

OPERATIONAL MACE AND STROTH MEETINGS: JOINT CHAIRING GUIDANCE

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide supports professionals who jointly chair Operational Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (Operational MACE) and Strategic Risk Outside the Home (STROTH) meetings.

The approach reflects expectations in Working Together to Safeguard Children, the responsibilities of Local Safeguarding Children's Partnerships and priorities within the Met Strategy for Children and Young People. It emphasises shared responsibility, strong partnership leadership, and combining safeguarding with disruption of harm.

CONTEXT: WHY JOINT CHAIRING?

Operational MACE and STROTH sit at the intersection of safeguarding and criminal justice. Joint chairing between Local Authority Children's Services and Police reflects this shared space, signals shared responsibility, strengthens information sharing and balances welfare-based and enforcement responses.

The decision for Children's Services and Police to jointly chair Operational MACE and STROTH meetings reflects their statutory and operational responsibilities for safeguarding children and responding to criminal exploitation.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER PARTNERS?

Chairing is only one aspect of leadership. While Children's Services and Police act as chairs, effective meetings depend on active leadership from all partners. Effective safeguarding requires shared ownership of risk, collective responsibility for action and confidence to challenge decisions where necessary.

Safeguarding does not work when agencies focus only on their own role or wait for others to act. It works best when partners take collective ownership of risk, remain accountable for their actions, and are willing to challenge delay, poor decisions or unsafe practice when necessary.



Supporting effective multi-agency safeguarding leadership

Meetings are less effective when professionals attend simply to provide updates or defend their service. They are more effective when people speak clearly, share concerns openly, and accept responsibility for what happens next. This is especially important in adolescent safeguarding, where risks are often spread across different agencies and can easily be overlooked or minimised.

Good partnership working therefore requires more than attendance and information-sharing. It requires honesty, professional confidence and a shared commitment to keeping children safe, even when this means asking difficult questions or challenging decisions.

DIFFERENT MODELS OF JOINT CHAIRING

There is no single “correct” model of joint chairing. Joint chairs should determine the co-chairing model that is most effective for their context, risks, and operational arrangements. The emphasis should be on purposeful, effective multi-agency leadership rather than adherence to a single prescribed approach.

Different arrangements may be appropriate depending on local relationships, workforce stability and turnover, levels of experience and confidence, operational pressures and the complexity of local exploitation concerns. Arrangements may need to adapt over time to reflect local circumstances and chairs should periodically consider whether the current model is effective, whether roles and responsibilities are clear or whether a different approach would work better.

LSCP Scrutineers may wish to satisfy themselves that the chosen model has been actively considered, is understood by partners, and continues to support effective safeguarding oversight, accountability, and outcomes for children.

Sample Joint Chairing Models

Model	What it is	Works well when	Risks / when not to use
Lead and Supporting Chair	One chair leads the meeting flow and decision-making, while the co-chair contributes challenge, intelligence, and leads specific agenda items.	Useful where one agency provides greater continuity or stability, where meetings require pace and consistency, or where one chair is newer to exploitation work. Often effective in operational forums.	Can become unbalanced if the supporting chair becomes passive or symbolic. Risks creating a perception that one agency “owns” the meeting.
Split-Agenda Leadership	Agenda sections are divided between chairs according to expertise or responsibility, for example safeguarding planning and disruption activity.	Works well where both chairs are experienced, preparation is strong, and meetings contain distinct areas requiring different expertise. Often effective in strategic meetings.	Can feel fragmented if transitions are unclear or safeguarding and disruption discussions become artificially separated.
Alternating Leadership	Chairs alternate responsibility for leading meetings while both remain active co-chairs.	Works well where relationships are strong, both chairs have similar experience, and there is organisational stability. More suited to mature partnerships and strategic forums.	Can create inconsistency where there is high turnover, differing chairing styles, or a need for strong continuity and pace.
Shadowing/ Developmental	An experienced chair leads while a newer co-chair develops confidence by taking sections over time.	Useful during police turnover, succession planning, induction or when building partner confidence.	Should not become permanent; the developing chair needs a clear route into active leadership.

EFFECTIVE JOINT CHAIRING IN PRACTICE

Regardless of the model chosen, chairs should operate as a partnership rather than as “lead chair” and “observer”.

Effective joint chairing relies on active collaboration between chairs throughout the meeting, not simply agreement about who will lead particular agenda items.

Even where one chair is taking the lead in facilitating discussion, the co-chair should remain actively engaged in monitoring the flow and pace of the meeting.

This may include prompting additional perspectives or professional curiosity, checking understanding or summarising key points, noticing dynamics within the meeting, including disagreement, disengagement, or uncertainty, supporting transitions between agenda items or reinforcing agreed actions and accountability.

The role of the co-chair is therefore not passive, even where they are not leading the discussion at that moment. Effective joint chairing depends on both chairs contributing to the leadership, oversight, and quality of the meeting.

Joint chairing should model the collaborative practice the partnership is seeking to achieve.

This checklist is intended as reflective tool rather than a performance measures. They are designed to support effective multi-agency leadership, shared accountability, and continuous improvement.

PRE-MEETING CHECKLIST FOR JOINT CHAIRS

Joint Chair Preparation

- Have we agreed who will lead different agenda items?
- Have we discussed where challenge, escalation, or sensitive discussion may arise?
- Are we clear about the outcomes we want from the meeting?

Purposeful Agenda, Oversight and Outcomes

- Do we want to achieve from each agenda item? Are we clear about the purpose of the discussion, the decisions required, and the expected outcomes or impact?
- Are these issues on the agenda because they require multi-agency oversight, analysis, or decision-making — or simply because they are routinely included?
- Do we understand the key risks, themes, or concerns requiring attention? Are there cases, locations, peer groups, or themes requiring particular focus or escalation?
- Are we creating space for analysis, challenge, and decision-making, rather than simply sharing updates?
- Are there agenda items at risk of dominating the meeting disproportionately, and how will this be managed?
- Does the agenda support purposeful safeguarding leadership, or is there a risk the meeting becomes procedural, repetitive, or overly focused on process?

Planning the Facilitation

- How will we ensure balanced multi-agency discussion? Are there partners that rarely contribute and how can we encourage participation?
- How will we ensure clear decision-making?
- Have we considered how we will manage disagreement constructively?

Working Together as Co-Chairs

- How will we support one another during the meeting?
- How will the co-chair remain actively engaged throughout?
- Have we considered how we will signal to one another during discussion?
- How will we intervene if discussion loses focus?
- How will we notice where contribution or challenge is missing?
- Are we presenting a shared leadership approach to the partnership?

Practical Readiness

- Is the agenda realistic and appropriately prioritised?

- Are papers, intelligence, and action trackers available?
- Is there clarity about recording actions and decisions?
- Is enough time allocated for the most significant discussions?

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POST-MEETING CHECKLIST FOR JOINT CHAIRS

Joint Chairing

- Did both chairs contribute actively and effectively?
- Did the co-chair remain engaged throughout the meeting?
- Was facilitation balanced and collaborative?
- Did the meeting model constructive partnership working?
- Did either chair dominate discussion unnecessarily, or were contributions balanced appropriately?

Multi-Agency Participation

- Did all relevant agencies contribute meaningfully?
- Were quieter partners appropriately drawn into discussion?
- Was professional challenge encouraged and managed constructively?
- Were any agencies passive, unclear, or disengaged?

Decision-Making and Actions

- Were decisions clear and proportionate?
- Are actions specific, time-bound, and clearly owned?
- Were escalation decisions clear where required?
- Was there clarity about next steps and accountability?

Meeting Effectiveness

- Did the meeting maintain pace and focus?
- Were any agenda items disproportionately dominant? If so, what does that tell us?
- Did the agenda support purposeful safeguarding leadership and did the meeting achieve its intended outcomes?

Planning for the Next Meeting

- What needs to happen before the next meeting?
- Are there actions, themes, or risks requiring closer oversight next time?
- Do any partners need additional support, challenge, or follow-up before the next meeting?
- Do the current chairing arrangements continue to work effectively?
- What should we do differently next time to improve the quality and effectiveness of the meeting?