



# MERTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

JULY 2023

## INTRODUCTION

***“Nothing is more important than children’s welfare” (Working Together 2018, p.6)***

**It is the vision of the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) that all statutory partners and relevant agencies work together to ensure that *everyone does everything they can to ensure that all of Merton’s children are safe, supported and successful.***

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each Local Authority Area to establish local arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. This Partnership Agreement sets out the local safeguarding arrangements for the London Borough of Merton. The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) fulfills this requirement for the London Borough of Merton, to enable all children and young people to be safe in their homes and communities, and to fulfill their potential.

## KEY DOCUMENTS

This Partnership Agreement should be read alongside the following key MSCP documents:

- [Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2021-22](#)
- [Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Plan 2023-25](#)
- [Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership Sub-Group Workplans](#)

This Partnership Agreement sets out local children’s safeguarding arrangements for Merton, in accordance with statutory legislation and guidance, including:

- [Working Together 2018](#)
- [Children Act 2004](#)

## WHO ARE WE?

### OUR MEMBERS

The Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership is made up the following partner agencies:

#### Statutory Partners

The Local Authority (represented by the Director of Children, Schools and Families, or their delegated representative)

An Integrated Care Board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area (the ICB, the Accountable Officer or their delegated representative)

The chief officer of police for a police area any part of which falls within the local authority area (the Chief Officer of the Basic Command Unit, BCU, or their delegated representative)

#### Relevant Agencies

Schools, colleges and other educational providers (who play a vital role in safeguarding children)

Housing

Probation

Department for Work and Pensions

Voluntary Organisations, represented by Merton Connected, or another relevant body

Acute Trusts, Health Providers and Mental Health Trusts

### WHAT WE EXPECT FROM OUR MEMBERS:

- ✓ Sufficiently senior and delegated to speak with authority, to make decisions and commit resources on behalf of their agency.
- ✓ Statutory partners should nominate a standing deputy to represent the Member in her/his absence. Members who represent a sector will be covered in their absence by other members from that sector and so do not require a deputy (e.g. voluntary sector)
- ✓ It is critical that education representatives attend and contribute to the partnership's working, even though they are not named as a statutory partner
- ✓ Relevant Agency members who represent their sector rather than a single agency cannot speak on behalf of any other single agency apart from their own.
- ✓ Commitment, consistency and continuity in membership – members must contribute actively to the work of the MSCP, provide constructive support and challenge, and act as a 'critical friend' to partner agencies in monitoring of safeguarding responsibilities
- ✓ Attendance at meetings and respond to communications between meetings
- ✓ Each Relevant Agency should nominate a standing deputy to represent the Member in her/his absence – who will hold the same authority on their agency's behalf.
- ✓ Where a Member does not attend two consecutive meetings, the absence will be reviewed with them on behalf of the MSCP with their organisation, by the MSCP Partnership Manager – and may be escalated via Sub-Group Chairs and/or the Executive group.
- ✓ All Relevant Agencies and Co-opted Members will respond to information requests from the MSCP in relation to data, commentary, evaluation, planning, performance and resources in order to assist the MSCP in the completion of its objectives

## WHAT DO WE DO?

*Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership will work together to ensure that everyone does everything they can to ensure that all of Merton's children are safe, supported and successful*

As set out in legislation (Section 14 of the Children Act 2004), the core purpose of the Partnership are:

- (a) to coordinate what is done by each person or body represented on the Board for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in the area; and
- (b) to ensure the effectiveness of what is done by each such person or body for those purposes



## REPORTING

The MSCP will publish an annual report, which sets out the work that the MSCP has done and the effectiveness of our arrangements. It will include actions relating to local child safeguarding practice reviews and what the safeguarding partners have done as a result.

The annual report is signed off through the governance arrangements of the Statutory Partners. It will then be sent to the Secretary of State, DfE, Ofsted, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care within seven days of publication.

## TRAINING PROGRAMME

The MSCP will deliver a training programme to ensure that practitioners continue to develop their knowledge and skills and are aware of new and emerging threats and learning from audits and local child safeguarding practice reviews. The Policy and Training Sub-group will have oversight of the training programme. Training will be delivered by MSCP partners to effectively utilise internal expertise. However, the MSCP will also commission training externally where the specialism does not exist in house.

The MSCP will also hold an annual conference to engage with agencies across the partnership, share learning and facilitate networking across partners. Other bespoke events may be delivered as required.

## HOW DO WE DO IT?

### STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

Business will be conducted through the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership, which holds the statutory responsibilities and duties – via MSCP meetings, sub-groups, correspondence and exchange of information between meetings. The Full Partnership will meet termly (three times per year). Business will be prioritised and organised in the Biannual Business Plan and functions delivered through Sub-Groups who meet quarterly.

Sub-groups will develop work plans to carry out the business identified in the Business Plan and report on projects termly (3x per year) to the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership. Every sub-group will have an agreed Terms of Reference and will be given delegated responsibility to act on the MSCP's behalf to progress the agreed Business objectives. It is essential that members of the MSCP demonstrate their commitment to the Partnership by ensuring agency attendance to sub-groups and undertake specific tasks as agreed at meetings. Sub-group chairs will also meet monthly to ensure that the work of sub-groups is coordinated and effective.

The newly established Joint Strategic Safeguarding Group will meet twice yearly to oversee the work of the MSCP and the Merton Safeguarding Adults Board (MSAB), including signing off the annual reports for both partnerships.

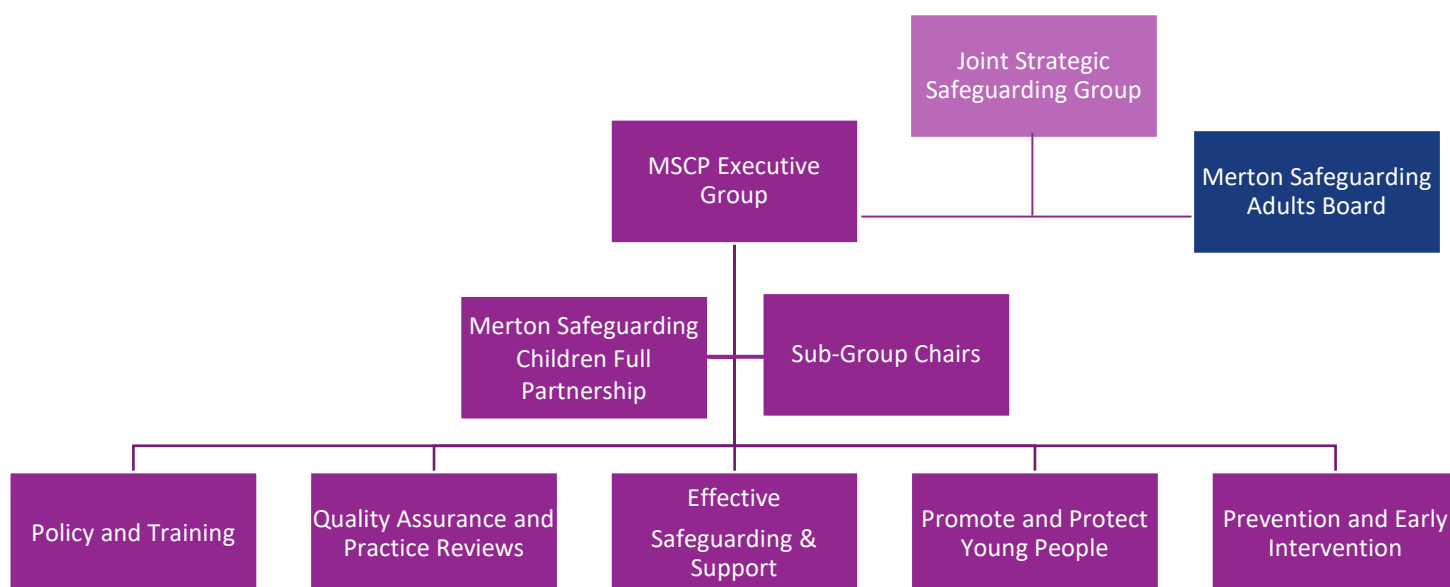


Figure 1 MSCP Meetings Structure

The Partnership will identify priorities, which will be informed by detailed analysis of local need, the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis, learning coming out of local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, and system-wide developments in safeguarding practice such as the Merton Social Work Practice Model. These are set out in a 24-month Business Plan.

On behalf of the Partnership, an Executive Group, consisting of the Statutory Partners will coordinate the work of the Partnership, prioritise actions and ensure the coverage of statutory functions and the business plan by ensuring governance and connectivity across the Sub-groups and ad hoc task and finish groups. The Executive Group will drive the MSCP agenda, seek assurance that the Partnership's priorities are being delivered, provide guidance and leadership to sub-group chairs.

The MSCP will liaise with and receive relevant reports from other local strategic partnerships, such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, Merton Safeguarding Adults Board, Strategic MACE, Youth Crime Prevention

Executive Board, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Board, and Safer Merton (Community Safety Partnership) as well as other strategic partnerships as appropriate.

To meet statutory requirements the Partnership will appoint an Independent Chair, Independent Scrutineer and Young Scrutineer. The Independent Chair and Independent Scrutineer will have diverse roles and will therefore need to be different people, and both will have significant experience at a senior level in the strategic co-ordination of multi-agency services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. An overview of their responsibilities is set out in the table below.

Independent Chair	Independent Scrutineer	Young Scrutineer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair of the Partnership</li> <li>• Chairs meetings of the Partnership</li> <li>• Provides independent challenge to statutory partners and relevant agencies</li> <li>• Scrutiny of leadership of the partnership including review of the Partnership’s annual report and Section 11 audit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides assurance in judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in Merton</li> <li>• Holds Partnership to account</li> <li>• Delivers at least one thematic scrutiny annually, gathering voice of CYP/families, to recommend improvements to partnership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides challenge as to how child-focused we are as a Partnership and whether young people’s voice really does inform our safeguarding practice</li> <li>• Scrutinises the extent to which Partners listen and respond to children, how the voice of children and young people is evident in the work of the Partnership, especially with regard to improving the commissioning and delivery of services that effectively safeguard children and promote their welfare</li> <li>• Working alongside the Independent Scrutineer and Independent Chair to assess the quality of services delivered to children and young people as listed in the previous columns</li> </ul>

## ACCOUNTABILITY

- ✓ The Statutory Partners, including the Chief Executive Officer of the Council, to meet with the MSCP Chair at least twice per year to review the Partnership’s work
- ✓ The Independent Chair has executive authority to make decisions on behalf of the MSCP between meetings, consulting Statutory Partners as appropriate, and will report on decisions at the next Partnership meeting or in writing.
- ✓ Statutory Partners will make arrangements to (a) identify serious child safeguarding cases which raise issues of importance in relation to the area and (b) oversee the review of those cases, where appropriate.
- ✓ Statutory Partners, Relevant Agencies and co-opted members will ensure shared responsibility and constructive, mutual challenge to keep children safe.
- ✓ The MSCP will be accountable to its members and local community through the Annual Report (see above).
- ✓ The MSCP is accountable to the children and young people of Merton and will work with our Young Scrutineer to ensure meaningful participation, consultation and accountability with young people.
- ✓ The MSCP will be accountable to the Statutory safeguarding partners through the Executive Group by ensuring appropriate representation and attendance on the MSCP Partnership and/or Sub-groups as agreed.
- ✓ The MSCP will be quorate if two Statutory Partners are present. In the event that a Statutory Partner fails to ensure appropriate representation at a scheduled Partnership meeting, the Independent Chair will write to the accountable officer to raise a concern regarding the lack of attendance.
- ✓ The Executive Group will be quorate if all Statutory Partners (Local Authority, ICB and Police) are present.
- ✓ The Independent Scrutineer, as part of their independent function, will, where they are made aware of an issue, have the responsibility to disclose wrongdoing, maladministration or organisational

dysfunction to the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) and the DfE, if it becomes clear that the MSCP is failing to fulfil its statutory responsibilities and normal processes of challenge and dispute resolution have become untenable.

## RESOURCES

The MSCP will have a shared budget to further its objectives. Statutory Partners will agree contributions each autumn for the following business year. The Statutory Partners will agree the level of funding secured from each partner, which should be equitable and proportionate, and propose any contributions from Relevant Agency, to support local arrangements.

The cost of any local child safeguarding practice review will be borne by additional subscription from the Statutory Partners who have been involved in the case (the Local Authority, the Police BCU and the ICB as the lead service commissioners). Statutory Partners may propose contributions from Relevant Agencies and Co-opted members who have been involved in the case. The cost of dissemination of lessons will be borne as part of the MSCP Training budget.

Partner agencies will take responsibility for chairing the range of sub-groups to ensure that there is leadership across several disciplines.

The MSCP will be supported by a Business and Administrative team designed in accordance with the needs of the Partnership. The MSCP Business Support team and MSCP meetings will be hosted by Merton Council. The MSCP will not routinely seek legal advice on all its work but only when it is needed.

## DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Every effort will be made by Safeguarding Partners to resolve disputes locally. Disputes within the Partnership will normally be raised and resolved at meetings of the Executive Group of the Partnership. The [MSCP Escalation Policy](#) can be found on the MSCP website.