



Department
for Education

Improving help and child protection: revised framework

Government consultation on updating Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, the Children's Social Care National Framework 2026 and policy underpinning the development of multi-agency child protection team regulations

Launch date 22 June 2026

Respond by 4 September 2026

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Introduction

Transforming children's social care is central to this government's mission to break down barriers to opportunity for all children. It is also fundamental to ensuring that every child grows up safe, supported and able to thrive, and key to putting our public services, and our public finances, on a sustainable long-term footing. Over the past eighteen months we have laid the legislative, financial and operational foundations for whole-system reform. The *Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026* now enables the most significant overhaul of children's social care legislation in a generation, while the *Crime and Policing Act 2026* has strengthened our response to child sexual abuse and criminal exploitation. Reform is being backed by sustained investment. At Spending Review 2025, the government confirmed £555 million from the Transformation Fund and £523 million per year for three years for the Families First Partnership Programme. This was reinforced through the Local Government Finance Settlement, bringing total investment in Families First to £2.4 billion.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 (CWS Act 2026) creates duties to establish new multi-agency child protection teams in every local authority area, improve information sharing between agencies and automatically include education and childcare settings in local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. It also makes sure families are offered family group decision making, so issues can be addressed earlier and, where possible, children can stay safely with their families. The Information Sharing Duty will commence in September 2026. [Statutory guidance for information sharing duty](#) has been co-developed with the sector and is currently subject to consultation. Working Together will be updated to align with the Information Sharing Duty and signpost relevant guidance.

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 makes the reporting of child sexual abuse mandatory. Work is underway across government to prepare for commencement and ensure workforce readiness, building on existing statutory safeguarding responsibilities and guidance already in place.

On the 21 May 2026, the government published '[Delivering the children's social care reset: an implementation plan for local partners](#)' which sets out the plans for reform between 2026 and 2029.

Who this is for

This is for all individuals, organisations and agencies who deliver help, support, safeguarding and protection and who have an interest in helping to keep children safe and supported.

Those who work in the three statutory safeguarding partners - local authorities, health and police - including senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners:

Local authority elected leaders, Chief Executives and Directors of Children's Services; practice managers, practice leaders and frontline social workers; Best Start Family Hub and other community-based early help workers; Family Help Lead Practitioners and Family Help team managers; housing and tenancy officers; youth justice/offending teams; multi-disciplinary practitioners commissioned or employed by the local authority, e.g., public health or domestic abuse practitioners; providers of care services including residential children's home workers; and youth workers, support staff and others in children and adult social care.

Health practitioners, commissioners and providers, including leaders of integrated care boards, named and designated professionals, paediatricians, GPs, nurses, midwives, health visitors and school nurses, speech and language therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, adult and child mental health workers, drug and alcohol workers and sexual health workers.

Police leaders including Chief Officers of Police, leaders responsible for delivering frontline policing, leaders of community safety partnerships, middle managers and those delivering frontline services including officers and support staff, investigators and responders, police and crime commissioners, and those working in Violence Reduction Units.

Education including early education and childcare settings, Virtual School Heads, Multi-Academy Trust leaders, school and college leaders, teachers, Designated Teachers for Looked-After and Previously Looked-After Children, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators and school governors.

Those who work in the probation service; providers of custodial establishments including His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service staff, the judiciary; and youth justice practitioners.

Those who work in the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

Voluntary, charity and social enterprise organisations. This could include youth workers and voluntary, community and charity workers.

Parents and carers of children, including kinship carers, adoptive parents and foster carers. Family and friends of children who have or have had a social worker, family support worker or personal adviser.

There is a [separate consultation for children and young people under the age of 18](#).

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 22 June 2026

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact:

StatutoryFramework.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email <mailto:Coordinator.CONULTATIONS@education.gov.uk>, by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in autumn 2026.

About this consultation

This consultation seeks views on updating the statutory framework on help, support and protection for children and their families to inform revisions to Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026¹ (Working Together), and the Children’s Social Care National Framework 2026² (the National Framework) statutory guidance, and policy that will underpin the development of the multi-agency child protection team regulations (MACPT regulations). Feedback from this consultation will also be used to inform wider safeguarding guidance and related policy development.

Alongside legislation³, Working Together 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 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. Working Together was last substantively updated in 2023, with an illustrated version for children and young people published in 2025 and a targeted update in March 2026.

The National Framework describes the purpose and principles of children’s social care, the outcomes that local authorities should achieve for children and families, and the enablers of good practice – including the importance of effective multi-agency working, leaders who drive the conditions needed in practice, and a supported workforce. The National Framework defines practice expectations for practitioners, practice supervisors and senior leaders. It is important that the National Framework reflects the latest expectations for practice and is aligned with changes to Working Together. The National Framework was updated in 2026, making the guidance shorter and more usable, setting clear expectations for practice whilst retaining the existing principles, outcomes and enablers.

The new duty in the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 for local safeguarding partners to implement multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) in their area includes three regulation making powers which allow the Secretary of State to prescribe:

- the support to be provided in connection with the local authority’s discharge of its duties, set out in section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (duty to investigate)

¹ [Working together to safeguard children 2026](#)

² [Children’s social care national framework](#)

³ 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

- the skills and qualifications of the nominated members
- the relevant agencies that may be notified to enter into co-operation memorandums to support MACPTs.

In January 2026, the government published [Multi-agency child protection teams: regulation making powers](#). This policy statement aimed to provide clarity on the intended scope and content of the regulations. The regulations are subject to the affirmative parliamentary procedure and are expected to come into force in 2027, subject to the outcome of this consultation.

What we are consulting on now

This consultation seeks views on proposed changes across key parts of the children's social care system. It focuses on multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA), including leadership, accountability and independent scrutiny and the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). There are questions relating to the development and delivery of Family Help, and earlier, more joined-up support for families, including where children return home from care. It seeks views on the use of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), to strengthen family-led solutions and asks key questions about the introduction of multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) to strengthen expert decision making where children may be experiencing or likely to experience significant harm. The consultation includes proposals relating to protecting children who are looked after or who live in kinship arrangements and seeks views on how to strengthen the response to extra-familial harm (EFH), and in particular to child sexual exploitation.

There are 41 questions across 5 sections, plus additional questions about you. Questions are included in the narrative for context and then summarised in Annex A as a single list. You do not have to respond to every question to submit a response. If you have a particular area of interest then you can respond on only these proposals. Even if you do not respond to all the questions, please complete the 'Personal Information' section so that we can take your responses into account.

We are making a series of technical and factual changes that either clarify existing guidance or correct factual inaccuracies. These updates are set out in Annex B for information. We are not consulting on these changes.

What will happen after the consultation closes

We will use the responses to the consultation to revise statutory guidance – Working Together and the National Framework – and to develop the MACPT regulations for parliamentary scrutiny. We expect these updates to happen in 2027 subject to the outcome of the consultation and parliamentary time.

Government will publish a response to the consultation in autumn 2026. This will set out plans for revising the statutory framework based on your responses.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit DfE consultations on GOV.UK to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may request and complete a Word document version of the form.

By email

StatutoryFramework.CONULTATION@education.gov.uk

By post

Statutory Framework Policy Team
Department for Education
4th Floor
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes on 4 September 2026.

Section 1: Voice of children and their families

Child voice in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA)

The voice of children and their families in shaping services is crucial. A core principle of the National Framework is that children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard and responded to at every stage, and they should contribute to decisions made about their lives, wherever possible. Working Together sets out expectations for safeguarding partners to capture the voice of children and families across their safeguarding arrangements. These expectations include how child and family voices are reflected in published arrangements, yearly reports and the role of independent scrutiny in supporting this.

Some safeguarding partnerships carry out direct, structured engagement with children and families, and young scrutineers⁴ form a meaningful part of their scrutiny processes. However, yearly reports often cite the voice of children as a focus for improved practice and an aspect of reporting that areas are working towards, rather than delivering on now. Partnerships also face challenges in engaging diverse and representative voices.

Proposed changes

We intend to strengthen expectations in Working Together to ensure that the voices of children and families are consistently and meaningfully embedded within MASA. This will include setting clearer requirements for safeguarding partners to demonstrate how the lived experiences of children directly inform decision making, scrutiny and continuous service improvement. We will also place greater emphasis on robust, inclusive and structured engagement with children and young people - including through independent scrutiny - so their perspectives are not only heard, but transparently reflected in challenge, assurance and demonstrable improvements to local safeguarding priorities, practice and outcomes.

⁴ [young-scrutineer-handbook.pdf](#)

Question 1: Do you agree that these proposals will strengthen the voice of children and families, including those who are under-represented or marginalised, in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements?

Please select one option:

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Question 2: Is there anything else you would like to comment on in relation to child and family voice and how this is included or represented in the statutory framework for help, support and protection (Working Together and the National Framework)?

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Section 2: Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA)

This section includes propositions on:

- Delivering multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- Independent scrutiny
- Reporting of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
- The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

Delivering multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

Protecting children from harm requires multi-agency join up and co-operation at all levels. Local organisations and agencies that work with children and families play a significant and often statutory role when it comes to safeguarding children. The way in which these organisations and agencies work together is set out in their multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASAs).

Strong, collaborative leadership and timely decision making are crucial to effective multi-agency working and in identifying and addressing system issues. The three statutory safeguarding partners – local authorities, integrated care boards and Chief Officers of the Police, for the relevant local authority area – are responsible and accountable for this in their local areas.

From 2023, Working Together provided greater clarity on the expectations of safeguarding partners including distinguishing between those responsible for setting the vision and priorities, now known as Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) and those leading delivery of arrangements, now known as Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs). Guidance is clear that LSPs are ultimately accountable for the welfare and safeguarding of children locally. All local leaders should be clear on their roles and responsibilities.

Safeguarding partnerships should be shaped locally, but national changes to local government, police and health services are affecting how they operate.

Independent Scrutiny

Independent scrutiny is a critical component of local accountability. Its purpose is to provide authoritative, evidence-based challenge, enable early identification of system weakness and support continuous improvement. It is distinct from inspection and functions as an independent, learning-focused mechanism within the wider accountability framework.

Evidence from local practice, sector feedback and prior reviews shows that the role and impact of independent scrutiny is inconsistent. Some areas use it effectively to challenge leaders, surface issues and drive improvement, while others report limited authority, constrained independence, insufficient access to information, and unclear expectations about escalation, reporting and follow-up. This variability weakens confidence in local safeguarding arrangements and reduces the effectiveness of the overall accountability system.

Feedback from local partners is that statutory guidance does not provide sufficient clarity. It lacks clear expectations in relation to the authority and independence of the role, including: who sets scope; access to relevant information; freedom from undue influence; challenge, escalation, and follow up, particularly where concerns persist or cannot be resolved locally; the contribution to wider accountability systems, including leadership assurance, annual reporting and learning from reviews; and how scrutiny should support early identification of systemic weaknesses. There is also a risk that independent scrutiny becomes too focused on process assurance or descriptive reporting, rather than testing effectiveness, impact and improvements for children and families.

Proposed changes

We are proposing to strengthen guidance to:

- clarify the purpose and functions of independent scrutiny as an authoritative source of challenge, assurance and support, focused on impact and outcomes for children;
- reinforce independence, including freedom from undue influence, access to information, relevant learning and the ability to report independent insights;
- set clearer expectations for challenge, escalation and reporting;
- strengthen transparency and consistency through more high-profile contributions to published arrangements and annual reports;
- clarify the differing relationship with inspection and other accountability mechanisms, without creating a proxy inspection function.

These changes are intended to improve consistency, credibility and effectiveness, while retaining local flexibility over how arrangements are delivered. Clearer statutory expectations would mean that, wherever children live, independent scrutiny has a meaningful role in holding safeguarding partners to account and supporting continuous improvement.

Question 3: Do you agree that the proposed changes will improve independent scrutiny across partnerships, including how effectively it supports shared learning and continuous improvement in multi-agency child protection practice, while still allowing sufficient local flexibility?

Please select one option:

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Reporting on multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

Working Together requires that safeguarding partners produce a yearly report and publish their arrangements to demonstrate how they co-ordinate, deliver and fund services for children and families locally:

- The **yearly report** by safeguarding partners must provide a joint account of what the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies have done as a result of the arrangements; this should be concise and detail how safeguarding partners have coordinated and delivered multi-agency safeguarding arrangements over the previous year. The yearly report must detail the effectiveness of the arrangements for children and families and should focus on impact.
- The **published arrangements** should set out how safeguarding partners coordinate, deliver and fund their multi-agency safeguarding responsibilities and should be updated whenever changes occur.

Together these are intended to provide assurance on how statutory safeguarding partners discharge their shared safeguarding duties.

There is variability across multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and in the yearly reports. Published arrangements are also not always routinely updated or aligned with yearly reports, reducing visibility of changes to governance, delegation or practice and how learning is applied.

Current reporting does not consistently provide clarity on how information sharing agreements are structured, formalised and operating in practice. This includes limited visibility of how data sharing agreements are used to support effective multi-agency working, making it difficult to assess the robustness of local arrangements.

In addition, reporting does not consistently provide sufficient transparency on partnership funding, there is limited visibility of financial contribution from each partner,

how funding is aligned or how funding decisions are agreed to or reviewed against local priorities.

Proposed changes

We propose combining the yearly report and the published arrangements into a single statutory annual return from safeguarding partnerships. This should prioritise how partnerships identify local needs and commission services, sectors and practitioners to meet those needs, supported by clear evidence of delivery and impact. Bringing commissioning to the centre of the return would ensure that resources, activity and assurance are demonstrably aligned to need.

In addition, we propose the annual return should include standardised financial transparency alongside standardised data, enabling clearer assessment of partnership working, performance and effectiveness. This would demonstrate whether funding is sufficient to deliver core functions and provide a clear link between investment, commissioning decisions, delivery and impact, whilst reducing duplication, and improving transparency through a single, consistent accountability mechanism, supported by evidence from serious incidents, local reviews, inspections and wider learning. We would ensure this does not increase the data burden and commit to working with multi-agency partners to develop what is required post-consultation.

Question 4: Do you agree that a single statutory annual return would improve accountability and understanding of the impact and effectiveness of local safeguarding partner arrangements?

Please select one option:

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is central to the safeguarding system for managing allegations against adults who work with children and those in a position of trust.

Evidence, including the national safeguarding practice review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex needs in residential settings⁵, indicates that local interpretation of the LADO role varies. In some areas, arrangements are effective and well-embedded; in others, the role has evolved unevenly, often shaped by local thresholds, resource pressures, or differing expectations about LADO authority and responsibility. This is exacerbated by a lack of defined authority in guidance attached to the role.

Working Together sets out the high-level functions of the LADO role but leaves key aspects under-defined, including:

- the boundaries between LADO oversight and employer or service decision-making;
- if LADO involvement should be proportionate to risk;
- expectations around challenge, escalation and system leadership; and
- the handling of complex contexts such as youth custody, foster carers, cross-boundary working, and individuals without a clear employer.

This lack of definition means that:

- similar concerns are handled differently across localities;
- LADOs are being drawn into operational or employment decisions that sit outside their intended oversight role;
- inconsistent expectations around oversight, timeliness and information sharing contribute to delay, fragmented responses and unmanaged system-level risk; and
- there is insufficient clarity for employers and services about their responsibilities within the allegation management process.

There is a need for greater clarity, consistency and confidence in how the LADO role operates within the wider safeguarding system and the level of authority the role should have. These issues reinforce the need to set out the LADO role and responsibilities.

The recent government consultation 'Foster care reform: proposed changes to assessment and handling of allegations of abuse'⁶ included questions about the role of the LADO and how allegations are managed. The Safeguarding Review Panel – Youth Custodial Estate review⁷ will also consider the role of the LADO for children detained in youth custody. We will consider responses to the fostering consultation and the outputs from the youth custody review when updating the statutory framework.

⁵ [Safeguarding children with disabilities in residential settings - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ [Fostering reform: proposed changes to assessment and handling allegations of abuse - Department for Education - Citizen Space](#)

⁷ [Safeguarding Review Panel – Youth Custodial Estate – February 2026](#)

Proposed changes

We propose that statutory guidance:

- **strengthens expectations about oversight, challenge and escalation:** empowering LADOs to challenge poor practice, delay or failure to follow statutory guidance, and to escalate persistent concerns through safeguarding partnership governance, regulatory or inspection routes where necessary. LADOs would be encouraged to review cases with relevant multi-agency colleagues such as MACPTs, independent scrutineers or Youth Custody teams to ensure consistency.
- **clarifies role boundaries and accountability:** to make clear that LADOs do not investigate allegations or determine employment, disciplinary or regulatory outcomes; and clarifies that responsibility for those decisions rests with employers and relevant bodies, with the LADO providing independent oversight rather than operational management. We will also clarify the LADO's responsibilities in regard to Ofsted and DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service) referrals.
- **sets clearer expectations for access to training, supervision and expert advice for the LADO:** including where allegations involve restraint, secure settings or commissioned children's placements to support informed safeguarding oversight.
- **puts greater emphasis on timeliness and information sharing:** so that delay and failure to share information are explicitly recognised as risk factors, particularly where individuals work across settings or local authority boundaries.
- **improves clarity for complex contexts:** better articulating expectations where concerns relate to foster carers, voluntary and community settings, regulated providers, or individuals without a clear employer, ensuring concerns are not left unmanaged. This would include clearer expectations that abuse or trust allegations in custodial, detention or secure settings are appropriately notified to the LADO and that decision making is informed by multi-agency safeguarding expertise.

Question 5: Do you agree that the proposed changes would improve the consistency and effectiveness of safeguarding responses to concerns about adults who work with children in any capacity?

Please select one option:

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Threshold for LADO involvement

In paragraph 260 of Working Together, when defining what constitutes an allegation against an adult who works with children and therefore requires LADO involvement, guidance sets the following threshold:

An allegation may relate to a person who works with children who has:

- *behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child*
- *possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child*
- *behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children*
- *behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children*

An over-reliance on this threshold has led to a binary model of “LADO involvement or not”, which focuses on whether an allegation is considered ‘serious enough’. This threshold relies on conditional language that is open to interpretation leading to inconsistent approaches between local authority areas.

Proposed changes

In revising guidance, we propose a shift from an allegation-defined threshold to a harms-led threshold for decision making. This does not remove the need for a threshold for LADO involvement but refocuses it on the assessment of harm and risk to the child rather than solely on the nature of the allegation. We propose:

- we develop a set of shared indicators that support consistent professional judgement for targeted and proportionate LADO involvement
- clearer differentiation of levels of LADO engagement so LADOs operate across defined levels that consider both complexity and risk of harm.

The indicators would consider the nature of the alleged behaviour; contextual or vulnerability factors; safeguarding reach and system-level risk. Guidance would set out how local arrangements should support the consistent application of this approach through clear procedures and appropriate professional review. LADO engagement would be proportionate to the identified level of risk or harm to a child and determined by reference to the indicators above. Engagement could range from the LADO providing advice and guidance to having more of an oversight role in informal proceedings or supporting more formal multi-agency safeguarding co-ordination.

Question 6: Do you agree that this approach and proportionate LADO involvement would improve consistency and outcomes for children?

Please select one option:

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Question 7: Is there anything else you would like to comment on in relation to MASAs or the role of the LADO?

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Section 3: Help and Support

This section includes propositions on:

- Family Help
- Family Networks
- Family Group Decision Making
- Family Network Support Packages
- Reunification

Family Help

The government is committed to rebalancing the children's social care system toward earlier intervention, to ensure that children and families are not left waiting to access help and support when issues arise.

At the heart of this commitment are reforms to Family Help, first recommended in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care⁸ (the Care Review) and being implemented through the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme. Family Help is now reflected in national guidance with the FFP programme guide, updated in March 2026, reaffirming expectations of safeguarding partners. In 2026, Working Together and the National Framework 2026 were also updated to reflect expectations for Family Help.

Family Help brings together two existing types of social care need: Targeted Early Help and Child in Need. Targeted Early Help is defined as support for children and families with multiple and/or complex needs requiring a plan and a Family Help Lead Practitioner, while Child in Need refers to children who, under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, are unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services, or whose health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of services, or who are disabled.

Although Working Together, the National Framework and the FFP programme guide describe Family Help as encompassing both, the legal basis impacts on how families receive help. Child in Need support is clearly defined in statute under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, whereas Targeted Early Help is described in the FFP programme

⁸ [Independent review of children's social care - final report](#)

guide as being delivered under Sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004. These provisions place duties on local authorities and specified partner agencies to cooperate to improve the wellbeing of children and to make arrangements to ensure their functions are discharged to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. While Sections 10 and 11 provide an important statutory context for multi-agency working, they do not confer specific service-delivery functions. As a result, this does not fully capture the level and type of support that children and families typically receive through Targeted Early Help.

We have consciously not yet defined Family Help entirely under section 17 in the FFP programme to reflect the way in which section 17 has historically been applied in practice - often shaped by local thresholds, organisational structures and risk-focused processes. But we know in practice, there is often overlap between the models of support children receive via Targeted Early Help and those who meet the CiN definition, including a Family Help Lead Practitioner, a single Family Help plan and a coordinated team around the family. However, the differing statutory bases have contributed to variation in practice, including the use of thresholds to keep families at a lower level of support, repeated assessments and less consistent, whole-family approaches. Maintaining Targeted Early Help as a separate category risks reinforcing these thresholds, handoffs and repeated assessments, delaying support and fragmenting families' experiences, rather than enabling timely, relational help. All children and families currently receiving Family Help should continue to do so, with no reduction in the level or continuity of support. Many local authorities are already well advanced in implementing Family Help in this way, reflecting the current statutory guidance.

Proposed changes

Our proposal is to clarify that all Family Help services should be delivered under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, reflecting how support is already provided to children with similar levels of need. This would mean that, in future, children currently supported through Targeted Early Help would receive support under section 17 - thereby creating a single offer of Family Help, as a broad category of family support delivered under a single statutory framework. Funding would continue to be provided through the Children's, Families and Youth Grant.

Section 17 is a broad, preventative duty to safeguard and promote children's welfare and offers a clearer and more appropriate statutory underpinning for Family Help. Bringing all Family Help under a single section 17 framework would align with how services are delivered in practice, remove ambiguity about legal footing and accountability and support more consistent practice, clearer national expectations and more coherent oversight and inspection.

However, we recognise that this proposal would represent a significant change for some local systems. The transition will require careful consideration of implications for operating models, workforce roles, decision-making structures and partnerships and

would need to build on existing expectations that Family Help operates as a single, seamless offer to families. We also recognise that there is a counter argument to this proposal and there are risks associated with increasing the size of the statutory Children’s Social Care cohort and the impact this might have on families consenting to support. However, we do not believe that maintaining a distinction between Targeted Early Help and Child in Need is helpful for families, and that we can bring the de-stigmatising practice of Targeted Early Help into Child in Need.

We propose that any previous references to Family Help covering Targeted Early Help and Child in Need will be removed and will refer to Family Help as services provided under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. We propose restructuring Chapter 3 of Working Together to align with this change.

Alongside our proposal to amend Working Together, we propose to combine reporting of Family Help into a single data collection. We currently collect child-level data on Family Help via the voluntary Targeted Early Help Data Collection (25-26 and 26-27) and the Child in Need census but propose that for 27-28 local authorities will have the ability to upload all Family Help episodes to the Child in Need census. We will continue to work with local authorities and case management system providers over the coming months on this proposal.

Question 8: Do you agree that Targeted Early Help should be removed and all Family Help support and services should be provided under section 17?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Question 9: Please outline the reason for your answer.

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Family Networks

Family networks offer vital support to children and their parents. Empowering family networks, to support children and help families to stay together safely, is central to the “whole family” approach of the reforms to the children’s social care system, and to achieving outcome 3 of the National Framework for children and young people to be supported by their family network.

The Care Review⁹ outlined the importance of using family networks, wherever safe and possible, noting the significance of family in retaining a strong sense of identity, culture and place. Engaging family networks, throughout the system is central to effective decision making and allows practitioners to work alongside family members to identify and agree sustainable solutions that allow a child to safely stay out of care, wherever possible. There is a wealth of evidence to highlight the importance of family in a child's life, including research that suggests children raised at home or within their family networks have significantly better outcomes compared to those who are raised in out of home placements¹⁰.

To empower family networks, they must be engaged. To engage family networks, all safeguarding partners should be aware of the role family networks can play and the existing strengths that can be built upon, if members are engaged effectively.

A key element of the FFP programme is to make greater use of family networks by identifying more sustainable, family-led solutions, earlier on, as well as involving the wider family in decision making from the earliest stages, throughout the system. The FFP programme guide published in April 2026 has a Family Network Section which includes two key interventions – Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), and Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs) which safeguarding partners should be aware of and understand.

Proposed changes

We propose adding a new sub-section, 'Family Networks' to Working Together. This will emphasise the importance of identifying family networks early, to empower and strengthen them and support more children to have better outcomes. We want to encourage practitioners and those responsible for safeguarding children to consider engaging family networks more often, where safe and appropriate to do so.

We will reflect the FFP guide and maintain the expectation, that practitioners should routinely consider whether appropriate family network members are able to support birth parents (or those with parental responsibility), to enable children to remain living safely at home, preventing them from entering care, where safe and in the child's best interests. We propose to strengthen the importance of family networks and "whole family" work to those who are responsible for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

⁹ [Unlocking-the-potential-of-family-networks.pdf](#)

¹⁰ [Sacker A 2021 Report The-lifelong-health-and-wellbeing-trajectories-of-people-who-have-been-in-care.pdf](#)

Question 10: Do you agree these changes will strengthen the use of Family Networks in keeping children safely at home?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Family Group Decision Making

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is an umbrella term for family-led meetings that allow family networks to play a key role in decisions about their children, where this is safe and appropriate. FGDM helps identify practical solutions that build on existing strengths within the family network, leading to outcomes that enable sustainable, healthy, loving relationships for the child, and empower the family to work together to make meaningful change.

Through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, government has placed a duty on local authorities to offer a FGDM meeting to the child's parents or any other person with parental responsibility for the child at the pre-proceedings stage, unless doing so would not be in the child's best interests. Evidence shows that effective use of FGDM can reduce court applications and divert children from care. Foundations'¹¹ randomised controlled trial found that children whose families were offered Family Group Conferencing (a particular format of FGDM) at the pre-proceedings stage were less likely to enter care proceedings and less likely to be in care one year later.

The FFP Programme Guide 2026 states that the offer of FGDM should be integrated into the support provided at every point of a child's journey, from initial referral onwards. This includes through Family Help, multi-agency child protection, into care, and as support for reunification.

Safeguarding partners have a shared responsibility to promote the safe and effective use of FGDM through supporting timely, proportionate information sharing and contributing to robust multi-agency risk assessments to determine whether FGDM is appropriate and whether it is necessary for certain family network members, including those with parental responsibility, to be excluded from the FGDM process. Safeguarding partners are also responsible for supporting effective delivery, including participation,

¹¹ Foundations What Works Centre for Children & Families generate evidence in order to strengthen support for families,

where appropriate, and alignment with agreed family-led plans as well as having a collective role in oversight, learning and continuous improvement of FGDM practice.

Proposed changes

Working Together will reflect the upcoming duty in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and clarify the role of safeguarding partners. It will clarify how and when practitioners should consider FGDM and draw on the most up to date evidence to ensure that FGDM is facilitated safely, including identifying circumstances where this might not be appropriate or where particular family network members may not be invited to participate due to safeguarding concerns.

Working Together will also provide detail on how practitioners should ensure that FGDM is delivered safely and in the child's best interests, with particular attention to circumstances where there is domestic abuse, coercive control and power dynamics. This includes awareness of:

- the significance of the adults in contact with the child and their family;
- any serious criminal convictions, previous allegations of child abuse, domestic abuse or impulsive violent behaviour, restrictions on contact with children or involvement with children subject to child protection plans or care proceedings;
- where plans should be put in place to manage instances where threatening or disruptive behaviour arises during FGDM.

Question 11: To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

To make family network engagement more central to children's services, guidance should state that existing processes including family help plans, child protection plans and child protection conferences should become more aligned to the principles of Family Group Decision Making, where safe and appropriate.

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Family Network Support Packages

Family Network Support Packages (FNSPs), offer flexible, financial and practical help to unlock family network support where this would otherwise be a barrier. FNSPs are tailored to the individual needs of the family and can include one off, short

term or long-term support, for example furniture, transport costs, housing adaptations and wage subsidies.

Strong practice is emerging through the Department for Education's Family Network Pilot and Families First for Children Pathfinder programmes, which are testing both FNSP impact and delivery. Emerging evidence from these programmes suggests FNSPs may strengthen family networks, reduce escalation, and avoid care proceedings. The updated FFP programme guide sets out how FNSPs can be used alongside FGDM to empower and mobilise family networks, across children's social care intervention, to prevent escalation and improve outcomes.

Proposed changes

We are proposing to update Working Together to set out that, as part of the FGDM process, practitioners should encourage families, throughout the system, to consider what barriers exist for networks and whether a Family Network Support Package (FNSP) could remove those barriers, allowing family networks to step in and support the child and family to prevent the child from entering care. We propose providing guidance to help support safeguarding partners to do this safely, for example by sharing intelligence where appropriate, about what types of support may be beneficial.

Reunification

Reunification is where a child returns to their birth parent(s) following a period in out-of-home care. A key principle of the Children Act 1989 is that children are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless this is not safe for them. This is reflected in Working Together and across the purpose, principles, outcomes and enablers of the National Framework.

Where it is the right decision for a child to return to the care of their birth parents, practitioners should carefully consider support and safety planning. Family Help and family networks will play a crucial role in supporting reunification, by enabling families to develop sustainable plans that facilitate a child's safe return home, in line with expectations in the Families First Partnership programme guide.

Evidence shows that the most effective reunification planning starts early so that practitioners can build and maintain trust with parents while the child is in care and following their return home. Parents can stay better engaged with support and

motivated to engage in programmes and interventions that can support a return home being possible¹².

NSPCC and Action for Children commissioned research¹³ to understand the effective delivery of reunification support. It found that, whilst there is a growing interest in reunification practice across the country, this is not yet matched by a growing awareness of how best to do it. Findings also highlight that it is common for reunified children to later re-enter care. Strong practice from the Family Network Pilot has seen local authorities using Family Network Support Packages to support successful reunification but this practice is not widely disseminated.

Supervision orders¹⁴ are sometimes used to support reunification. They require local authorities to “advise, assist and befriend” a supervised child but they do not require the local authority to set out a plan for support. Research has highlighted practitioners’ concerns about supervision orders lacking accountability¹⁵, as well as parents’ concerns regarding support promised by the local authority not being provided¹⁶. Additionally, findings from Judith Harwin *et al.* (2019) suggest a high rate of return to court following a supervision order being granted. Children on a supervision order have the highest probability of a return to court (20%) for new s.31 proceedings (care or supervision order) within five years compared to care orders, special guardianship and child arrangement orders, emergency protection orders, placement orders and adoption orders¹⁷.

Proposed Changes

To support safe, carefully considered reunification and reduce the number of children returning to care, we will use Working Together to clarify that safeguarding partners should support reunification as a core part of the Family Help offer and encourage agencies to develop a specific pathway for reunification within their services. This would mean that children returning to their families should receive support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (child in need), be allocated a Family Help Lead Practitioner, supported by a multi-disciplinary team, and have a Family Help plan. Family Help is at the heart of local communities and is well placed to support children to return to their

¹² [Reunification: an evidence-informed framework for return home practice](#)

¹³ [ACT0037 Home again Report Final digital.pdf](#)

¹⁴ Supervision orders are granted under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 and may require a child to live in a specified place, do certain activities and report to a particular place at a set time. These orders can last for one year and can be extended yearly to a total of three years. They last until the child reaches the age of 18, unless discharged at an earlier date

¹⁵ [Supervision orders in care proceedings: survey findings - Nuffield Family Justice Observatory](#)

¹⁶ [cfj-lancaster.org.uk/files/pdfs/Harwin_Report_on_Parental_Perspectives.pdf](#)

¹⁷ [SGO_FinalReport.pdf](#)

families safely and with support. The offer of Family Help where reunification is being considered should include robust engagement with family networks and consideration of support through Family Network Support Packages. We propose to set this out in Working Together.

We are also keen to explore the use of supervision orders when children are returning to their families from care (noting that an order will only be granted if the threshold of actual or likely significant harm would be met). For supervision orders to be used successfully we want to explore whether there is merit in setting out a responsibility for local authorities and partners to provide a support plan, such as a family network support package, alongside the supervision order. This might require a change in primary legislation. It should also be recognised that supervision orders are used for a range of reasons, in this consultation we are focusing on the use of these orders to support children returning home.

Question 12: Do you agree that we should explore requiring local authorities to provide a support plan for children returning home on a supervision order?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Question 13: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Family Help, Family Networks, Family Group Decision Making, Family Network Support Plans or reunification?

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Section 4: Protection

This section includes propositions on:

- Multi-agency child protection teams
- Responding to extra familial harm
- Protecting looked after children
- Safeguarding children in kinship care arrangements
- Fabricated illness
- Child sexual exploitation
- Extreme violence

Multi-agency child protection teams

A decisive child protection system is one in which multi-agency practitioners have the expertise, experience, time and support to identify and take effective action in response to actual or likely significant harm.

The Independent Review of Children’s Social Care and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report, *Child Protection in England – National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson*¹⁸, both published in 2022, found the following key factors where child protection fails to keep children safe:

- ineffective multi-agency information sharing, decision making and coordinated action;
- child protection activity being undertaken by inexperienced practitioners;
- a child protection framework unsuited to responding to significant harm outside the home; and
- poor parental engagement and experience.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel recommended introducing multi-agency child protection units in every local authority area to address this. Establishing multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) in every local authority area in England – via the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and Families First Partnership programme – are our response.

Early findings from the independent evaluation of the Families First for Children Pathfinders¹⁹ show strengthened multi-agency collaboration and improved co-working

¹⁸ [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report, Child Protection in England – National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#)

¹⁹ [Families first for children pathfinder programme: evaluation report - GOV.UK](#)

between social care, education, health and police. Learning from existing multi-agency working in other parts of the children’s social care system also provides important evidence, for example Foundations’ – the What Works Centre for Children and Families - evaluation of multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH)²⁰.

It is essential that MACPTs align with existing safeguarding arrangements. Statutory safeguarding partners are expected to determine the most appropriate way for MACPT to link with the front door arrangement. Front door arrangements and MACPT provision should be complementary but separate in terms of dedicated agency resource. MACPTs focus exclusively on child protection and nominated members need specific expertise, authority, time and support to navigate and mobilise input across agencies and make decisions about child protection intervention. We will further clarify the relationship between MACPTs and front doors (including MASHs) in statutory guidance.

Families First for Children pathfinders²¹ are reporting positive MACPT impacts, including improvements in the timeliness and quality of strategy discussions and the number of joint section 47 investigations. These suggest a more focused, efficient and effective multi-agency response to child protection concerns. MACPT members’ ability to quickly navigate, influence and engage their agencies is focusing protective action and resource where it is most needed. The expertise and input of Family Help Lead Practitioners, team managers and others who know the child and family are critical in building a clear understanding of the child’s daily life.

The statutory framework for MACPTs

Section 3 of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 creates a new duty on safeguarding partners – local authorities, police and integrated care boards – to establish MACPTs in every local authority area in England. The Act requires MACPTs to lead section 47 enquiries (“co-ordination of assistance for the local authority under section 47(9)” of the Children Act 1989).

Section 3 also allows the Secretary of State for Education to use regulations to further prescribe the:

- support provided by MACPTs (referred to in this document as “functions”, meaning a description of what the MACPT is expected to do as opposed to legal functions relating to statutory safeguarding partners);

²⁰ [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs - Foundations](#)

²¹ [Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder programme and family networks pilot \(FNP\) - GOV.UK](#)

- requirements for persons nominated as members of MACPTs (including in particular qualifications and experience);
- relevant agencies that will be in scope of the duty to enter co-operation memorandums.

Regulations will be subject to robust Parliamentary scrutiny through the affirmative procedure before they come into force. The multi-agency child protection teams: regulation making powers policy statement²², published in January 2026, sets out the intended scope and proposed content of the regulations.

Proposals and questions in the section focus on multi-agency child protection practice and the scope of the three regulation making powers - support, skills and knowledge, and relevant agencies. Responses will inform the development of regulations and updates to statutory guidance.

The support provided by MACPTs (functions)

We expect MACPTs to lead all child protection decision making with input from practitioners that know the child and family. Family Help and multi-agency child protection will form one integrated system to improve the experience of families that need help, while bringing a clear, expert focus to concerns about significant harm. This was the intention of the Children Act 1989 and our children’s social care reforms, including MACPTs, are our direct response to drive this.

The Families First Partnership programme guide and policy statement outline the intended functions of the MACPT. We intend that regulations will prescribe the support MACPTs will be required to provide to support the local authority to discharge its child protection functions. We are proposing that regulations set out that MACPTs:

- provide advice and consultation for practitioners who need MACPT expertise;
- determine whether the significant harm threshold has been met;
- convene and chair strategy meetings;
- lead or oversee multi-agency investigations (as required);
- convene and chair child protection conferences;
- oversee the development and delivery of child protection plans, and keep these plans under review;
- decide whether to move into pre-proceedings for care and supervision orders and the Public Law Outline (PLO) process;
- provide relevant evidence for Emergency Protection Orders, Child Assessment Orders, care and supervision orders;

²² [Multi-agency child protection teams: regulation-making powers - GOV.UK](#)

- maintain knowledge of all children who are the subject of section 47 enquiries or on a child protection plan;
- contribute to reporting requirements aligned with statutory safeguarding partner duties to prepare and publish reports on local safeguarding arrangements.

Proposed Changes

We are proposing that the functions of MACPTs are clearly set out in regulations to support effective multi-agency child protection practice.

Question 14: Should the following MACPT functions be prescribed in regulations?

- **provide advice and consultation for practitioners who need MACPT expertise**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **determine whether the significant harm threshold has been met**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **convene and chair strategy meetings**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **lead or oversee multi-agency investigations (as required)**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **convene and chair child protection conferences**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **oversee the development and delivery of child protection plans, and keep these plans under review**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **decide whether to move into pre-proceedings for care and supervision orders and the Public Law Outline (PLO) process**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **provide relevant evidence for Emergency Protection Orders, Child Assessment Orders, care and supervision orders**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **maintain knowledge of all children who are the subject of section 47 enquiries or on a child protection plan**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **contribute to reporting requirements aligned with statutory safeguarding partner duties to prepare and publish reports on local safeguarding arrangements**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

MACPT practice standards, frameworks and approaches

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report identified the need for specialist child protection skills and expertise, especially in relation to complex risk assessment and decision making. The Care Review found a lack of development of social worker expert knowledge and skills as a significant problem in child protection, resulting in children being less safe. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report commissioned research from the Behavioural Insights Team²³ to explore the most effective operational conditions for high-risk, high-volume decision making. It concluded there are five core conditions required:

- trust;
- shared values and identity;
- clear information sharing policies;
- leadership support;
- regular feedback loops and systems that minimise the cost of information sharing.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel concluded that teams with expertise from across agencies underpinned by these principles would be the most effective way of achieving better outcomes for children who need protection. The Strengthening Families, Protecting Children programme²⁴ also evidences the impact of effective multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working, including that building good relationships between professionals reduced barriers to support to families.

In 2023, Working Together introduced new national multi-agency practice standards for child protection (updated in 2026). The standards are for all practitioners working in services and settings who come into contact with children who may be suffering or have suffered significant harm inside or outside the home, or online. Alongside these standards, there are a range of national competency and skill frameworks for partner agency practitioners. Social workers and health practitioners are regulated professionals, and police officers and staff are required to meet standards set by the College of Policing.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act allows safeguarding partners to include other practitioners, agencies and organisations to form part of the MACPT, so that these teams are able to respond to local harm and need profiles. Prescribed skills, competencies or experience for these practitioners will be for safeguarding partners to determine, supported by statutory guidance and other competency frameworks.

²³ [Child Protection in England - May 2022](#), page 102

²⁴ [Strengthening families, protecting children \(SFPC\) programme - GOV.UK](#)

Government recently published [new standards for lead child protection processes \(LCPPs\)](#). They set out the minimum knowledge and skills LCPPs are expected to have to effectively lead child protection processes. These standards will be used to inform the content for the LCPP programme that the department plans to roll out from autumn 2027, as part of a wider Social Work National Professional Development Offer. They are non-statutory, but we are considering making them statutory in future, alongside making the LCPP a protected title.

Proposed Changes

We are proposing that statutory guidance require MACPTs to have a shared local multi-agency practice framework or approach, aligned to the national multi-agency child protection practice standards and the outcomes and enablers in the National Framework. This local approach should set out senior management oversight, accountability, quality assurance, training and delegated decision-making arrangements from the local statutory safeguarding partnership for practitioners in MACPTs.

We are proposing that the statutory framework reflects the core conditions outlined by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report to inform an agreed multi-agency framework or approach, which underpins cohesive MACPTs and supports strong multi-agency child protection practice.

We are not proposing to update the national multi-agency child protection standards but will consider doing so once the statutory framework for MACPTs is more established.

Question 15: Do you agree that statutory guidance should set out that MACPTs should have an agreed local multi-agency practice framework or approach aligned to the National Framework?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Strategy discussions and section 47 enquiries

Working Together is clear that a strategy discussion should take place where there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm in any context – within the home, from extra-familial sources or online. Its purpose is to determine whether the significant harm threshold has been met and an enquiry under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 is needed. Working Together already sets out the expected roles of social workers, health and police practitioners in a strategy meeting.

Proposed Changes

We are proposing that regulations require that the MACPT convene strategy discussions. This approach will support a robust and consistent application of the significant harm threshold and ensure effective and immediate multi-agency input.

We propose that statutory guidance sets out that LCPPs should chair strategy meetings and that all nominated MACPT members should ensure appropriate representation from their agencies. We also intend to update guidance to clarify that where the child is subject to public or private legal proceedings, MACPTs should invite the child's guardian or representative to attend the strategy meeting.

The LCPP, with input from the practitioners in the MACPT and those in Family Help working directly with the family, will be expected to decide whether the significant harm threshold has been met and the action that should be taken following a strategy discussion. This will bring a fresh, sharp, expert MACPT focus on decision making and thresholds from the point at which child protection concerns are identified.

Working Together states that following strategy discussions lead practitioners should record all decisions made across all agencies, in accordance with local recording procedures. This includes decisions not to take further action and the reason for this. We propose to specify in statutory guidance that MACPTs should record the decision and rationale concerning whether the threshold for section 47 enquiries has been met. Our intention is to clarify and distinguish between decisions within the assessment and regarding the enquiry itself, in turn supporting more robust data collection and reporting on child protection activity to improve outcomes for children.

Question 16: Do you agree that statutory guidance should include an expectation that:

- **LCPPs chair strategy meetings**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **MACPT members ensure appropriate partner agency representation in strategy meetings**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **MACPTs record whether the threshold decision has been met, alongside the reasons for the decision**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

Timeframe between strategy discussion and initial child protection conference

Working Together states that an initial child protection conference should take place within 15 working days of the strategy discussion at which section 47 enquiries were initiated. This is to avoid drift and delay in decisions and action to protect children.

Some local areas have raised concerns that this timescale does not allow sufficient time to secure appropriate family network and partner agency engagement. This is particularly the case where a wider range of agencies are needed due to the contexts in which the harm is occurring, or further efforts are needed to engage the family network. Examples include children who have been open to children's services for some time; are experiencing cumulative or extra-familial harm; or are part of transient families moving across local authority areas.

In these scenarios, the 15-day timeline to gather sufficient information across professional and family networks may have the unintended consequence of pre-empting further child protection intervention, rather than focusing on whether the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. Local areas have also said statutory guidance provides conflicting expectations – namely that they should meet this timeframe, whilst also stating that children's social care assessments, including under section 47, should be concluded within 45 working days.

Proposed Changes

We know that some local areas hold review meetings five days after the strategy discussion, to monitor progress and agree next steps. We want to explore how changing – not removing – requirements and guidance around these timeframes could support better child protection practice and outcomes for children, whilst avoiding drift and delay.

We propose to prescribe in regulations that, five days after the strategy discussion, the MACPT:

- convenes a meeting to review the progress of the section 47 enquiry;
- sets a timeframe for the initial child protection conference, including where an extension is needed;
- records the decision and reason for that timeframe; and
- agrees and documents a clear interim safety plan for the child.

Statutory guidance could then set an expectation that the initial child protection conference, where the MACPT decides this is required, takes place as close to the 15-day timeframe as possible unless there are exceptional circumstances agreed by the MACPT.

Question 17: Do you agree that regulations should prescribe that, within five days of the strategy discussion at which section 47 enquiries were initiated, the MACPT:

- **reviews the progress of the section 47 enquiry**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **sets a timeframe for the initial child protection conference, where an extension to the 15-day timeframe is needed**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **records the decision and reasons for that timeframe**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **agrees and documents a clear interim safety plan for the child**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

Question 18: Do you agree that statutory guidance should set out that initial child protection conferences should take place as close to the 15 day-timeframe as possible, unless there are exceptional circumstances agreed and recorded by the MACPT?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Chairing child protection conferences

The main check on decision making in the child protection system is the child protection conference (initial and review), which should bring together family members and practitioners to decide whether the threshold for child protection is met and how interventions are reducing the actual or likely significant harm. Until now, independent chairs have chaired child protection conferences, sometimes having limited contact with and knowledge of the child and family beforehand.

The Care Review found that child protection conferences were not working effectively, citing issues with parental engagement and a lack of critical interrogation of information between practitioners. The review recommended that experienced, senior social workers return to frontline child protection practice in the form of Expert Child Protection

Practitioners (the recommendation that led to the LCPP role). The Care Review stated that they should undertake joint visits to families with Family Help Lead Practitioners, chair child protection conferences, and lead multi-agency professionals who input into child protection decisions.

Pathfinder LCPPs are chairing child protection conferences, with reported positive impacts. Many are former child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers. In one area, LCPP oversight, specific expertise and joint pre-conference home visits alongside the Family Help Lead Practitioner have reportedly resulted in significantly shifting a parent's thinking and ability to protect their child. The parent subsequently participated fully in the initial child protection conference and could demonstrate clear evidence of increased safety at the review conference.

Proposed Changes

We want regulations to require MACPTs to convene child protection conferences and forums and for LCPPs to chair them. The LCPP has the benefit of providing a fresh, clear and expert perspective, drawing on engagement with the child and family and input from the practitioners who know them best. As far as is possible, the same LCPP should chair subsequent child protection review conferences. Family Help Lead Practitioners will be involved in decision making and work closely with the MACPT to ensure support is brought around the child and family in one integrated system.

Working Together states that a practitioner with sufficient child protection experience and knowledge about the child and family's daily life should chair the initial and subsequent review child protection conferences. We propose that statutory guidance will specify that the LCPP (social workers embedded in the MACPT) fulfil this role. They are accountable to the Director of Children's Services but not in the line management chain for the Family Help Lead Practitioner.

Working Together already states that conferences should be multi-agency and multi-disciplinary. We want the MACPT to support the local authority in deciding the action needed to protect the child. We will strengthen statutory guidance to ensure necessary representation, from the right practitioners, across different agencies and enable objectivity and effective decision making through the conference process.

Question 19: Do you agree that Lead Child Protection Practitioners embedded in the MACPT should chair child protection conferences?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Developing, reviewing and closing child protection plans

Decisions about child protection plans must be made carefully, with coordinated input from multi-agency practitioners. This is especially important during transitions out of child protection, such as into pre-proceedings, where delays or changes in oversight can increase the risk to children.

Statutory guidance already requires a multi-agency conference to review whether a child protection plan should be ended. Working Together is clear that a plan should only be discharged when:

- all agencies agree the child is no longer suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm;
- the child and family have permanently moved to another local authority, and the plan has been appropriately transferred to that local authority;
- the child has turned 18, died, or permanently left the UK.

Proposed Changes

We are proposing that regulations require MACPTs to oversee the development, review, and closure of child protection plans. This includes formal decision making on when plans should end and why. This will strengthen safety planning and ensure ongoing oversight and support during these critical transitions, where children may be particularly vulnerable.

We propose that regulations require:

- formal recording of decisions to discharge a child protection plan;
- clear identification of any ongoing support after discharge, including where proceedings begin;
- recording of MACPT input sought and obtained from all practitioners involved with the child;
- notification to all relevant agencies, as well as parents and carers who were invited to the initial child protection conference;
- that MACPTs inform decisions about and support transitions into pre-proceedings and the Public Law Outline, care proceedings, reunification and wider Family Help, early help or universal services.

Closure of child protection plans following reunification should include consideration about the support and services a child may need once they return home. Children and their families should continue to receive support through Family Help where this is needed to ensure they are safe and changes in need are addressed early.

Recognising the complexity of legal processes, such as preparing evidence and acting as expert witnesses, we propose that statutory guidance continues to support local area flexibility in assigning this work, provided practitioners have an appropriate level of knowledge and expertise in social work and of statutory and legal processes (for example, LCPs, court and children looked after teams). Family Help Lead Practitioners will remain responsible for holding the primary relationship with and coordinating wider support around the child and family throughout.

Question 20: Do you agree that regulations should prescribe that MACPTs:

- **record decisions to discharge a child protection plan**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **identify ongoing support after discharge, including where proceedings begin**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **record input sought and obtained from all practitioners involved with the child**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **notify all relevant agencies of the decision**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **notify parents and carers who were invited to the initial child protection conference of the decision**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **inform decisions about and support transitions into pre-proceedings and the Public Law Outline, care proceedings, reunification and wider Family Help, early help or universal services?**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

Question 21: Do you agree that statutory guidance should continue to support local flexibility in assigning pre-proceedings and court work?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Qualification or experience requirements for nominated members of MACPTs

Regulations will include requirements about the minimum qualifications or experience for nominated MACPT members, to ensure a consistent national standard across agencies in the operation of MACPTs. This regulation-making power relates to the requirements of the nominated MACPT members prescribed on the face of the Act, which are a:

- social worker;
- registered health professional;
- police representative;
- person with education experience.

Regulations will reflect the competencies required to provide support to local authorities in delivering effective child practice and activities. We do not intend to nominate a specific title or grade to these roles. Our goal is to ensure that regulations strike the right balance between facilitating effective child protection practice and ensuring local areas have flexibility to recruit practitioners within their available resource and capacity.

Across the safeguarding partner agencies, there are already national competency and skills frameworks and statutory guidance for child protection expertise. We want to ensure that regulations align with what is set out in these documents in determining the qualifications and experience required for MACPT members. These include the:

- The Royal College of Nursing's "Safeguarding children and young people and children and young people in care" competencies for healthcare staff intercollegiate document²⁵ provides a helpful framework of competencies required for the nursing workforce. In this document, the competencies

²⁵ [Home | Child health Safeguarding](#)

prescribed at NHS Agenda for Change pay band 8a/b/c appear appropriate for the MACPT health professional.

- The College of Policing standards²⁶ and new Professionalising Public Protection Programme²⁷, which involves a range of training, learning and development initiatives that will ensure the police workforce have enough of the right professionals with the right competences, qualifications and experience to work in a multi-agency child protection team.
- Government's post qualifying standards for social workers²⁸ and Social Work England's professional standards for safe and effective practice²⁹ and new lead child protection practitioner standards which have been produced to support the knowledge and skills development of LCPPs.

Pathfinders have appointed a range of practitioners across social work, health, police and education, for example former child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers or social work qualified team managers, designated safeguarding and community public health nurses, and detective sergeants. They have emphasised that requirements should reflect child protection competence, experience and decision-making authority, rather than relying solely on job title or length of service.

Proposed Changes

While we recognise the differences in each of these agency's specific remits, roles and responsibilities for child protection activity, we propose that regulations state that nominated MACPT members must, as a minimum:

- have knowledge and understanding of the statutory child protection framework;
- have an applied understanding of what constitutes actual or likely significant harm in all contexts (including inside and outside the home, and online) and across all age ranges (from unborn babies to teenagers);
- contribute effectively to assessment of needs, understanding the indicators and drivers of abuse, neglect and exploitation;
- build an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the child's daily life to establish the likelihood of significant harm;
- act inclusively and foster anti-discriminatory environments in which it is safe to challenge and respond to the needs and experiences of children and families of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds whilst always remembering that whether decisive action is taken should never be influenced by prejudices

²⁶ [Professional standards | College of Policing](#)

²⁷ [Public protection and safeguarding leadership programme launched | College of Policing](#)

²⁸ [Social work post-qualifying standards: knowledge and skills statements - GOV.UK](#)

²⁹ [Professional standards - Social Work England](#)

about a family's background, or by discomfort in tackling issues involving people from minority backgrounds;

- possess the ability to assess information for timely, effective and reliable multi-agency decision-making;
- respect and constructively challenge multi-agency perspectives to reach the best intervention and outcome for the child;
- ensure interventions are prompt, evidence-based and tailored to the child;
- listen and take into consideration what children tell them (verbally or non-verbally) to help them and their family.

In addition, we think it is crucial that MACPT members have the appropriate level of seniority or decision-making authority to operate effectively. While we do not propose that regulations attribute this to a particular grade or level for each safeguarding partner agency, we do propose that regulations stipulate that MACPT members are able to effectively:

- navigate their agency;
- access, collate and (where necessary) critically challenge and assess the quality of relevant information;
- mobilise input from the practitioners within their agencies; and
- have the authority to make decisions about child protection intervention.

Question 22: Do you agree that regulations should state that nominated MACPT members must, as a minimum:

- **have knowledge and understanding of the statutory child protection framework**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **have an applied understanding of what constitutes actual or likely significant harm in all contexts (including inside and outside the home, and online) and across all age ranges (from unborn babies to teenagers)**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **contribute effectively to assessment of needs, understanding the indicators and drivers of abuse, neglect and exploitation**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **build an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the child's daily life to establish the likelihood of significant harm**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **act inclusively and foster anti-discriminatory environments in which it is safe to challenge and respond to the needs and experiences of children and families of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **possess the ability to assess information for timely, effective and reliable multi-agency decision-making**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **respect and constructively challenge multi-agency perspectives to reach the best intervention and outcome for the child**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **ensure interventions are prompt, evidence-based and tailored to the child**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **listen and take into consideration what children tell them (verbally or non-verbally) to help them and their family**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

Question 23: Please provide any further views on how regulations and statutory guidance should be aligned with existing national competency and skill frameworks, to support effective child protection practice.

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Relevant agencies to facilitate the operation of MACPTs

The regulations will prescribe the relevant agencies that safeguarding partners can approach to facilitate the operation of MACPTs. Relevant agencies are already prescribed in secondary legislation³⁰. There are 38 agencies in total.

The subset of relevant agencies included in regulations will be under a duty to enter into a co-operation memorandum with MACPTs if they are notified to do so by safeguarding partners. This locally agreed memorandum will set out how the relevant agency and safeguarding partners, through their MACPT, will work together for the purposes of supporting the local authority to discharge its duties under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Proposed Changes

We do not intend to specify all relevant agencies in MACPT regulations. Those specified would only need to enter a co-operation memorandum if notified by safeguarding partners to do so. Co-operation memorandums are not automatic.

Prescribing a specific sub-set of relevant agencies in regulations will allow for national consistency. The regulations will not require agencies to provide dedicated resources, and agency involvement will only be required where it supports the effective operation of a MACPT. It is possible that our proposal for agencies in scope of these powers will vary over time, as we understand more about how MACPTs operate and which agencies they need to engage with to deliver their day-to-day functions. Any change to the prescribed list would require consideration by Parliament through the affirmative process. The eight agencies we propose to prescribe in regulations are:

- Probation Service;
- Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), secure colleges, training centres, young offender institutions;
- British Transport Police (BTP);

³⁰ [Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency \(England\) Regulations 2018](#)

- Charities working with children and/or their families;
- Religious organisations;
- Schools and further education institutions;
- Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and alternative provision;
- NHS trusts and foundation trusts.

Question 24: Do you agree that the eight relevant agencies that we have listed should be specified in regulations as in scope to enter into co-operation memorandums with the MACPT? (select all that apply)

- **Probation service**
- **Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), secure colleges, training centres, young offender institutions**
- **British Transport Police (BTP)**
- **Charities working with children and/or their families**
- **Religious organisations**
- **Schools and further education institutions**
- **Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and alternative provision**
- **NHS trusts and foundation trusts**

Question 25: Is there anything else you would like to comment on in relation to multi-agency child protection teams?

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Responding to extra-familial harm

Actual or likely significant harm can occur in many different contexts and circumstances, including inside and outside the home, as well as in online and real-world environments. Children can experience these harms simultaneously. Our ambition is a single multi-agency child protection system which is effective and appropriate for significant harm in all contexts – inside and outside the home, and online.

The Children Act 1989 and statutory guidance is clear that all forms of significant harm, including extra-familial harm, should receive a child protection response under section 47 of that Act.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report³¹ and the Care Review found that the current child protection framework is unsuited to responding to extra-familial harm. Local practice varies which can be exacerbated by child protection processes viewing parents in terms of their risk to the child (when they could be protective in an extra familial harm context), time limits and escalation processes being inappropriate for extra-familial harm and / or the child protection process being seen as stigmatising.

Some areas have tested and developed local approaches to extra-familial harm, including “Risk Outside the Home pathways” which offer adaptations and additions to respond to significant extra-familial harm while remaining within section 47 processes. These adaptations may bring in different agencies or additional structures and use less stigmatising terminology to promote engagement, support and effective interventions.

Proposed Changes

We want to explore how we update statutory and non-statutory guidance to reinforce, strengthen and ensure greater consistency in how areas understand, identify and respond to concerns about actual or likely significant extra-familial harm through the child protection process, and achieve good practice and better outcomes for children.

We propose to set out in statutory guidance:

- situating parents/carers as partners alongside practitioners, where safe to do so;
- supporting parents, both those who do and do not have wider vulnerabilities requiring a children’s social care response, to ensure they can continue to support their child(ren);
- working with the child so they can engage and participate in the process, ensuring the outcomes meet their needs (including previously unidentified or unmet needs) and make them feel and be safer;
- consistent application of the existing section 47 thresholds for actual or likely significant harm to extra-familial harms;
- a focus on the contextual drivers of harm in all outcomes;
- the role of MACPTs in co-ordinating partners who can create safety, or identify risk, in extra-familial contexts;
- clarity on the appropriate escalation process when the primary harm is extra-familial and action is needed from agencies and services rather than families, meaning e.g. care proceedings are an ineffective escalation;

³¹ [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report, Child Protection in England – National review into the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson](#)

- a requirement for clear and accountable actions for professionals responsible for places where children are harmed (for example, community areas, businesses, public spaces, online);
- consistent participation in disruption activity.

Question 26: Do you agree that statutory guidance should set out the elements below, to drive consistent and effective protective action for children suffering or likely to suffer significant extra-familial harm? (list with tick option for yes, no, don't know against each statement)

- **Situating parents/carers as partners alongside practitioners, where safe to do so**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **Supporting parents, both those who do and do not have wider vulnerabilities requiring a children's social care response, to ensure they can continue to support their child(ren)**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **Working with the child so they can engage and participate in the process, ensuring the outcomes meet their needs (including previously unidentified or unmet needs) and make them feel and be safer**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **Consistent application of the existing Section 47 thresholds for likely or actual significant harm to extra-familial harms**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **A focus on the contextual drivers of harm in all outcomes**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **The role of MACPTs in co-ordinating partners who can create safety, or risk, in extra-familial contexts**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **Clarity on the appropriate escalation process when the primary harm is extra-familial and action is needed from agencies and services rather than families, meaning e.g. care proceedings are an ineffective escalation**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **A requirement for clear and accountable actions for professionals responsible for places where children are harmed (for example, community areas, businesses, public spaces, online)**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **Consistent participation in disruption activity**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

Protecting looked after children

The safeguarding and child protection principles within Working Together apply to all children, no matter where they live. The Children Act 1989 sets out specific duties to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm. This duty applies to all children including those who are looked after by the local authority.

There can be a misconception that once children are in care, they are safe. However, evidence demonstrates that this is not always the case. The National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse³² (the audit) reported that the victims of group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse are often children who have had a history of living in care and/or having repeated episodes of going missing. There is also evidence that being in care can be a risk factor for certain types of harm. For example, the audit found that victims of group-based child sexual exploitation are often adolescent girls who have had a history of living in care.

We also know that where concerns are identified, there can be differences in local responses for looked after children. Where there are concerns that a looked after child

³² [National Audit on Group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse - GOV.UK](#)

is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, some local areas respond using the care planning process, whereas others use child protection interventions.

We want to ensure that child protection processes are clear, robust and consistent in how they relate to looked after children. We want to improve the integration between care planning and child protection processes and that these are clearly and consistently applied.

We want effective multi-agency child protection responses to all forms of significant harm, protecting children of all ages and in all contexts - from unborn children to teenagers, and children in family homes to children in or leaving care. We are already clear that significant harm outside the home should receive a child protection response under section 47. We want to do the same for looked after children, and to explore what role MACPTs could have in protecting them.

Proposed Changes

We propose to clarify in statutory guidance how the child protection and care planning processes should be integrated to protect looked after children. We propose that strategy discussions, section 47 enquiries, and child protection conferences are used where there are concerns about significant harm and the threshold is met. We propose that the child protection response for looked after children is effectively integrated with the child's care plan, supporting a single plan and review process.

The intention is to better protect looked after children by ensuring that actual or likely significant harm is effectively identified and there is robust, expert multi-agency input into the response. This includes defining the role of MACPTs in protecting looked after children.

Question 27: Do you agree that statutory guidance should set out the following expectations:

- **consistent use of strategy discussions, section 47 enquiries and child protection conferences for looked after children**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **multi-agency input into child protection responses and care planning through the multi-agency child protection team and the LCPP role**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **clarity of roles, responsibility and lines of accountability of different practitioners in the team around the child**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]
- **alignment of care planning and child protection processes including reviews and integrated plans**
[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

Safeguarding children in kinship care arrangements

On 27 February 2026, the Department for Education launched seven Kinship Zones to support kinship families to get the right help at the right time to support better outcomes for children in kinship care. The recent report published by the National Kinship Care Ambassador, *Improving the Kinship Local Offer and Approach to Kinship Care*³³, shared important learning on current practice with local authorities and their partners. The Department, together with the National Kinship Care Ambassador, has also launched the first national research project into the needs and experiences of children in kinship care.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act places a new duty on all local authorities to publish their kinship local offer, to consult on that offer, and also places on a statutory footing the role of the Virtual School Head to promote the education, attendance, and attainment of children in kinship care arrangements.

Children's social care reform is driving earlier help and intervention to keep children with families where possible, including in their wider family network through kinship care. It is therefore vital that, as we expect more children to be in these arrangements, the wider system is building in the right safeguards to support both children and carers and ensure multi-agency working where it is needed.

In 2026, *Working Together* was strengthened to ensure effective safeguarding for children in kinship care. However, we know that children living in kinship arrangements may experience complex family dynamics and require support that reflects their individual needs and circumstances. We also recognise that many kinship carers are grandparents or other family members raising children within their wider family network.

³³ [Improving the kinship local offer and approach to kinship care](#)

This may have implications for the kinship carer's relationship with their own adult children, for example.

Often kinship carers are raising children within their family network with little preparation or training. This can include managing contact and safeguarding children who have multiple and complex needs. Where a kinship carer has agreed to take a special guardianship order for a child, this can be particularly challenging, as local authorities may no longer provide support or services. All of this requires local authorities to give careful consideration to how they assess these arrangements and ensure that effective safeguarding and appropriate support are in place.

Whilst there is a strong focus and good early emerging evidence about the needs of children in kinship care and their carers, we are keen to understand what more needs to be done to make sure that children in kinship care are safeguarded effectively and that kinship carers have the right support to promote the welfare of the children in their care.

Proposed Changes

We want to make sure that Working Together and the National Framework are providing clear expectations about how practitioners should help, support and protect children in kinship care.

Question 28: Do you agree that the current statutory framework for help, support and protection is clear enough about how to effectively safeguard children in kinship care?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Question 29: If you do not agree, how would you like to see the statutory framework strengthened? (e.g., greater recognition that children living in kinship care may be impacted by complex family dynamics, more support for kinship carers to manage safeguarding responsibilities, training to improve services' understanding of the context of kinship arrangements, support for managing contact, etc.)

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Defining child sexual exploitation

The definition of child sexual exploitation (CSE) was first published by government in 2009. This helped move away from victim-blaming and inaccurate terminology like ‘child prostitutes’ to a more accurate, child-centred understanding of the harms and abuse children suffer. This is the current definition included in Working Together:

“Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.”

Proposed Changes

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse report on child sexual exploitation by organised networks stated:

The definition of child sexual exploitation must also be regularly reviewed to ensure it addresses the changing nature of the harm, including the substantial increasing use of online grooming.

The report recommended that the Department for Education review and publish updated guidance which “should specify that the core element of the definition of child sexual exploitation is that a child was controlled, coerced, manipulated or deceived into sexual activity. It should also include detailed information on: the role of the internet in the perpetration of child sexual exploitation; and how to identify and respond to child sexual exploitation perpetrated by networks of offenders.”

We are exploring whether to update statutory guidance in line with the report recommendations. This includes considering updates to the definition of child sexual exploitation.

The appropriate timing for any update to the definition is important as, for example, definitional changes would impact data collected by organisations and data comparisons over time. We should also take into consideration the ongoing Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs and the national police operation into group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse (Operation Beaconport).

Question 30: Do you agree that DfE should update

- **the definition of children sexual exploitation**

[Yes/No/Don't know]

- **the accompanying guidance**

[Yes/No/Don't know]

Question 31: Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. Which of the following are core aspects of child sexual exploitation:

- **It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity**

[Yes/No/Don't know]

- **It could be in exchange for something the victim needs or wants**

[Yes/No/Don't know]

- **It could be for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator**

[Yes/No/Don't know]

- **Apparent consent is irrelevant, the victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual**

[Yes/No/Don't know]

- **Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology**

[Yes/No/Don't know]

Question 32: Do you agree these other features should also be included?

- **Child sexual exploitation can occur where a child or young person under 18 is controlled, coerced, manipulated or deceived through the use of, or threat of, violence to engage in sexual activity. This violence and intimidation may be directed at any person and it only matters if the victim perceives this to be real**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- **Child sexual exploitation can occur for sexual gratification**

[Strongly agree/agree/neither agree nor disagree/disagree/strongly disagree]

- Other [free text, 500 characters]

Extreme violence

The children's social care system is designed to respond to children who are experiencing harm, treating them first and foremost as children and supporting their needs. Some of these children also cause harm, whether within their families, towards their peers or their wider community.

Children may cause harm for a range of reasons. For some, the harm they experience themselves, such as sexual or criminal exploitation or involvement in gangs, can place them in situations where they are coerced into harming others. Others may cause harm within their families or communities, for example through harmful sexual behaviours. In addition, there are a small number of people, including children, who become very interested in, and intend to inflict, harm. The response to this latter group will vary and may include a PREVENT, counter terrorism, mental health or other response.

The Southport Inquiry³⁴ includes recommendations concerned with understanding, identifying, intervening and risk managing individuals, including children, who intend to commit acts of extreme violence. Along with other aims, this seeks to ensure that a wide range of agencies and services are prepared to understand their role and own and manage risk appropriately.

The report recognised that while the purpose of the Children Act 1989 and the children's social care system is principally to respond to children experiencing harm it is also important that the risk that some children may pose to others is not overlooked or missed. The report commented on this referring to a "*blind spot within Children's Social Care in relation to risk to others.*"

For children's social care it recommended that:

The Department for Education should update Working Together to Safeguard Children and the Children's Social Care National Framework. These documents should highlight that safeguarding and child protection assessments, when considering what support to put in place and planned multi-agency working, must consider the risks posed by children to others. (Recommendation 39.)

The multi-agency child protection standards in Working Together require practitioners to have an applied understanding of what constitutes a child suffering actual or likely

³⁴ [The Southport Inquiry: Phase 1 report - GOV.UK](#)

significant harm, and in doing so, require practitioners to consider harm to others. The National Framework directs practitioners to consider the potential for children to cause harm to others³⁵. It emphasises understanding the context of harm while recognising the influence of trauma, coercion, and additional needs. Practitioners are asked to respond to situations where children harm others by viewing them first as children in need of help and protection, and to explore the underlying drivers of behaviour, challenge assumptions and work with families and partners to provide appropriate support.

Proposed Changes

The following questions will be used to inform cross-government work on the response to those who intend to inflict extreme violence including any strengthening of Working Together, the National Framework and statutory and non-statutory guidance.

Question 33: Do you agree that Working Together and the National Framework currently reflect good practice in responding to potential extreme violence by children?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Question 34: In which areas could Working Together and the National Framework better reflect best practice in responding to extreme violence by children?

Select all that apply

- **The role and responsibilities of children's social care**
- **The role and responsibilities of local partners**
- **Information sharing**
- **Working with child mental health and special educational needs**
- **Signposting to services and interventions**
- **Children's online activities**
- **Working with families affected**
- **Other:** [Free text, 500 characters]

³⁵ [Children's social care national framework](#) - Outcome 2 ("Children are safe in and outside of their homes")

Question 35: What expectations should there be across Working Together and the National Framework for how local authorities work with their multi-agency partners to respond to extreme violence and risks posed by children to others?

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Question 36: Is there anything else you want to tell us about responding to extra familial harm, protecting looked after children and those in kinship care, or the children's social care response to extreme violence?

[Free text, 1000 characters]

Section 5: Improving outcomes

This section includes propositions on:

- Enduring relationships
- National Framework implementation

Enduring relationships

Too many looked after children and care leavers do not have high quality relationships because it has not been a focus of the care system. Research shows that just one stable and committed and supportive relationship can be enough to buffer the effects of significant childhood adversity³⁶.

Enduring relationships provide emotional security and warmth, responsiveness, trust, dependability and shared positive experiences. When children have at least one relationship with these elements, they have improved educational and health outcomes, reduced likelihood of harm and increased resilience.

In June 2026, government published a [policy paper](#), outlining the evidence base for enduring relationships and why they matter. The paper sets out why all looked after children and care leavers should be supported to maintain and build enduring relationships as well as highlighting best practice. The Enduring Relationships Programme will align our national reforms of care to:

1. **Focus practice on enduring relationships** by ensuring that all work in the system is aligned with the focus on enduring relationships
2. **Create homes for enduring relationships** by ensuring that there is enough of a varied range of homes in the right places to meet the needs of children
3. **Support the transition to early adulthood** by making sure that children are ready and supported to transition to interdependent living when they leave care, aided by those important relationships
4. **Ensure that inspection and accountability guide the system towards prioritising enduring relationships**

³⁶ [Supportive Relationships with Trusted Adults for Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Adversities: Implications for Social Work Service Provision | The British Journal of Social Work | Oxford Academic](#)

Practice expectations for looked after children and care leavers are explicitly set out within the National Framework under Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes. This outcome covers different stages of the care journey, including entering care, experiences of care and the places children live, and transitions from care into adulthood. It includes expectations that local authorities support children and young people to nurture lifelong, loving relationships with family and friends.

Proposed Changes

Our intention is to make sure that the National Framework reflects the importance of enduring relationships as a priority for looked after children and care leavers, and provides clarity on how practitioners, practice supervisors and senior leaders can embed good practice.

As part of this, we are interested in whether there would be benefits to splitting Outcome 4 of the National Framework and focusing on children in care and care leavers separately, with distinct outcomes for each group. We are mindful that there are many similar expectations about what good practice looks like for those in care and leaving care but want to give appropriate attention to all children in the guidance.

Currently, Ofsted's Inspecting Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS) framework looks at the progress and experiences of looked after children and care leavers separately, and we are continuing to work with Ofsted on how to strengthen alignment between statutory guidance and inspection.

Question 37: To what extent do you agree that the expectations in the National Framework for children in care and care leavers supports children to have enduring relationships?

- **Strongly agree**
- **Agree**
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- **Disagree**
- **Strongly disagree**

Question 38: What benefits or difficulties can you see in separating Outcome 4 of the Children's Social Care National Framework into two distinct outcomes: one focusing on looked after children and one focusing on care leavers?

[Free text, 500 characters]

Implementing the Children’s Social Care National Framework

The National Framework³⁷ was last updated in March 2026. Local authorities should use the National Framework as they embed children’s social care reforms, and continue to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

In response to feedback from the sector, the National Framework is shorter and more user friendly. The improving practice supporting information page³⁸, is designed to be read alongside the National Framework and Working Together. It explains how local authority practitioners, safeguarding partners and relevant agencies can embed the National Framework into practice.

To achieve the outcomes of the National Framework, the page includes a set of tools to support local areas in using data and evidence to improve practice, including:

- Children’s Social Care Dashboard³⁹: a learning tool to help understand what is happening in practice and how effectively the outcomes and enablers set out in the National Framework are being achieved.
- Practice Guides⁴⁰: tools that translate the strongest available evidence into actionable recommendations to support local leaders in strengthening family services when designing, commissioning and delivering their services.
- Case studies: showcasing how local authorities are embedding the National Framework into the way they work, including Cheshire West and Chester⁴¹ and City of York Council⁴².

We want to continue supporting local areas to embed the National Framework and improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

Question 39: How are you embedding the National Framework locally within your organisation? (Select as many as apply)

- **Aligning your local practice framework to the National Framework**
- **In assessments and plans for children and young people**
- **In recruitment processes**
- **In supervision processes**

³⁷ Children’s Social Care [National Framework](#)

³⁸ [Improving practice with children, young people and families](#)

³⁹ [Children’s social care dashboard](#)

⁴⁰ [Practice Guides - Foundations](#)

⁴¹ Case study: Children’s social care national framework: Cheshire West and Chester Council

⁴² Case study: Children’s social care national framework: City of York Council

- **Informing local assessments of need**
- **Informing strategic plans**
- **Sharing best practice regionally**
- **Through briefings**
- **Updating learning and development products to reflect the National Framework**
- **Updating quality assurance processes**
- **Using the Children's Social Care Dashboard**
- **Using Practice Guides**
- **Using published case studies**
- **Other:** [free text – 100 word limit]

Question 40: What additional support would you find most useful to consistently and effectively embed the National Framework into day-to-day practice? (Please select up to 3 options)

- **Briefings**
- **Case studies**
- **Regional peer engagement opportunities**
- **Webinars tailored for senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners**
- **Webinars tailored for multi-agency partners**
- **Other** [please add free text]

Section 6: Equalities Impact Assessment

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Secretary of State, when exercising the functions of the Secretary of State, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Government is carefully considering how these revisions might have an impact, whether positive or negative, on individuals and groups who share protected characteristics and those who do not. We will undertake a full equality impact assessment as part of our response to this consultation.

Government will continue to ensure statutory guidance reflects the best available evidence on anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice and leadership. This includes making clear that safeguarding decisions must always be taken in the best interest of the children and not be influenced by bias. Practice must be inclusive in order to engage children and families of all backgrounds and experiences but anti-discriminatory considerations should never constrain evidence-based professional judgement and always keep the best interest and safety of children at the forefront of decision making. It is in this context that this statutory guidance needs to ensure leadership at all levels drives accountability that delivers the right outcomes for children. The equality impact assessment will take all this into account.

Question 41: Do you have any overall comments about the potential impact, whether positive or negative, of our proposed changes on those who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?

Where you identify any negative impacts, we would also welcome suggestions of how you think these might be mitigated

Annex A: Consolidated list of consultation questions

To help us analyse the responses, please use the online system wherever possible. Visit www.education.gov.uk/consultations to submit your response. Please note that this consultation applies to England only.

We know that not everyone will wish or feel able to answer all of the questions in this consultation. You are encouraged to answer the questions you would like to respond to, but you do not have to respond to all of them.

Privacy Notice

The personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) that you provide in response to this consultation is processed by the Department for Education as a data controller in accordance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018, and your personal information will only be used for the purposes of this consultation. The Department for Education relies upon the lawful basis of article 6 (1) (e) of the UK GDPR, which allows us to process personal data when this is necessary for conducting consultations as part of our function.

We may share information we hold about you with certain organisations, where the law allows it or we have a legal obligation to do so. There may be some circumstances where we'll need to share information about you with others without your consent. For example, this might be to prevent or detect a crime, or to produce anonymised statistics for research purposes. In all cases, we'll comply with the Data Protection Act 2018.

The personal information will be retained for a period of 12 months following the closure of the consultation period, after which it will be securely destroyed.

You can read more about what the Department for Education does when we ask for and hold your personal information in our personal information charter, which can be found here: [Personal information charter - Department for Education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk).

Confidentiality Notice

Information provided in response to consultations, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

If you want all, or any part, of a response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

Personal Information

The following questions are about your personal details and contact preferences. It would be helpful if you would first give some information about yourself as context to your other responses.

- 1. What is your name?**
- 2. What is your email address?**
- 3. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?**
- 4. Are you responding:**
 - As an individual
 - In a professional capacity
 - On behalf of an organisation

[if individual adult]

- 5. Which of the following best describes the perspective from which you are responding to this consultation?**
 - A care leaver up to age 25
 - A care leaver aged 25+
 - Adult who received children's social care support as a child or young person
 - Parent of a child involved with children's social care
 - Parent
 - Adoptive parent
 - Kinship carer

- Foster carer
- Special Guardian
- Family member of a child who is in care
- Family member of a care leaver
- Other

6. Which region are you responding from?

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- East of England
- London
- South East
- South West
- Prefer not to say

[If in a professional capacity]

7. Which of the following best describes your professional role?

- Social worker
- Teacher/DSL
- Health professional
- Police or justice
- Family support worker
- Youth worker
- Academic
- Other practitioner

8. What best describes your level of seniority?

- Frontline practitioner

- Middle manager or team leader
- Senior leader
- Director or equivalent
- Other

9. Which region are you responding from?

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- East of England
- London
- South East
- South West
- Prefer not to say

[If on behalf of an organisation]

10. Which of the following best describes your organisation?

- Local authority
- Education organisation
- Health organisation
- Safeguarding partnership
- Policing organisation
- Professional body
- Research organisation
- Voluntary, community or social enterprise
- Charity
- Other

11. What is the geographical scope of your organisation?

- Local
- Regional
- National
- International

12. Which region(s) does your organisation operate in? (select all that apply)

- North East
- North West
- Yorkshire and the Humber
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- East of England
- London
- South East
- South West
- Prefer not to say

Diversity Questions

How old are you?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to say

What is your ethnic group?

- White
- Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
- Asian or Asian British
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
- Other ethnic group
- Prefer not to say

Do you have an impairment, health condition or learning difference that has a substantial or long-term impact on your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

Consent and Contact Preferences

In sharing findings from this consultation, may we quote from your response?

- Yes
- No

May we contact you if we have any follow-up questions about your response?

- Yes
- No

Consolidated list of consultation questions

1. Do you agree that these proposals will strengthen the voice of children and families, including those who are under-represented or marginalised, in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements?
2. Is there anything else you would like to comment on in relation to child and family voice and how this is included or represented in the statutory framework for help, support and protection (Working Together and the National Framework)?
3. Do you agree that the proposed changes will improve independent scrutiny across partnerships, including how effectively it supports shared learning and continuous improvement in multi-agency child protection practice, while still allowing sufficient local flexibility?
4. Do you agree that a single statutory annual return would improve accountability and understanding of the impact and effectiveness of local safeguarding partner arrangements?
5. Do you agree that the proposed changes would improve the consistency and effectiveness of safeguarding responses to concerns about adults who work with children in any capacity?
6. Do you agree that this approach and proportionate LADO involvement would improve consistency and outcomes for children?
7. Is there anything else you would like to comment on in relation to MASAs or the role of the LADO?
8. Do you agree that Targeted Early Help should be removed and all Family Help support and services should be provided under section 17?
9. Please outline the reason for your answer.
10. Do you agree these changes will strengthen the use of Family Networks in keeping children safely at home?
11. To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

To make family network engagement more central to children's services, guidance should state that existing processes including family help plans, child protection plans and child protection conferences should become more aligned to the principles of Family Group Decision Making, where safe and appropriate.

12. Do you agree that we should explore requiring local authorities to provide a support plan for children returning home on a supervision order?

13. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Family Help, Family Networks, Family Group Decision Making, Family Network Support Plans or reunification?

14. Should the following MACPT functions be prescribed in regulations?

- provide advice and consultation for practitioners who need MACPT expertise;
- determine whether the significant harm threshold has been met;
- convene and chair strategy meetings;
- lead or oversee multi-agency investigations (as required);
- convene and chair child protection conferences;
- oversee the development and delivery of child protection plans, and keep these plans under review;
- decide whether to move into pre-proceedings for care and supervision orders and the Public Law Outline (PLO) process;
- provide relevant evidence for Emergency Protection Orders, Child Assessment Orders, care and supervision orders;
- maintain knowledge of all children who are the subject of section 47 enquiries or on a child protection plan
- contribute to reporting requirements aligned with statutory safeguarding partner duties to prepare and publish reports on local safeguarding arrangements

15. Do you agree that statutory guidance should set out that MACPTs should have an agreed local multi-agency practice framework or approach aligned to the National Framework?

16. Do you agree that statutory guidance should include an expectation that:

- LCPPs chair strategy meetings
- MACPT members ensure appropriate partner agency representation in strategy meetings
- MACPTs record whether the threshold decision has been met, alongside the reasons for the decision

17. Do you agree that regulations should prescribe that, within five days of the strategy discussion at which section 47 enquiries were initiated, the MACPT:

- reviews the progress of the section 47 enquiry
- sets a timeframe for the initial child protection conference, where an extension to the 15-day timeframe is needed
- records the decision and reasons for that timeframe
- agrees and documents a clear interim safety plan for the child

18. Do you agree that statutory guidance should set out that initial child protection conferences should take place as close to the 15 day-timeframe as possible, unless there are exceptional circumstances agreed and recorded by the MACPT?

19. Do you agree that Lead Child Protection Practitioners embedded in the MACPT should chair child protection conferences?

20. Do you agree that regulations should prescribe that MACPTs:

- record decisions to discharge a child protection plan
- identify ongoing support after discharge, including where proceedings begin
- record input sought and obtained from all practitioners involved with the child
- notify all relevant agencies of the decision
- notify parents and carers who were invited to the initial child protection conference of the decision
- inform decisions about and support transitions into pre-proceedings and the Public Law Outline, care proceedings, reunification and wider Family Help, early help or universal services?

21. Do you agree that statutory guidance should continue to support local flexibility in assigning pre-proceedings and court work?

22. Do you agree that regulations should state that nominated MACPT members must, as a minimum:

- have knowledge and understanding of the statutory child protection framework;
- have an applied understanding of what constitutes actual or likely significant harm in all contexts (including inside and outside the home, and online) and across all age ranges (from unborn babies to teenagers)
- contribute effectively to assessment of needs, understanding the indicators and drivers of abuse, neglect and exploitation

- build an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the child's daily life to establish the likelihood of significant harm
- act inclusively and foster anti-discriminatory environments in which it is safe to challenge and respond to the needs and experiences of children and families of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds
- possess the ability to assess information for timely, effective and reliable multi-agency decision-making;
- respect and constructively challenge multi-agency perspectives to reach the best intervention and outcome for the child
- ensure interventions are prompt, evidence-based and tailored to the child
- listen and take into consideration what children tell them (verbally or non-verbally) to help them and their family

23. Please provide any further views on how regulations and statutory guidance should be aligned with existing national competency and skill frameworks, to support effective child protection practice.

24. Do you agree that the eight relevant agencies that we have listed should be specified in regulations as in scope to enter into co-operation memorandums with the MACPT? (select all that apply)

- Probation service
- Youth Offending Teams (YOTs), secure colleges, training centres, young offender institutions
- British Transport Police (BTP)
- Charities working with children and/or their families
- Religious organisations
- Schools and further education institutions
- Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and alternative provision
- NHS trusts and foundation trusts

25. Is there anything else you would like to comment on in relation to multi-agency child protection teams?

26. Do you agree that statutory guidance should set out the elements above, to drive consistent and effective protective action for children suffering or likely to suffer

significant extra-familial harm? (list with tick option for yes, no, don't know against each statement)

- Situating parents/carers as partners alongside practitioners, where safe to do so
- supporting parents, both those who do and do not have wider vulnerabilities requiring a children's social care response, to ensure they can continue to support their child(ren);
- Working with the child so they can engage and participate in the process, ensuring the outcomes meet their needs (including previously unidentified or unmet needs) and make them feel and be safer
- Consistent application of the existing Section 47 thresholds for likely or actual significant harm to extra-familial harms
- A focus on the contextual drivers of harm in all outcomes
- The role of MACPTs in co-ordinating partners who can create safety, or risk, in extra-familial contexts
- Clarity on the appropriate escalation process when the primary harm is extra-familial and action is needed from agencies and services rather than families, meaning e.g. care proceedings are an ineffective escalation
- A requirement for clear and accountable actions for professionals responsible for places where children are harmed (for example, community areas, businesses, public spaces, online)
- Consistent participation in disruption activity

27. Do you agree that statutory guidance should set out the following expectations:

- consistent use of strategy discussions, section 47 enquiries and child protection conferences for looked after children
- multi-agency input into child protection responses and care planning through the multi-agency child protection team and the LCPP role
- clarity of roles, responsibility and lines of accountability of different practitioners in the team around the child
- alignment of care planning and child protection processes including reviews and integrated plans

28. Do you agree that the current statutory framework for help, support and protection is clear enough about how to effectively safeguard children in kinship care?

29. If you do not agree, how would you like to see the statutory framework strengthened? (e.g., greater recognition that children living in kinship care may be impacted by complex family dynamics, more support for kinship carers to manage safeguarding responsibilities, training to improve services' understanding of the context of kinship arrangements, support for managing contact, etc.)

30. Do you agree that DfE should update

- the definition of children sexual exploitation
- the accompanying guidance

31. Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. Which of the following are core aspects of child sexual exploitation:

- It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity
- It could be in exchange for something the victim needs or wants
- It could be for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator
- Apparent consent is irrelevant, the victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual
- Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology

32. Do you agree these other features should also be included?

- Child sexual exploitation can occur where a child or young person under 18 is controlled, coerced, manipulated or deceived through the use of, or threat of, violence to engage in sexual activity. This violence and intimidation may be directed at any person and it only matters if the victim perceives this to be real
- Child sexual exploitation can occur for sexual gratification
- Other

33. Do you agree that Working Together and the National Framework currently reflect good practice in responding to potential extreme violence by children?

34. In which areas could Working Together and the National Framework better reflect best practice in responding to extreme violence by children?

Select all that apply

- The role and responsibilities of children's social care
- The role and responsibilities of local partners
- Information sharing
- Working with child mental health and special educational needs
- Signposting to services and interventions
- Children's online activities
- Working with families affected
- Other

35. What expectations should there be across Working Together and the National Framework for how local authorities work with their multi-agency partners to respond to extreme violence by children and young people?

36. Is there anything else you want to tell us about responding to extra familial harm, protecting looked after children and those in kinship care, or the children's social care response to extreme violence?

37. To what extent do you agree that the expectations in the National Framework for children in care and care leavers supports children to have enduring relationships?

38. What benefits or difficulties can you see in separating Outcome 4 of the Children's Social Care National Framework into two distinct outcomes: one focusing on looked after children and one focusing on care leavers?

39. How are you embedding the National Framework locally within your organisation? (Select as many as apply)

- Aligning your local practice framework to the National Framework
- In assessments and plans for children and young people
- In recruitment processes

- In supervision processes
- Informing local assessments of need
- Informing strategic plans
- Sharing best practice regionally
- Through briefings
- Updating learning and development products to reflect the National Framework
- Updating quality assurance processes
- Using the Children's Social Care Dashboard
- Using Practice Guides
- Using published case studies
- Other

40. What additional support would you find most useful to consistently and effectively embed the National Framework into day-to-day practice? (Please select up to 3 options)

- Briefings
- Case studies
- Regional peer engagement opportunities
- Webinars tailored for senior leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners
- Webinars tailored for multi-agency partners
- Other

41. Do you have any overall comments about the potential impact, whether positive or negative, of our proposed changes on those who share protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010?

Where you identify any negative impacts, we would also welcome suggestions of how you think these might be mitigated

Annex B: Technical clarifications and amendments

C.1 The table below includes other drafting changes we expect to make when we reissue guidance, but on which we are not seeking views as part of this consultation. We propose to amend ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026’ as follows (this is indicative and not an exhaustive list):

Clarification/Update	Reason for change
<p>The strengthened role of education providers and childcare settings in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.</p> <p>A factual update ensuring where appropriate, current wording is amended from ‘should’ to ‘must’ in line with section 3 of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.</p> <p>Detailed guidance on the implementation of this section is set out in the Families First Partnership Programme Guide 2026.</p>	<p>Factual update in line with section 3 of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.</p>
<p>Update to reflect new information sharing duty when implemented.</p>	<p>Factual update in line with section 4 of the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026.</p>
<p>Update to reflect amendment to the Victim and Prisoners Act 2024 which restricts parental responsibility where a parent has murdered another parent, when implemented.</p>	<p>Factual update in line with Section 18 of the Victim and Prisoners Act 2024.</p>
<p>Update to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include a new definition of child criminal exploitation (CCE) in line with the new statutory/non statutory guidance on CCE (expected to be published autumn 2026) • include references to the new CCE, cuckooing and internal concealment offences and new CCE prevention orders introduced by the Crime and 	<p>New offences on CCE, cuckooing and internal concealment and new CCE prevention orders have been introduced by the Crime and Policing Act 2026. The date for commencement of the offence has not yet been agreed, but is expected in autumn 2026. The new offences will be accompanied by statutory guidance for police and non-statutory guidance for other partners. The Home Office will be consulting on the new guidance and a</p>

Clarification/Update	Reason for change
<p>Policing Act 2026 (to be commenced no sooner than autumn 2026)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> remove reference to existing child criminal exploitation guidance and to replace with reference to new CCE, cuckooing and internal concealment guidance (expected to be published autumn 2026) 	<p>new definition of CCE over the coming months.</p> <p>Agencies with statutory duties under Working Together will need to be aware of the new offences and the additional information provided in the supporting guidance to be published.</p>
<p>Update regarding disclosure and barring regime</p>	<p>From 1 Sept 2026, regulated activity will include those working /volunteering with children in supervised roles.</p>



Department
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