MACE Protocol 5th Edition

London Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) and Harm Outside the Home Protocol 5th Edition

Contents

A note about the language used in this document
The terminology used within the field of adolescent safeguarding often carries overlapping meanings and may be used and interpreted differently across agencies and boroughs. For the purposes of this protocol, the London Safeguarding Children Partnership has adopted the definitions and distinctions set out in **Safeguarding Adolescents in London (SAIL)**. However, in the interest of readability and to avoid unnecessary repetition, the term 'child' is, at times, used as an inclusive reference to the phrase 'children and young people' within the safeguarding context.

Foreword by Ade Adetosoye Chair of the London Safeguarding Children Partnership

I am pleased to introduce this updated London Multi-Agency Child Exploitation and Harm Outside the Home Protocol on behalf of the London Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive.

Since the first edition in 2014, our understanding of adolescent safeguarding has developed significantly.

There has been important progress across London. Multi-agency working is stronger, contextual approaches are better established and there is growing recognition that adolescents affected by exploitation and violence must be approached through a child-first lens.

However, serious challenges remain. Too many young people continue to experience harm, and disproportionality persists across safeguarding, policing, education and youth justice systems, particularly for Black and other minoritised adolescents. Addressing this is fundamental to effective safeguarding.

Safeguarding adolescents from violence and exploitation requires purposeful, coordinated multi-agency working, clarity of roles, confident challenge and shared ownership of risk and plans. This edition strengthens governance and accountability, placing clear responsibility on Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships to oversee implementation and learning.

I encourage all partners to use this protocol as a shared framework for action to support consistent, child-first practice across London and strengthen how we work together to protect adolescents from harm.

Foreword by Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist KPM

As the Lead Safeguarding Partner for the Metropolitan Police Service, I want to be clear: protecting children from exploitation and associated abuse is one of the most serious challenges we face in London. These harms destroy lives, fracture communities, and demand a response that is both relentless and compassionate. No single agency can tackle this alone. It requires all of us— social care, health, education, housing, the voluntary sector and police —working together with shared purpose and accountability.

This **Multi-Agency Child Exploitation and Harm Outside the Home Protocol** provides the foundation for that collective response. It sets out the minimum expectations for how we will work together to safeguard children at risk of exploitation and harm outside the home. Real safeguarding depends not only on process but on professional values and ethical judgment. Every decision should be guided by the principle: *"If this were my child, what would I hope someone would do?"*

Our commitment is clear:

- **Early Identification and Intervention** – spotting the signs of exploitation and acting before harm escalates.
- **Contextual Safeguarding and Partnership Working** – recognising that risk often lies in peer groups, online spaces, and public environments, and responding in ways that go beyond the child's family unit.
- **Disruption and Accountability** – using every available power to dismantle networks, prosecute offenders, and safeguard victims.

This protocol aligns with the MPS's Children's Strategy's goal to see every child as a child first and the Mayor's ambition to make London the safest city for children to grow up in.

Policing will play its part by sharing intelligence, leading disruption activity, and ensuring victims are treated with dignity and care. But success depends on all of us—stepping up, not stepping back, when a child has come to harm or is at risk. By embedding professional curiosity, listening to children and families, and working as one system, we can create a London where every child has the chance to thrive.

Thank you to all partners for your shared commitment to deliver. Together, we will turn this protocol into action and deliver the protection every child deserves.

1 Introduction

1. Introduction

This protocol outlines how agencies in London will work together to identify, assess, challenge, and provide an effective service to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children in London who are impacted by exploitation including radicalisation, violence, and other forms of harm outside the home. It also sets out our shared commitment to targeting those who pose a risk of harm and to creating contexts in which harm is less likely to occur.

> "We know that the risks children face through exploitation and other forms of extra-familial harm are not static."

They evolve with technological advancements, societal changes, and criminal tactics. Some people who exploit and harm children are sophisticated and highly adaptable. They use grooming, coercion, violence and emotional, financial and online manipulation to control children. Children are often unaware that this is exploitation and that they are being exploited. Other scenarios are far more opportunistic and on occasion those involved in exploiting children are victims themselves.
While criminal, sexual, online, financial, and modern slavery-related forms of child exploitation and radicalisation are often defined and categorised separately, in practice they frequently overlap, interact and compound, forming a complex, interwoven pattern of risk and harm to children.

Children frequently experience multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities, requiring a proactive and coherent multi-agency response. Children who are harmed through exploitation can also be drawn into behaviours that are harmful to themselves and others. This may include a susceptibility to extreme violence such as weapon related violence as part of group conflict, fascination with extreme violence or radicalisation and extremism. These behaviours should be addressed through a child-first safeguarding lens. Our response, regardless of the harm type, must be nuanced and compassionate; ensuring that we address both protection and accountability without criminalising vulnerability.
Crucially, practitioners must always take a child first approach which in this context means seeing and treating young people under 18 as the children they are. Practitioners should actively guard against perceiving children (especially Black and other minoritised children) as older, more consenting, or more culpable than their age and circumstances indicate. Adultification bias reduces empathy and protection. Decisions, language, and plans must explicitly reflect the child's legal status, developmental stage, and lived experience.

Practitioners should recognise that children who are neurodivergent may find it harder to disclose harm or be heard and extra care must be taken to ensure their voices are understood and that professional curiosity is maintained. Only through robust information sharing and a relentless focus on prevention, identification, intervention and disruption can we break the cycles of exploitation and ensure that every child has the chance to thrive. Because this can only be achieved through effective multi-agency working, this edition of the protocol makes explicit that responsibility for ensuring effective implementation including training, oversight, analysis, and scrutiny rests firmly with the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP), who will be accountable for its delivery. This protocol is designed to be read alongside:

- **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (WTSC)**: Statutory framework for agencies including local authorities, police, health services, and schools.
- **London Safeguarding Children Procedures**: Practical and operational translation of WTSC in the London context.
- **Safeguarding Adolescents in London (SAIL)**: Best practice guidance for supporting and protecting young people.

The law recognises that children require greater protection and therefore places clear duties on agencies to act to keep them safe. This first, and subsequent editions of the protocol were written primarily with a focus on safeguarding children, in line with the specific legislation that provides a stronger mandate for practitioners to intervene when there are concerns about harm. However, as professional understanding of exploitation and extra-familial harm has developed, it is now recognised that development continues well into adulthood, vulnerability does not end on a young person's 18th birthday and young adults may still require support and protection albeit within different legal frameworks.

The concept of transitional safeguarding highlights the need for a whole-system response that is developmentally attuned, relational, and contextually aware.

It is recognised that different areas will be at different stages in embedding these principles. It is therefore for each Local Safeguarding Children Partnership to determine the age range considered within the MACE/STROTH process whether this is limited to children, extended to include young adults up to the age of 25, or a hybrid model (for example, including all children up to 18 and care leavers up to 25). All sections of this document, and especially those relating to meeting structures, should be read and understood with this in mind.

2 Framework for Understanding Risk

2. Framework for Understanding Risk

2.1 Vulnerability Factors & Indicators of Exploitation

People who cause harm to children manipulate and control them in different ways including grooming, coercion, through emotional, financial, and physical threats.

Exploitation can occur through multiple routes, including in-person contact, social media, gaming platforms and the dynamics within peer relationships. These routes often overlap and can be used simultaneously by those who exploit children.

While children of all cultures, backgrounds, ages, and genders can be exploited, certain characteristics can be used as a means to access them; for example, children who are not in school may be accessed during the day when they have less supervision, children who are living in poverty may be offered food or accommodation in exchange for sex or holding drugs and children who do not feel they have a trusted adult may seek protection in weapons or via peers.

To prevent child exploitation effectively, it is crucial to recognise and address the factors that can make a child more vulnerable to being targeted. These are not signs that a child is currently being exploited, but rather indicators that they may be at higher risk of exploitation if the right support is not in place.

There are also indicators that a child may already be experiencing extra-familial harm. While these signs do not provide definitive proof, they warrant serious attention and prompt, appropriate action.

The SAFEGUARD mnemonic covers many of these factors and indicators and should be used when considering the risk that a child may be coming to harm from outside the home.

Practitioners should consider contextual, cultural and community dynamics alongside individual indicators. They should avoid adultifying interpretations of coping strategies (e.g. ‘choice’ to stay out, ‘maturity’ in relationships with older peers/partners, or ‘gang association’) and explore what need, coercion or fear may be driving behaviour.

They should be conscious that patterns of exploitation may be highly gendered. For example, in child sexual exploitation girls are more likely to be targeted and boys more likely to be overlooked by practitioners.

Safeguard

S Sexual identity, wellbeing and choice
Sexually transmitted infections (particularly repeat infections); Pregnancy; terminations; changing or out of character sexual behaviour; exploring sexual relationships in an unsafe context or environment; unable to disclose sexual orientation and fearful of societal responses.

A Absence, truancy and going missing
Truancy from school, including during the school day; missing from home or care, and repeat incidents; travelling outside borough/town when missing; unexplained absences.

F Family and home
Sexual, physical, emotional abuse and neglect; risks of forced marriage or so-called honour-based violence; female genital mutilation; domestic violence; substance misuse; parental mental health concerns; bereavement; parental and sibling criminality; experiences of homelessness or sofa surfing; living in care or temporary accommodation; immigration status.

E Emotional and physical health
Suicidal thoughts, plans and attempts; self-harm; low self-esteem/confidence/worth; learning difficulties; changing emotional wellbeing and signs of poor mental health; unexplained injuries and changes in physical appearance.

G Gangs, Groups, Age Gaps and Crime
Involvement in gangs or gang-affected family, peers or siblings; concerns of abusive peer groups; involvement with older individuals or groups, lacking friends in the same age groups; older 'boyfriends'; sudden changes in peer groups; bullying, both on and offline; friends of young people experiencing CSE.

U Use of technology and sexual bullying
Sexting, both sending and receiving; being listed on social network pages in relation to sexual activity and/or named in videos; secretive use of the internet/phones/social networking sites; sudden behaviour changes when using the phone or internet; control via phone or internet; multiple or secretive social networking profiles.

A Alcohol and substances
Reliance on and changing use of substances, both legal and illegal.

R Receipt of unexplained gifts or money
Unexplained money, mobile phones; phone credit, items, clothes, money; new nails; travel in taxis; gifts where payment is required at a later date; worries about having debts.

D Distrust of authority figures
Resistance to communicating with parents, carers, teachers, social services, health, police and others.

2.2 Prevention and Early Intervention

Preventing child exploitation is the responsibility of everyone who works with children. Prevention requires action at every stage of a child's journey, including ensuring that the spaces they live, learn, and socialise in are inclusive and safe from harm and exploitation.

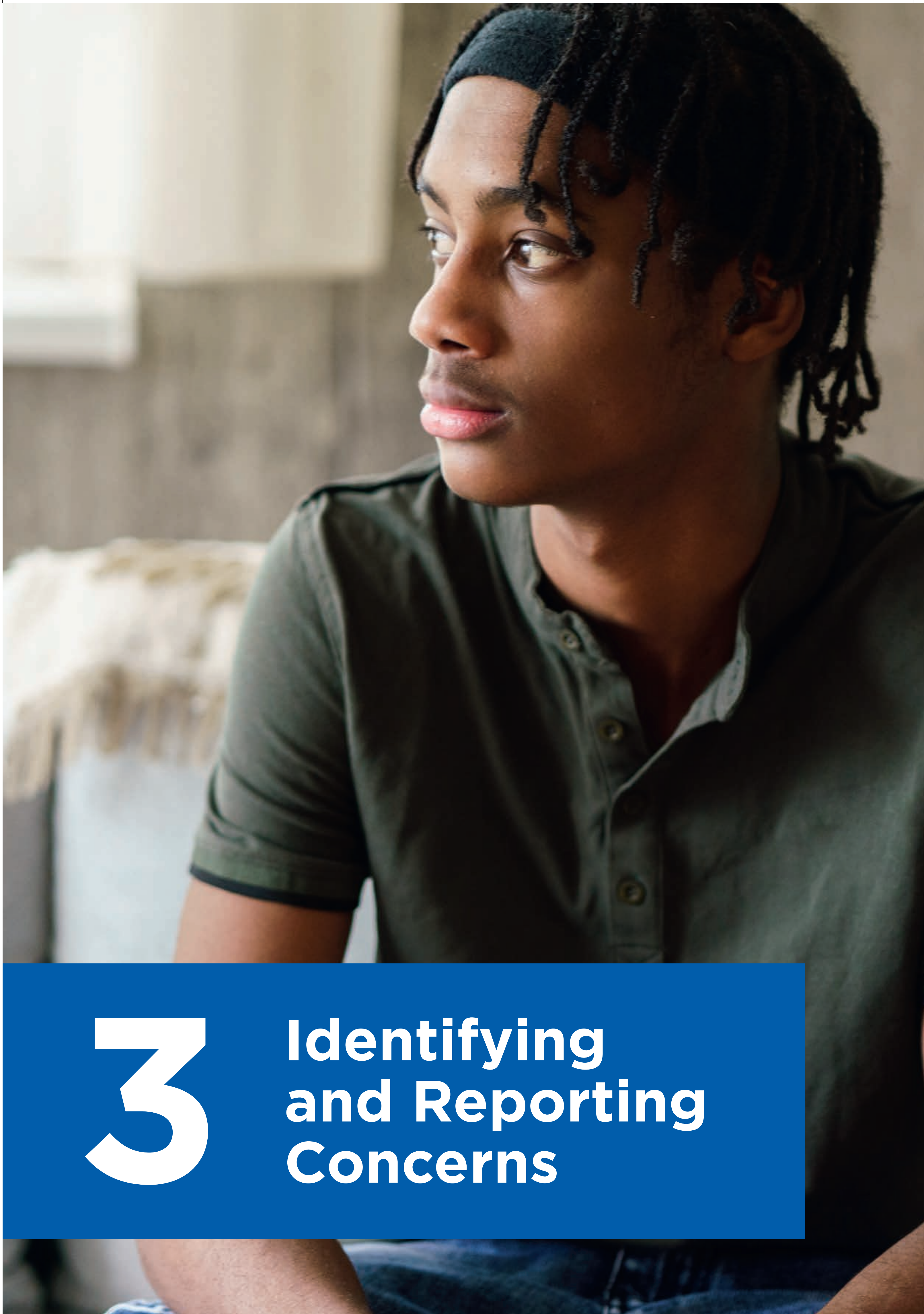
In London, we recognise three types of prevention and intervention:

- **Primary Prevention (Awareness, Education & Safe Environments)**: Delivered in universal settings such as schools, colleges, GP surgeries and youth clubs. This includes education, online safety campaigns, and designing and providing physical environments that are safe and well-monitored.
- **Secondary Prevention (Early Intervention)**: Targeted support for children showing vulnerability and risk indicators to stop exploitation and extra-familial harm before it starts. Decisions such as school exclusions or managed moves must consider and mitigate the risk of increasing vulnerability.
- **Tertiary Prevention (Restoring Safety and Resilience)**: Interventions for children who are on the cusp of, or have already been, harmed—especially during 'teachable moments' (e.g. following arrest, assault, or crisis).

To meet this responsibility, it is essential that all practitioners understand:

- their area of responsibility and remit
- safeguarding structures and local reporting routes and escalation pathways
- child exploitation indicators, associated risk factors and the importance of disrupting and prosecuting those who exploit children
- the importance of professional curiosity and asking thoughtful questions to spot hidden risks,
- trauma and its impact on behaviour and vulnerability
- the demographics of their area, community complexities and ongoing challenges such as conflict between known groups and serious youth violence

It is the responsibility of the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership in each borough to assure themselves that all practitioners understand what exploitation is and are aware of their obligation to spot risks, report concerns, act and protect children before harm occurs. There is some evidence to suggest that children from minoritised groups are less likely to be offered, or access, early help and preventative services. Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships should review disaggregated data (e.g. by race, gender, disability, care status, neurodiversity) to identify disproportionality in referrals, thresholds, outcomes, and access to early help. Where patterns of inequity are found, they should be addressed through targeted outreach, culturally competent provision, and community partnerships.



3 Identifying and Reporting Concerns

3. Identifying and Reporting Concerns

All concerns that a child may be at risk of or experiencing exploitation, violence or extra-familial harm must be referred to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), in line with the London Safeguarding Children Procedures.

Exploitation and risk of harm outside the home must be treated with the same urgency and seriousness as all other forms of harm. Children who are experiencing or at risk of extra-familial harm must receive protection, support, and co-ordinated intervention.

3.1 Role of the MASH and Front Door

The MASH must:

- treat referrals related to extra-familial harm with the same intensity and rigour as other forms of abuse
- maintain awareness of potential co-occurring harms (e.g. neglect, domestic abuse)
- use a broad, inquisitive approach to explore hidden risks or unmet needs

MASH practitioners must remain alert to the risk of exploitation in referrals not initially flagged as such. Given the hidden nature of many exploitation scenarios, all referrals should be viewed through a lens of curiosity, vigilance, and child-centred analysis. It is good practice for MASH to have prompts to counter adultification (e.g. 'Is the child being described in adult terms?' 'Is language neutral/non-blaming?') and to capture diversity data to support monitoring of disproportionality.

If a child is believed to be in immediate danger, the police must be contacted by dialling 999.

3.2 Police Responsibilities

If the MASH identifies concerns about exploitation, a police exploitation report must be created and the relevant tags applied. They are responsible for referring the case to the appropriate Basic Command Unit (BCU) referral desk.

The referral desk will liaise with the Child Exploitation Team and:

- a non-crime exploitation report will be created or updated, if one already exists
- the CET will record and manage any subsequent strategy discussions on the originating report
- any identified crimes will be recorded on their own reports and allocated to the most appropriate investigative unit

Where exploitation is suspected or confirmed, a form 87a must be completed by either a MASH Social Worker, the allocated Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) or the Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) in the Multi Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) and a strategy discussion organised.

The police Child Exploitation Team will share information and record the concerns raised on police systems. Where a crime is identified (for instance offences under the Modern Slavery Act or the proposed Child Criminal Exploitation offence) these will be recorded and investigated by an assigned officer from the Child Exploitation Team or another unit if more suitable. These officers will represent police in multi-agency meetings and work with the team around the child.

Where no crime is alleged then the concerns will be recorded and the risk to the child assessed. For the highest risk cases a proactive multi-agency risk management plan will be created and an officer assigned to manage this on an ongoing basis. For other children markers will be placed on police systems to ensure any interactions with the child by police are fully informed and information shared but the non-crime report will be closed, and no officer will be assigned as part of the team around that child. This will allow police to focus on the detection and disruption of exploiters, and safeguarding of those children at the highest risk of harm.

3.3 Multi-Agency Curiosity and Shared Responsibility

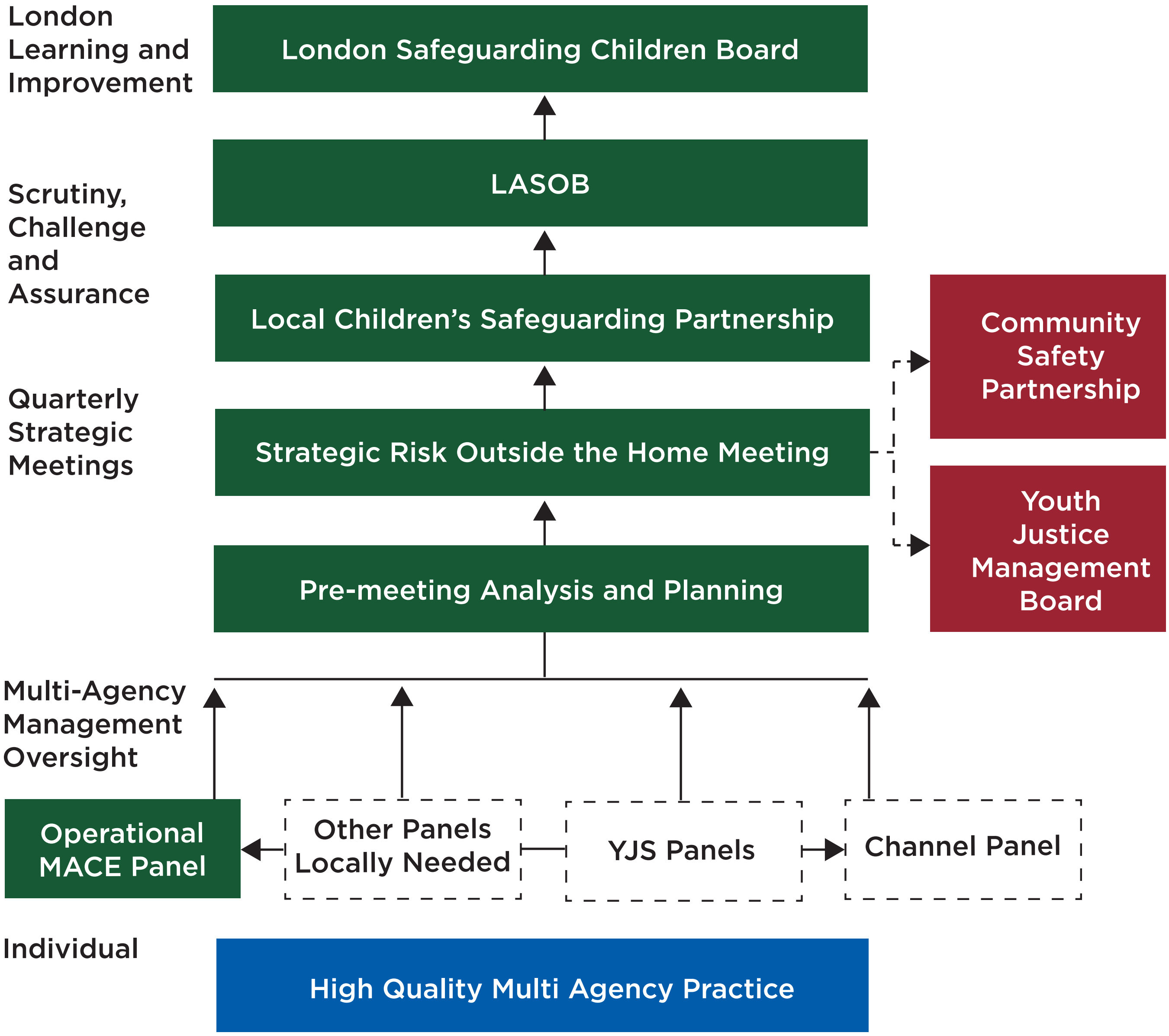
All practitioners involved in safeguarding must:

- prioritise professional curiosity and critical thinking
- share concerns clearly and promptly
- understand local reporting pathways
- take shared responsibility for escalating concerns

By embedding these principles, practitioners and agencies strengthen the safety net around vulnerable children and increase the likelihood of identifying risk before serious harm occurs.

All practitioners involved should operate on the principle that information they have is not assumed to be known by others.

Multi Agency Structures and Governance



Quarterly Strategic Meetings
Whole system effectiveness strategic allocation of resources. Can set up themed Task and Finish groups to progress actions.

Multi-Agency Management Oversight
Child Focused Panels. Those with dotted lines have their own reporting structures, but expectation is that there will be co-ordination and information sharing and activity will inform strategic analysis.

Individual
Underpinned by understanding of environment and contexts, reflective supervision, timely and effective. Strategy Discussions, peer assessments and planning meetings

4 Multi-Agency Structures and Governance

4. Multi-Agency Structures and Governance

A strong multi-agency response to extra-familial harm including exploitation and violence requires structured oversight and collaboration at individual, tactical and strategic levels supported by effective scrutiny from the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership.

In the first instance it is built on every practitioner fulfilling their role with dedication and accountability. Each practitioner has a specific role and doing it well is essential.

The strongest safeguarding comes from practitioners who are skilled, deeply committed, passionate and curious about the young people they support and who understand the roles and responsibilities of other workers.

By adopting a trauma-informed approach, they recognise how past experiences may shape behaviour and responses, responding with empathy, patience and consistency.

By asking questions, listening attentively, working collaboratively, communicating consistently, and taking shared responsibility, they create the 'grip' that keeps children safe, ensuring that no gaps or system failures put children's wellbeing at risk.

All meetings should check for adultified or victim blaming narratives or language (e.g. 'he brought this on himself') and ensure records adopt child-centred, trauma-informed language. Where there is disagreement about thresholds, the meeting should consider whether bias related to being a member of a minoritised group is influencing decisions.

4.1 Child and Peer Group

4.1.1 Strategy Discussions

Strategy Discussions are required in all cases where there is a risk of significant harm from exploitation or other forms of harm both inside and outside the home. Detailed guidance about Strategy Discussions is contained in Chapter 4 of Working Together to Safeguard Children and the London Safeguarding Children Procedures. This guidance applies to all strategy discussions. However, when addressing exploitation and risk outside the home there are additional factors to be taken into consideration. Specific guidance on best practice for strategy discussions relating to adolescent safeguarding can be found in Safeguarding Adolescents in London.

4.1.2 Group Strategy Discussions

Exploitation, more than other forms of risk inside the home, often involves multiple child victims, and on some occasions children who are exploiting or offending against others. The children may be living in various local authority areas, or open to different services and teams. Due to this it is important that all practitioners and teams working with these children and families are working in a concerted and co-ordinated manner. As such it is important that where linked children at risk of harm are identified that there are regularly held Group Strategy Discussions to allow practitioners to co-ordinate their working and share information that may be relevant to other teams. These meetings do not need to be attended by all practitioners working with each child; however, each child's practitioner network should be represented. This meeting should be chaired by a Team Manager or equivalent.

When multiple local authorities, NHS trusts or Police forces are involved it should be decided in each case which agency will take the lead to arrange and chair these meetings.

4.1.3 Complex Strategy Discussions

Where the exploitation against one or more children is organised, it will be appropriate to enter the Organised and Complex Abuse procedures as detailed in the London Safeguarding Children Procedures to ensure there is strategic direction and oversight to the work safeguarding child victims and other children. For any exploitation that meets this threshold, it is expected that regular updates will be supplied to the Strategic ROTH Meeting.

4.1.4 Peer Assessment Meetings

Exploitation and violence are complex issues that require more than just a high-quality coordinated response to an individual child. In some cases, peer assessment meetings may be appropriate.

These meetings provide a structured, multi-agency forum to explore the peer relationships and social dynamics that may be contributing to a child's vulnerability outside the home.

The purpose of Peer Assessment Meetings is to understand peer associations, understand the needs of the group, their access to protective adults and the environments where they spend their time: not to criminalise or pathologise them. By collaboratively mapping peer networks, practitioners can begin to identify patterns of positive influence and potential harm, as well as opportunities for intervention and support.

4.2 Multi-Agency Management Oversight

To support and complement high quality practice, there is a need for levels of management oversight, strategic overview, and scrutiny.

4.2.1 Roles of Panels that Address Risk Outside the Home

The risks children face are often shaped by a complex web of peer relationships, community influences, school dynamics, online interactions, and family pressures. These overlapping factors are rarely straightforward and never experienced in isolation.

Multi-agency panels are a critical mechanism for holding this complexity. They are required because no single practitioner or agency can hold the full picture, the full risk, or the full solution.

Each borough will have a range of multi-agency panels in place to coordinate responses to the varied and often complex risks children face. Specialist forums that bring together expert knowledge about a specific need or level of need are valuable for shaping targeted support. However, it is important to be aware of a key challenge: this often results in the risk that a child is fragmented into a series of discrete needs that can become divided across too many separate discussions.

This can lead to overlapping work, missed opportunities and a lack of clear ownership where no single panel keeps sight of the whole picture or takes responsibility for driving a joined-up plan. Even more concerning is that children often do not fit neatly into a particular category or reach a threshold and therefore slip through the net.

Every borough must determine how best to balance specialism with coherence, ensuring that the structures of panels serve the child, rather than the system.

4.2.2 Operational MACE Panel

Each borough must have a panel that considers children at risk of, or already subject to, harm through exploitation.

Children and young people do not experience harm in neatly defined or isolated categories. Attempts to address their experiences through single-issue, threshold-based structures often result in fragmented and ineffective responses. It is strongly recommended that the work of this panel be integrated with other multi-agency forums addressing risks that they might face, including those focused on missing episodes, youth violence, harmful sexual behaviour, Channel Panels and prevention panels.

The panel offers a space where services come together to see the whole child and interconnections, both positive and negative, between children. Its role is to ensure that support is coordinated, purposeful, and young person-centred, not simply the sum of separate agency actions, but a shared and integrated response.

Crucially, these panels are not only for managing risk when the levels are high. They are equally important for identifying patterns and concerns that are likely to lead to significant harm and where timely, multi-agency problem solving could prevent escalation. Early panel discussions can help spot patterns across different children or locations, uncover hidden links between individuals or groups, and bring a wider lens to the contexts in which harm is occurring.

The Operational MACE Panel is not an information-sharing forum about individual children. It is a place for practitioner challenge, decision-making, and accountability. Its role is to ensure that:

- The network is clear on roles and responsibilities
- There is a shared plan of action that reflects the child's lived experience and addresses both internal and external controls to keep children safe
- Recognises and addresses the adultification of children in the decisions they make
- Barriers to progress are named and addressed—including contextual, systemic or resource constraints
- Risk is not simply handed from one agency to another, but owned collectively, with each agency's role complementing the others, and managed with the best interests of the child at heart
- Learning is captured and practice developed
- Community level risk and disruption opportunities are identified

An effective panel actively tests whether current interventions are working and whether they reflect what the child needs and how they experience the world. It asks whether practitioners are still making assumptions, acting in silos, or asking the young person to carry the burden of risk. Most importantly, it encourages creative, flexible, and relational responses that are grounded in shared values, shared goals, and a genuine commitment to keeping young people safe through collaboration, not compliance.

The Operational MACE should explicitly identify and address instances of adultification within its discussions and records. All deliberations, decisions, and communications must be framed from a child-centred perspective. Chairs are to consider and, where appropriate, articulate the reflective question: "Would our language, assessment, or plan differ if this child were younger, female, white, not in care, or without a disability?"

The Operational MACE Panel brings together practitioners from agencies such as children's social care, police, education, youth justice, health, housing and community safety to coordinate responses to complex themes and concerns involving exploitation. Partners must send appropriately senior staff who are empowered to make decisions and take accountability for actions.

In addition to the core membership, individuals who know the child and the contexts in which they are operating should be invited to attend as needed.

Chairs must be skilled and experienced practitioners with expertise in safeguarding, multi-agency working, and child exploitation. They are responsible for ensuring that meetings are purposeful, that attendees are well-briefed, and that actions are tracked and followed up.
To ensure that both safeguarding and enforcement perspectives are considered in a balanced and informed way, the panel should be jointly chaired by a senior representative from the local authority and a Detective Inspector in the police.

To ensure the effectiveness and integrity of the panel the Delegated Safeguarding Partners have a responsibility to ensure that chairs and members of the panel are appropriately supported. This includes:

- **Protected time** for preparation, follow-up, and reflection.
- **Access to personal and professional development** including cross borough/BCU peer support and other learning opportunities as well as reflective supervision, particularly in areas such as systems thinking and facilitation of multi-agency training and learning as appropriate.
- **Administrative support**, including timely circulation of agendas, minutes, and action tracking
- **Access to relevant data** to enable informed oversight and thematic analysis.

The Operational MACE Panel, alongside any other operational panels that address the risks and harms faced by children and young people, plays a critical role in informing the Strategic Risk Outside the Home Meeting.

These panels are not only mechanisms for progressing work with individual children, but also function as sources of rich, practice-based intelligence. They help surface trends, recurring barriers and gaps in service provision that may not be visible through data alone.

By maintaining a feedback loop between operational practice and strategic oversight the Operational MACE Panel and similar panels ensure that STROTH can respond proactively to emerging risks, adjust priorities, and drive partnership-wide improvement.

Each borough should determine the frequency of its panel meetings based on local demand and need. Some may find weekly meetings appropriate; others may opt for fortnightly or monthly cycles.

A suggested Terms of Reference can be found in Safeguarding Adolescents in London.

4.3 Strategic Risk Outside the Home (STROTH) Meeting

Each borough must hold a **quarterly strategic meeting** to:

- monitor the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding responses to risk outside the home
- allocate resources to address identified patterns, locations, or emerging risks
- ensure systemic learning feeds into prevention planning

This meeting is known as the Strategic Risk Outside the Home (STROTH) Meeting. Its function is to examine data and trends, monitor effectiveness of work, commission thematic reviews, and agree actions at a population and community level.

All panels that address extra-familial risk and harm should formally report into the STROTH. This meeting provides the opportunity for strategic oversight, and identification of cross-cutting themes. To this end, all panel chairs are expected to participate in STROTH, enabling a shared understanding of risk, driving system accountability, and ensuring that no child is lost.

This meeting does not focus on child level interventions. Equally it should avoid locating success purely in efforts to change the behaviour of children and young people.

Instead, the meeting should balance success of individual change with the recognition that risk and safety are shaped by the broader environments in which young people live, learn, and socialise. This includes peer relationships, school settings, neighbourhood dynamics, and online spaces. Crucially, this approach requires balancing the protective aims of welfare and safeguarding with the responsibilities of enforcement and crime prevention.

Measuring effectiveness must go beyond child-level outcomes. The group should assess whether harmful contexts have been disrupted, whether community safety has improved, and whether access to safe and supportive spaces has increased for children and young people. This might include reductions in location-based incidents, improved school attendance linked to safer peer dynamics, or increased disclosures and engagement from young people in previously unsafe areas. These indicators should be monitored over time to support continuous learning and improvement.

The STROTH is jointly chaired by the Practice Leader for Children's Social Care and a Detective Chief Inspector who are jointly responsible for convening a pre meeting planning session. This preparation is essential to enable purposeful, evidence-informed decision-making during the meeting.

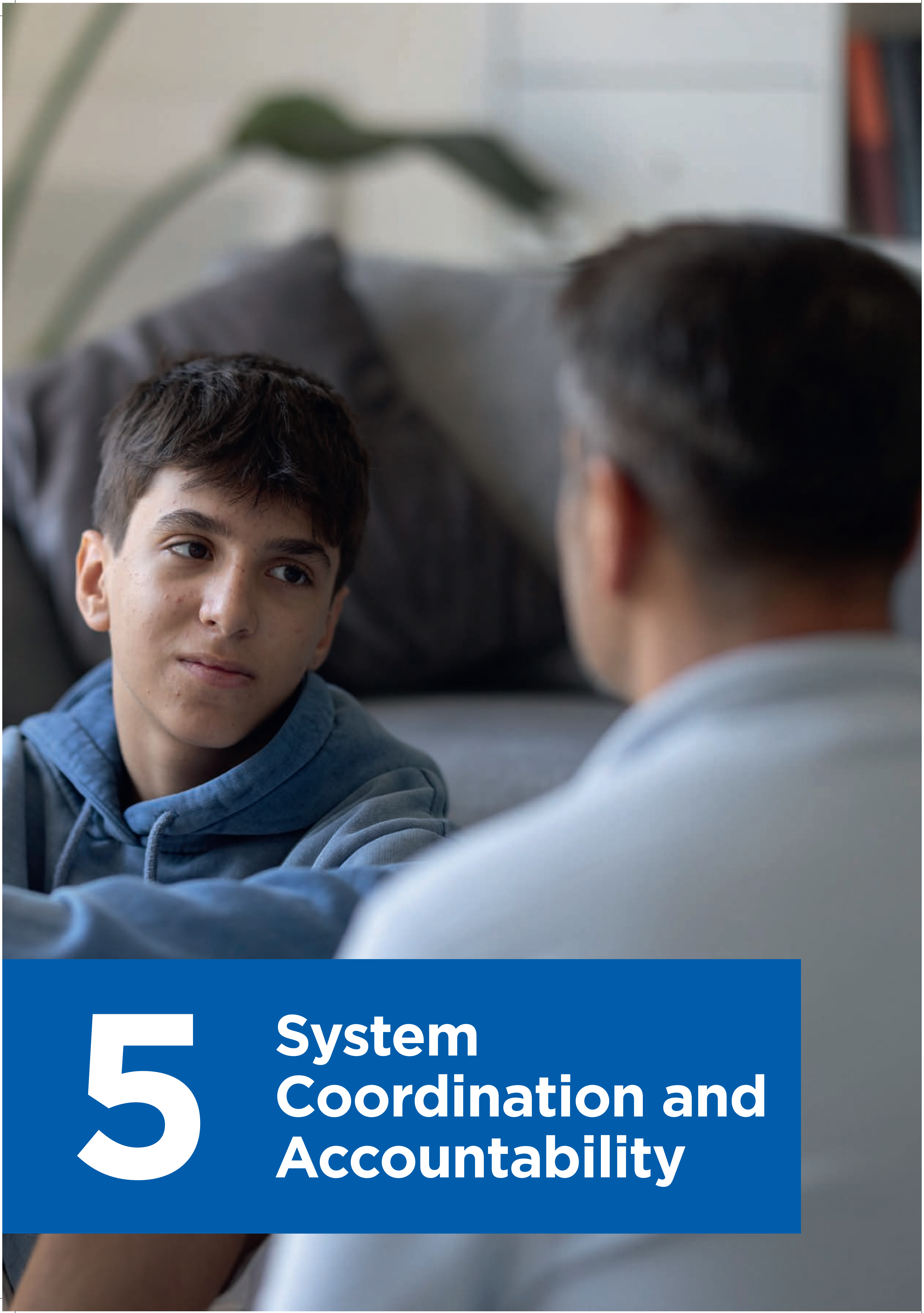
It is the responsibility of the Delegated Safeguarding Partners to ensure that the Joint Chairs are provided with sufficient time, capacity, and resources to do whatever is necessary to make the meeting meaningful.

This includes assigning a named analyst to support the work. The analyst is responsible for ensuring that data is meaningful, consistent across sources, and clearly presented with appropriate context to stimulate informed discussion.

The STROTH is accountable to the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership. As part of its governance responsibilities, the STROTH must produce an annual report on an agreed template outlining its effectiveness, key themes, and areas for development as well as summarising trends in disproportionality and progress in addressing it. Preparation of this report should be overseen by the Independent Scrutineer and must be submitted to the London Adolescent Safeguarding Oversight Board which will collect and review reports from across all boroughs to identify patterns and share learning with the London Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive to inform strategic responses to exploitation, violence and risk outside the home in London.

4.4 Panel Integration and Alignment

The Local Safeguarding Children Partnership should publish an annual overview of its panel structures in relation to adolescent safeguarding and confirm how governance and accountability are assured across borough and BCU boundaries.



5 System Coordination and Accountability

5. System Coordination and Accountability

Effective safeguarding for young people at risk of or experiencing exploitation and violence depends on co-ordinated roles, clear accountability, and strong agency infrastructure.

5.1 Agency Responsibilities

Agency	Key Responsibilities
Local Authority Children's Services	The Delegated Safeguarding Partner for the Local Authority is responsible for ensuring arrangements are in place for safeguarding children at risk of exploitation, including the Operational MACE Panel, STROTH participation and lead practitioner coordination. This includes early help, social care, youth justice and any youth services that are delivered by the local authority.
Police (MPS)	The Chief Superintendent of each Basic Command Unit (BCU) in their role as the Designated Safeguarding Partner holds responsibility for ensuring adequate resources are in place to carry out the core policing functions: identifying and safeguarding victims, investigating crimes, pursuing offenders and responding to emergencies. Additionally, the Chief Superintendent must appoint a Detective Inspector to chair the Operational MACE Panel and a Detective Chief Inspector for the Strategic Risk Outside the Home Meeting (STROTH), reinforcing the police's ongoing commitment to multi-agency collaboration. Each of these appointees is responsible for representing all functions of the BCU.
Community Safety	The Head of Community Safety has a key leadership role in coordinating strategic partnership responses to issues such as serious youth violence, exploitation, and anti-social behaviour and is responsible for ensuring that appropriate community safety representatives are identified and meaningfully engaged in safeguarding panels and meetings. Importantly the Head of Community Safety should ensure that the strategic community safety partnership are meeting their statutory obligations for preventing and reducing serious violence, including serious youth violence, as set out under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.

Agency	Key Responsibilities
Health	The Executive Lead for Safeguarding in the relevant Integrated Care Board (ICB) is responsible for ensuring that appropriate health practitioners from the ICB and its commissioned services are identified, resourced and authorised to participate in multi-agency processes including individual case discussions as well as attending and contributing meaningfully to Operational MACE Panel and STROTH meetings.
Education (including Virtual Schools)	The Delegated Safeguarding Partner for the Local Authority is responsible for determining how schools and education settings can best be involved and engage at operational and strategic level and ensuring the effectiveness of these arrangements. Schools and educational settings should identify vulnerabilities, share concerns, and support continuity of education as a protective factor.
Youth Justice Service	The Delegated Safeguarding Partner for the Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that the YJS participates in multi-agency panels, escalates risk, supports rehabilitation of young people involved in exploitation and is appropriately represented at operational and strategic level. The expectation is that there will be regular work with social care and police to develop contextual responses.
Voluntary and Community Sector	All three Delegated Safeguarding Partners are responsible for determining how best to include the voluntary and community sector is appropriately and meaningfully included at operational and strategic level. The voluntary and community sector is responsible for bringing community insight and contributing to peer and location-based interventions. The sector must have clarity on escalation and referral pathways and participate in team around the child meetings as well as the MACE Operational Panel where appropriate.
Housing	The Delegated Safeguarding Partner for the Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that the housing department is appropriately represented at operational and strategic level and that frontline staff are trained to recognise and respond to risk in the community placements to protect vulnerable individuals.

In addition to the specific responsibilities outlined above, everyone working to address exploitation and extra-familial harm, regardless of agency, has an obligation to ensure that the voices of children and families are actively sought, heard, and meaningfully responded to. This includes engaging with those who may be less visible and embedding their lived experiences into planning, decision-making, and service delivery.

Equally, all activity must be underpinned by a commitment to identifying and addressing disproportionality and inequality, ensuring that responses are fair, equitable, and sensitive to the impact of race, disability, gender, and other factors that shape children's experiences of risk and support.

5.2 Delegated Safeguarding Partners

In addition to any specific responsibilities outlined in the protocol, which stem from their statutory duties, Delegated Safeguarding Partners also have an overarching responsibility to:

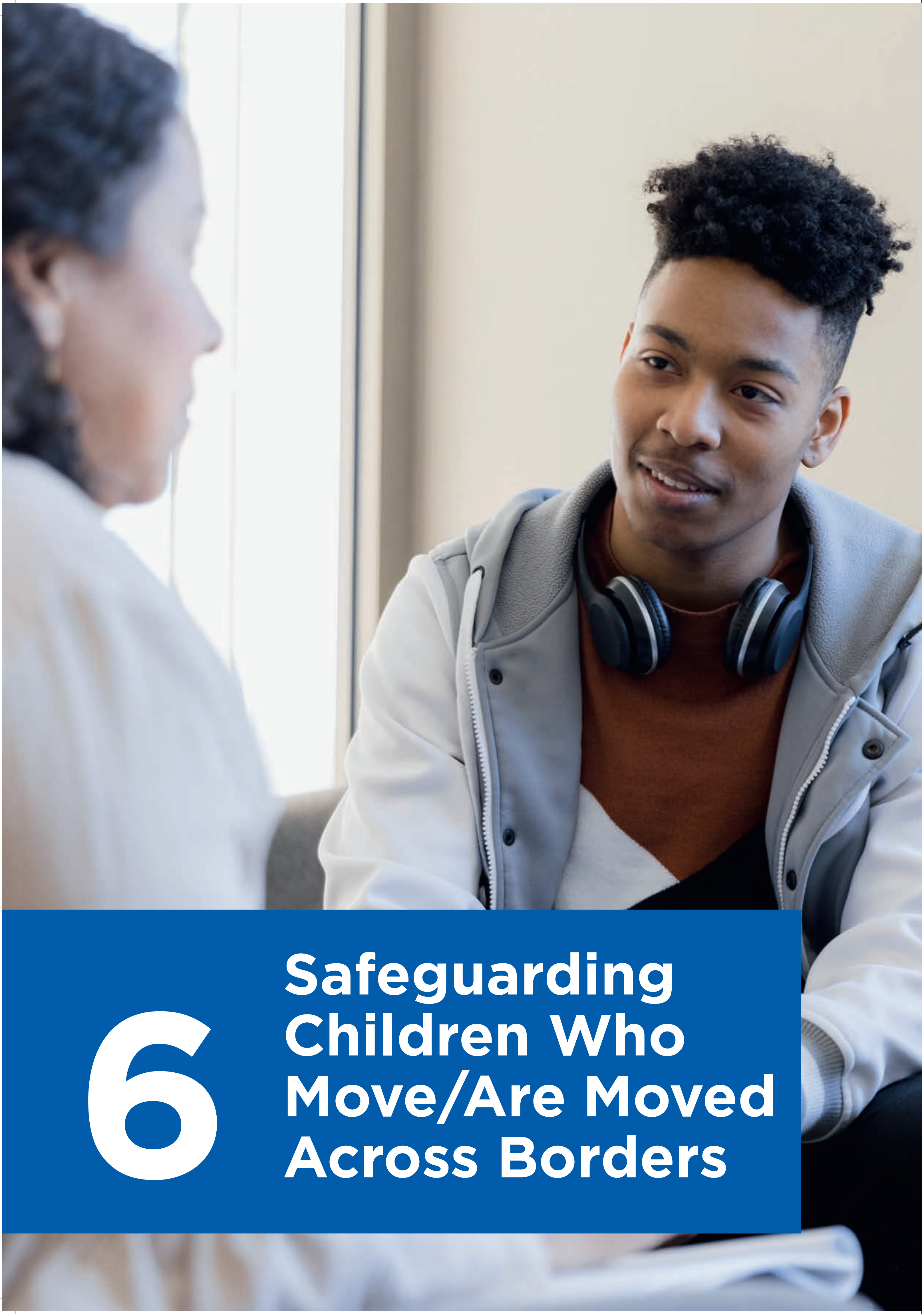
- ensure adequate multi-agency structures are in place
- monitor the quality of strategic and operational safeguarding responses
- oversee timely collection and analysis of relevant data
- drive improvement based on evidence and local learning

5.3 Information Sharing and Training

All agencies must:

- Ensure intelligence about local hotspots, perpetrators, peer groups, and trends is routinely shared with the Operational MACE Panel and STROTH.
- Commit to multi-agency training on exploitation, trauma, contextual safeguarding, equity, and professional curiosity.
- Embed learning into supervision and continuous improvement processes.
- Ensure staff understand information sharing guidance and legislation and their responsibilities under both.

The London Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive should support the development of shared resources and templates to support consistent implementation across boroughs.



6 Safeguarding Children Who Move/Are Moved Across Borders

6. Safeguarding Children Who Move/Are Moved Across Borders

Children who are exploited or at risk of exploitation, violence and other extra familial harm face increased dangers when they move across local authority and BCU boundaries. These transitions can disrupt safeguarding plans, sever support networks, and create gaps in professional oversight.

Where a move is initiated by practitioners, it must be underpinned by clear, evidence-based reasoning and a demonstrable belief that it is in the best interests of the child. Such decisions should only be made when all other avenues to support stability have been fully explored and exhausted. The rationale for the move must be robust, child-centred, and subject to careful scrutiny.

Whether moves are initiated by families or practitioners, the risks to the child may increase if proper coordination does not occur.

6.1 Roles and Responsibilities

- The originating authority and owning police force must inform their counterparts in the new area and transfer records in line with their agency's protocols and in all cases notify the receiving authority and police force within 24 hours of the presence of the child in their area.
- Where a corresponding support agency does not exist in the receiving borough, the practitioner must liaise with the lead practitioner to identify suitable services or alternatives.
- The receiving authority/new borough must respond promptly to notifications, request further information where needed, and determine the level of intervention required in line with their agency's protocols.

6.2 Safeguarding Continuity

Practitioners must:

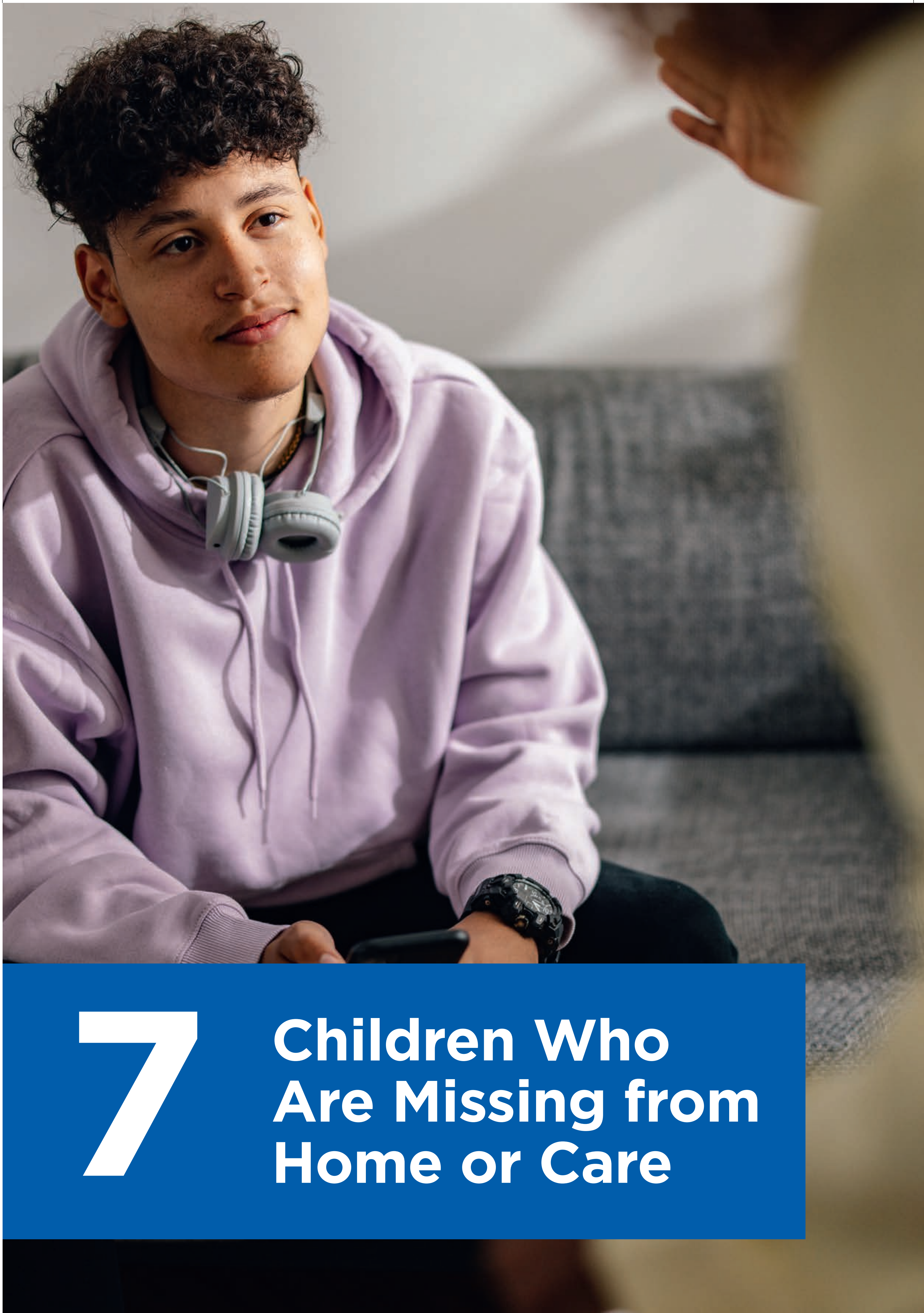
- show through their actions and behaviours that the child's wellbeing and safety are paramount
- coordinate to ensure there are no safeguarding gaps
- maintain oversight through joint meetings or planned handovers
- track changes in risk and build updated safety plans accordingly

Where a move is initiated by practitioners, it must be underpinned by clear, evidence-based reasoning and a demonstrable belief that it is in the best interests of the child. Such decisions should only be made when all other avenues to support stability have been fully explored and exhausted. The rationale for the move must be robust, child-centred, and subject to careful scrutiny.

Whether moves are initiated by families or practitioners, the risks to the child may increase if proper coordination does not occur.

- A new PNC marker should be created, and all trigger plans updated.

If a child is placed or moves outside London, the local force should be informed within 24 hours, and the non-crime child exploitation investigation report should be transferred to the relevant local unit as soon as practicable.



7 Children Who Are Missing from Home or Care

7. Children Who Are Missing from Home or Care

Missing episodes for children are a significant safeguarding concern is often both a symptom and an amplifier of extra familial risk including exploitation. Every missing episode, no matter how brief, should be treated with professional curiosity and urgency.

7.1 Understanding the Risk

Children may go missing due to coercion, fear, grooming, or an attempt to escape harm. Perpetrators often exploit missing episodes to reinforce control and facilitate abuse. These episodes should never be seen as routine. There is a duty on all agencies to identify and investigate any potential offences being committed that drive missing episodes. Children may also go missing due to emotional distress, unmet needs, or lack of stability. Each episode should trigger a review of known risks and an update to the safeguarding plan.

7.2 Prevention Planning

For children at risk of experiencing missing episodes the lead practitioner should work in partnership with the child and relevant agencies to create a plan, including:

- triggers and early warning signs
- safe contact points and trusted adults
- check-in routines
- exit strategies from dangerous situations

This plan should ideally be designed with the child, but in any event must be widely shared among practitioners involved and reviewed as circumstances change.

7.3 Philomena Protocol and Missing Response Plans

The Philomena Protocol is a National Police safeguarding initiative.

Under the Protocol, carers and social workers have a shared responsibility to assess risk and respond appropriately when a young person is late returning, in breach of curfew or missing from their home.

Practitioners are expected to apply informed professional judgment, considering each incident in the context of the young person's known risks, patterns of behaviour, and lived experience.

Key expectations include:

- Responding with proportionality and care, informed by the question: "What would I do if this were my own child?"
- Taking steps to actively safeguard which may include contacting the young person, attempting to bring them home or escalating concerns where necessary.
- Avoiding automatic escalation to enforcement or criminal justice responses where risk does not justify it.
- Ensuring that any absence or breach of curfew is recorded, discussed, and contributes to a dynamic understanding of risk.

The protocol recognises that when there are concerns about a child potentially coming to harm while missing, it is essential that relevant information is readily available. All children identified as at risk through missing episodes should have a completed Information Sharing Form containing key details such as medical needs, routines, and known associates to support a swift and informed response by police.

It is the responsibility of the placement or carer to complete and regularly update the form, and the social worker to verify its accuracy and ensure it is included in the child's record.

For missing children where a fast time response is required, a Missing Response Plan (formerly Trigger Plan) should be completed. This plan builds on the Philomena Form and outlines the operational response to each missing episode. It must be:

- regularly updated
- shared securely with relevant practitioners
- used in multi-agency planning

When a child is recovered from a setting where there is evidence of criminal activity, the police have a duty not only to ensure the child's immediate safety, but also to take appropriate investigative action in response to the suspected crime.

7.4 Return Conversations

Following a missing episode, the child must be offered two distinct conversations:

- **Prevention Interview (Police)** – Completed within 24 hours of return. This interview is proportionate to risk and aims to:
  - check immediate wellbeing and safety
  - understand motivations for going missing
  - identify any harm or exploitation experienced
- **Return Home Interview (Local Authority)** – Offered within 72 hours of return. This deeper conversation aims to:
  - explore underlying causes
  - identify services and support needs
  - help prevent future missing episodes

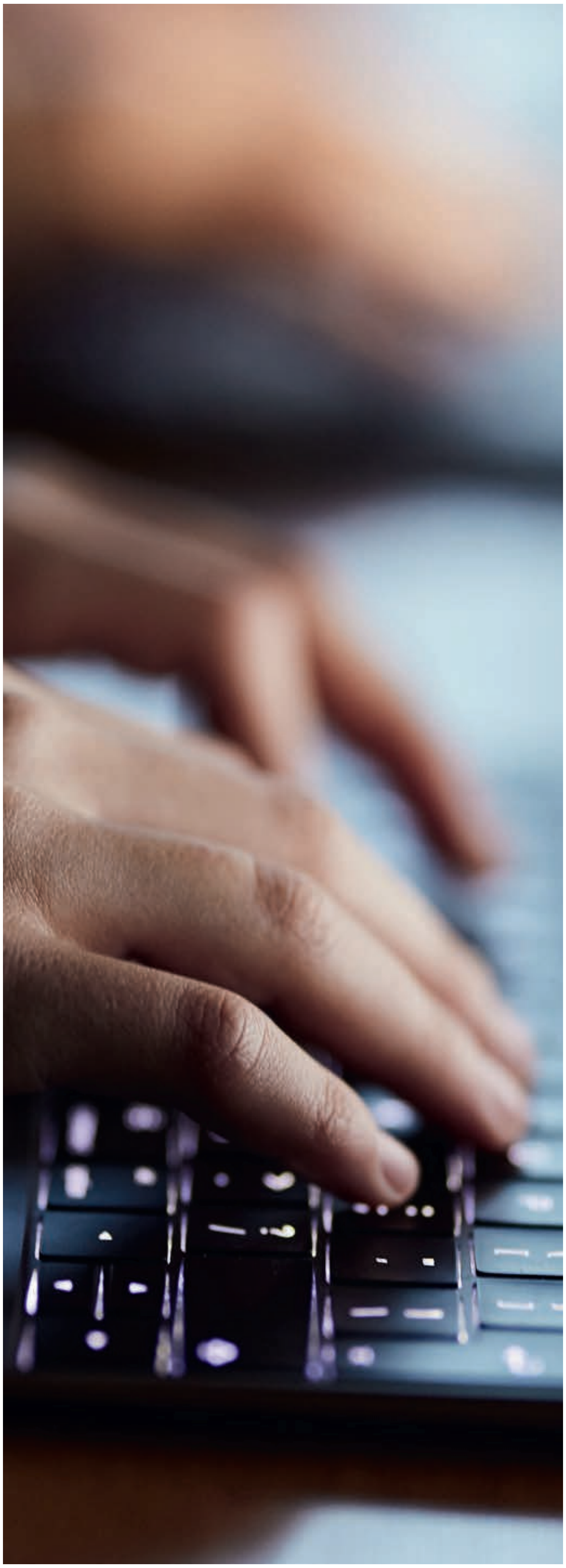
The person conducting any return conversations should actively reflect on and test for their own biases across the full spectrum of social identity and inequality factors (e.g. gender, geography, race, religion, age, class, culture, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability) and consider how intersecting aspects of identity may influence perceptions, experiences of safety, or whether concerns are minimised or dismissed.

7.5 Sharing and Acting on Intelligence

Information from missing episodes should be:

- captured in intelligence reports (e.g. Connect)
- shared across agencies to inform understanding and assessment
- used to review and update safeguarding plans

Even when exploitation and risk outside the home are not the cause of missing episodes, practitioners should consider how the effect may be to increase the likelihood of exploitation and other forms of harm. Any repeated or concerning patterns should trigger escalation through the MASH or local Missing Meetings, or other appropriate pathways.



8 Implementation and Monitoring

8. Implementation and Monitoring

Robust implementation and continuous monitoring are essential to ensure this protocol leads to measurable improvements in the safety and wellbeing of young people across London.

8.1 Data and Intelligence

The Local Safeguarding Children Partnership in each borough must:

- maintain accurate and up-to-date data sets on extra-familial harm
- include disaggregated data to support analysis of disproportionality
- ensure that there is access to relevant intelligence to guide priorities

A standardised data set across London boroughs is being devised to support consistency and cross-borough learning. All partners have a responsibility to provide this data.

8.2 Addressing Disproportionality

A critical component of this framework is the recognition and active challenge of disproportionality in the systems surrounding children at risk of exploitation, violence and extra-familial harm.

Children from minoritised communities are over-represented in exclusion statistics, stop and search, criminal justice pathways, and under-represented in early help and therapeutic support. Addressing this is not optional: it is fundamental to our approach.

All partners should:

- collect and analyse disaggregated data across all safeguarding systems
- examine the impact of practice and decision-making through an equity lens
- involve young people and community leaders in shaping services
- develop anti-racist and culturally competent interventions

Each practitioner and agency has an individual and collective responsibility to address inequity and ensure that their responses do not inadvertently contribute to further harm.

8.3 Reporting and Accountability

- Panels must document decisions, actions, and outcomes.
- Reports and learning should be shared across sectors and with community partners.
- Lessons learned should be embedded into workforce development and future planning.

By embedding regular review, effective governance, and continuous learning, the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership can sustain positive momentum in empowering children and young people to thrive safely within their communities.

METROPOLITAN POLICE

LiiA Together for London's Children
LONDON INNOVATION AND IMPROVEMENT ALLIANCE

ALDCS
The Association of London Directors of Children's Services

London safeguarding children Partnership