, the process used is the same as where a safeguarding concern has been identified.” [Parent]

The need for more resources and provision was also a key theme. Respondents suggested they would benefit from better joined up working between partners such as local authority Special Education Need and Disability teams, health professionals, schools and safeguarding and child protection practitioners.

### **Government response**

We will take forward the proposed changes to emphasise that in addition to its safeguarding function, a key role of children's social care in relation to disabled children and their families is to provide practical help and support when needed. This includes strengthening language in the section on the assessment of disabled children and their carers to emphasise that the assessment should understand their distinctive needs and context and focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for the child and the whole family. We will also strengthen the language around the role of the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) to align with wider reforms to the SEND system and ensure better integration between services at a local level.

This update is the first step towards improving how children's services provide support to disabled children and their families. Future changes will also take into account the findings of the Law Commission Review of children's social care legislation for disabled children, together with emerging evidence from our Families First for Children Pathfinder, where we will work with local areas to consider implementing a bespoke assessment protocol. The Pathfinder will also provide the opportunity to test a broader range of practitioners to work with disabled children and their families, including leading assessments.

### **Mother and baby units**

Prison Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) are discrete specialist accommodation units for women with children up to the age of 18 months, or above where appropriate, managed and supported by both operational prison staff and qualified nursery professionals.

The updates to Working Together respond to the recommendations from the Chief Social Worker's independent review 'Applications to mother and baby units in prison; how

decisions are made and the role of social work', published November 2022, which included clarifying the role of children's social care in assessments.

In the consultation we asked, '**Does the new information clarify the role of children's social care in the assessment of suitability for a MBU placement?**' There were 928 responses and with over half of respondents (53%) saying yes, the proposed updates clarify the role of children's social care. Over a third (38%) didn't know and only a minority of respondents (9%) said no.

We received 72 comments relating to changes to MBUs. Many respondents noted that they valued the clarification of support for children through a whole family assessment, which provides a balanced view and recommendation about the best interests of the child.

"Positive the processes are more robust and strengthened to assess risk and impact on children." [Health practitioner]

A few respondents were concerned that the guidance would increase the number of children in prisons and a few respondents were unclear if this guidance applied to other MBUs in different settings such as hospitals.

### **Government response**

We will continue with our proposed change to add additional information to clarify the role of children's social care in the assessment of suitability for a MBU placement. We will also make it explicit that this guidance refers to MBUs in prisons.

MBUs promote and facilitate the development and maintenance of relationships between women and their children during a pivotal attachment and development period. This is only in cases when a whole family assessment determines this is in the best interests of the child.

### **Prison and Probation Services**

Practitioners across different agencies can have little experience or contact with the Criminal Justice System and will sometimes have limited knowledge of the work of HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). This can lead to missed opportunities for multi-agency working for help, support and safeguarding for children and their families. We proposed changes to provide a clear description of the role of the prison and probation service and how it contributes to safeguarding work alongside other agencies. We want these changes to help improve the local arrangements the prison and probation service have with children's social care, particularly in relation to exchanging information.

In the consultation, we asked '**To what extent do you agree these changes will give practitioners across all agencies and organisations, a clearer understanding of the work HMPPS do and the contribution HMPPS makes to keeping children safe?**'



There were 919 responses with over half of respondents (53%) agreeing/strongly agreeing these changes will provide a greater understanding to practitioners. Over a third (37%) neither agreed or disagreed and a minority (10%) disagreed/strongly disagreed.

We received 62 comments on whether the changes would improve understanding about the role of the prison and probation service. Respondents acknowledged the importance of exchanging information with HMPPS but highlighted perceived gaps in the guidance regarding information sharing with health, and noted the need to be explicit about how information from health may benefit risk assessments and risk management plans.

A small number of respondents voiced concern that their local authority may not be adequately resourced to implement the updated guidance. Other respondents noted the need for a decision on prisoner child contact arrangements to be multi-agency, or one made jointly with children's social care and a few respondents highlighted the importance of meeting the needs of children who are impacted by parental imprisonment. Several respondents challenged us to go into greater depth in places and broaden the guidance to cover wider themes, for example, safer sentencing in courts, working with families, victim services, health, and domestic abuse.

## **Government response**

We will implement the proposed changes to provide clarity for professionals across agencies and organisations about the role of the prison and probation service in safeguarding children and working with families.

We have strengthened the guidance in relation to prisons improving the access children's social care have to prisoners involved in safeguarding or child protection by emphasising the importance of prisons collaborating with social care to improve outcomes for children. We have been explicit that the prison's decision on contact must take into account information gathered from other relevant agencies. We have also strengthened guidance relating to the transfer of probation cases between different local authorities. Regarding information sharing for individuals who pose a risk to children but are no longer supervised, we will consider how we provide guidance on this in future updates.

We are confident we are not placing any new requirements on local authorities in terms of the role and responsibilities of prisons and probation, and the processes in place to exchange information. We recognise that some local authorities may decide to review their information sharing agreements with their local probation delivery units to strengthen or consolidate existing arrangements.

We are confident that the requirements for probation practitioners are clear when working with people who are neurodiverse, alongside the management of personality disorders, mental health issues, and any other health-related risk factors, when determining the approach to case management. Practitioners are already required to exchange information with healthcare services where appropriate. The HMPPS primary risk

assessment tool (the Offender Assessment System or OASys) also supports robust information gathering from health and enables probation practitioners to embed it into risk management plans. Local Safeguarding Partnerships should have arrangements in place which set out the interface between health and the prison and probation service, we would encourage practitioners to familiarise themselves with these arrangements. The wider topics raised by respondents, including safer sentencing in courts and working with domestic abuse, are a matter of probation practice and are covered in the HMPPS Domestic Abuse Policy Framework.

Working Together is clear that the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) do not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of keeping children safe. It is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child provided that there is another lawful basis to process any personal information required. We have made clear the legal basis on which the prison and probation service are able to share information without offender consent. We are confident that Working Together, alongside the revised Non Statutory Information Sharing Advice for Safeguarding Practitioners<sup>14</sup> and Information Commissioners Office 'A 10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children'<sup>15</sup> provides the necessary support for practitioners to share information to protect children. Practitioners should consider the advice in these documents alongside guidance relevant for their profession or setting. For example, health practitioners should consider the GMC guidance on 'Confidentiality: Good practice in Handling Patient Information and Protecting Children and Young People'.

The prison service update already includes how prison staff use the National Information Centre on Children of Offenders (NICCO) website – a public resource where any organisation can find local services to support children who are impacted by parental imprisonment; the HMPPS 'Think Child' approach to child safeguarding encourages staff to think more widely about the welfare and wellbeing of these children, and we have collaborated with Time Matters UK over the last two years to raise staff awareness, and promote the use of child impact assessments. The impact of parental imprisonment is a growing area of importance for HMPPS.

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<sup>14</sup> The updated Information Sharing Advice is expected to be published in early 2024.

<sup>15</sup> [A 10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children | ICO](#)

## You said, we will – Section 3 Help and Support for children and their families

### You said that:

- there should be more focus and references to teenagers across early help, and the guidance should go further to clarify that practitioners understand that the range of risk factors identified in the draft guidance are not exhaustive
- there are potential safeguarding concerns with family group conferences, such as domestic abuse, and that data protection law could be a potential barrier
- there are challenges with broadening the range of practitioners working with families under section 17, without additional training and capacity in the system
- families and children want practical support where children with disabilities are receiving services
- it was unclear if this guidance applied to other Mother and Baby Units in different settings such as hospitals
- there are gaps in the guidance regarding information sharing between HMPPS and health, and needed to be more explicit about how information from health may benefit risk assessments and risk management plans

### Following your feedback, we will:

- strengthen the language around teenagers, the range of risk factors practitioners need to be aware of and partnership working, in the early help section
- clarify the language around family group conferences so it is in line with other existing statutory guidance, as well as explore good practice with local authorities on how to successfully and safely engage birth parents and family networks
- make clear the skills, knowledge and capacity for lead practitioners, the role of social work qualified practice supervisors or team managers and emphasise the local authority accountability for section 17 support and services
- place greater emphasis on whole, family working and a strengths-based approach in supporting families of disabled children
- amend the subtitle to reflect that the guidance is referring to Mother and Baby Units in prisons
- be explicit that the prison's decision on contact must take into account information gathered from other relevant agencies. Regarding information sharing for individuals who pose a risk to children but are no longer supervised, we will consider how we provide guidance on this in future updates

## Section 4 – Decisive, multi-agency child protection

Our vision for child protection is an effective multi-agency system where practitioners across agencies have the highest levels of knowledge and skills, and work in a multi-agency way across statutory child protection activities. We have created a new clear section heading for child protection and brought together both practice guidance and messages from evidence about good multi-agency working in protecting children from harm.

### A sharp focus on child protection including new national multi-agency practice standards for child protection

The consultation proposed to introduce a new set of national multi-agency practice standards for child protection that apply to all practitioners who come into contact with children where there is concern that the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. These standards emphasise the skills, experience, and expertise practitioners working in a multi-agency child protection context need. The term “standards” was recommended by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel to promote an effective and consistent framework for all practitioners.

In the consultation we asked, **“To what extent do you agree these standards will be effective in supporting improved multi-agency child protection work?”** There were 946 responses, the majority of respondents were supportive of the proposed changes. Almost two thirds (61.5%) agreed/strongly agreed that child protection standards will be effective in supporting improved multi-agency child protection work. Around a tenth (13.5%) of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed, and the remaining quarter (25%) neither agreed or disagreed.

More than half of respondents from education, local authorities, and police agreed/strongly agreed that the standards would be effective in improving multi-agency child protection work. The views were mixed from those respondents who identified as being from a health background, with 47% agreeing/strongly agreeing, and 24% neither agreeing/disagreeing. Most respondents in other categories, such as professionals with lived experience, carers, birth parents, and children, neither agreed nor disagreed with the question. This is understandable, as the standards are operations focused.

We received 114 comments relating to the standards. The majority of respondents were from a health background, local authorities, and safeguarding partnerships. Respondents overall agreed the standards were comprehensive and clear, and they provided support and guidance to practitioners who come into contact with children who may be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

A participant in the child protection event commented the standards were a welcome development, particularly for those working in early years sector or voluntary organisations.

Written responses echoed this sentiment stating:

“We believe that the proposed practice standards found in a new section within the guidance gives greater clarity and support to practitioners and enhances their depth of knowledge in working with children, placing more emphasis on skills and experience.” [Health practitioner]

“From a police and partnership perspective, the introduction of new national multi-agency practice standards for child protection appears promising in standardising practice and improving inter-agency collaboration.” [Walsall Safeguarding Partnership]

Some responses highlighted the need to increase representation of the child’s voice throughout the standards, as this was perceived as an important but missing element. A few responses highlighted the importance of including how harm can manifest differently for children with SEND, and how children who are non-verbal communicate when they have experienced harm. Some responses also highlighted the lack of extra-familial harm focus.

The term “practitioner” was also questioned by some respondents, particularly those from police and health, as this felt too social work focused. This was also echoed in comments during the health event.

Many responses, whilst welcoming of the standards, raised concerns about how these will be implemented and monitored in practice. Respondents felt that lack of resourcing, funding, and training in some agencies could be a barrier to successful implementation.

Respondents also asked for clarification as to who will monitor and review the standards, how, what accountability will look like and how government will ensure the standards are followed in practice.

We received 103 responses relating to strengthening multi-agency child protection responses. Comments were varied, with no overriding themes. Resourcing and investment challenges were highlighted as main issues. A few comments raised the need to increase the voice of the child across the child protection process. The need to define expectations and responsibilities clearly and explicitly were highlighted in a few responses, particularly around the role of health practitioners and the independent chair.

## **Government response**

We will implement the new national multi-agency child protection standards and strengthen references to multi-agency working within child protection processes. We have also noted that the standards should be implemented within the wider context of

chapter 3, section 3 of the guidance, which emphasises the importance of the child's voice and working with different groups of children experiencing different types of harm. We have made changes to the guidance to ensure that experiences of children with SEND and non-verbal children are considered in multi-agency child protection. We have also strengthened the wording on the importance of practitioners listening to the child and their personal experiences throughout the standards, and more clearly referenced the different types of harm children can experience both within and outside the home.

We are confident that the current inspection frameworks for local areas (Inspecting local authority children's services - ILACS) and Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs) are sufficient to monitor the implementation and impact of the changes. Safeguarding partners are inspected by their respective inspectorate bodies (Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services) and jointly through Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs). We are testing new approaches to multi-agency child protection as part of the Families First for Children Pathfinder and will work with the local areas to test and understand the impact of the standards. We will use the learning from the Pathfinders to make updates to the guidance and standards in the future.

## Harm outside the home

The changes proposed aimed to clarify in guidance that a multi-agency safeguarding response applies to all forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The guidance should help practitioners to support children who experience harm outside the home, including how they work with children, families and safeguarding and community partners to understand the extra-familial context in which harm is occurring. This should include where harm occurs online, the role of multi-agency partners in keeping children safe and providing support, and working with parents as partners, wherever safe to do so, to create safety for their child.

In the consultation, we asked, **'To what extent do you agree that the proposed changes make clear that the multi-agency safeguarding response applies when harm, or risk of harm, comes from outside the home, including online?'** There were 945 responses, and the vast majority of respondents (72%) agreed/strongly agreed that the changes proposed in this area were clear. Just under a fifth of respondents (19%) neither agreed or disagreed, and a minority of respondents (9%) disagreed/strongly disagreed.

We also asked, **'To what extent do you agree that the updated section 'supporting children at risk of or experiencing harm outside the home' makes clear what practitioners need to consider in supporting this group of children?'** There were 935 responses, with the majority of respondents (69%) agreeing/strongly agreeing that the updated section made clear what practitioners need to do to support children at risk

of or experiencing harm outside the home. Just over a fifth of respondents neither agreed or disagreed (22%), and a minority of respondents (9%) disagreed/strongly disagreed.

We received 190 comments relating to harm outside the home. The vast majority, as well as those attending consultation events, were supportive of changes and welcomed the additional guidance in this area.

“It is positive that extra-familial harm has been clearly brought into the guidance and clearly places extra-familial harm/exploitation into the statutory framework of children in need of help, support and protection.” [Health practitioner]

Several respondents were positive about the importance of practitioners from different agencies working together, and alongside the community, to respond to contexts that may be causing harm to children. A number of respondents asked for further information on the different types of extra-familial harm, in particular online harm, with respondents acknowledging the prominence of online activities and the opportunities for harm that this can present. Respondents also welcomed the recognition in guidance that children who may have caused harm to others also need a safeguarding response from practitioners across different agencies. Further information in relation to the strategic response to harms outside the home, for example further clarification on role of different partners as part of a multi-agency response, was called for in a small number of responses.

The issue of thresholds in relation to extra-familial harm was raised by a number of respondents, with some welcoming the clarity in guidance about working with children experiencing harm outside the home across the system of help, support, and protection. However, a small number of respondents noted that further guidance would be helpful on the application of the threshold for significant harm, where harm is outside home, to ensure a more consistent approach was applied nationally. Several respondents also felt improvements to the collection of data were needed, particularly where there is a child protection response, to help local areas to identify when harm is happening in contexts outside the home.

Finally, there were several supportive comments related to the inclusion of parents as protective partners where harm is outside the home, while recognising the complexity and need for practitioners to be aware of situations where there is overlap between harm inside and outside the home.

## **Government response**

We will proceed with the proposed changes to the guidance in relation to harms outside the home. We have made minor changes which include:

- adding additional resources to Annex B to support practitioners in their understanding of, and response to, online harm

- clarifying that practitioners should consider children at risk of experiencing extra-familial harm in all children’s social care assessments
- strengthening references to harm outside the home across the guidance, including in the principles for working with parents and carers section and in the national multi-agency practice standards for child protection

Identifying and responding to harm outside the home is an area of practice that continues to evolve. We know that many local areas are already taking innovative approaches in this area, with multi-agency collaboration and partnership across agencies playing a key part in keeping children safe from harm in contexts outside their home. Government has already taken a number of actions in this area including:

- publishing, in March 2023, a set of multi-agency practice principles to help local areas respond to harm outside the home<sup>16</sup>. These principles have been developed by the Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Support Programme in consultation with leaders and practitioners from across a range of agencies, as well as children and parents and carers with personal experience of harm outside the home, including exploitation. They have been used to inform both this guidance and outcome 3 of the National Framework, ‘children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes’
- testing, in 4 local areas, a Risk Outside the Home child protection pathway, that is tailored to the needs of children and families facing harm outside the home
- working closely with the Youth Endowment Fund as they launched their Agency Collaboration Fund: A Supportive Home, working with 5 local areas to test specialist multi-agency and multi-disciplinary teams to support children, young people and their families/carers who are vulnerable to, or experiencing, violence and/or criminal exploitation outside the home

We will use the learning from these programmes to inform expectations for effective multi-agency responses to harms outside the home in the Families First for Children Pathfinder areas and to update future guidance.

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<sup>16</sup> [Multi-agency practice principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm](#)



## You said, we will – Section 4 Decisive, multi-agency child protection

### You said that:

- the child's voice needed to come through more clearly in the standards, and more was needed on working with children with particular needs or experiencing particular harms
- it is important for all professionals to understand online harms
- further guidance on addressing the contexts in which harm can take place outside the home would be welcomed, including further clarification on role of different partners as part of a multi-agency response

### Following your feedback, we will:

- strengthen the references in the new child protection standards to acknowledge the particular needs of children with SEND, non-verbal children and those experiencing harm outside the home
- include resources for practitioners to support their understanding of and response to online harm
- use best available evidence to strengthen what an effective multi-agency response to harms outside the home looks like, including the role of different partners in responding to contexts where harm occurs
- draw on learning from the Risk Outside the Home pilots, the Youth Endowment Fund Agency Collaboration Fund: A Supportive Home, and the Families First for Children pathfinders of what an effective multi-agency response to harms outside the home looks like, to inform future changes to guidance

## Section 5 – Learning from serious child safeguarding incidents

We know that care leavers are more likely to experience homelessness and can be financially vulnerable. This can prevent them from engaging in further or higher education, employment, and increases the risk of isolation and loneliness. Concerns were raised about the number of deaths of care leavers by suicide, and whether being a care leaver reduced an adult's life expectancy. We proposed the non-mandatory reporting of the death of care leavers to help us better understand the outcomes for care leavers aged 18-25.

In the consultation we asked, **'Will it be feasible for your local authority to submit notifications for the deaths of care leavers aged 18-25?'** There were 895 responses, two thirds of respondents (61%) weren't sure and would need to know more to determine if this was feasible. A small percentage (3%) didn't think it would be feasible, the remaining respondents were equally split. 17.5% thought it would be feasible, with a similar number, 18.5%, noting it would be feasible with more support or guidance.

These figures were broadly the same when broken down by the different respondent types. However local authorities, who would be responsible for this change, were more supportive with 41% saying that it would be feasible or feasible with more support. Only 1.5% of respondents across all safeguarding partners felt that it would not be feasible to report the deaths of care leavers.

We received 312 comments relating to reporting on the death of care leavers. Most respondents were supportive of the introduction of care leaver death notifications, although some people raised concerns about the practicality of local authorities keeping in touch with care leavers who do not wish to receive support after the age of 21. A small number of people commented on the links to health professionals in supporting the notification of care leaver deaths.

### Government response

We will take forward the policy of non-mandatory reporting of care leaver deaths up to age 25. We will make some small changes to the wording in guidance to be clearer about the expectation for keeping in touch with care leavers over the age of 21. We will also consider the links to health professionals in supporting the notification of care leavers deaths in future updates.

## You said, we will – Section 5 Learning from serious child safeguarding incidents

### You said that:

- there are practical considerations for local authorities to keep in touch with care leavers over age 21

### Following your feedback, we will:

- clarify wording so that is clearer on how local authorities can keep in touch with care leavers over age 21
- consider the links to health professionals in supporting the notification of care leavers deaths in future updates

## Equalities impact assessment

As part of the update to Working Together, we considered how policy proposals may impact those who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010<sup>17</sup>. We asked respondents for any comments on the potential impacts, whether positive or negative, of these changes in terms of a particular protected characteristic.

We received 323 responses, with birth parents being the largest respondent group. There was support for the proposed changes to guidance and overall respondents thought that they would have a positive impact on those who share a particular protected characteristic, but some noted their effectiveness would depend heavily on implementation. Some respondents also called for more detail on how practitioners should consider protected characteristics and apply these in practice when working to help, support and protect children and their families. Respondents also suggested that more training and education about the provisions and application of the Equality Act 2010 would be beneficial to individuals, agencies, and organisations.

A significant number of respondents didn't directly answer the question however they provided feedback on the current system more widely, particularly around those with disabilities. Comments were around the need to ensure the system provides equal opportunities and access to support both children and parents. In both the consultation responses and events, it came through clearly particularly from parents, that those with a

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<sup>17</sup> [Equality Act 2010: guidance](#)

disability should be looked at through a support lens rather than safeguarding lens, so that they aren't lumped together with neglect/abuse cases and treated the same/offered the same services.

These were also key themes throughout the consultation events, and we held additional sessions on support for disabled children and their families, as well as for parents with personal experience of the system to understand concerns. The changes to Working Together are intended as a first step towards shifting the focus away from always considering needs through a safeguarding lens first, towards practical, non-stigmatising support for disabled children and their families rather than the creation of separate guidance. We plan to make further changes in line with our Pathfinder testing as we await the findings of the Law Commission Review.

Multiple respondents mentioned the need for care leavers to be added as a protected characteristic, with some noting that some local authorities do this already. Some respondents also raised concerns about discrimination against certain groups, including disabled people, ethnic minorities, people who are LGBT, and women. For example, there were a few comments around neurodiversity not being recognised in Working Together, and the need for more support including for neurodiverse parents and carers. Respondents have said there is not enough understanding, and more training is needed.

We received a wide range of feedback in the consultation and although we are unable to address all the points raised in this response, we are committed to considering the impact that policies within Working Together have on individuals and groups with protected characteristics and on children's rights. We will continue to update equalities and children's rights assessments for all proposed policy changes, and we will use the Pathfinders to assess the impact of new measures and to inform future decision-making.

## Next steps

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who gave feedback through both written responses and in the events. We have taken the feedback and set out how we have strengthened Working Together statutory guidance.

We are committed to supporting everyone to implement changes following the publication of the revised Working Together and recognise the importance of understanding how these changes align with the new National Framework and wider reforms. Working Together and the National Framework are central to setting national direction for children's social care practice and sit within the vision for children's social care and wider safeguarding structures.

We have provided implementation funding of c£6m to support safeguarding partners to embed the changes set out in Working Together (primarily chapter 2) and the National Framework. There will also be additional grant funding for local Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIIAS), bespoke support throughout 2024 from government funded national facilitators and published information advice to support local areas and their partner agencies, to implement changes that reflect the revised Working Together and to embed the National Framework in practice.

Working Together and the National Framework will be embedded across the reforms as our transformational journey progresses and following this publication, we have committed to reviewing Working Together each year.

We have responded to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's phase 2 report into the abuse and neglect suffered by children and young adults in 3 privately-run children's homes operated by Hesley Group, in Doncaster. Many of the failures identified by the Panel are parts of the system that we are already beginning to reform. The events in these homes bring into even sharper focus our reforms in SEND and Alternative Provision, children's social care and in the NHS Long-Term Plan to improve the lives of disabled children.

## Annex A: List of organisations that responded to the consultation

The consultation response analysis was led by DfE colleagues, with support and agreement from other government departments including Home Office, Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and the Ministry of Justice. Responses were received via the online Citizen Space platform and via email. We also listened to responses through 12 public events.

We want to thank everyone for engaging and responding to the consultation. We received responses from a wide range of stakeholders including local authorities, health professionals, police, and education.

Organisations who gave permission to be named as respondents:

- Acorns
- Action for Children
- Archway Learning Trust
- Article 39
- Aspris children services
- Association for Education Welfare Management
- Association of Child Death Review Professionals
- Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)
- Association of Colleges
- Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS)
- Association of School and College Leaders (ADCL)
- Barnardo's
- Barnsley hospital NHS foundation trust
- Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council
- Barts Health NHS Trust
- Bath and North East Somerset Council
- Become Charity
- Beyond
- Birmingham and Solihull ICB Designated Safeguarding Team
- Birmingham Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Birth Companions
- Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council – Early Help Team
- Blackpool Borough Council- Public Health
- Bristol City Council
- British Association of Social Worker (BASW England)
- British Transport Police
- Bromley Healthcare CIC
- Cafcass
- Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust
- Cambridgeshire Community Services

- Catch22
- CCS
- Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Centre for Child and Family Justice Research, Lancaster University
- Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse
- Cerebra
- Challenging Behaviour Foundation
- Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel
- City Health Care Partnership CIC
- City of York Council
- Cleveland Police
- Connect Centre for International Research on Interpersonal Violence and Harm, University of Central Lancashire
- Contact (for families of disabled children)
- CoramBAAF
- Cornwall Council
- Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- Da'aro Youth Project
- Darlington Safeguarding Partnership
- Devon and Cornwall Police
- Devon Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Diocese of Truro
- Disabled Children's Partnership
- Dorset Healthcare NHS Trust
- Durham Constabulary
- Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership
- East of England Named Safeguarding Professionals
- East Sussex Children's Services
- ECPAT UK (Every Child Protected Against Trafficking)
- Family Action
- Family Rights Group
- Fightback
- Flying Start Day Nursery
- Forum
- Gloucestershire County Council
- Greenwich Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust
- Havering Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Havering Starting Well (Children's Social Care)
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust
- Hertfordshire Parent Carer Involvement
- Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

- Hope instead of Handcuffs
- Hull Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Humberside Police
- IPSEA (Independent Provider of Special Education Advice)
- James Montgomery Academy Trust
- Kirklees Council - Learning & Early Support
- Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB
- Legal Action for Women, co-ordinators of Support Not Separation; Disabled Mothers Rights Campaign
- Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland ICB
- Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
- Local Government Association
- London Borough of Hillingdon
- London Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Luton Council
- Luton Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Manchester Safeguarding Partnership
- Marish Academy Trust
- Matchmothers.org
- Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP)
- Mencap
- Mid & South Essex Integrated Care Board (MSE ICB)
- Midland Partnership Foundation NHS Trust
- Milton Keynes Together Safeguarding Partnership
- NAHT – The schools leaders' union
- NASUWT - The Teachers' Union
- National Association Special Schools (NASS)
- National Children's Bureau & Council for Disabled Children
- National Network of Designated Healthcare Professionals for Children (NNDHP)
- National Network of Parent Carer Forums
- National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) Portfolio for Child Protection and Abuse Investigations
- National Working Group on Safeguarding Disabled Children
- Nene Education Trust
- Newham Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- Nexus Multi Academy Trust
- NHS
- NHS Gloucestershire ICB
- NHS Greater Manchester
- NHS North East London ICB
- NHS South East London ICB



- NHS West Yorkshire ICB, and Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Noah's Ark preschool
- Norfolk and Suffolk mental health trust
- North Central London ICB
- North East and North Cumbria NHS ICB
- North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership North East London Foundation Trust
- North Tyneside Council
- North West Association of Directors of Children's Services
- Northumberland Children and Adults Safeguarding Partnership
- Northumbria Police
- Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Nottingham CityCare Partnership
- Oastlers School
- Office for Health Improvement and Disparities
- Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner
- Ofsted & HMCI
- Oldham Council
- Operation Encompass
- Our Time
- Outcomes First Group
- Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership
- Parents Families and Allies Network
- Pause
- Pennine Oak's
- PGL Travel Ltd
- Principal social worker children and families network
- PROMISEworks
- Public Health, Portsmouth City Council
- Rachel Batten Training Consultant
- Refuge
- Refugee Council
- Resolution
- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
- Royal National College for the Blind
- Safeguarding Network
- SafeLives
- Sarah Henry Safeguarding Consultancy Ltd
- School and Public Health Nurses Association
- SEND Parent Action Group
- Shenstone Lodge School - The Brades Lodge
- Slough Children First
- Social Care Institute for Excellence
- Social Work England
- Solihull Safeguarding Children Partnership

- South West Region NHS England
- South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
- Southend on Sea City Council
- Southend Safeguarding Partnership
- Southway Playcare
- Speech and Language UK
- St Christopher's Fellowship
- Staffordshire and Stoke-On-Trent ICB
- Stockport Safeguarding Childrens Partnership
- Suffolk and North East Essex ICB
- Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership
- Surrey and Sussex Healthcare Trust
- Surrey County Council
- Surrey Heartlands ICB
- Tameside Safeguarding Children Partnership
- The Association of Child Protection Professionals (AoCPP)
- The Association of Lawyers for Children
- The Centre for Personalised Education
- The Children's Commissioner's office
- The Children's Society
- The City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive
- The Drive Partnership
- The Independent Schools Association
- The Institute of Race Relations
- The Lucy Faithfull Foundation
- The National Youth Agency
- Thoughtful Therapists
- Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (TLSCP)
- Titan Education Trust
- Toot Hill School
- Trafford Children's Services
- Trafford Strategic Safeguarding Partnership
- Transform Trust
- Treloar School and College
- United Lincolnshire NHS Trust
- VOYC Devon
- Walsall Safeguarding Partnership
- Warrington borough council
- West London Zone
- West Yorkshire Police
- Wirral Community Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust
- Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together
- Working Together with Parents Network - University of Bristol
- Youth Justice Board

- Young Roots

# Annex B: Summary of changes we are introducing as a result of consultation responses

## Section 1 – A Shared Endeavour

### You said that:

- the term ‘endeavour’ does not accurately reflect this chapter and does not resonate with many people
- that a focus on working with parents could reduce the focus on the voice of the child
- the principles for working with parents and carers should say more about understanding adversity and trauma and should include more references to working with particular groups in different contexts
- the multi-agency expectations should include more references to specific practitioners in the example list under each category

### Following your feedback, we will:

- rename chapter 1, ‘A Shared Responsibility’
- strengthen the principles for working with parents and carers to bring out the importance of; the voice of the child, tailoring responses to the specific challenges faced when harm is outside the home, awareness of the impact of adversity and trauma when working with parents and include specific reference to working with fathers and male carers
- add more examples of practitioners at each level in the multi-agency expectations, and clarify that the list is not exhaustive

## Section 2 – Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

### You said that:

- there needs to be greater clarity on lines of accountability and the relationship between the LSP and DSP, including what delegation means in practice
- the expectation and relationship between the partnership chair, independent scrutiny and business management office could be strengthened
- education should be included in operational and strategic decision-making
- additional, simpler guidance and support was needed for VCSE and sports clubs directly and for local authorities, focusing on best-practice for engagement
- there needed to be more clarity and direction on how to achieve equitable funding arrangements locally

### **Following your feedback, we will:**

- clarify links between roles and be explicit about delegation and what this means for all three agencies
- clarify the difference between the roles of partnership chair and independent scrutiny by including a functions list for both and including the possibility of a rotating partnership chair
- explore possible legislative changes to include education as a safeguarding partner, and test out how a strengthened role of education would look in practice through the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme
- ensure that education settings are appropriately referenced in guidance
- develop free-to-access e-learning to sit alongside existing safeguarding guidance for out-of-school settings and make it more accessible to a wide range of practitioners
- develop guidance on equitable funding to promote best practice in relation to local funding arrangements

## **Section 3 – Help & support for children and families**

### **You said that:**

- there should be more focus and references to teenagers across early help, and the guidance should go further to clarify that practitioners understand that the range of risk factors identified in the draft guidance are not exhaustive
- there are potential safeguarding concerns with family group conferences, such as domestic abuse, and that data protection law could be a potential barrier
- there are challenges with broadening the range of practitioners working with families under section 17, without additional training and capacity in the system
- families and children want practical support where children with disabilities are receiving services
- it was unclear if this guidance applied to other Mother and Baby Units in different settings such as hospitals
- there are gaps in the guidance regarding information sharing between HMPPS and health, and needed to be more explicit about how information from health may benefit risk assessments and risk management plans

### **Following your feedback, we will:**

- strengthen the language around teenagers, the range of risk factors practitioners need to be aware of and partnership working, in the early help section

- clarify the language around family group conferences so it is in line with other existing statutory guidance, as well as explore good practice with local authorities on how to successfully and safely engage birth parents and family networks
- make clear the skills, knowledge and capacity for lead practitioners, the role of social work qualified practice supervisors or team managers and emphasise the local authority accountability for section 17 support and services
- place greater emphasis on whole, family working and a strengths-based approach in supporting families of disabled children
- amend the subtitle to reflect that the guidance is referring to Mother and Baby Units in prisons
- be explicit that the prison's decision on contact must take into account information gathered from other relevant agencies. Regarding information sharing for individuals who pose a risk to children but are no longer supervised, we will consider how we provide guidance on this in future updates

## **Section 4 – Decisive, multi-agency child protection**

### **You said that:**

- the child's voice needed to come through more clearly in the standards, and more was needed on working with children with particular needs or experiencing particular harms
- it is important for all professionals to understand online harms
- further guidance on addressing the contexts in which harm can take place outside the home would be welcomed, including further clarification on role of different partners as part of a multi-agency response

### **Following your feedback, we will:**

- strengthen the references in the new child protection standards to acknowledge the particular needs of children with SEND, non-verbal children and those experiencing harm outside the home
- include resources for practitioners to support their understanding of and response to online harm
- use best available evidence to strengthen what an effective multi-agency response to harms outside the home looks like, including the role of different partners in responding to contexts where harm occurs
- draw on learning from the Risk Outside the Home pilots, the Youth Endowment Fund Agency Collaboration Fund: A Supportive Home, and the Families First for Children pathfinders of what an effective multi-agency response to harms outside the home looks like, to inform future changes to guidance

## **Section 5 – Learning from serious child safeguarding incidents**

### **You said that:**

- there are practical considerations for local authorities to keep in touch with care leavers over age 21

### **Following your feedback, we will:**

- clarify wording so that is clearer on how local authorities can keep in touch with care leavers over age 21
- consider the links to health professionals in supporting the notification of care leavers deaths in future updates



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