



Implementing Contextual Safeguarding

Warwickshire Children & Families have initiated a project to implement a framework for Contextual Safeguarding and develop systems to address extra-familial risk and harm (EFRH) experienced by children and young people outside the family home, such as from child sexual and criminal exploitation, peer-on-peer abuse, and gang affiliation and violence. Like many areas across the country, Warwickshire is seeing a growing number of young people who are being identified as being exposed to these harms and it is recognised that more sophisticated systems of assessing and supporting these cohorts of young people need to be introduced.

Background

Contextual Safeguarding (CS) is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families, within neighbourhoods, public places, schools, peer networks, and online. It is recognised that the existing Child Protection system, legislative and policy framework was designed on the risk of violence and abuse from inside the home, usually from a parent/carer or other trusted adult and has limitations with addressing the exposure to harm outside the home, including the influence of peers on young people's development and safety. CS is an approach that looks at how interventions can change the harmful extra-familial environments to make them safer for all young people.

Warwickshire Children & Families are committed to adopting the Contextual Safeguarding methodology to improve how we respond to these harms. We held a virtual conference in March 2021, hosted by Dez Homes Research in Practice, to develop understanding, encourage debate and establish next steps, and continue to raise awareness of the workforce internally, most recently conducting a broadcast during Staff Conference week in September 2021.

Development towards a CS Approach

Contextual thinking has been applied within our response to Child Exploitation (CE) since January 2020. The WCC CE & Missing Team have initiated considerable practice development, implementing upgrades to the Mosaic database to enable data to be captured about the different forms of exploitation young people are experiencing outside of the family home, and to provide a more relevant and targeted approach by ensuring the contextual risks are considered within an updated CE Assessment Tool.

Our multi-agency meeting forum for managing exploitation risk, Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) has been strengthened to incorporate Contextual Safeguarding into assessments and planning. Meeting forms within Mosaic have been updated to support integration of MACE into existing processes according to the level of intervention as per our 'one meeting and one plan' approach (see [MACE Guidance](#)). Plans established within meetings are now configured around the key elements of Disruption and Support to maximise interventions in the spaces of concern and there is a focus on ensuring that these interventions are initiated *with* the young person and family.

The team have introduced Peer Mapping and Peer Assessments into practice to better understand links and dynamics between young people and harmful associations within a CS context.

Practitioners in the CE & Missing Team have been designated to localities to establish relationships and build up knowledge of contextual risks with locality professionals, enabling enhancement of the intelligence picture and targeted preventative/disruptive action.

CS Project

The initial focus of the Project has been to strengthen current approaches by further enhancing CS practice within our Exploitation response and drawing extra-familial contexts into direct work with children and families.

MACE practice guidance has been implemented to ensure CS requirements are clear within it. This guidance highlights that where the risk is external to the family the focus must be clearly on the perpetrator(s) and other contextual spaces of concern rather than on a parent's ability to protect or blamed for their child's vulnerability. This is to ensure that child protection procedures are not initiated unless exceptional circumstances exist, but rather that parents are seen as safeguarding partners and supported to be a positive intervention factor in appropriate circumstances.

A MACE Independent Review role has also been established to support effective practice, ensuring appropriate pathways are followed in proportion to the concerns and that plans created meet the young persons need and address the contextual issues.

Training on MACE has been provided to teams across Children & Families and a plan developed for ongoing delivery.

In addition to these enhanced processes, identification of CS has been integrated in the Contact and Referral (IFD) to enable a holistic response from referral through to assessment, planning and intervention and an evidence base to identify contextual trends.

Next Steps

Moving towards the next stage of the Project, work is in progress scoping requirements to support development of a whole systems CS approach within Children & Families and the multi-agency. This is in Discovery stage and necessitates a whole service change in our culture, practice, and process, aligned to our Restorative approach.

The project is working with the wider Children and Families teams and external partner organisations to deliver:

- A single and holistic approach to identification, referral and assessment of individual children, peer groups, neighbourhoods, locations, or persons of concern.
- An Assessment of Risk that guides the assessor to the correct pathway or action.
- An Assessment of Risk that identifies vulnerabilities, behaviours, environment, relevant concerns, and indicators, as well as protective factors.
- Clear pathways that inter-links with existing structures whilst providing a clearer focus on CS, including consideration of a new model of conferences for planning and intervention.
- The development of approaches and tools which disrupt or change harmful extra-familial contexts rather than move families or individuals away from them.
- The opportunity to enhance 1:1 work with children/young people
- The opportunity to enhance work with families and systems that surround and support the child/young person
- Increased confidence and clarity for practitioners and colleagues across the business in understanding CS, it's impact and supporting those identified with CS needs.

Working with contextual harm requires safeguarding partnerships to adopt a system wide approach that interlinks with existing Safeguarding procedures whilst providing a clear policy and practice framework for adopting a CS approach. The project will engage with multi-agency partners and key governance groups to establish safeguarding relationships with new sectors having responsibility for and influence over the spaces and places in which we know contextual harm is taking place, and commitment to develop the systems and processes needed.

Progress is provided to the Exploitation Sub-Group of the Warwickshire Safeguarding Partnership and the framework for operation will be submitted to the Safeguarding Executive for partners consideration and approval.

The agreed methodology will be implemented through a multi-agency CS Training Plan.