

National Updates Round-up

Newsletter – April 2026



A quick summary of recent safeguarding guidance, research and inspection updates for partners and practitioners.

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Introduction

A number of important national publications have been released that affect how we work together to help, support and protect children. This newsletter brings together the updated statutory guidance “Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026” and the refreshed Children’s Social Care National Framework, alongside practical guidance to support local areas to embed the changes.

We also highlight the updated Families First Partnership programme guide for 2026/27, and what this means for delivery expectations across Family Help, multi-agency child protection reforms and strengthening family networks. Alongside this, we signpost Ofsted’s Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework updates, which apply to inspections and visits from 1 April 2026.

Finally, we share recent research and learning on responding to exploitation and serious youth violence, including new work on recording child sexual abuse and exploitation and partnership responses to county lines and serious youth violence, plus an Iverson Trust report on working with parents as partners when children are exploited. We close with an update on the published terms of reference for the Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs, which is due to be formally set up on 13 April 2026.

1) Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and the Children's Social Care National Framework

At a glance

- Sets the national expectations for multi-agency working to help, support and protect children.
- The Children's Social Care National Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 underpin wider system reforms.

Summary

Updated statutory guidance has been published to provide clarity on how local authorities, safeguarding partners, relevant agencies and others can work towards the government's vision for supporting children, young people and families. These documents underpin system reforms, including the Families First Partnership programme.

Links

- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026](#)
- [Children's social care: national framework](#)
- [Working Together 2026: summary of changes](#)

2) Supporting local areas to embed Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 and the Children's Social Care National Framework

At a glance

- Non-statutory guidance to support local implementation.
- Focus on consistency, integrated working and using evidence/data to drive improvement.

Summary

Non-statutory guidance has been published to support local areas to improve outcomes by focusing on: increasing consistency of practice across teams and agencies; strengthening multi-agency arrangements and integrated working; ensuring systems, processes and decision-making align with the Children's Social Care National Framework and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026; and using evidence and data to evaluate impact and drive improvement.

Links

- [Supporting local areas to embed Working Together and the national framework](#)

3) Families First Partnership programme guide (updated for 2026/27)

At a glance

- Programme guidance for safeguarding partners and relevant agencies (including education and childcare).
- Covers delivery expectations for Family Help, multi-agency child protection and support for family networks.

Summary

The Families First Partnership programme guide has been updated for 2026/27. It is aimed at safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including education and childcare settings. The guide supports implementation of children's social care reforms, including Family Help, multi-agency child protection reforms, and family group decision-making and family network support packages. It includes delivery expectations, how progress will be measured, areas for local flexibility and the support available.

Links

- [Families First Partnership programme](#)

4) Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework updates (from 1 April 2026)

At a glance

- Framework updated for inspections/visits from 1 April 2026.
- Includes removal of the overall effectiveness judgement (practice judgements and leaders' impact remain).

Summary

Ofsted has published updates to its Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework. These changes apply to inspections and visits from 1 April 2026. The summary of changes includes the removal of the overall effectiveness judgement (while retaining three practice judgements and the judgement on the impact of leaders), an expanded introduction, updated evaluation criteria reflecting "family help", and clarification on how inspectors will evaluate the use of unregistered provision.

Links

- [Inspecting local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#)
- [Summary of the framework changes](#)
- [Ofsted blog: what to know about the April 2026 updates](#)

5) Research: Child sexual abuse and exploitation – recording practices and serious incident reporting

At a glance

- Research on how Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation (CSAE) is identified and recorded in children's social care.
- Highlights challenges with visibility in extractable datasets and information held across systems.

Summary

A research report commissioned by the Department for Education has been published by the Institute for Children's Futures at Manchester Metropolitan University. It examines safeguarding responses to child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSAE) and explores how CSAE is identified, understood and recorded in children's social care, including approaches to serious incident reporting. The report highlights challenges where exploitation is not consistently visible in extractable datasets and where key information may sit in narrative notes or across multiple systems.

Links

- [CSAE recording practices research report](#)

6) Research: safeguarding partnership responses to county lines and serious youth violence

At a glance

- Home Office research on multi-agency responses to county lines and serious youth violence.
- Identifies themes, learning and recommendations for safeguarding partners.

Summary

A Home Office research report has been published exploring multi-agency safeguarding arrangements responding to county lines exploitation and serious youth violence. The research considers how safeguarding partnerships and universal and specialist services work together and identifies themes, learning and recommendations for safeguarding partners.

Links

- [Deep dive exploration report](#)

7) Ivison Trust: From Excluded to Included – Parents as Partners in Child Exploitation

At a glance

- Highlights parents' experiences and the wider impact of exploitation on families.
- Sets out headline recommendations to improve responses and outcomes.

Summary

An Ivison Trust report may be of interest, exploring the experiences of parents and carers whose children have been criminally or sexually exploited. It highlights how parents can feel excluded from safeguarding processes, the wider impact of exploitation on families, and sets out headline recommendations to improve responses and outcomes for affected families.

Links

- [From Excluded to Included \(Ivison Trust\)](#)

8) Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs – terms of reference published

At a glance

- Terms of reference published; formal set-up date 13 April 2026.
- Final report due by 31 March 2029; interim findings may be published.

Summary

The final terms of reference for the Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs have been published. The formal setting-up date of the Inquiry will be 13 April 2026, and the final report must be submitted to the Home Secretary by 31 March 2029. The Inquiry may publish interim reports and emerging findings during its three-year duration, including local investigation reports which must be made publicly available.

Links

- [Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs: terms of reference](#)

9) Crossing the Line: Rethinking the 'Alpha Victim'

At a glance

- Available resources for practitioners to share

Summary

The project explores the complex realities facing young people caught up in county lines drug trafficking – specifically those labelled 'alpha-victims'. [Research conducted by the Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre](#) highlights how these young people, though coerced or

forced into exploiting others, are frequently viewed as offenders rather than victims by criminal justice and safeguarding professionals.

There are multiple factors fuelling this, which include: the complex and shifting nature of young people's involvement in county lines operations over time; the appearance and demeanour of the alpha-victim, and their response to intervention measures; processes of 'adultification' – particularly in relation to Black young men; and conjecture concerning the roles played by females within organised crime groups.

Links

- [Crossing the Line: Rethinking the 'Alpha Victim'](#)