Durham University

Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding 2024

The Next Chapter

The Next Chapter :
An update on the Contextual Safeguarding framework

Durham University

This project is part of the Contextual Safeguarding programme's 'The Next Chapter' project. The Contextual Safeguarding research programme is based at Durham University.

For more information about the research and to find resources from this project please visit: www.contextualsaefguarding.org.uk

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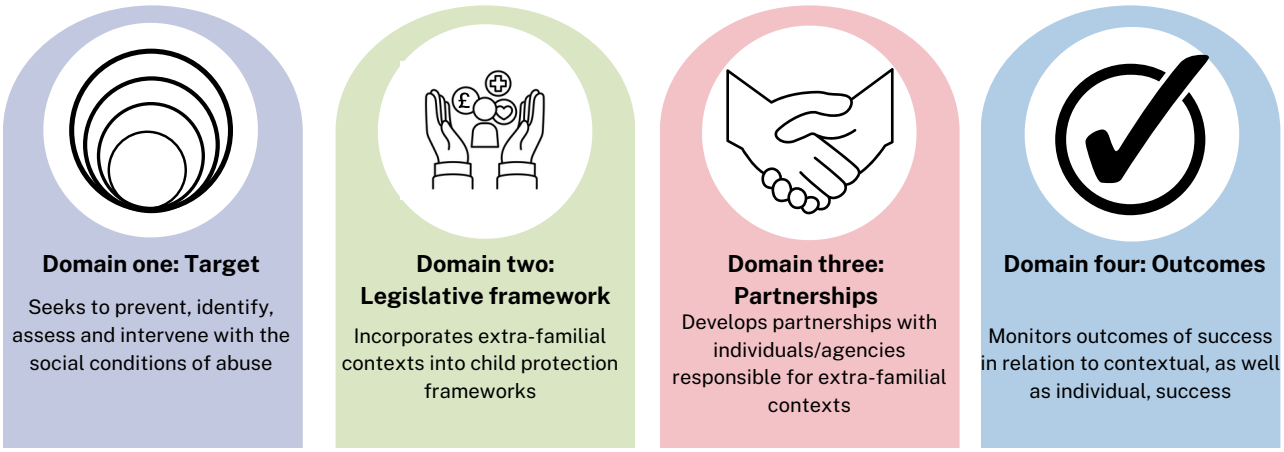
Background

This document outlines the latest updates to the Contextual Safeguarding (CS) framework following our research project: The Next Chapter (TNC). The document includes an update on each domain of the CS framework and its underpinning values, as well as launching a new CS value.

In 2017 we launched the CS framework which introduced the four domains. These are the key principles that anyone wanting to develop a CS approach to extra-familial harm should be working towards. In 2020, we introduced five values to underpin the domains. The domains and values are:



The Contextual Safeguarding Domains

The **values** ensure work is:

1. Collaborative: Collaborating with professionals, children and young people, families and communities to inform decisions about safety.
2. Ecological: Considering the links between the spaces where young people experience harm and how these are shaped by inequalities.
3. Rights-based: Rooted in children's and human rights.
4. Strengths-based: Building on the strengths of individuals and communities to achieve change.
5. Evidence-informed: Producing research that is grounded in the reality of how life happens. Proposing solutions informed by lived experience.

From 2017, the CS research team worked with ten children's social care departments in England and Wales (as part of the Hackney and Scale-Up projects) to implement the CS framework in practice. Alongside this, over 70 children's social care departments have become members of the Local Area Interest Group, which involves committing to developing a CS approach.

In 2024 we finished TNC: a collection of four research projects that together address the legal, contextual and structural shortfalls of current responses to extra-familial harm. Each project has launched a range of new resources. Collectively, they have helped us to learn more about the CS framework when it is applied in practice. This briefing presents the results of this shared learning, to explain what needs to be strengthened, what must be sustained and what has changed about the CS domains and values, as we build systems, services, and communities that can safeguard children beyond their front doors.

The four projects included:

1. Planning for safety: Developing a child protection pathway for risks outside of the home (ROTH).
2. Building safety: Exploring inequalities in relation to extra-familial risk and protection.
3. In the name of safeguarding: Looking at the education experiences of children impacted by extra-familial harm.
4. Sustaining social work: Considering the impact of Contextual Safeguarding practice on the professional experiences of social workers and related practitioners.

The Contextual Safeguarding values

New value: 'Caring'

The learning from TNC has led us to a new CS value: 'caring'. Projects across TNC evidenced the importance of care as a foundation to the ethical use of CS. As a result, we concluded that a CS approach must be delivered through relationships characterised by care. By this we mean relationships between young people, their parents/carers, wider communities as well as with and between the professionals who support them. When adopting a CS approach, the conditions must be created for young people, their parents/carers and wider communities to access relationships of emotional support and solidarity with each other and with professionals who: advocate for their safety, centre their humanity, and challenge the harmful conditions of both the situations in which they are living their lives and the systems responsible for providing support.

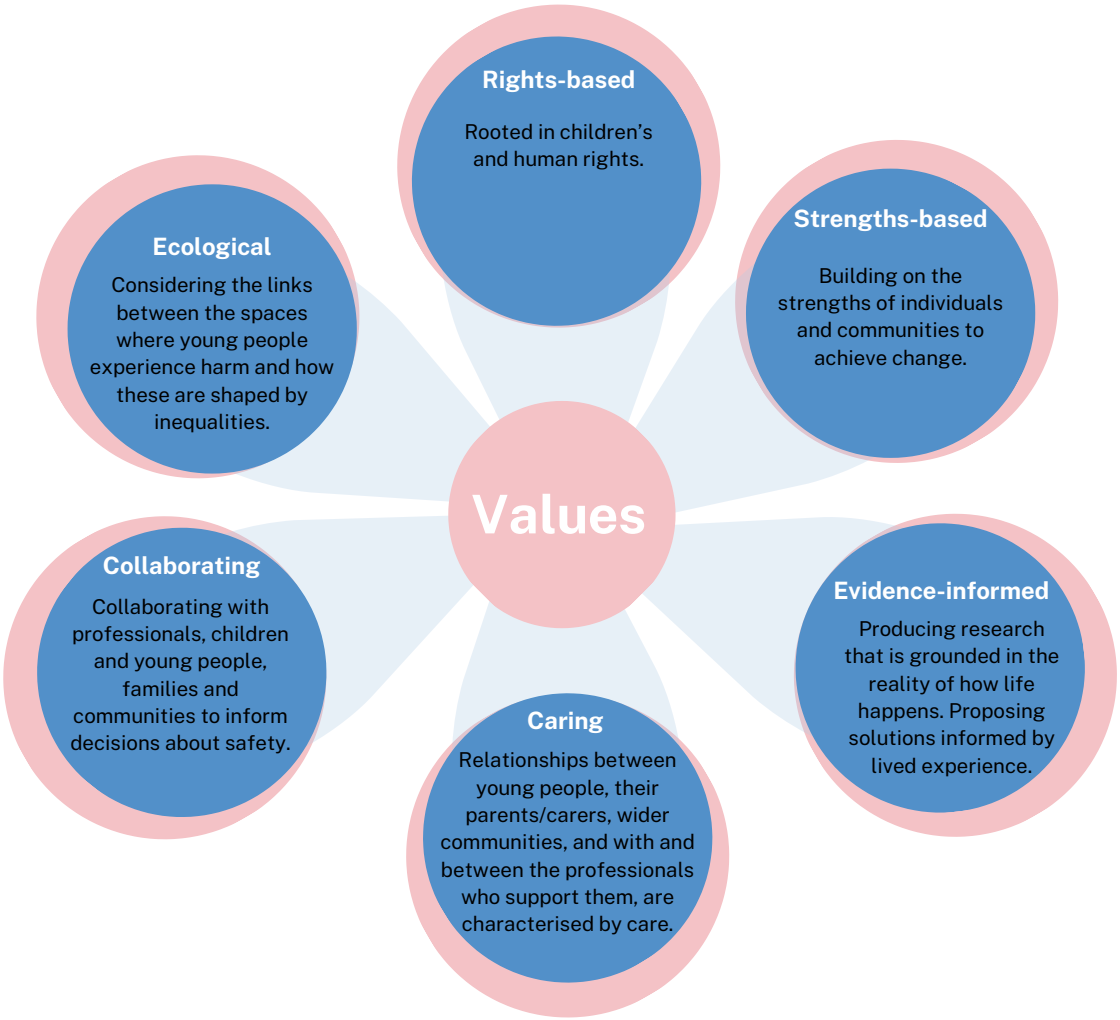
In TNC projects, care was found, or required, in a multitude of ways. Relationships of emotional support and solidarity were a source of care, helping people to realise the potential of CS in often adverse climates. This applied to:

- Young people being able to access relationships in which they felt emotionally supported by someone who advocates for their needs ('Building safety'). In the following quotation a practitioner describes the difference this could make to a young person when they return from being 'missing':
  - "And then also how they were greeted on their return. You know, was it the finger-wagging? Were they in trouble? Were they gonna get this, that and the other, or actually were they gonna be welcomed back in, and then could share where they've been? … they'd be able to make contact, to say, 'I want to stay here', or, 'actually, I'm now in a dodgy situation. Can you come and pick me up'? Because that relationship would be far stronger." (Professional Interview)

- Parents/carers being supported through child protection processes that recognise and seek to address the conditions in which they are raising children ('Planning for safety'). This quote shows a parent talking about what it is like to have this kind of care shown to them by professionals, as they go through the child protection system:
  - [They were saying] We want to make this work so you can have the best life. We're not here to take you away… not … telling us how stupid she is or what horrible mistakes she's making. And it's all her fault, and she should know better. We haven't had any of that this time. It's been very understanding, very calm. (Parent Interview)

- Professionals who were bolstered by each other when facing considerable systemic barriers to actualising the possibilities that CS offered ('Sustaining social work'). In this extract a practitioner describes how important having peer support is to them:
  - [I'm] so fortunate to have a small group of professionals hell bent on challenging and changing things and thinking through different solutions (Social worker, Digital diary).

Finally, when responses to extra-familial harm are characterised by care, they centre a person's humanity. Professionals, and other adults in young people's lives, offer support based on who a young person is and what they need, rather than based on the risks they face and/or pose. Young people are allowed to be a whole person beyond the extra-familial harm that has brought them into contact with statutory systems, and in the process, relational forms of protection and flourishing can grow.



The learning from TNC has also informed our understanding of how the other pre-existing values should underpin the four domains of the Contextual Safeguarding framework:

Updates to the CS values

Collaborative

Projects across TNC evidenced the importance of collaboration with young people, parents/carers and community-based and youth work organisations.
'Planning for safety' showed us that parents can be partners in the delivery of child-welfare approaches to extra-familial harm, rather than subjects of it, and that young people can be involved in statutory processes and decision making in relation to their experiences of extra-familial harm when they are given multiple options for collaboration to suit their specific circumstances.

There is clearly a role for universal spaces and forms of guardianship that are organic and rooted in the places and people that young people know, trust and spend time with.

Collaboration with young people and their trusted networks (friends/family/community organisations and other professionals they trust) led to more proportionate responses that were not process-led or escalated unnecessarily but rooted in trusted relationships and communication with young people. In 'Sustaining social work' we saw that local areas with inter-professional collaboration between youth workers and social workers led to greater levels of flexibility and creativity in response design.

When it comes to designing and delivering responses to extra-familial harm, being committed to collaboration can result in approaches that surface, hold and work with different views between professionals and young people. These could be different views about risk, what is happening in their lives, and what safety means. Working collaboratively means being committed to finding out these differences, respecting them and including them when decisions are made, to increase reciprocity and equality. Transparent discussions between professionals and young people, their families and communities, about power and how professional responses have/can contribute to harm can bring accountability, honesty, trust and choice into decisions about partnerships and plans.

Ecological

To target and change the social conditions of harm we need to think about harm and safety ecologically – beyond the individual. TNC taught us that social workers spend considerable time trying to influence other safeguarding partners to understand young people's lives ecologically. However, there remains a tendency for partnerships to focus on inter-personal violence, behaviour and decisions. An ecological lens can move responses to extra-familial harm from individualised to contextual ways of working – i.e. looking beyond inter-personal violence or young people actions and behaviours, to the contexts that facilitate harm.

Rights-based

Learning from TNC reinforced that responses to extra-familial harm in adolescence must be rights-based. Firstly, child-welfare approaches should focus on creating the conditions for young people to live safely, rather than using statutory frameworks to control children's behaviour. We found this to be true for all young people, but particularly so for those who are in the care of the local authority and so have higher levels of statutory oversight of their lives. Responses should be proportionate to harm and young people's developmental stage.

TNC raised important questions about how thresholds for intervention are applied for young people depending on their care status, ethnicity, gender and perceived background or social class. Our findings mirrored national trends that suggest that racially minoritised young people (boys and young men in particular) can be deemed simultaneously as more at risk but less vulnerable.

We learnt that information sharing with the police can jeopardise young people's safety or contribute to their profiling in the absence of their views and experiences

being heard. Practitioners told us they often feel conflicted about how to act in a rights-based way when they are asked to share information with the police. We need a shared vision amongst safeguarding partners about what a child-welfare response means and clear parameters around partnership working to ensure young people's rights are respected. Being rights-based means upholding young people's rights to privacy and association as well as their right to protection. To achieve this, we need to ensure that responses to extra-familial harm attend to their needs as children, not just their perceived riskiness.

Strengths-based

Making contexts safer for young people means focussing on safety as well as harm. TNC taught us that being strengths-based is about ensuring that what makes young people feel safe is just as important as the factors that can present risk and harm. To change the social conditions of harm, we need to work in strengths-based ways in relationship to young people. 'Disrupting' adults who perpetrate harm is not enough.

A strength-based approach to extra-familial harm includes building on the strength of existing people and places in young people's networks. We need to restore relationships between professionals and families by including, resourcing and trusting young people, families and communities to play a role in harm-prevention.

Evidence-informed

TNC underlined the importance of collecting 'evidence' by listening to young people and valuing their views. Practice responses need to reflect the realities of young people's lives. To do this, practitioners need to design responses based on relationships with young people, rather than 'intelligence' from other professionals, and listen to people that young people trust, including their families, networks and communities. When this happens, safety plans and support are more likely to match young people's needs rather than abstract perceptions about risk. Findings from TNC highlighted how discrimination, stereotyping and bias can creep into systems. To be evidence-based, therefore, services need to monitor 'who', 'where' and 'why' responses are targeted. They need to continually critically reflect, using diverse forms of data, to analyse patterns and trends, becoming accountable not only to senior managers and government but also to young people and families for their actions.

The Domains

Domain one: Target

Seeks to prevent, identify, assess and intervene with the social conditions of abuse.

"Cos it- it does still feel to me that a lot of our conversations we're having a- is about actions that relate to what we expect the child to do, or the parent to do. And I'm just – like, er, to me, all of this should be about us shifting that- that weight of responsibility on to us doing something about the context." (Children's social care practitioner)

Why was it needed?

Domain one is about ensuring safeguarding responses focus on the context where harm is happening. This might be the family home, but if harm is happening in a peer group or online, then these contexts would be the target of safeguarding efforts. Domain one was developed due to the challenges of safeguarding systems that prioritised interventions to change the behaviour of parents and young people, rather than the contexts where harm occurred. When young people encountered harm beyond their front doors, parents had little capacity to influence what happened there. Despite this, traditionally, if cases of extra-familial harm were addressed by children's social care, they would assess and intervene with parents and develop individual responses to children. This often resulted in either parents feeling blamed or young people being responsibilised, and a lack of any welfare response taking place in contexts of significant harm. Domain one aimed to move the 'target' of safeguarding away from parents and individual young people to contexts and the social conditions of abuse. The social conditions are those things that contribute to the 'ecology' of context, like the power dynamics, relationships, attitudes and physical features.

What have we learnt?

Domain one is perhaps the element most associated with CS. Findings from TNC evidenced four themes. These suggest that greater work needs to be done to move beyond identifying and assessing interpersonal harm to individuals in places and move towards routes to engaging with and addressing the social, structural and systemic causes of harm.

Prevent and intervene alongside identifying and assessing harm

We found that professionals developing CS practice have prioritised creating systems capable of knowing more about the contexts where harm occurs. Safeguarding systems, policies and approaches appear better designed to identify and assess the locations and people impacted by harm, than to prevent or respond to such harm. Additionally, the contexts and harm-types professionals prioritise appear to be shaped by service/system concerns and issues causing the greatest anxiety to professionals (for example criminal exploitation), rather than those identified by young people. Where work does respond to contexts it is not always welfare-orientated or social-care led. For example, contextual interventions on the 'Planning for safety' ROTH pathway was often delegated to community safety partnerships who used behaviour-based or disruptive interventions, as opposed to ecological and/or welfare-based ones. The intersection of Domain one and Domain two are therefore of critical importance – indicating it is not just what you target, and how you target it, but who coordinates the 'targeting', that needs to be considered in a CS approach.

Address the social conditions of abuse not just places outside the home

Domain one has been strongly associated with working in places outside of the home and less with tackling the social conditions of abuse (as Domain one requires). For example, the rapid uptake and development of context assessments and extra-familial harm panels have been mostly focussed on identifying 'where' harm happens. Safeguarding professionals and agencies appear enthusiastic about working in new places. However, they often struggle to understand how to use ecological approaches to change the social conditions of those places and so they focus on changing the behaviour of individuals in those places instead. Some social workers believe that tackling the social conditions means mostly removing perpetrators of harm. Some feel unable to tackle the complexity of the exploitation directly and therefore focus on other things (like changing individual behaviour of parents and young people) out of a sense of needing to feel purposeful, even if this doesn't reduce harm or increase safety.

Professionals are not always supported to understand how services and professionals themselves can influence social conditions that negatively impact young people. Most social work departments involved in 'In the name of safeguarding' did not prioritise finding out about young people's educational contexts, like exclusion, despite the significant impact this could have on safety. Furthermore, professionals across projects spoke about challenges of exploring how partner agencies – specifically the police – shaped young people's experiences of different contexts and could result in young people feeling more unsafe.

In 'Sustaining social work' social workers talked about how they needed more freedom and creativity to practice differently and address the social conditions of harm. This was easier where there was local commitment to relationship-based practice and youth workers were a valued lead partner. In places where risk lay heavily on the shoulders of individual workers, it was much harder for these people to be creative in their thinking and actions. Despite the challenges of addressing social conditions in practice, social workers spoke passionately about how CS supported them to think and act differently. CS gave them a language for resisting behaviour-based responses and a vision for addressing social injustice, bringing them back to why they came into social work. These findings point to a need for more resourcing and professional support to facilitate the confidence and creativity required to think differently about intervening with the social conditions of abuse.

Understand structural and systemic causes of harm

Many professionals felt more comfortable assessing and building interventions that target the interpersonal aspects of extra-familial harm and less on the structural and systemic causes of harm. We found that over-intervention from safeguarding services could contribute to harm in extra-familial spaces, creating a cycle of increasing risk. For example, in 'Building safety', the use of arbitrary curfews for young people who were in the care of the local authority could increase the time young people were 'missing' for, if the young people were then worried about consequences on their return. 'In the name of safeguarding' showed that racially minoritised young people were disproportionately discussed at safeguarding panels and more likely to be described as 'gang affiliated' comparative to non-racially minoritised young people. These findings suggest that safeguarding systems need to monitor their activity according to whether they disproportionally target groups based on racialised bias.

'Planning for safety' showed that it is possible to create approaches that recognise and attempt to respond to system harm. For example, the ROTH pathway itself created the conditions to recognise harm caused by services or professional decision-making, and to challenge or address these as part of safety planning.

Consider safety as much as harm

When targeting extra-familial contexts, it is important to recognise that they can feature safety as well as harm. Members of the 'Building safety' project called for work to enhance and include safe relationships and places in young people's plans. They also shared the need for more places where young people can spend time or go to for respite. Intervening in extra-familial contexts should also mean increasing the capacity of universal services and organic support networks. Assessing the social conditions of harm and safety therefore means considering the places and people who are universally and ordinarily available to young people, not just targeted or professional services.

Domain two: Legislative framework

Incorporates extra-familial contexts into child protection frameworks

"we found that there was lots of significant harm being managed on child in need and a lot of the network would want it to come to a conference, which would then feel very punitive for families to go through that process when the risks weren't within their control" (Child Protection Chair)

Why was it needed?

Domain two requires that responses to extra-familial harm are underpinned by child protection and wider child welfare legislative frameworks rather than criminal justice ones. It addresses the fact that historically abuse in child-caregiver relationships was viewed as a child protection matter whereas abuse in extra-familial relationships was not. As a result, young people impacted by extra-familial harm, including those at risk of significant or fatal harm in extra-familial contexts, were often viewed as 'out-of-scope' in terms of child protection systems and wider social work support. Instead of their needs being considered, many young people impacted by extra-familial harm were viewed as 'anti-social' and primarily responded to by community safety and wider justice agencies, particularly those who committed 'offences' in the context of their abuse. According to Domain two, all children and young people at risk of significant harm are entitled to a child protection response, regardless of whether that harm occurs in a familial or extra-familial context. As a result, peer group, school and community contexts are drawn into the field of child protection; a field previously reserved for intervention with parents/carers. From the perspective of prevention, Domain two also requires that efforts to build safety in extra-familial contexts is driven by child-welfare principles that characterise children's services, youth work and community development practices, as opposed to community safety and justice models of disruption, surveillance and dispersal.

What have we learnt?

CS, and the use of Domain two, requires us to reiterate social work ethics and reframe features of child protection when taking a child-welfare approach to extra-familial harm.

Reframe the subject of child protection

For extra-familial harm to be addressed using a child protection framework, the focus of safeguarding intervention needs to be rethought. In England, as in many countries, parents/carers are the focus of the system. This needs to change because in many cases of extra-familial harm, risk/protection does not sit solely, if at all, with the actions of parents/carers. Instead, parents/carers work alongside other professionals in developing/implementing plans to keep young people safe. Findings from TNC demonstrated that this reframing is possible, for example, when using the ROTH child protection pathways during the 'Planning for safety' project. This project also found that it is possible to focus child protection systems on addressing young people's needs, rather than monitoring and mitigating risks; something that the 'Building safety' project identified as essential.

Centre proportionality and parity

Increased recognition of extra-familial harm, alongside a lack of policy oversight and practice knowledge about how to help, can lead to disproportionate state oversight and intervention into young people's lives. We need to apply a threshold of significant harm for statutory responses to extra-familial harm, similar to that used in traditional child protection. The 'Building safety' project illustrated that some young people, for example those in care, may be subject to intrusive statutory interventions that their peers in the same situations, but who live with their family, are not subject to; for example, being called 'missing' and being picked up by the police when late home without evidence of significant harm. In 'Planning for safety' a threshold of significant harm was applied for extra-familial harm as it would for harm within families; providing a clear way to differentiate situations that warrant increased professional intervention, and associated resourcing, and those that do not. All four TNC projects identified issues with parity in how systems are experienced, with racially minoritised children, and those impacted by criminal exploitation or serious violence (instead of sexual exploitation), often being viewed through a lens of, and receiving, punishment rather than protection. This risk requires attention to ensure that Domain two doesn't increase system harm in the lives of young people at risk of extra-familial harm.

Ensure work is lead by social care

Children's social care play a critical role in facilitating a child-welfare approach to extra-familial harm. However social workers described experiencing opposition when they advocated for what were perceived as 'soft' welfare responses as opposed to 'tough' or 'robust' policing ones. We therefore need a stronger articulation of a social care framework to guide responses to extra-familial harm, which foregrounds children's needs and best interests; language that does not characterise community safety or wider justice responses to the same issue. The 'Planning for safety' project evidenced how social care leadership is important in facilitating processes that respond to extra-familial harm as a child-welfare issue. By coordinating interagency plans under the leadership of social care, all partners were encouraged to focus their assessment of the issues, and their role in responding, in respect of young people's best interests, their welfare and their needs beyond any specific crime that may warrant attention from criminal justice organisations. Maintaining this level of leadership and building a culture of care amongst professionals who respond to extra-familial harm, can take its toll. Social workers in 'Sustaining social work' stressed the need for organisational cultures characterised by love, care and compassion with strong peer-support networks, to create the conditions for workers to care for others. They also spoke about how these conditions require stable financial resourcing for CS work.

Address structural and systemic harms

When Domain two was published, it was used to argue that specific extra-familial social contexts be brought into child protection processes (like peer groups, schools and public spaces). TNC has shown us that services, and not just social contexts, need to be brought into the frame of child protection. 'In the name of safeguarding' evidenced that school exclusion is a safeguarding issue, but one that social care and wider interagency panels often know little about when assessing need or planning support. 'Planning for safety' illustrated that decisions to exclude children from mainstream education can escalate the risks that they face. The ROTH pathway provided an example of an environment where this type of concern could be voiced. However, as it is a pathway reserved for significant harm it is insufficient for addressing the wider knowledge-gap surfaced by 'In the name of safeguarding'. 'Planning for safety' also evidenced that system harms caused by policing could be recognised and addressed via child protection pathways; with young people, parents and social workers all raising these concerns and conference chairs recommending that actions to address them be included in plans. The 'Building safety' consortium identified how important it is that CS is used in a way that addresses rather than replicates system harms; particularly those caused by intervention from statutory agencies. Young people described how child welfare approaches could also be facilitated by community and informal relationships, and asked that such relationships be promoted, with statutory intervention reserved for severe situations and only where they are warranted.

Domain three: Partnerships

Develops partnerships with individuals/agencies responsible for extra-familial contexts

"I feel like there should be not actually police picking you up, if you see what I mean. They should be like in town nowadays they have the suicide people going out instead of the police coming around on the docks and stuff. They should make a thing up for missing people". ('Building safety' Workshop One, Consortium Member)

Why was it needed?

Domain three is about ensuring that safeguarding responses draw on a range of partners. These partners need to have reach into the spaces and relationships where young people are harmed. Traditional safeguarding partners may not have the insight or leverage to enact change in young people's peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods. Collaboration with young people and their peers, with members of the community, youth work organisations, local businesses and community leaders is needed to build safety for young people in these spaces. Having the correct partners in place to respond when young people are being significantly harmed beyond their families is contingent on a shared understanding that the response should be rooted in child welfare legislation (Domain two) – and determines the ability to appropriately target/impact the social conditions of harm (Domains one and four).

What have we learnt?

We've learnt that those doing Domain three often rely on traditional partnerships. More support is needed to ensure Domain three aligns across the domains and with the values.

Build guardianship rooted in care and love

Greater levels of guardianship are required for young people in extra-familial settings. The values of youth work are particularly aligned to CS and youth workers are often best placed to deliver support to young people. Youth work provision should be flexible, available at the times when young people might need it, i.e. in the evenings and weekends, and universally available. Specialist services and provision for young people at risk of extra-familial harm can be stigmatising and labelling. Visible and accessible workers in the community for young people are helpful, for example detached youth workers. Such guardianship could reduce the need for statutory and police involvement in young people's lives.

Building relationships between young people's trusted networks, i.e. their families, friends and communities, and the professionals who are responsible for their care, is important to maximise guardianship for young people. These trusted relationships are not always in place and can be compromised by statutory processes and partnerships. Professionals felt the conflicting demands of building trusted relationships with young people whilst being part of multi-agency networks. Trust needs to be built between statutory agencies and grassroots and community-based organisations that support young people:

> "I struggle quite a lot when I go, right, I wanna bring in a community organisation to do this piece of work. And there's still a lot of negativity and mistrust from people quite high up within the council when we're talking about grassroots community organisations.('Building safety'" Consortium Member)

Findings from TNC raised the needs for partnerships to act with care and love; in 'Building safety' this looked like familiarity and respect, and usefulness i.e. offers of practical help like lifts and food. Pressure from professionals, proceduralism and fear of punishment were contributing factors to young people's vulnerability to harm. Police and social care responses were thought to be slower and less caring for Black children, and this was described as 'favouritism' and 'racism'.

Make sure partners are accountable for harm caused

All partners need to recognise that they can be a source of harm as well as a source of protection. Across TNC, tensions in relation to the police were raised: heavy handed and unhelpful policing of young people; information sharing with the police that could compromise safety; the dominance of police in multi-agency arrangements and bias from the police toward young people. Social care and education were flagged as having biased attitudes and practices towards specific groups of young people.

> "Not a happy bunny with police this weekend one bit... they have been putting curfews on kids and checking in on them - especially looked after young people and it's driving me mad... one child had his curfew checked at 2/3am... that is ... a blatant infringement of his human rights" ('Sustaining social work', Social Worker, Digital Diary)

The ROTH pathway appeared to create the conditions in which system harm by policing and education partners could be raised, allowing parents/young people to make choices about which professionals were present.

Ensure collaboration with young people and families is seen as essential

All partners, including parents/carers, need to have space to recognise their responsibility (and the limits of it) in creating safety around young people. Focus on extra-familial drivers can include the contribution of parents to safety planning, however professionals must also acknowledge the impact that such collaboration can have:

> "I think a little bit more understanding for those that aren't parents of how much, you know, how much that sort of stuff hurts and how much it affects you, how long it takes you to get over listening to all of that stuff" ('Planning for safety', Parent interview)

A variety of approaches are needed to ensure young people's views are heard and considered; some young people may not feel safe to participate in statutory activities, while others will – their views should still be sought (and shared with consent). Young people's involvement in planning can ensure that the support provided is what they need.

Set clear roles and responsibilities for partners

We found that partners do not always understand what their role is in contributing to safety planning in relation to extra-familial harm. A stronger policy and practice framework is needed to support multi-agency partners to reach a shared vision and approach to young people. There is significant variation in the partnerships that different areas draw on. In some areas, social workers were thought to be best placed to co-ordinate safeguarding responses whilst youth workers and grass-roots organisations were best placed to deliver support to young people and were resourced and trusted to do so. However, social workers also expressed a wish for freedom to practice in roles that allow them to work creatively alongside young people, through caring relationships with them, expressing social justice and ecological values, and saw CS as legitimising this. This new learning about Domain three therefore suggests that we re-think the nature and purpose of professional roles within and beyond social work in responding to contexts, and young people, impacted by extra-familial harm.

Domain four: Outcomes

Monitor outcomes of success in relation to contextual, as well as individual change

"It does still feel to me that a lot of our conversations we're having ..is about actions that relate to what we expect the child to do, or the parent to do. And...to me, all of this should be about us shifting that – that weight of responsibility on to us doing something about the context" (Social Worker, Planning for Safety)

Why was it needed?

Domain four helps us know if we created contextual safety. In traditional safeguarding, 'cases' are closed when individual children are thought to be safer. This is usually measured by looking at whether their behaviour, or their parents' behaviour, has changed. But in CS, we don't solely ask has the child/parents' behaviour changed. Instead, we ask whether the contexts in which young people are safer, and how this relates to any change (or lack of change) in their behaviour. When it comes to extra-familial harm, if we don't have a way to measure if a context is safer, then it's possible that the harm could persist. Even if one child is safer, other children who are linked to that context could still be harmed. If we think of a peer

group in a school where a child is being bullied; that child could move to a different school, and their 'case' closed because the bullying has stopped. But if we follow Domain four, and measure changes in the context, we might find that the peer group dynamics have not changed, and another child is now being bullied in the same way. So, Domain four helps us to measure if contexts have changed for the better, and to use this as the basis for deciding when to end intervention.

What have we learnt?

We need values-led outcomes measures that are shaped by young people and with critical awareness of structural inequality and discrimination. Practitioners need support to be able to identify and measure contextual outcomes.

How changes are made is as important as what changes are made

In TNC we learnt that there are two elements to measuring contextual change. The first element (the 'what') is about whether a response has built safety around young people. To do this we ask if extra-familial spaces and relationships in the context have improved. The second element (the 'how') is about the way that changes have been delivered. For example, in 'Building safety', the consortium identified that it's important to create responses and services that show care, flexibility and fairness towards young people. This means that we need to listen to how young people experience safeguarding responses – do they feel stigmatised or helped? Responses that seem right to professionals can be experienced by young people as neither creating safety nor caring.

It is not enough to measure whether young people are safer from exploitation or violence, we must also measure outcomes according to how interventions are delivered and experienced. Our goal should be to reduce unhelpful professional interventions that put pressure on young people to behave in certain ways and to increase young people's access to caring, respectful relationships and places. It is important to remember that changing the attitude of professionals, or the structure of a service, can be the main outcome of a contextual response.

Be sensitive to inequality and difference

We need to be cautious about any outcome claims that pretend that safeguarding responses treat all young people the same. In TNC we saw that services are often influenced by stereotypes – about being in the care of the local authority, being a boy, being racially minoritised, being from certain 'backgrounds' or living in a particular area. In 'Sustaining social work', Black social workers also described being subject to similar stereotypes by other professionals. 'In the name of safeguarding' highlighted how a quarter of racially minoritised children open to extra-familial harm panels did not have their education experiences recorded by children's social care, making it impossible to routinely consider their school contexts. In 'Building safety' we heard that boys who went missing were reported to the police more than girls, even though the same number of boys and girls went missing in that area.

When we measure outcomes, we should not do so naively, treating service interventions as neutral. We need critical awareness of how inequalities shape interventions and therefore shape what we measure. Our outcomes should be designed with our eyes wide open to the

intersecting inequalities and differences that young people experience and the tools we use to measure outcomes should be diverse, to mitigate assumptions and discrimination.

Set goals and measures based on how young people see the world

TNC has underlined the importance of setting goals and outcomes measures based on how young people experience the world. We must not assume that we know what it's like to experience extra-familial harm or to be subject to services intervening in our lives. In 'Building safety', for example, young people told us that the risks they experience were often aggravated by the web of professionals, services and rules that shaped their day to day lives. They were especially clear about the need to reduce police presence in their lives unless absolutely necessary. Practitioners in 'Sustaining social work' echoed how goals and values that they develop alongside young people seem to be often misaligned with those of other professionals, especially the police. They spoke about how they had learnt to value and measure small changes, which were not necessarily the things that service leaders or other agencies cared about and which did not fit neatly into performance targets.

To arrive at successful outcomes, we need all partners, including those at a senior level, to agree not only to a shared set of goals, but a shared way of arriving at those goals and a shared way of measuring them. This must be guided by what matters to the young people affected, alongside their experiences, views and needs.

Support practitioners to develop skills to measure contextual outcomes

In CS, practitioners make changes to extra-familial contexts at two levels. Level one describes how, during traditional case work, practitioners make changes to the contexts around an individual young person. At level two, a context itself (e.g. a peer group, park, school) becomes the 'case' and once it has been assessed, changes are made accordingly that could affect multiple young people. The description of Domain four might lead us to think that it is primarily about measuring level two work. While this is important, and continues to be the focus of learning and development, we have also learnt that we need to explore further what it means to measure outcomes at Level one. In 'Planning for safety' and 'Sustaining social work' most participating social workers were working at level one and needed support to identify a contextual outcome and to link their actions to contextual change. When asked to name an outcome on child protection plans, social workers tended to confuse tools for doing CS work with what the response aimed to achieve, for example, peer-mapping being described as an outcome when it is a means to explore and display the relationships between a group of young people.

We need to build the skills and confidence of professionals to set contextual goals when they are creating safety around individual young people (level one), and the ability to interrogate whether their actions have achieved those goals. This could significantly support new developments at level one like the ROTH pathway, strengthen the role of social work and related roles in CS generally, and lay a foundation for developing a similar set of goals and outcome measurements at level two.

Conclusion

Implementing The Next Chapter of Contextual Safeguarding

It is only through efforts to do Contextual Safeguarding that we have learnt about how far we have come and how far we must go to realise the vision set out in the CS Framework. Through a deeper understanding of the four domains of the CS Framework we can identify thematic priorities for future implementation.

Contextual Safeguarding not only requires that we draw extra-familial harms and extra-familial contexts into child protection systems. It requires that those systems are fundamentally reimagined. Contextual Safeguarding can only be achieved through child protection systems and wider child welfare approaches that: address structural and system harms, as well as interpersonal ones; create safety and not solely disrupt risk/harm; and effect change beyond the behaviour of individuals.

The way we adopt Contextual Safeguarding is as important as what we do to facilitate it. Ensuring that the values of Contextual Safeguarding are at the forefront of implementation is one way to do this. Contextual Safeguarding might require us to work beyond individuals, but this should not be at the expense of relationships. Instead, relationships, particularly those characterised by care and collaboration, are at the heart of contextual safety.

Structural and system harm, and the oppressive and discriminatory effects of such harm, both drive extra-familial interpersonal harm and undermine efforts to adopt Contextual Safeguarding. To ensure that Contextual Safeguarding is of benefit to all those young people in need of support and/or protection, we must recognise that our current systems are not experienced equally. In fact, some intervention is harmful to some young people, and Contextual Safeguarding must provide avenues to recognise and address this fact, rather than reproduce it.

As much as we have used Contextual Safeguarding to principally focus on reforming social care responses to extra-familial harm, our work has evidenced that this can only be achieved through interagency adoption. This is likely to be complicated. Contextual Safeguarding is built on values that centre children's best interests, needs and welfare, and this is not the driving value base of all partner agencies or the frameworks through which they are measured. Partnership implementation of Contextual Safeguarding requires a partnership commitment that prioritises child welfare objectives as paramount in the way agencies respond to extra-familial harm.

To help people hold these ideas in mind we have produced an image of the Contextual Safeguarding domains and values, that summarises the key tenets of how the approach should be implemented in future. However, we also note that such progress cannot be achieved by individual practitioners alone. Nor are they solely in the gift of local organisations or interagency partnerships. We recognise that national policy and guidance, as well as

commissioning and funding decisions, create conditions that will either frustrate or enable the ethical take-up of Contextual Safeguarding in the future. Our work has identified various policy recommendations, published separately to this briefing, that we believe are critical to supporting the advances we have witnessed in local services over recent years. We will pursue these through the next phase of our research programme, and look forward to working with our Contextual Safeguarding practice champions, local area interest network members, voluntary and community sector partners, UK advisory policy group, and the young people, families, and communities in the areas we support, in creating safeguarding systems capable of protecting young people beyond their front doors.