

Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting	29 th February 2024
Report Subject	Contextual Safeguarding
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services and Wellbeing
Report Author	Chief Officer Social Services
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contextual safeguarding recognises that as young people grow and develop they are influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside of their family. For example in school or college, in the local community, in their peer groups or online. Children and young people may encounter risk in any of these environments. Contextual safeguarding looks at how we can best understand these risks, engage with children and young people and help to keep them safe.

An operational forum has been developed that brings together professional organisations to discuss concerns relating to extra familial harm (harm outside of the family home) and to plan responses that reduce risk. This Contextual Safeguarding Hub does not replace safeguarding of individual young people but recognises the important role that communities and partner agencies have in creating safe places and spaces for the children and young people. There are, however, opportunities to streamline and align approaches to individual and contextual safeguarding and this will form the second phase of our work to develop our approach to effective safeguarding.

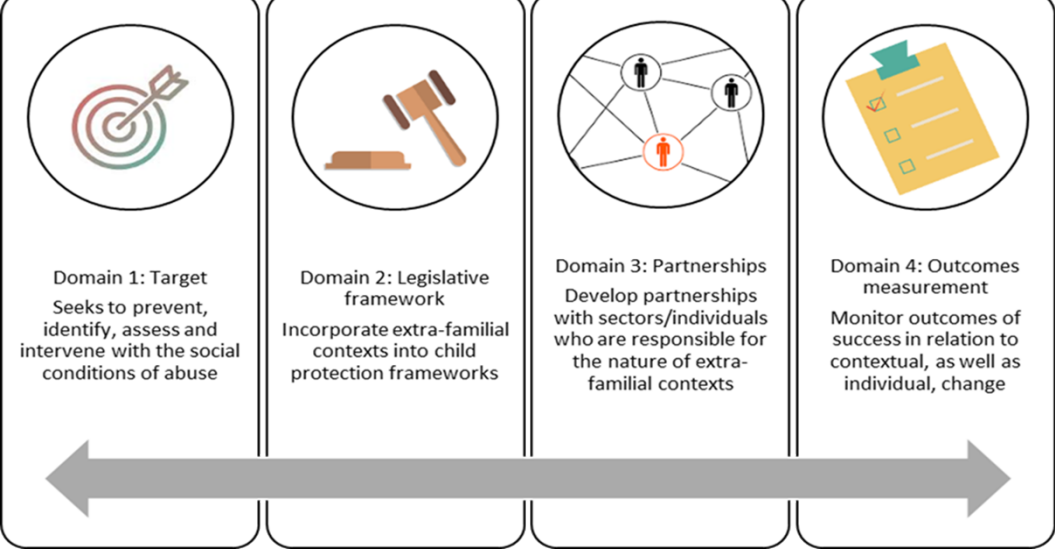
RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To support the ongoing development and co-ordinated approach to contextual safeguarding that maximises resources to enable a streamlined and effective approach to individual and contextual safeguarding.
---	--

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	Explaining Contextual Safeguarding
1.01	Contextual safeguarding is a safeguarding approach that focuses on understanding the situations outside of an immediate family environment that may put an individual at risk of harm. It was first developed by Dr Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire as a framework for understanding the influences that young people specifically are exposed to in adolescence and how these might lead to safeguarding concerns.
1.02	Whilst contextual safeguarding was initially created to focus on those between the ages of 10 and 25, it can be applied to children or vulnerable individuals of any age as a way of identifying areas of risk and creating plans to minimise harm.
1.03	Contextual safeguarding operates on the principle that, as young people grow older and spend less time with their family in a home environment, they are exposed to other influences that may pose a safeguarding risk. It also acknowledges that extra-familial relationships can be just as harmful as those a young person has with their family and that these relationships need to be considered when assessing whether someone could be harmed.
1.04	Whilst immediate action is often taken when a safeguarding risk is identified inside a child's home, it is much harder to take preventative or protective measures when a risk comes from a factor in their wider environment. The contextual safeguarding framework not only makes it easier to understand where these external risks might come from, but it also helps safeguarding professionals set up schemes that reduce the likelihood of harmful scenarios happening in the first place.
1.05	Traditionally, social work practice concentrates on parental capacity to protect their children from harm, whereas a Contextual Safeguarding approach views parents as partners and acknowledges that they have little control over the harm that their children experience outside of the family home and that current responses can alienate parents and lead to limited impact in reducing the risk of the harm.
1.06	Purpose of Contextual Safeguarding
1.07	The purpose of the contextual safeguarding is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To acknowledge, assess, plan, intervene and reduce the risk of extra-familial harm for young people.• To work together to create safer places, spaces, and communities.• To view and address concerns within our communities through a child welfare rather than a youth justice or crime reduction lens.
1.08	Why is Contextual Safeguarding Important?

1.09	Contextual safeguarding is important as it doesn't just focus on helping one individual but looks to make spaces and areas safer for all young people. By creating partnerships, increasing awareness, and updating legislation, the chances of harm occurring in schools, neighbourhoods and online are reduced and everyone is protected.
1.10	Young people are most affected by contextual safeguarding concerns as they tend to spend more time away from their families and homes than children. At this age they are also still very impressionable and likely to be affected in the long-term by the things that happen whilst they grow up, which means the impact of things like bullying, crime and exploitation is much more severe. By creating safe environments where young people can spend their time, problems and future harm in adulthood are reduced and more young people have a happy and healthy adolescence.
1.11	What is Involved in Contextual Safeguarding?
1.12	The contextual safeguarding framework identifies four key dynamics that should be considered when understanding where threats or risks may come from. The first of these is the child's home and family, which is the typical area of focus when it comes to safeguarding issues.
1.13	The next dynamic is a young person's peer group, which can have a very significant impact on how an individual behaves and the choices they make. The issues caused by a peer group can range from bad behaviour in school where a young person is encouraged to act out by their friends, all the way to serious involvement in gangs, organised crime, drug trafficking or sexual exploitation. This may also include romantic and sexual relationships, which can present a serious safeguarding issue if there is a large age difference or any abusive behaviour.
1.14	A key sign to look out for in contextual safeguarding is a change in a child's behaviour around certain peers or an obvious move to a new friendship group, as well as involvement with others involved in risky behaviour.
1.15	After a child's peer group, the next dynamic considered in contextual safeguarding is their school. As a local authority we work effectively with schools to ensure proactive awareness, prevention and action to provide supportive and safe school environments with initiatives to counter bullying, recruitment into gangs, drug dealing and organised crime all of which can happen at school or on school grounds and can put young people in very dangerous situations and lead to participation in harmful or illegal activity later in life.
1.16	Contextual safeguarding is completely aligned to our proactive work with schools in considering the potential risks that their students are exposed to within the educational environment.
1.17	The next dynamic that comes after a young person's school environment is their neighbourhood. Whether young people become victims of criminal activity or get directly involved with it, both of these scenarios can lead to safeguarding concerns.

1.18	<p>Another contextual dynamic that has been identified as a real safeguarding risk is the online environment. Young people spend a large proportion of their lives online in environments or on platforms that are not moderated or controlled by adults which can lead to a wide range of different safeguarding issues. When considering contextual risks, things like cyberbullying, online grooming and radicalisation or extremism through online groups and content should all be factored into the things young people may be exposed to.</p>
1.19	<p>Contextual Safeguarding Framework</p>
1.20	<p>There are four key features of an appropriate response to prevent contextual safeguarding concerns. They set out a process to resolve and reduce extra-familial harm, which is outlined below:</p>
1.21	 <p>The diagram illustrates the Contextual Safeguarding Framework with four domains, each represented by an icon in a circle and a text box below it. A large grey double-headed arrow spans the bottom of the four boxes, indicating a process or relationship between them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domain 1: Target Seeks to prevent, identify, assess and intervene with the social conditions of abuse Domain 2: Legislative framework Incorporate extra-familial contexts into child protection frameworks Domain 3: Partnerships Develop partnerships with sectors/individuals who are responsible for the nature of extra-familial contexts Domain 4: Outcomes measurement Monitor outcomes of success in relation to contextual, as well as individual, change
1.22	<p>Target</p> <p>The systems and settings that are commonly associated with safeguarding concerns are identified in the area and measures are put in place to try and reduce or remove the social conditions that tend to lead to harm.</p>
1.23	<p>Legislation</p> <p>Whilst there is already a lot of legislative framework involved in child protection that applies to family relationships and the home environment, there aren't the same procedures and resources concerning contextual safeguarding issues. The process suggests that extra-familial contexts should be included in this existing safeguarding legislation.</p>
1.24	<p>Partnerships</p> <p>Partnerships or connections should be established between those in safeguarding positions and the organisations or people who are directly associated with the extra-familial contexts or locations where harm is likely to occur. For example, community projects could be established in at-risk neighbourhoods to provide young people with things to do outside of school time to keep them safe.</p>

1.25	<p>Outcome Measurement</p> <p>To ensure that these measures are making a difference, the outcomes of these steps should be measured on both an individual and contextual level.</p>
1.26	<p>Two-Tier Contextual Safeguarding</p>
1.27	<p>The approaches in contextual safeguarding are implemented in two different ways, known as a two-tier approach.</p>
1.28	<p>The first tier builds on the work that safeguarding professionals are already doing with children, young people and their families and brings in considerations for the wider context which may also have an impact on the individual who is at risk. This may include factoring in extra-familial risks to a care plan and identifying any external factors that have the potential to cause harm.</p>
1.29	<p>The second tier then looks to establish new approaches to removing or reducing the harm caused by extra-familial factors. This may involve connecting existing child protection services with locations identified as high-risk, assessing settings that have caused harm and working to remove this or providing more education to those in high-risk areas. This approach is delivered in Flintshire through our contextual Safeguarding Hub which was established in January 2023.</p>
1.30	<p>The current partners within our Contextual Safeguarding Hub are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NWP (Exploitation and Neighbourhood Policing teams primarily) • Housing • Clwyd and Alyn • Streetscene • Gypsy Traveller Liaison service/resettlement coordinator • Barnardo's • MST • Trading Standards • Licensing • Community Safety Officer • Education • Health • Youth Justice Service • SORTED • Youth Service • Aura • Theatr Clwyd • Action For Children – Sidestep Project • <p>Some of the above are standing members (some we are still working together with to build up to this) and others support on an ad hoc basis depending on need.</p>
1.31	<p>The focus of the Contextual Safeguarding Hub is on making the environments young people frequent safer by working within the community and with partners who have a reach in to these areas to create</p>

	<p>safer spaces. This is where the Contextual Safeguarding Hub differs from our current Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Panel (MET) which concentrates on safety plans for individuals and Anti-Social Behaviour Meetings (ASB) which take a criminal justice viewpoint with the purpose of reducing demand on the police.</p>
1.32	<p>The current interface between the CS Hub and other relevant meetings such as MET, ASB, Prevent and Deter (PAD) and the Eastern Serious Organised Crime Group Meeting is currently via the CS Hub Chair's standing membership on the above panels. The CS Hub chair also works closely with colleagues within the Local Authority and relevant Partner Agencies to ensure effective and efficient information sharing with regards to issues of Extra-Familial Harm within Flintshire.</p>
1.33	<p>Future of Contextual Safeguarding in Flintshire</p>
1.34	<p>Since our first Contextual Safeguarding Hub meeting in January 2023 we have received 27 referrals. These cases provide a strong baseline which will enable us to measure and review the effectiveness of how we have dealt with these referrals, our impact, and our learning to help inform how we continuously develop and improve our approach and continue to raise awareness of the support we can offer as a multi-agency partnership, continuing to build partnerships with relevant agencies.</p>
1.35	<p>This work will support us to continue to refine our approach to suit Flintshire, to support large numbers of young people on a preventative basis and reduce the risk of them experiencing extra-familial harm within the places and spaces that they spend time, in turn reducing the need for them and their families to access statutory services.</p>
1.36	<p>In Flintshire we are currently reviewing our MET Panel and Missing From Home processes to ensure they are aligned to best practice, ensuring they are a productive and an efficient use of time and resources and that they are effectively focussed on reducing the risk of our young people experiencing exploitation. This includes reviewing our IT system to ensure it provides effective business support for our processes and reporting requirements.</p>
1.37	<p>Our aim is to have a single meeting that incorporates the contextual Safeguarding Hub, MET and missing from home strategy meetings, where consistent partners can attend and contribute. Our intention is to also work with partners to establish whether key meetings that they lead could be brought into a single meeting framework to ensure a consistent welfare approach offered to protect and support young people at risk of exploitation.</p>

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Our focus in 2024 will be review multi-agency safeguarding meetings to strengthen a co-ordinated approach to contextual safeguarding. The aim is to maximise resources to enable a streamlined and effective approach to individual and contextual safeguarding and reduce demand on Officer and partner attendance and time spent in meetings.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	Contextual safeguarding is a nationally recognised, researched, and developed approach to effectively managing and reduce risks associated with extra familial harm (harm outside of the family home).

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	Our work to review MET, missing from home and the operational of the Contextual Safeguarding Hub has commenced with clear indicators of potential efficiencies and options for streamlining meetings and processes. Initial consultation has commenced and will require further focus and work to ensure that benefits can be fully realised.
4.02	Report to be considered at Social and Health Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 th February 2024.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Contextual Safeguarding Process - Flintshire

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	Contact Officer: Frankie Norcross Telephone: 07500993165 01352 701143 E-mail: francesca.norcross@flintshire.gov.uk

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	None.

Contextual Safeguarding Process - Flintshire

