



HM Government

Protecting all vulnerable babies better

A government response

July 2026

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Foreword

The death of baby Victoria Marten was a tragedy that shocked the nation and raised questions about how safeguarding arrangements across England identify, assess and respond to risk of harm for babies and pregnant women.

In February 2026, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (the Panel) published its national review: “Protecting all vulnerable babies better: national review into the broader safeguarding issues raised by the death of baby Victoria Marten.” The review sets out a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities babies face, and the consequences when risks of harm are not identified and addressed early enough. While prompted by the death of Victoria, the review examined wider patterns of serious harm and death involving babies and identified systemic issues that cut across services and agencies.

Babies are uniquely vulnerable. Risks can often emerge during pregnancy or in the earliest months of life, and safeguarding depends on professionals acting early, sharing information effectively and maintaining focus on the baby’s lived experience. The Panel’s review reinforces the need for consistent, joined-up responses across both adult and children-facing services, and for sustained engagement with parents where risks of harm are present.

Since the publication of the Panel’s review, the appalling death of Preston Davey has been a further reminder that we can never be complacent in our efforts to protect babies. An independent local child safeguarding practice review is underway, and it would be inappropriate to pre-empt its findings. While this response does not seek to address the specific circumstances of that case, it sets out this government’s actions to strengthen many of the wider safeguarding issues that continue to arise across serious child safeguarding incidents, and which are reflected in the Panel’s findings. We are committed to learning from the findings of the Preston Davey review, alongside other national and local reviews, and will incorporate any relevant lessons into the implementation of this response and wider safeguarding reforms.

This government response reflects our shared commitment to strengthening protection for babies. It brings together action across adult and children’s social care, health, policing, justice, housing and wider public services, reflecting that safeguarding babies is a shared responsibility across government and beyond.

We are already taking forward significant reform including legislative change and system-wide improvements to safeguarding arrangements, workforce capability and information sharing. This response sets out how these reforms align with the Panel’s findings, where we are strengthening our approach further, and where we will continue to develop practice.

The death of Victoria was a tragedy that must not be forgotten and must inform future practice. We will work collectively to deliver the actions set out in this response and to

ensure that learning from the Panel's review leads to meaningful and lasting improvement. Our focus remains clear: babies must consistently be recognised as a safeguarding priority across all partnerships and agencies, risks must be identified and acted on early, and safeguarding systems must work together to prevent avoidable harm and deaths.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bridget Phillipson". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Bridget" and the last name "Phillipson" clearly legible.

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

Executive Summary

This document sets out the government's response to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's national review: "Protecting all vulnerable babies better."¹ The review highlights the unique vulnerabilities of babies, and the serious consequences when risks of harm are not identified and addressed early enough.

The government is committed to implementing all eight of the Panel's national recommendations and to driving sustained improvement across local safeguarding arrangements. Significant progress is already underway, including legislative reform, strengthened statutory guidance, and system-wide changes to how agencies work together to identify, assess and respond to risk.

This response brings together coordinated action across adult and children's social care, health, policing, justice, housing and wider public services. It reflects the shared responsibility across services to protect babies, and pregnant women, and the need for more joined-up, preventative and evidence-informed approaches.

The response is structured around four objectives:

- to prevent babies dying by identifying and responding earlier to key risk factors behind baby deaths
- to reduce babies entering care by preventing repeat removals and strengthening family support
- to build the evidence base on effective and promising practice
- to facilitate consistency in national guidance on babies and pre-birth support for pregnant women in safeguarding and child protection.

The government will continue to take action to strengthen prevention and early intervention, improve continuity of support for families, and ensure effective responses to key risk factors such as domestic abuse, parental mental ill health, parental substance misuse and causes of parental non-engagement.

Central to this are the new measures in the landmark Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act which will provide greater protection for vulnerable children who are at risk of abuse and neglect. We have also launched plans for a new Child Protection Authority in England and are providing £2.4 billion funding for the Families First Partnership programme as well as rolling out Best Start Family Hubs to ensure that all children are supported to stay safe and thrive.

Collectively, these actions aim to embed a focus on babies and pregnant women as a priority across all relevant services, ensuring that risks are identified and acted on earlier,

¹ [Protecting all vulnerable babies better – National review into the broader safeguarding issues raised by the death of baby Victoria Marten](#)

support for families is more coordinated and effective, and avoidable harm and deaths are prevented.

Introduction

The Panel's national review highlights that: the earliest years of life are critical; risks to babies often emerge during pregnancy; and effective safeguarding depends on timely information sharing, professional curiosity and sustained support for families. It also draws focus to the impact that having babies removed can have on mothers. It therefore concludes that we need to do more to support mothers who have had children removed if we are to prevent more children entering care and support appropriate reunification.

The review makes eight national recommendations, focused on strengthening the safeguarding system across four key areas:

- protecting babies and unborn children
- engaging parents
- serious offenders
- families who move

This document sets out the government's collective response to the national review. It reflects the reality that safeguarding babies is a shared responsibility that relies on children and adult services with coordinated action across health, social care, education, justice, policing and wider public services. It considers the broader learnings and key findings from the review by:

- highlighting existing and ongoing activity across government that aligns with the review's findings
- identifying where programmes are being strengthened or expanded as a response to the Panel's national review
- setting out areas for further consideration
- providing a direct response to the eight national recommendations made in the Panel's national review (annex A).

As part of this, we have focused on four objectives:

- to prevent babies dying by identifying and responding earlier to key risk factors behind baby deaths
- to reduce babies entering care by reducing repeat removals and strengthening family support
- to build the evidence base on effective and promising practice
- to facilitate consistency in national guidance on babies and pre-birth support for pregnant women in safeguarding and child protection.

Some parts of this response reference 'unborn children', recognising the vulnerabilities babies face before birth, and the need for early, pre-birth assessment and planning, while remaining consistent with the government's position that children's rights begin at birth and the clear legal position of respect for a woman's right to bodily autonomy and privacy.

Prevent babies dying by identifying and responding earlier to risk

We aim to strengthen the earlier identification of risk for babies and pregnant women and ensure timely, coordinated multi-agency responses to the key factors associated with serious harm and death.

What we are doing

Across government, significant action is already underway to improve how risks to babies, pregnant women and unborn children are identified and responded to more effectively.

Universal and early identification

Universal health services play a critical role in the early identification of vulnerability and the safeguarding of babies and pregnant women. This is especially important not just during pregnancy but into the first year of life, when risks can emerge and/or escalate rapidly. Maternity, health visiting and primary care services are often the first to have contact with expectant parents and babies. Alongside statutory safeguarding practice, health services are delivering a range of universal and targeted support offers that contribute to earlier identification of vulnerability and improved engagement with families. This includes maternal mental health services, the expansion of NHS Talking Therapies,² and provision through Best Start Family Hubs (BSFH/BSFHs).³ It also includes the embedding of trauma-informed approaches within maternity and neonatal services and wider health services, which support earlier recognition of need and sustained engagement with parents facing complex or cumulative risks. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) is exploring whether to refresh guidance on the working definition of trauma-informed⁴ practice to further support this work.

DHSC is committed to strengthening health visiting, building on the recent publication of updated Healthy Child Programme guidance⁵ with work focused on building capacity, capability and strengthening delivery. Health visiting offers antenatal and postnatal early identification and support for a wide range of issues including perinatal mental health, wellbeing, and parenting and behaviours support. Health visiting offers more intensive specialist level support to those with greatest need, including the family nurse partnership for young first-time parents. Families can also access Healthy Babies services⁶, including

² [Talking therapies - NHS](#)

³ [Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies: guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [Working definition of trauma-informed practice - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ [Healthy child programme - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ [Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies: guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK](#)

perinatal mental health and parent-infant relationship support, through Best Start Family Hubs. These prevention-led, community-based support services have a specific focus on the health and development of babies and act as a gateway to more targeted and specialist support delivered elsewhere, including family help services.

Recognise, Respond and Report is the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) approach to safeguarding, and is supported by training and operational guidance for the workforce. DWP's participation in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)⁷ supports information sharing and coordinated risk management where households may include babies and pregnant women, helping to maintain visibility of families requiring additional support.

Safeguarding and child protection responses

Statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026⁸ (Working Together) has been strengthened to ensure babies are explicitly recognised as a priority group across both children and adult services. Working Together provides the statutory framework for, and underpins, the safeguarding duties and child protection processes that all practitioners and professionals should follow. The 2026 update clarified the legal position of unborn children, placed greater emphasis on earlier identification of risk during pregnancy and reinforced expectations for robust, multi-agency pre-birth planning where there are concerns. It also strengthened the focus on understanding children's lived experiences when assessing harm, and for the first time, referenced the need to consider support for birth parents who had previously had a child removed from their care.

Through the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme,⁹ we are rolling out Family Help and multi-agency child protection teams (MACPT/MACPTs) to improve the experience of families that want help, whilst bringing a clear, expert focus to concerns about significant harm. Central to this is making sure that the right lead practitioners, with the right skills and expertise, work together to protect children.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026¹⁰ creates a new duty on safeguarding partners (local authorities, police and integrated care boards) to establish MACPTs in every local authority area in England. This is being delivered through the FFP programme, backed by £2.4 billion investment. MACPTs will bring a clear, fresh, expert focus to concerns about significant harm, lead all child protection decision making with input from practitioners who know the child and family, and advise and guide their local Family Help systems on child protection concerns.

⁷ [Multi-agency public protection arrangements \(MAPPA\): Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

⁸ [Working together to safeguard children 2026](#)

⁹ [Families First Partnership programme - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁰ [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026](#)

MACPTs will consistently and robustly apply the significant harm threshold from the point at which child protection concerns are identified and determine what action is needed to prevent or stop significant harm and support recovery. All MACPT members must have a robust, applied understanding of actual or likely significant harm across all settings: inside and outside the home and online. MACPTs and wider Family Help system practitioners are expected to understand and respond to the needs of pregnant women and all children from pre-birth onwards, with specific consideration given to babies.

Children of all ages may be especially vulnerable during transitions between services – including out of child protection. We therefore want MACPTs to oversee the development, review, and closure of child protection plans, including formal decision-making on when plans should end and why. This will strengthen safety planning and ensure ongoing oversight and support during transitions, such as into pre-proceedings, where delays or changes in oversight can increase the risk to children.

Central to these reforms is the Information Sharing Duty introduced by the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. From September 2026, local safeguarding agencies will be required to share information to safeguard and promote the welfare of children unless it is determined that sharing would be of greater detriment to the child. This will allow practitioners to gain a fuller understanding of a child's circumstances, to make more informed decisions and provide timely support. Statutory guidance¹¹ will be provided to support this and is currently being consulted on.

Domestic abuse and substance misuse as key risk factors

Across government, action is also focused on tackling the key risk factors associated with serious harm and baby death.

The impact of domestic abuse on babies is profound and long-lasting. The Domestic Abuse Act 2021¹² recognises children and babies as victims of domestic abuse in their own right. The Act is supported by Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance, 2022¹³ that sets out how agencies should identify and respond to the impact of domestic abuse on children. This statutory guidance will be updated later this year, including sections relating to children and babies. Wider government strategies on violence against women and girls reinforce the importance of early identification, information sharing and coordinated responses, particularly during pregnancy and early infancy when risks are heightened.

Within police and justice responses, initiatives such as Drug Testing on Arrest¹⁴ support earlier identification of substance misuse linked to offending and domestic abuse. The

¹¹ [Information sharing duty statutory guidance - GOV.UK](#)

¹² [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)

¹³ [Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance](#)

¹⁴ [Drug testing on arrest: guidance for police forces - GOV.UK](#)

Crime and Policing Act 2026¹⁵ includes measures that will provide greater opportunities for drug testing and open referral pathways to enable individuals to attend assessments and be considered for onward treatment. These changes require secondary legislation to implement and work on this is underway. This will help address substance misuse that may be contributing to risk within households that include children of all ages.

Working with parents in the criminal justice system

The criminal justice system plays an important role in identifying and responding early to risks facing babies, and pregnant women. His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) Child Safeguarding Policy Framework¹⁶ provides expectations around pre-birth safeguarding and early risk identification and recognises the pre-birth period as a crucial window for intervention. Practitioners are required to identify safeguarding risks at the earliest opportunity, share information with children's services, and contribute to multi-agency safeguarding processes where concerns are identified. Where custody is a likely outcome, Probation Practitioners must share information with the relevant authority, analyse both historic and current risks to children, and consider the impact on children of any sentencing proposals within the pre-sentence report.

In custodial settings, processes are in place to support early identification and coordinated care for pregnant women, including pregnancy testing at reception, individual care and management plans that bring together healthcare, safeguarding and wider support services and specialist Prison Mother and Baby Liaison Officers. All pregnant women in custody receive regular midwifery contact, with support intensified in the third trimester through enhanced monitoring, tailored care planning and increased staff oversight to safeguard the wellbeing of pregnant women.

Where babies are born to women in custody, Mother and Baby Units (MBUs) provide safe, developmentally appropriate environments that support the child's welfare and enable continued assessment of risk and need. Access to MBUs is governed through a formal, criteria-based decision-making process, with the child's best interests as the overriding consideration, and units are subject to Ofsted inspection.

¹⁵ [Crime and Policing Act 2026](#)

¹⁶ [HMPPS Child Safeguarding Policy Framework - GOV.UK](#)

Upcoming activity

Activity	What this will deliver	Timing	Lead
Think Child campaign	Improved practitioner awareness during the first 1001 days	July 2026	HMPPS
Information sharing duty	Statutory duty to share safeguarding information	September 2026	DfE
Health visiting workforce. Data publication “Public health nursing workforce and Healthy Child Programme delivery data 2025-2026 in England.”	Timely workforce and delivery data to inform service planning and support reduction of regional variations	Autumn 2026	DHSC
Strengthened MAPPA guidance	Clearer thresholds and accountability for safeguarding	December 2026	MoJ / HMPPS
MAPPA safeguarding and learning	Improved recognition of risk to babies and unborn children	December 2026	MoJ / HMPPS
Updated mandatory NHS safeguarding learning	Improved identification of safeguarding risks across the NHS	From 2026	NHSE
Research on domestic abuse and pregnancy	Improved understanding of heightened risk during pregnancy	From 2026	DHSC
Suicide prevention pathfinders	Upstream identification of parental vulnerability	From 2026	DHSC

Activity	What this will deliver	Timing	Lead
Steps to Safety referral pathways	Earlier identification of safeguarding risks across general practice	2026-2029	DHSC
Working Together to Safeguard Children	Stronger national guidance on safeguarding babies, pre-birth planning, trauma and MAPPA alignment as per the Panel's national recommendations	2027	DfE
MACPT regulations	Prescribe the support provided by, and the membership of a MACPT ¹⁷	2027	DfE

¹⁷ [Multi-agency child protection teams: regulation-making powers - GOV.UK](#)

Reduce babies entering care by preventing repeat removals and strengthening family support

We aim to reduce the numbers of babies entering care by strengthening early, effective support for families and addressing the underlying drivers of repeat removals, while maintaining the safety and wellbeing of babies.

What we are doing

Across government, action is already underway to strengthen support for families where there is a risk of babies entering care, including where parents have experienced previous removals, recognising the significant impact associated with separation and the effect this can have on future pregnancies and parenting.

Universal and early identification

The national roll out of BSFHs will improve access to support at the earliest stage for families, with an expectation that family help teams will be co-located in a BSFH where possible. BSFHs will provide families with holistic support, connecting them to services to help with health and cost of living, such as maternity and neonatal support, debt and welfare support, housing advice and tailored services for families with children of different ages or with particular needs. These services may include family help, support for young parents including teenage parents and those needing support with teenage pregnancy, support for armed forces families, help for those at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse, or those with parents in prison. Services and professionals will work as one team so that families experience support as a single, joined-up journey rather than a maze of different organisations and appointments. As an example, Redbridge has launched a new pre-and post-birth service as part of their family help offer. This has significantly increased their pre-and post-birth assessments and access to specialist support for new and expectant parents. The impacts of this model include a reduction in child protection investigations and a reduction in issuing care proceedings.

Family Help

The FFP programme further reinforces whole-family working and the importance of supporting adults as well as children. The FFP programme guide sets out how safeguarding partners can use funding and local arrangements to strengthen support for birth parents, including those at risk of repeat removals, with the aim of addressing underlying drivers such as trauma, domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse. This approach reflects learning from the Panel's national review that reducing repeat removals requires sustained and coordinated support.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 explicitly references the need to consider support for parents who have previously had children removed from their care. This is the

first time these parents have been recognised within this statutory guidance, and it reinforces expectations for safeguarding partners to take account of trauma, lived experiences and patterns of repeat removal when assessing risk and planning support, while maintaining the safety of babies.

Safeguarding and child protection responses

Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) roles are new social worker roles, embedded in MACPTs. LCPPs should have significant frontline child protection knowledge, experience and skills. This will include identifying and responding to all types of actual or likely significant harm, including patterned bruising and bruising in protected areas and bruising in non-mobile babies. The government published new standards for LCPPs¹⁸ on 23 June 2026 that set out the minimum knowledge and skills LCPPs are expected to have to effectively lead child protection processes.

Children's social care workforce reforms also underpin this objective. National graduate entry routes into social work, including Approach Social Work¹⁹ and Step Up to Social Work²⁰ strengthen the supply, quality and readiness of practitioners working with families where risks are complex and cumulative. New Early Career Standards for Social Workers²¹ set clear expectations for supervision, reflective practice and professional judgement, which are critical when working with families affected by repeat removals. Reforms to improve workforce stability and reduce reliance on agency social workers support continuity of relationships, retention of professional memory and more consistent assessment for families who are mobile or disengaged from services. From autumn 2027, we are introducing a new social work national professional development offer. The offer will support social workers on identifying and responding to harm in babies and very young children. The national professional development offer is fully aligned with the national framework for children's social care, supporting its ambition to strengthen practice, build workforce capability, and improve outcomes for children and families.

Addressing key risk factors

Health services play a key role in supporting parents where there is a risk of repeat trauma and adverse outcomes. Maternal mental health services provide specialist assessment and treatment to women with moderate to severe or complex mental health issues directly related to birth trauma, tokophobia (intense fear of childbirth), or baby loss, including removal at birth or soon after due to safeguarding concerns. The expansion of NHS Talking Therapies (to 915,000 completing a course of treatment by 2028/29) contributes to earlier access to treatment and improved parental wellbeing,

¹⁸ [Lead child protection practitioner standards - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁹ [Approach Social Work – Frontline](#)

²⁰ [Step up to social work - GOV.UK](#)

²¹ [Child and family social worker early career standards - GOV.UK](#)

which can support engagement with services and reduce escalation of risk. Through Healthy Babies, we are also investing £109 million (April 2026 – March 2029) to improve mental health support for families and promote positive early relationships between caregivers and their babies. This provision is intended to support mild to moderate perinatal mental health difficulties; perinatal mental health difficulties for fathers and co-parents; and parent-infant relationships.

Upcoming activity

Activity	What this will deliver	Timing	Lead
Families Unmet Need toolkit	Better identification of children affected by parental substance misuse	Summer 2026	DHSC
Forthcoming Mental Health Strategy for England	Intends to strengthen the advice and support available to parents and carers, both for their own mental health and wellbeing and to help them support their child's mental health	Late 2026	DHSC
Women's drug and alcohol treatment guidance	Improved recognition of women with drug / alcohol problems and identification of good practice	Summer 2027	DHSC

Activity	What this will deliver	Timing	Lead
Social Work National Professional Development Offer Programme	Coherent, national professional development pathway spanning early career to senior leadership, including a 2-year early career programme, specialist training for Lead Child Protection Practitioners, and leadership development; aligned to national standards to strengthen practice, supervision, decision making and workforce consistency	Autumn 2027	DfE

Building the evidence base on effective and promising practice

We aim to strengthen the evidence base on what helps to identify risk earlier, reduce harm and improve outcomes for babies and families by learning from serious incidents, inspections and local approaches.

What we are doing

Learning from national reviews, including the Panel's work, continues to play a key role in identifying systemic issues and common risk factors associated with serious harm and death in infancy. Learning from these reviews informs updates to guidance, workforce development and cross-government policy responses ensuring that evidence about what places babies at risk translates into changes in practice. An example of this can be found on the Panel's new website²².

Universal and early identification

Across departments, existing data and evaluation activity supports a growing evidence base on vulnerability and outcomes for babies. This includes service activity and access data from health services, workforce data on children's social care capacity and stability, and criminal justice data relating to families affected by offending, imprisonment and domestic abuse. These sources help build a clearer picture of cumulative risk, patterns of repeat removal, and points where babies may become less visible to services.

Evaluation and monitoring of programmes and pilots – including trauma-informed approaches in maternity and neonatal services, as well as anti-discrimination and equity interventions – also contribute to strengthening the evidence base. This activity supports understanding of what helps improve engagement, continuity and outcomes for families facing multiple disadvantage, and how disparities in experience and outcomes for babies can be reduced.

Safeguarding and child protection responses

The development of the Child Protection Authority (CPA)²³ will include the function of identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge, practice, and coordination. This includes improving visibility of where risks are emerging, where responses are inconsistent, and where children and families are not receiving the support that they need. The CPA will draw on data, lived experience, frontline insight and research to build a clearer picture of system-wide challenges and promote evidence-informed solutions. By doing so, it will

²² [Vulnerable babies | Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#)

²³ [Establishing the Child Protection Authority in England - GOV.UK](#)

help ensure that evidence gaps are identified, interventions are targeted, and improvements are sustained across local and national levels. The CPA will also support and hold local areas to account for embedding learning from reviews and drive continuous improvement in the protection of children.

Workforce standards and professional frameworks contribute to strengthening evidence-informed practice. New Early Career Standards for Social Workers reinforce the importance of strong analytical skills, reflective supervision and professional judgment, which are critical to identifying and responding to risk for babies where harm may be concealed or underestimated.

Upcoming activity

Activity	What this will deliver	Timing	Lead
Equity and anti-discrimination monitoring	Better understanding of disparities affecting babies	Ongoing	NHSE
Domestic abuse and pregnancy research	Stronger evidence on risk and effective interventions	From 2026	DHSC
Families Unmet Needs toolkit	Improved understanding of prevalence and unmet need	Summer 2026	DHSC
NHS Minimum Dataset for statutory child safeguarding	Consistent clinical coding in statutory safeguarding reporting	September 2026	NHSE
National data sharing agreements	Consistent frameworks for lawful information sharing	September 2026	DfE/NHSE
Health system wide coverage of Child Protection Information Sharing service	Improved awareness of babies at risk	December 2026	NHSE

Facilitate consistency in national guidance on babies and pre-birth support for pregnant women in safeguarding and child protection

We aim to improve consistency of practice across the country by providing clearer national expectations, guidance and support focused specifically on babies and pre-birth support for pregnant women.

What we are doing

Since the publication of the Panel's national review, we have passed legislation and updated national guidance and policy frameworks to provide a stronger and more consistent foundation for safeguarding babies, pregnant women and unborn children across the country.

Universal and early identification

Guidance for BSFHs and Healthy Babies²⁴ supports local areas to create a connected system that reaches families earlier, meets them where they are, and supports practitioners to take a whole family approach. It sets out how health, family and early education services should work together, within community settings, to enable identification of risk during pregnancy and infancy, improve information sharing and coordinate multi-agency responses.

Safeguarding and child protection responses

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 provides the statutory framework that underpins safeguarding duties and child protection processes for all practitioners. The strengthened guidance explicitly recognises babies and unborn children as a priority group and included a new section on supporting babies, including through early identification of risk, pre-birth planning and multi-agency safeguarding responses. It also highlights the importance of multi-agency and multi-disciplinary training to improve practitioners' awareness and their ability to identify where a pregnant woman may require additional support to provide safe and suitable care for their unborn child.

The FFP programme guide²⁵ (March 2026) sets clear delivery expectations for safeguarding partners. This includes, for example, ensuring the needs of babies are reflected in local needs assessments and in family network support packages.

²⁴ Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies: guidance for local authorities - GOV.UK

²⁵ [FFP Programme guide: delivery expectations for statutory safeguarding partners in England: year 2 \(2026 to 2027\)](#)

MACPTs will lead core child protection functions and decision making. These teams are designed to bring greater consistency and expertise to child protection decision making including for babies and infants from pre-birth onwards. They will bring a clear, fresh multi-agency focus to child protection practice, identify and respond decisively to all types of significant harm – inside and outside the home, and online.

The Children's Social Care National Framework 2026²⁶ (National Framework) is a key piece of statutory guidance for local authorities which describes the purpose, principles and the outcomes that local authorities should achieve for children and families, and the enablers of good practice. The National Framework sets clear expectations for senior leaders to address the needs of vulnerable infants and asks practitioners to adapt practice approaches where previous removal of children from birth parents has caused mistrust. It also sets an expectation for practitioners to recognise that different stages of child development may increase the likelihood of significant harm, explicitly drawing attention to situations where children under the age of one live with someone who has a history of violence.

The Department for Education (DfE) also commissioned Foundations (the What Works Centre for Children and Families) to produce a series of Practice Guides, showcasing which interventions are proven to support achievement of the outcomes defined in the National Framework. This includes a Practice Guide on Parenting through Adversity 0–10²⁷ (published in February 2025) which contains a series of principles and recommendations specifically to inform the design of support for families with young children, including children aged 0-3.

Addressing key risk factors

Within the criminal justice system, national policy frameworks support consistent safeguarding practice where parents are involved with probation or custody. The HMPPS Child Safeguarding Policy Framework and related policy documents establish clear requirements for identifying pregnancy, sharing information with children's services, contributing to multi-agency processes and safeguarding babies and pregnant women. National templates and training further support consistent information sharing and practice across custodial and community settings.

Across government, shared approaches to safeguarding, training and participation in multi-agency arrangements, including MAPPA, support more consistent identification and management of risk where babies and unborn children may be affected by adult vulnerability or offending.

²⁶ [Children's social care national framework](#)

²⁷ [Parenting Through Adversity Practice Guide \(0–10\) - Foundations](#)

Upcoming activity

Activity	What this will deliver	Timing	Lead
MAPPA alignment with safeguarding	Clearer relationship between MAPPA and safeguarding	December 2026	HMPPS / MoJ / DfE
Updated Domestic Abuse statutory guidance	Strong focus on children and babies as victims of domestic abuse as well as heightened risk in pregnancy	2026	Home Office
Updated Coercive or Controlling Behaviour statutory guidance	Stronger focus on children and babies as victims of domestic abuse as well as heightened risk in pregnancy	2026	Home Office
Working Together to Safeguard Children	Align with MAPPA arrangements as per the Panel's recommendations	2027	DfE

Areas for further consideration

Alongside the actions set out above, the government will consider how the following would further strengthen safeguarding and child protection for babies and pregnant women:

- **embedding babies and support for pregnant women as a priority group across services:** for example, by considering how existing national guidance could better reflect their needs across adult-facing services such as mental health, substance misuse, housing and the criminal justice system
- **strengthening early identification of vulnerability:** including through exploring the contribution of universal services such as maternity, health visiting and primary care, and how data and information-sharing arrangements could better support earlier identification of emerging risk both before and after birth
- **improving continuity of support for families:** for example, by considering how services can better understand and respond to barriers to engagement, including through more flexible and relationship-based practice and improved information sharing where families move between areas
- **exploring how support for parents can be strengthened even further to help prevent repeat removals:** including by considering access to earlier psychological and therapeutic support, support provided before, during and after family court proceedings, and how family justice processes can better support longer-term parental outcomes.

Conclusion

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's national review provides a clear and urgent reminder of the unique vulnerabilities faced by babies, even before they are born, and the serious consequences when risks are not identified and acted on early. This response sets out the government's commitment to addressing those challenges through co-ordinated, cross-system action.

Significant reform is already underway and has been strengthened since the publication of the Panel's review to reflect on the findings. Alongside this, targeted action across health, social care, policing, justice and wider public services will improve how we respond to the key risk factors associated with harm to babies.

However, this response recognises that improving outcomes for babies requires sustained effort across government and beyond.

Delivery will be critical. We will continue to work collaboratively across government, with safeguarding partners and with frontline practitioners and, most importantly, with families to ensure that these reforms translate into meaningful change in practice. This will be overseen through ongoing cross-government arrangements, including the Keeping Children Safe ministerial board, to ensure accountability and sustained progress.

Our ambition is clear: babies must be consistently recognised as a priority across adult and children's services, with risks identified and addressed early, support for families strengthened, and systems working together effectively to prevent avoidable harms and deaths.

Annex A – government response to the Panel’s national recommendations

Recommendation numbering follows that used in the Panel’s national review

Recommendation 1: The next version of Working Together to Safeguard Children should include a new section on safeguarding and child protection for babies that includes content on vulnerable babies, concealed pregnancy and pre-birth planning for unborn infants when there are child protection risks

DfE has strengthened the 2026 version of Working Together to Safeguard Children to better reflect the needs of babies and unborn children and ensure they remain a central focus. The legal position for unborn children has been clarified, and a clear baby-centred approach reinforced. Repeat removals have been highlighted as a key risk factor, as parents who have had a child removed may face challenges that make engagement with services difficult and increase vulnerability of future babies. In addition, a new section on “Supporting Babies” has been introduced that provides guidance relating to baby centred assessment, early identification of risk in pregnancy, multi-agency pre-birth planning and triggers for statutory action where significant harm is likely.

DfE will continue to consider updates in future revisions of Working Together to ensure it remains responsive to emerging evidence and practice.

Recommendation 4: The next version of Working Together to Safeguard Children should make clear that safeguarding partners need to work with all relevant adult services to develop, implement and resource effective parental engagement strategies. This should include developing, implementing and resourcing effective multi-agency parental support planning when parents are no longer able to care for their children. The aim is to reduce the risk of further children being removed from parental care and to promote consistency in local area approaches. The government should keep under review whether these requirements need to be further strengthened in primary legislation

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 sets out expectations on whole-family working and multi-agency collaboration, reinforcing the importance of engaging parents and carers, including pregnant women, as part of safeguarding and child protection assessments and interventions.

The FFP programme guide further strengthens this approach by setting clear expectations for whole-family, multi-agency support and earlier intervention. It emphasises intensive, wraparound Family Help, delivered through multi-disciplinary teams, and stronger engagement of family networks through approaches such as Family Group Decision Making and Family Network Support Packages. The guidance makes clear that birth parents should be offered support, including where children are at risk of removal or have already entered care. This includes targeted support to address underlying issues, reducing the risk of repeat removals, and support reunification where appropriate, alongside a wider expectation that services work with adults as well as children within a whole-family model.

Recommendation 5: The next version of Working Together to Safeguard Children should include a definition of trauma on which safeguarding partners, agencies and organisations can base their approaches to trauma-informed practice, with reference to the working definition of trauma-informed practice

Trauma is referenced in Working Together in relation to expectations for assessment, multi-agency working and understanding children's lived experience.

DfE will work with DHSC to review future updates of Working Together to cross reference working definitions of trauma from "Working definition of trauma-informed practice"²⁸.

Recommendation 10: HMPPS should update the MAPPA guidance to clarify the relationship between MAPPA agencies and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and highlight child safeguarding in the thresholding document

HMPPS will ensure the MAPPA Guidance and Thresholding Documents support all partner agencies to contribute effectively to the protection of children from serious offenders managed under MAPPA. We will update the MAPPA Guidance and Thresholding Documents to clarify the relationship between MAPPA agencies and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and the thresholds for MAPPA management in child safeguarding cases.

Recommendation 11: The government should strengthen the registration requirements for registered sex offenders in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 to include a requirement to inform the police of the name of new partners and to notify the police within a specified period of time if they or their partner is due to give birth

Freedom from Violence and Abuse²⁹, the cross-government strategy to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) has committed to overhaul the framework for managing sex offenders, to ensure the focus is on effectively and intensively managing the offenders who pose a risk. The most recent statistics show that over 70,000 sex offenders were subject to notification requirements (often referred to as "being on the sex offenders' register") in England and Wales. We will undertake research into the current notification requirements system for registered sex offenders – which has remained fundamentally the same for 20 years – and identify opportunities to enable the police to target resource at risk.

Recommendation 12: Working Together to Safeguard Children should reflect the HMPPS Child Safeguarding Policy Framework, which requires all Heads of Probation Delivery Units to attend local safeguarding partnership meetings where required.

DfE will work with HMPPS to take this forward for the 2027 update to Working Together.

²⁸ [Working definition of trauma-informed practice - GOV.UK](#)

²⁹

[Freedom from violence and abuse: a cross-government strategy to build a safer society for women and girls \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#)

Recommendation 13: Working Together to Safeguard Children should reflect MAPPA statutory guidance which states that one or more people who can reflect the range of social services responsibilities, including children and vulnerable adults should be members of MAPPA Strategic Management Boards

DfE will work with HMPPS to take this forward for the 2027 update to Working Together.

Recommendation 17: The next version of Working Together to Safeguard Children should

17a. make clear that where a child in need or a child with a child protection plan moves between local authority areas, there are robust formal processes in place to transfer information (this should include a full case summary and chronology for the transfer-in conference relating to that child and family that adheres to the timescales set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children for child protection and children in need)

17b. set out the necessary principles for local areas to follow in situations where there is a lack of clarity about which local authority should be responsible for a child

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 sets out expectations for multi-agency safeguarding processes, including timely information sharing, clear decision making and accountability between safeguarding partners. This includes expectations for the transfer of cases where children in need or children subject to a child protection plan move between local authority areas.

Further detail on the role of MACPTs including the support they will be required to provide local authorities in discharging their section 47 duties will be set out through regulations. These details will be reflected in future revisions of Working Together and, alongside the new information sharing duty, will provide expectations on information transfer, multi-agency decision making and accountability where children move between areas.



HM Government

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