Context Safeguarding Conferences Guidance

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The University of Bedfordshire with the Hackney Contextual Safeguarding Team

Background

Contextual Safeguarding (CS) is an approach to safeguarding that supports practitioners to recognise and respond to the harm young people experience outside of the home.[1] This Context Safeguarding Conference guidance has been developed by Hackney Children and Families Services with the University of Bedfordshire to support practitioners to consider how to carry out a Context Safeguarding Conference. This guidance is designed to be used following a context assessment. Guidance on carrying out a school assessment, a neighbourhood assessment or a peer group assessment can be found on the Assessment section of the Contextual Safeguarding Implementation Toolkit.

The purpose of a Context Safeguarding Conference meeting is to explore the identified risks and safety young people experience within a specific context, reduce risks and increase protection and agree an intervention plan accordingly. Context Safeguarding Conferences differ to meetings to discuss individual young people that may be affected by issues related to their families or home environment (such as Child Protection (CP) conferences or Child In Need (CIN) Reviews) and instead consider broader factors within specific contexts that may impact young people's safety.

Context Safeguarding Conferences are delivered through a lens of safeguarding and child welfare, and as such are chaired by independent chairs who also chair Child Protection Conferences. Professionals who participated in some of the first Context Safeguarding Conferences in Hackney commented how this chairing arrangement distinguished these meetings from others focused on crime reduction; they welcomed the focus on child welfare and the tone this gave to conversations and action planning.

Much like a Child Protection Conference, Context Safeguarding Conferences are held following a context assessment, when it is deemed that this context is one in which young people are at risk of significant harm. As such the conference focuses on findings of the assessment including risks, vulnerabilities and strengths with associated actions. A proportion of the meeting should be used to discuss an intervention plan and to task actions to agencies and partners. The focus and attendees of the conference will vary depending on the context but should include practitioners and agencies who can influence the nature of that context, as detailed in the guidance below.

Structure of this guidance document:

- Planning for Context Safeguarding Conferences
- Roles and responsibilities
- Governance
- Actions
- Appendix A: Exemplar report structures
- Appendix B: Example intervention plan
- Appendix C: Exemplar minutes of Context Safeguarding Conferences

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[1] Visit www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk for more information.

This guidance should be used alongside the Terms of Reference and Information Sharing Agreement for Context Safeguarding Conferences – both available in the CS Implementation Toolkit.

Planning for Context Safeguarding Conferences

Structure of meeting

Context Safeguarding Conferences follow the same structure as Child Protection Conferences. However roles and representation within the meeting will vary between contexts. This may be clearer in some contexts. For example if the focus of a Context Safeguarding Conference is a school then the school itself would be the focus of the conference and the school's leadership team would take the role of the concerned parents as individuals with overall responsibility for that context. In other contexts the division of roles may be less evident. For example it may be a private business and a collection of council departments with the ability to influence the nature of a public space. Like CP conferences, Context Safeguarding Conferences are chaired by Independent Chairs with cases presented by a lead practitioner who oversaw assessment that is being presented. Table One below outlines some of the similarities and differences between a Hackney Child Protection Conference and Context Safeguarding Conference with example roles:

	CP Conference	**Context Safeguarding Conference**
Chair	Independent Chair	Independent Chair
Presenting case	Lead social worker	Lead social worker
Parent	Parent or Carer of child	Place Manager (Head Teacher, Business Owner, Council etc.)
Focus of meeting	The nature of the family environment and the impact that it has on individual children in the household (personal details discussed)	The nature of the context itself and the impact it has on the welfare of a collection of young people (personal details not discussed)
Chronology/history	Relevant factors in the family history presented	Relevant factors in the history of that context presented

Table 1: Example focus and representation of meetings

Pre conference: assessment and report

Before holding a Context Safeguarding Conference an identified social worker or practitioner should carry-out a contextual assessment. This will include identifying risks, vulnerabilities and strengths within a particular context. As part of this process the lead social worker/practitioner should have identified specific areas of concern relating to the context and begun to consider an intervention plan following the assessment. Throughout the assessment the lead social worker/practitioner should have worked with different partners and agencies, including young people within the context and external agencies to ensure the assessment identifies a range of factors and partners that could increase safety. Guidance

and tools to carry out a context assessments can be found on the Assessment section of toolkit.

Following the assessment and prior to the Context Safeguarding Conference the findings of the assessment should be written up in a report for those attending the conference. Appendix A provides an example overview of what to include within the assessment report. The report and findings should be circulated to attendees prior to the meeting.

In some cases it may be advisable to meet with individuals before the Context Safeguarding Conference and to outline the findings and suggested plan. This will allow the lead practitioner to highlight any findings, check that the information is correct and provide attendees with an opportunity to review and discuss the assessment before the conference.

Location

It is advisable to hold the Context Safeguarding Conference in, or close to, the context under discussion where possible. For example if a school is the site of the assessment then the conference should be held at the school or if it is about a housing estate it should be held in a community hall or space within or near that estate. This facilitates the ability for professionals and partners to attend. If it isn't possible, for example the context is a stairwell or high street, it may be helpful to hold it in a local community centre or an area nearby.

Agenda

Enough time should be allocated to the conference to allow for a discussion of the assessment findings, agreeing the plan and allocating actions. Conference time should be spent discussing matters of priority within the assessment – these should be determined prior to the meeting. The Lead Practitioner should prioritise which issues will be discussed, choosing one or two and communicating this to both the Chair and conference attendees prior to the meeting. A suggested agenda is below:

1. Introduction and brief overview of meeting aim (Chair)
2. Current concerns – what triggered the referral, how many young people are known to be affected by the context (and where do they sit in Children's Services at present) and any additional information required to set the scene for attendees (Lead practitioner)
3. Overarching contextual vulnerability, risk and resilience factors
4. Contextual strengths
5. Current professional involvement with the context
6. Agreed plan of priority interventions/actions to increase protection/safety in that context

Roles and Responsibilities

Decision making

The meeting should be chaired by an Independent Chair and the case presented by the Lead practitioner. Actions will be agreed at the meeting to be taken forward and will be the responsibility of individual agencies to follow up and provide an update across the network and at subsequent review meetings. Appendix B provides an example intervention plan.

Role of Lead Practitioner

The role of the Lead Practitioner is to present an overview of the assessment conducted and outline key contextual findings that the meeting will focus on. It is likely that multiple issues will be raised during the assessment, it is essential that any pre-meeting discussions the lead practitioner considers which key issues will be raised in the meeting and categorises or orders them in terms of weighting/priorities. While there may be many issues impacting a context, it is important to decide which issues meet a threshold for statutory intervention (aligned to the partnerships thresholds (see context threshold document for further insights)) and are relevant to Contextual Safeguarding. Throughout the meeting it is the role of the lead practitioner to guide partners towards developing a plan – presenting identified concerns and with the support of the chair problem-solving what partners could do to affect that contextual factor. It will be the role of the lead practitioner to coordinate the delivery of plan, working alongside and brokering actions between multiple partners to ensure commitments at met.

Role of Independent Chair

Context Safeguarding Conferences are focused on safeguarding the welfare of young people and meetings chairs play a central role in maintaining this ethos. The role of the Independent Chair is to ensure that the meeting focusses on the key contextual factors outlined in the assessment and to facilitate the development of a plan. It is essential that the Independent Chair has a good understanding and knowledge of Contextual Safeguarding and is aware of the aim and purpose of Context Safeguarding Conference. To support the chair in their role it is advisable for the Lead Practitioner to set up a consultation with the chair ahead of the meeting. In this pre-meeting the Lead Practitioner can share the assessment with the chair and give them an idea of what the suggested plan might be.

During the meeting the Chair will need to keep attendees focused on selected contextual issues. Familiarity with the Context Threshold Document, relevant Context Assessment Triangle, and priority findings in the assessment will all assist with this. This will involve outlining what the issues are and ensuring that the discussion remains focussed on the context in question – and contextual factors (as per the thresholds document or context assessment triangle) that are impacting the welfare of young people in that context – rather than discussing the individual characteristics of any individual young people or families associated to that context. They can also provide challenge to partners, and motivate them to problem-solve contextual issues – where necessary making reference to the context intervention catalogue to think through what steps may be taken to create contextual safety. Conference chairs may also find it helpful to reference the specific text in Working Together 2018 which recommends that:

- thematic issues within contexts to be addressed (Chapter 1, Paragraph 12)
- plans must address environmental factors which impact the welfare of young people when extra-familial risks are identified (Chapter 1, Paragraphs 33-34)
- a range of agencies (under Section 11 of the Children Act 1989) have a duty to create cultures of safety, equality and protection with the services they provide (Chapter 2, Paragraph 3)

It is important that they ensure sufficient time is provided for developing the plan and tasking actions.

Attendance

Attendance to the meeting will vary depending on issues raised by the assessment. It is important that there is sufficient attendance by multi-agency practitioners, community members (where appropriate) and those that have responsibility for the context. Careful attention should be taken to ensure a range of practitioners are present. If a number of young people open to Children's Services are affected by that context the lead practitioner for the context assessment will meet their workers prior to the Context Safeguarding Conference and report back to them afterwards in a separate meeting to keep numbers at the Context Safeguarding Conference manageable – and to avoid specific discussion about individual young people.

When deciding upon who to invite it is important to consider the following:

- What agencies/ practitioners/ community members have been engaged throughout the assessment process and can provide further detail to the issues raised?
- Who is already engaged with work within the context?
- Who has capacity to affect and implement changes that may be suggested in the particular contexts raised?
- Who has best placed to represent young people's voices and consider the opinions of those that may be affected by planned interventions?

The following outlines a range of practitioners/ agencies that could be considered:

- Children's Social Care
- Local Council representatives
- Community Safety
- Education/ local schools
- Representation from parents forum (or similar)
- Representation from young people/ school council (where relevant)
- Police (Safer Schools Officer/ Community police)
- Youth Justice Service
- CAMHs
- Local youth provision
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Health – school nurse
- Health – sexual health
- Housing
- Local businesses

Consideration should be given to how parents, carers and young people affected by that context will be involved in the assessment and planning process.

Governance

Terms of reference

An exemplar Terms of Reference for a Context Safeguarding Conference, outlining the aims, membership and governance or meetings, and how outcomes of the assessment and plan will be shared with them is available under Tier 2 of the Planning section of the toolkit.

Information sharing

Statutory partners are asked to apply the same confidentiality and information storage procedures as they would for a Child Protection Conference. An additional Information Sharing Agreement – also available under Tier 2 of the Planning section of the toolkit – is particularly important for non-traditional safeguarding partners such as local businesses. All attendees are reminded that individual and personal level details are not to be discussed in Context Safeguarding Conferences – and that the focus of discussion should be the nature of the context itself and how it impacts upon the welfare of young people.

Minute taking

The Independent Chair of a Context Safeguarding Conference will use flipchart paper to capture the key discussion points of the meeting under the following headings which act as a visual reference during the meeting:

- Current concerns/ risks/ vulnerabilities
- Complicating factors
- Strengths
- Safety plan (intervention plan)

Appendix C provides a template for minute-taking during or after the Context Safeguarding Conference. These were converted into minutes after the meeting.

Actions

Intervention plan

Following the meeting the agreed intervention plan should written-up and disseminated with relevant tasks allocated to different agencies and timescales allocated (Exemplar in Appendix C). The lead practitioner is responsible for coordinating the actions on the plan. A core group of professionals who will work together to ensure the progression of the plan may be identified. A review meeting will be held to monitor progress, and the case will be closed once actions have increased levels of safety and/or reduced risks/concerns in the context in question.

Referrals to social care

While the purpose of the meeting is to discuss factors within contexts rather than individual children, the process of the assessment might highlight safeguarding concerns relating to individual young people. In this instance, a referral should be made to the appropriate social

care team for follow up prior to, or following, the Context Safeguarding Conference, and are not to be discussed at the meeting.

Follow-up and review

Depending on the plan and issues raised it may be relevant to hold a follow up meeting after a period of time to review the plan and actions. Individual meetings can also be held with different partners or at multi-agency review meeting.

If you have any questions or have used this guidance please get in touch via the Contextual Safeguarding Network.

Appendix A: Report Templates

Exemplar report structures

Table of Contents

1. Summary of initial concerns that triggered a context referral and the young people and families affected (overview of numbers of open to service)
2. The Community affected, or associated to, that context
3. Young People's Views on the context gathered during assessment
4. Thematic Contextual Issues
a) XXX
b) XXX
c) XXX
5. Resources, services and potential guardianship in the context
6. Assessment Conclusion – including context weighting and identified priorities
7. Suggested Contextual Safeguarding Plan

Other option is the structure the report around the three corners of the assessment triangle as follows:

Table of Contents

1. Summary of concerns and thematic overview of affected young people and families
2. Context Assessment Triangle Findings
a) Young people's needs in the context
b) Context Guardianship
c) Environmental Factors associated to the Context
3. Thematic Contextual Issues Identified
4. Young People's and Parents' Views
5. Assessment Conclusion and Context Weighting
6. Proposed Plan

Appendix B: Example Intervention Plan

Context Intervention Plan

Assessment period:	DATES
Pre-meeting date:	DATE
Context Safeguarding Conference date:	DATE
Context	School – Year 9
Date of review:	DATE
Attendees:	LIST

Identified Need or Problem	Intervention to be offered	Agency/Team responsible	Timescale
Normalisation of harmful sexual behaviour/ norms amongst students including sexual harassment within school by male students.	Bystander Approach Intervention to be delivered to staff and students.	Early Help	
	Review of school policies/procedures to include greater detail on school response to harmful sexual behaviour ensuring links between behaviour policy and safeguarding policy	School	
	Well-being survey to be administered across all year groups annually including questions about corridor culture, sexual harassment and harmful sexual behaviours in school.	School	Annually
Young people feel unsafe in local neighbourhood locations	Further consultation with students to be undertaken including safety mapping local neighbourhood and routes to school.	Lead Social Worker	
	Following consultation, discuss issues raised and concerns and	Safer neighbourhoods	

	plan with Safer Neighbourhoods/ Community safety: • enforcement response XXX where students have reported XXX • increased lighting and supervision in identified areas		
Apparent variation in staff responses to students based on class/gender/ethnicity of students	School to access training on unconscious bias and provide training to all staff.	School	
	Review policies and procedures in relation to unconscious bias and the schools response to gender, racism and class.	School	
	School to amend behaviour log recording to process to ensure that actions taken, as well as issue raised, is being recorded and any themes monitored by designated safeguarding lead	School	

Appendix C: Minute-taking template with examples

Current concerns/ risk/ vulnerabilities	Complicating factors	Strengths	Safety Plan

• *Normalisation of harmful sexual behaviour*
  • *instances of sexual harassment in schools by male pupils*
  • *low reporting of bullying but high levels reported sexual touching/ comments by students in survey*
  • *concerns of abuse through social media*
• *Students report feeling unsafe in local area (school journeys)*
  • *concerns about local park*
  • *fear in relation to 'gang' activity*
  • *feel unsafe between3-6pm*
• *Key community partners not present at meeting.*
• *Cohort of girls vulnerable to CSE within student body – appear to be have been groomed by adult males online.*
• *Feeling that external agencies not listening to concerns being raised*
• *School not informed of interventions that have taken place in the past*
	• *School staff unsure how to challenge sexually abusive behaviour*
	• *School feel messages by parents and wider community counter the schools ethos of gender equality.*
	• *Attendees unclear as to why do young people report feeling unsafe when surveyed*
	• *Congregation of young- how to should staff respond?*
	• *What makes young people feel safe in some areas?*
	• *How to engage community agencies/partners?*
	• *Age of those perpetrating CSE is unclear? Is it adults or peers?*
	• *How have the students met those who pose a risk? Is it online or through other students?*
	• *How can the school best link to other agencies?*
		• *Year 7s have strong relationships with adults*
		• *Students feel safe when at school and enjoy after school activities*
		• *Targeted work started in school to tackle sexual harassment has commenced.*
		• *Low homophobic bullying reported by students*
			• *Bystander interventions with staff and students*
			• *Further work with young people to map safe and unsafe areas outside school.*
			• *Work with police and community safety to respond to areas identified as unsafe.*
			• *Review of school policies, behaviour logs and procedures in relation to harmful sexual behaviour.*
			• *Feedback to students following student survey*
			• *CSE assessment and trauma informed work with specific cohort identified (to be followed up in separate plan for the group)*