

## Q&A for publication

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### 1. **Statement from IsabelleTrowler, Chief Social Worker for Children and Families**

Statement on the publication of Working Together to Safeguard Children:

The best way to support families and protect children is through the delivery of timely and effective services, underpinned by sound professional judgement. Working Together provides a statutory framework within which this collaborative, multi-disciplinary practice can flourish. All those who work with children, and those who work with adults who are parents or who have contact with children, should read this guidance, understand it and have access to it at all times. Doing this is a critical part of the responsibilities we all share to support and protect the most vulnerable in society.

### 2. **Publication package**

#### **Q. What is being published and why?**

- A. We are today publishing: revised statutory guidance – *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, along with the Department's response to the public consultation which took place in relation to that guidance; revised and reissued *What to do if you're worried a child is being abused* advice for practitioners; revised and reissued *Information Sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers*; and updated guidance, *Keeping Children Safe in Education*.

The Government signalled its intention to publish updated advice and guidance in its joint response to Rotherham, *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation*. These child protection documents are complementary to one another. We want practitioners to have access to the best, most up to date guidance and advice on protecting children.

### 3. **Working Together to Safeguard Children**

**Q. What exactly has changed and what does this mean for frontline practitioners?**

A. There are three substantive changes on which we consulted:

*The management of allegations against those who work with children:*

We have emphasised that when dealing with allegations against those who work with children, any action to address corresponding welfare concerns in relation to children should be taken without delay and in a coordinated manner. We have responded to the feedback received through the consultation and are not requiring that allegations and welfare concerns be routed through the same single point of contact.

The revised guidance is also clear that any designated officer or officers managing allegations against those who work with children should be suitably qualified and experienced. Over time, we expect to move to a position where all such officers will be qualified social workers (although we are not requiring this at this stage, other than for new appointments).

*Notifiable incidents involving the care of a child*

We have integrated existing guidelines covering notification of Serious Childcare Incidents and deaths of looked after children and children in regulated settings.

***If needed (why are you doing this/what is its purpose?):*** these guidelines were set out in a local authority circular in 2007, but concerns raised by Ofsted, work initiated by the national panel of independent experts on serious case reviews and child homicide data issues have highlighted that local authorities are currently unclear about the requirement to notify serious incidents. Through adding a section to *Working Together* we aim to raise the profile of this requirement.

*The definition of serious harm*

We have brought together examples of what should be considered by LSCBs as constituting serious harm to a child as a result of abuse or neglect for purposes relating to serious case reviews (SCRs).

***If needed (why are you doing this/what is its purpose?):*** this arises from concerns from the national panel of independent experts for serious case reviews about LSCBs' failure to initiate SCR. The concerns stem from inappropriate decisions by some LSCBs about what constitutes serious harm, leading to unjustifiable decisions about whether SCR criteria are met.

*If needed: other updates*

We have also: added a clear statement of safeguarding responsibility; made some updates to the information to be published in Local Safeguarding Children Boards' annual reports (in response to Rotherham); made an amendment to clarify the application of *Working Together* to all schools; and made a number of minor clarifications and updates.

**Q. Why are these changes necessary?**

A. The overall aim of the changes is to simplify processes for local authorities, making them clearer and easier. We have also made a number of minor clarifications and updates, primarily needed as a result of the Children and Families Act 2014.

**Q. Why is the old version not up to scratch?**

A. A full-scale review of *Working Together* and consultation took place in 2013. We subsequently identified a small number of areas where substantive changes were required, along with minor clarifications and updates to reflect policy changes and new legislation.

**Q. Why are you requiring future appointments to these roles to be social work qualified? Isn't this more restrictive?**

A. The changes made to the guidance on allegations are intended to reduce the risk that allegations against those who work with children are managed separately from related child welfare concerns. The guidance is clear that it is for local authorities to determine how this should be done, taking account of their local circumstances, and we have responded to the consultation feedback and not specified a single model that everyone should follow.

Similarly, we have listened to the responses to the consultation about whether officers managing allegations should be qualified social workers. We acknowledge that there may be existing, non-social work qualified, designated officers who are very experienced and who are working effectively. That is why such officers can continue in their roles. However, the Government's view remains that social workers bring a number of particular skills to this role. For example, around assessment of risk and thresholds, relevant child protection legislation, and knowledge of early help and care pathways. This is why we have said that new designated officers should be social work qualified. In practice, however, we do not expect this to be restrictive for local authorities. Evidence suggests that local authorities have drawn similar conclusions and have already been requiring social work qualifications when appointing new designated officers.

**4. What to do if you're worried a child is being abused**

**Q. What exactly has changed and what does this mean for frontline practitioners?**

A. *What to do if you're worried a child is being abused* guidance was last published in 2006. It was not current, and needed to be updated to reflect the passage of time and changes in Government policy. We will produce three versions of this guidance, one for practitioners, one for the general public and one for children. We are publishing the first of these now. It is a completely new document which focusses more strongly on ensuring that practitioners are aware of the signs of abuse and neglect and know what action they should take in response. The document provides practitioners with clear advice on what they should do to keep children safe, and fulfils a commitment made in the *Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation* Government report, published on 3 March.

**Q. Why are these changes necessary?**

A. If children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action. Where this happens children are better protected. The revised version of the 'What to do if you're worried a child is being abused' advice put a stronger focus on ensuring practitioners are aware of the signs of abuse and neglect and what action they need to take in response.

**Q. Why is the old version not up to scratch?**

A. The 2006 guidance was out of date and needed to be revised to reflect the passage of time and changes in Government policy. The new version has a stronger focus on the 'front end' of the process, providing examples of what constitutes abuse and neglect and what practitioners should do in response.

**Q. Will these changes be more onerous to practitioners like social workers?**

A. No, the advice reinforces the important role practitioners play in protecting and supporting children who suffer abuse and neglect.

**Q. When will the children's and public versions of WTDI be published?**

A. We expect to publish these documents in summer 2015.

**5. Information sharing**

**Q. What exactly has changed and what does this mean for frontline practitioners?**

A. The new advice is streamlined with the main focus now on children and young people. It includes key principles to information sharing as well as a myth-busting guide aimed at dispelling common myths which should make it easier for frontline practitioners to follow should they need any advice on information sharing.

**Q. Why are these changes necessary?**

A. To bring the advice on information sharing up to date and in line with other Government documents that are being published as part of a package in response to the Jay report on Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham. The Sexual Violence against Children and Vulnerable People National Group Action Plan also highlighted the need to update the former guidance along with producing a myth-busting guide to dispel common myths.

**Q. Why is the old version not up to scratch?**

A. The former *Information sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers* was too long and bureaucratic with much of the terminology and legal aspects out of date. The former guidance has also been archived.

**Q. Will these changes be more onerous to practitioners like social workers?**

- A. No, this is a streamlined version of the previous guidance, which incorporates new terminology, principles and myth-busting guide. Practitioners should find the new 'advice' easy to navigate.

## **6. Keeping Children Safe in Education**

### **Q. What exactly has changed and what does this mean for frontline practitioners?**

- A. Technical and clarification amendments have been made to all parts of the document. These include:

- Part 1 - We have inserted a specific section on *Preventing Radicalisation* to clarify the upcoming duties under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act, which received Royal Assent on 12 February 2015.
- Part 2 - We have strengthened what the behaviour policy should include in terms of staff/pupil relationships and communications.
- Part 3 - We have provided further detail in respect of: regulated activity; DBS checks for contractors and volunteers; references to relevant legislation; pre-appointment checks; single central record; and the required checks for proprietors of independent schools.
- Part 4 - We have made changes to reflect the updated *Working Together* 2015 statutory guidance

### **Q. Why are these changes necessary?**

- A. Following the publication of *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE) 2014 in April last year, we have noted a number of areas that require technical or clarification amendments. This is as a result of speaking to stakeholders who have asked for a number of clarifications and also as legislation and requirement changes are made elsewhere - for example, the commencement of the new Independent School Standards 2014 and changes in requirements for Safer Recruitment training.

### **Q. Why is the old version not up to scratch?**

- A. The old version requires updating. In some instances it requires clarification, in others it needs updating to reflect changes in legislation and requirements.

### **Q. Will these changes be more onerous to practitioners like social workers?**

- A. No. The changes do not result in any major changes in processes or requirements for practitioners. The aim of the changes is to clarify the guidance and ensure it is technically accurate.