

Child First: MOPAC Commitment Statement

Introduction

In the Police and Crime Plan 2022-25 MOPAC committed to 'look to take a Child First approach in all of our work with children'. Child First is a summary of the evidence of what works to enable positive outcomes for children, leading to safer communities.

This statement explains what Child First means, and why MOPAC are committed to embedding this approach. MOPAC are committed to implementing Child First in three key areas of our work:

- Internally in our commissioning and policy making.
- In our oversight of the Metropolitan Police Service.
- Collaborating with partners to facilitate a wider system that will enable the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to respond to every child in a Child First way.

This is an ambitious goal and will be a journey that spans the current Mayoral term and beyond. To achieve this goal significant strategic, cultural and operational change will be needed.

Achieving this ambition will require a partnership approach rooted in collaboration and mutual challenge underpinned by the Police and Crime Plan and the Metropolitan Police Service's Children's Strategy. MOPAC will also draw on some of the fantastic existing work of our partners in City Hall, including the London Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) and externally, including the Youth Justice Board.

To guide the development of MOPAC's Child First approach we have worked with the University of Salford, in a project led by Professor Neal Hazel, a leading academic in Child First thinking and implementation within systems and services.

This was informed by focus groups with children and interviews with stakeholders, including various ranks in the MPS.

The policy position presents a series of position points – or recommendations – for how MOPAC could implement Child First across its work, including oversight of the MPS. The policy position also presents a series of position points that MOPAC could adopt to encourage and support partners to implement Child First in various policing contexts.

The position points in the document are intended as a useful starting point, not a comprehensive manual or set of actions.

It is for MOPAC and partners to use these Child First tenets as a guiding principle to work through each policy and practice on the ground *in context*, so ensuring that it reflects the evidence base of what achieves positive child outcomes.

What is Child First?

Child First is a four-part summary of the current evidence base for what is important to achieve positive outcomes for children, leading to preventing offending, fewer victims, and safer communities. Child First originated in the youth justice system and has been adopted as the guiding principle for the Youth Justice Board (YJB) of England and Wales.

Child First can be broken down into four key parts (sometimes called tenets) that the evidence has shown to be important. These are:

- **Treating children As Children** – that is recognising their specific needs, rights, capacities and potential. Treating children as children also means prioritising adult duties of child safeguarding and wellbeing in any situation and using child-specific / developmentally informed processes.
- **Building pro-social identity for positive child outcomes** – this means promoting children's strengths, working in a constructive and future-focused way, empowering children to fulfil their potential. At a strategic level this also means prioritising positive child and community outcomes when measuring success.
- **Collaborating with children** – this means that all work relating to children should engage children and their parents / carers appropriately and involve them to solve problems both at a policy level and in each encounter.
- **Diverting from stigma** – this means preventing stigma for any child involved in the justice system either as a victim, witness or perpetrator. This also means promoting a childhood removed from the justice system by using early prevention, diversion and minimal intervention where required.

When implemented, Child First should be a guide for decision making, including for those working directly with children or policy makers. It should focus on finding the most constructive solution in an interaction with a child while not inhibiting necessary actions to protect the public and the child. Child First is more about **how** agencies work rather than **what** they do.

The importance of Child First

Child First presents a useable summary of the evidence base for what works to improve outcomes for children. Child First is designed for both policy and practice decision making.

The evidence demonstrates that when implemented, a Child First approach will create better outcomes for children, leading to preventing offending, fewer victims, and safer communities in London.

Research tells us that by adopting a Child First approach, the following outcomes are achieved.

- Improved multi-agency responses.
- Services matched to need/demand.
- Increased quality of services.
- Greater awareness of children's rights and entitlements.

- Improved knowledge and awareness of safeguarding.
- Use of trauma informed approaches.
- Reduced adultification of children.
- Increased trust and confidence in policing and the wider criminal justice system.
- Improved life chances for children.
- The most vulnerable children reporting better experiences of policing.

MOPAC's Commitment to Child First

Ensuring that MOPAC as an organisation is Child First

The Police and Crime Plan states that MOPAC will look to take a Child First approach in all work with children and young people and encourage partner agencies to do the same. MOPAC is committed to its work being aligned with the evidence of what works to ensure better outcomes for children and safer communities in London. This work will include addressing inequalities in the system which negatively impact children who are overrepresented, including Black minoritised groups and care experienced children. Areas where MOPAC commit to taking a Child First approach include, but aren't limited to:

- Development and promotion of a Child First culture.
- Adoption of Child First language.
- Meaningful collaboration with children.
- Guiding compliance with Child First principles across areas such as commissioning and policy work.
- Convening partnership working aligned to Child First principles and approaches.
- Promotion of diversion where appropriate, avoiding stigma and promoting pro-social identity.

Oversee a Metropolitan Police Service that is Child First

The [A New Met for London](#) plan states that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) will “radically reset our approach to protecting and policing London’s children and young people, adopting a ‘child-first’ approach” (p27).

The Metropolitan Police Service published their [Children's Strategy](#) in September 2024, which, with MOPAC's support, makes a clear commitment to Child First.

MOPAC fulfils the functions of the Police and Crime Commissioner in London, and so has a legal duty to deliver oversight of the Metropolitan Police Service. This includes ensuring the Commissioner delivers against strategic objectives set out by MOPAC in the Police and Crime plan and is held accountable for safeguarding children and promoting child welfare.

MOPAC's role in overseeing a Child First Metropolitan Police Service will include, but not be limited to:

- Supporting the Met to embed child participation in their work.
- Actively bringing children's perspectives and experiences into our oversight of the Met.
- Collaborating with the Met to build a strong development offer around children, as outlined in the Children's Strategy, to include training, supervision and leadership development.
- Exploring ways for children and adults to become involved in local scrutiny.

- Providing advice, guidance and challenge on policing Operations that involve or target children.
- Holding the Commissioner to account for improving policing outcomes and interactions for children coming into contact with Metropolitan Police Service.

Collaborating with partners to create a wider system that will enable the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to be truly Child First.

For MOPAC and the Metropolitan Police Service to be Child First, and for children to have a consistent Child First response, wider systemic changes will be needed. This will require collaboration with partners across the Criminal Justice System and the organisations and agencies within and adjacent to it.

This will draw on MOPAC's role in bringing partners together as a convener, as well as a commissioner. MOPACs work within and across partnerships will ensure a focus on the following:

- Prioritise adult duties of child safeguarding and wellbeing, using child-specific processes, and presuming against use of any powers risking trauma (with appropriate scrutiny if used).
- Prioritise positive child and community outcomes over offence, incident or contact related targets for any encounter in which a child is involved.
- Engage children appropriately and involve them fully in finding positive solutions in both policy and each encounter.
- Presume constructive diversion and minimal criminal justice intervention at each stage, and view all situations through a stigma/ 'identity lens'.
- Convening partners across the CJS to agree to a whole-system approach to improving outcomes and experience of children in the system, underpinned by the four parts of Child First.
- Focusing future commissioning activity on promoting a joined up and Child First system, informed by the experiences of children who have had contact with the CJS.

Conclusion

By adopting a Child First approach, MOPAC aims to achieve the Child First Strategic Outcome of a London that treats all children who experience or commit crime in a way which acknowledges their distinct needs and vulnerabilities, recognises adult duties of safeguarding, engages the child in identifying solutions and in future-focused constructive work, and avoids stigma.

By achieving positive child outcomes, this leads to preventing offending, creates fewer victims, and ensures safer communities.