

Undertaking location assessments - guidance and advice

Developing safeguarding practice with young people at risk of harm in locations, communities, and neighbourhoods

June 2022

Location Assessments: contents

When young people are harmed within their communities and neighbourhoods, what is the role of social care? How can other people get involved and what are the frameworks and ethical considerations that need to be held in mind? Here we provide general advice and specific guidance based on the learning from Scale-up test sites, to support you to get going with location assessments.

General learning about location assessments

1. Routes into a context assessment
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Specific advice and guidance

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Next steps

Here we set out where to go with this knowledge, once your assessment has been completed.

Routes into a locations assessment

When should we be concerned about safety in a location? How do we know when a location needs a safeguarding assessment and intervention? Here is some of the learning on this from Scale-up sites about routes into location assessments.

Extra-Familial Harm Panels

Many areas have a panel to discuss harm outside the home. Even if the agenda is to discuss individual young people, locations are sometimes identified and themes can emerge about the places where, for example young people are known to spend time and are vulnerable to exploitation. If these links are made, it can lead to questions about what is happening in that context and trigger a context assessment.

Professional knowledge of events

Professionals' knowledge of a community can often trigger a location assessment. For example, in the past locations have referred for assessment following practitioners responding to serious incidents where young people have been harmed, or after sharing historical knowledge among different partners about a location of concern.

Other assessments

During other contextual work, involving young people harmed outside the home, locations can be identified as needing their own assessment. For example, if, during a peer assessment a location where young people are at risk is identified, this could trigger a location assessment alongside the peer assessment.

Deciding on the parameters of assessment

Remember a location assessment can be as small as assessing safety in a bus stop, park bench, or specific shop. While it may be tempting to conduct an assessment of a large area, the bigger the location, the more difficult it can be to assess and intervene with. If a large location is causing concern for young people, consider breaking it down into manageable locations and assessing them individually, then bringing together these assessments at a later date to look at collectively. Ensure your response is proportional to the size of the location.

An overview of the task

When you lead a locations assessment it is important to develop a clear goal that is shared by the key partners. Your task will be to make sure that the work stays aligned to this goal at every stage of the planning and delivery - which is not always an easy thing to do. In this section we share some key questions for anyone who is leading a location assessment to consider at the outside and throughout the assessment process.

Who should we include?

To answer this question, think about who is linked to this location through their work, leisure, education, because they volunteer or attend religious gatherings in the location or because they live there. Find out who is influential in this location and why.

When you start you will probably identify traditional safeguarding partners, like colleagues from children's social care, youth workers, VCS organisations, schools, community safety teams, youth offending teams, and the police.

Next think about non-traditional partners - people who care about the place and want to see it safe for young people. This might lead you to business owners, residents, community leaders, housing partners, and faith leaders.

Young people's views and experiences will be central to the assessment. The assessment will be shaped by where they feel safe and unsafe, how they experience harm in this location, and what they would change in their community.

What are we trying to achieve?

Start by developing a shared goal with those involved. To align with Contextual Safeguarding, the goal will need to be framed around the welfare of young people. You will need to affirm and reaffirm with partners, that the focus is creating safety for young people in the locations where they spend their time and not disrupting crime or perceived 'anti-social behaviour'.

Have a look at the toolkit for more resources to help with this including a video on being welfare led.

What determines the response?

When the assessment is complete its time to create a response plan. At this point it is easy to revert to use those traditional responses that are already available, but these are unlikely to address the needs of the context. Remember that assessing a context is a new form of social work practice, and so its likely to require new response.

To help with this ask:

- Will the response target the harm found in the location?
- What do we hope the response will achieve?
- How will the response impact the location and the young people who spend time there?

The Context Weighting Tool (found on the toolkit) will help with this)

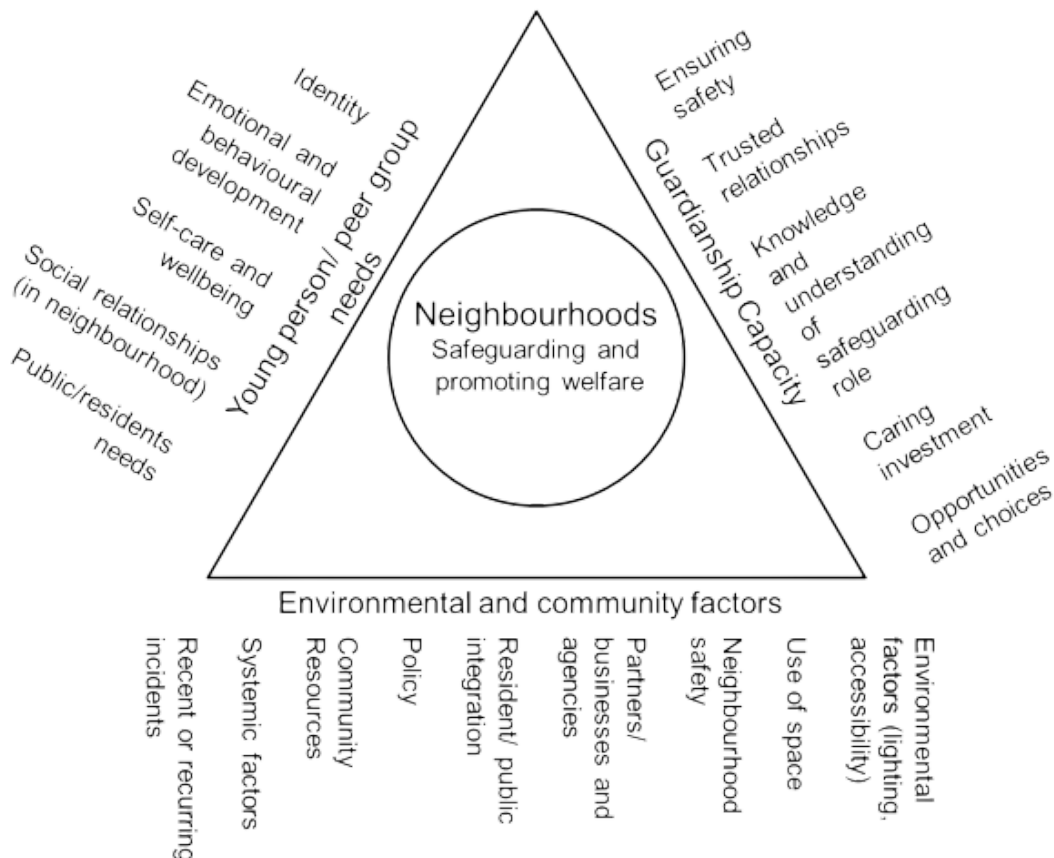
Neighbourhood assessment triangle

Location assessments help practitioners to gain insight into extra-familial contexts and organise complex information about how young people operate within these context. They also enable practitioners to understand the specific ways in which the environmental factors around a location contribute to the harm that young people face there.

In location assessments we broaden those elements that are traditionally the focus of

child and family assessments, applying them to contexts outside the home. Figure one below outlines the different elements that should be considered. These fall across three domains:

1. Young person/peer group needs - how the young people or person operates within the location
2. Guardianship capacity - the capacity, willingness and ability of guardians to keep young people safe in the neighbourhood. These will vary depending on the context or location.
3. Environmental and community factors - which other factors affect the safety of the young people? These may relate to existing resources/services in the location, the policies in place to safeguard young people, and systemic factors such as the impact of poverty in the area.



**COMMON PITFALLS**

Contextual Safeguarding practice is relatively new. Those first sites who have tested the local assessments have shared their learning to help others avoid their mistakes and to give a heads up on the likely challenges:

Contain the area under focus: it can be tempting to try and increase the location assessment area to incorporate the surrounding contexts. While the interplay with nearby contexts is important to consider, remember that if the location area is too big it can be unwieldy and difficult to manage.

Increase safety, not surveillance: while policing and crime-prevention strategies have their place, it is important to remain focussed on increasing safety. Remember to keep viewing young people as in need of a safeguarding response, rather than punitive one. Moving young people out of an area does not always reduce their risk and could just move them on to new areas where they are vulnerable.

Be prepared to develop new responses: it is essential that the response plan that follows on from your locations assessment targets the context of harm. Interventions should not only take place in the context where the harm happens but should also seek to change the dynamics in that context. For example, this might be seeking to alter negative attitudes towards young people, rather than trying to alter the behaviour of individual young people. It is likely you will need to develop new responses rather than relying solely on interventions people are familiar with, so be creative and enjoy the process (*see the responses catalogue on the toolkit for ideas*).

Create active guardians: engaging partners in being good guardians in a location is central to a Contextual Safeguarding approach. This might start with training people to spot signs of exploitation and abuse so they can report it - but it doesn't end there. We also need to engage guardians to take ownership for creating safety in their communities and to support them to develop appropriate trusting relationships that will reduce harm and promote safety.

Developing partnerships

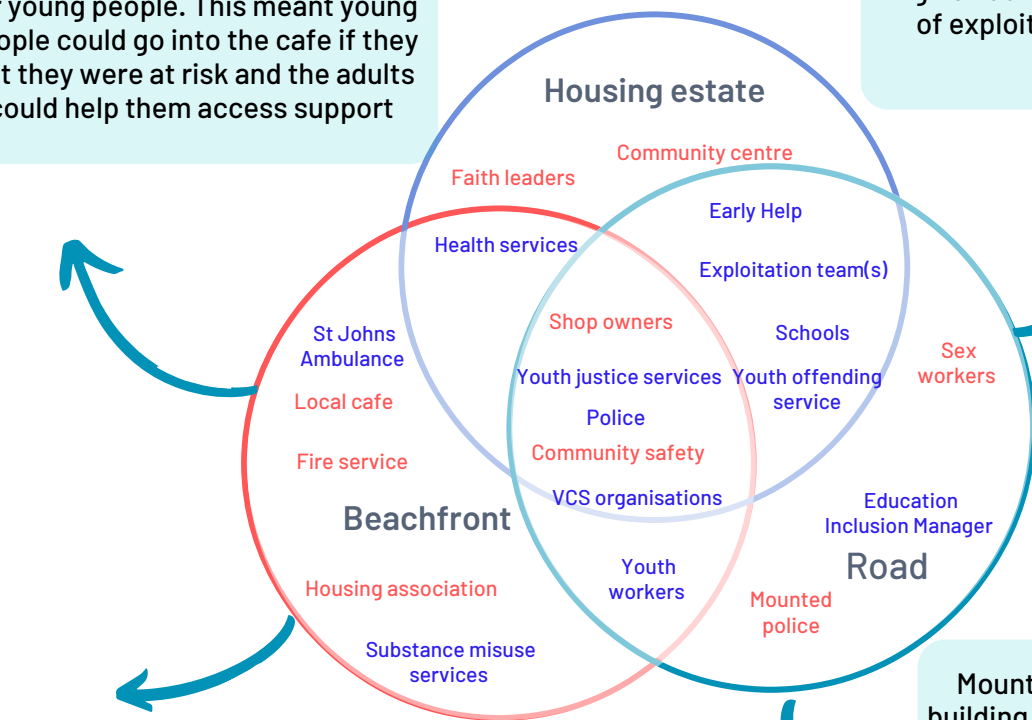
Who should be involved in a location assessment? We start by asking who has influence in the location and who can make it safer?

Location assessment partners can be split into two categories: **traditional** and **non-traditional**. Traditional partners are professionals who hold a safeguarding duty or have professional (often

statutory) responsibilities for health, well-being, education or crime prevention within a location, community, or group. Non-traditional partners are those who do not usually hold safeguarding responsibilities, but who might be able to provide support to young people and have the capacity to increase safety in the location. They must have the capacity to influence what happens in the location and/or the lives of young people who are at risk in the location. Here are examples of traditional/non-traditional partners that were engaged in location assessments:

In the Beachfront location assessment, a local café was engaged to become a “safe space” for young people. This meant young people could go into the cafe if they felt they were at risk and the adults could help them access support

Sex workers were engaged as community guardians in a location where young people were at risk of sexual exploitation. They were given advice on how to spot signs of exploitation, and resources on reporting.



The housing association in this local area increased community engagement by doing leaflet drops to local residents explaining what was going on and how residents could help keep young people safe

Mounted police conducted trust-building exercises with young people, including sessions with horses for the young people who had experienced sexual exploitation. They also developed their guardianship capacity by introducing ‘code phrases’ that young people could say to them, meaning they would remove them from a location immediately without arousing suspicion from potential abusers.

How to gather information

There isn't one way of running an assessment. Below are some examples of methods used by sites to gather information and assess the safety and risk in a location.

Safety mapping

Safety mapping is a way to understand where a young person feels safe or unsafe in a community. They are useful to conduct with young people as part of a locations assessment to inform how young people relate to a context, who they have good relationships with and how safety can be strengthened. See our *'Safety Mapping Exercise'* document for more guidance on how to conduct mapping with young people.

Surveys with young people

Doing a survey with young people is a more 'formal' way (compared to, say, informal discussion) of finding out what young people think about safety in the location. It's important to think about where young people feel happiest and safest sharing their experiences of safety and harm - e.g. would they rather speak to you in a group or fill out an anonymous survey? See *'Developing a Survey'* section below for more information.

Surveys with community members

Surveys can be used with people who live and work in a community and business owners in a location. Survey questions need to be tailored for the group you are consulting with. Findings from surveys should inform the safety plan that follows the assessment. See *'Developing a Survey'* section below for more information

Observations

Observations of a context are good for helping practitioners get to know an area and what's going on there. Observations should focus on the built environment and how young people use the space. They can also be good for engaging people in the community about the safety of young people to inform the assessment, and identifying potential guardians. See our *neighbourhood observation video* for more information

How to engage the community

People who live and work in a location where you are conducting an assessment are a great source of knowledge and potential partnership. By engaging these people you can learn more about the social dynamics of a place and find people who are willing to be guardians. Of course, some people are more than happy to be involved in creating safety in their community, some may take time to understand and agree, whilst others will be simply unable or unwilling to engage. It's good to be mindful of this unpredictability and that things may not run as smoothly as you might like.

Engaging different community members

Think about which partners are likely to engage the young people in this context. For example, some young people mistrust the police and would prefer to engage with youth workers.

Think too about who is best placed to engage businesses, residents, and other community members.

Make sure what you learn about engagement is shared with colleagues so this can be taken forward into future assessments.

Below are 7 key considerations for approaching members of the community and engaging them in location assessments:

Who to approach

When thinking about who to approach in the community, ask yourself:

- What do I want to learn about the location?
- Who might have information about this?
- Who has influence over, and relationships in, this context?
- Who wants to see this location made safer for young people?
- Who wouldn't we traditionally approach, who could have insight into this context?

Identifying the gaps

Find out about, and reflect on, the gaps in your approach. How can these be mitigated? For example, is there anyone else who is linked indirectly to the context and could support with community engagement - such as young people's parents.

Ask yourself if you have thought about people who might traditionally be overlooked by professionals as partners.

Remember that if you share your learning about the gaps identified, these can be used to inform wider strategic conversations about the barriers and enablers of contextual safeguarding in your area, which can then be addressed in future assessments.

Addressing the barriers and risks to engagement

Before you engage with the community, think about who might be apprehensive to talk with you, and if there is anything you can do to mitigate this .

Approaching individuals or groups, particularly young people, can carry some risks. For example, there could be repercussions for young people who are criminally exploited if they are seen by those who are exploiting them to be talking to the police. It is essential to think about this when planning how best to engage community members.

Ensuring transparency

It is important to make sure that those engaging in the location assessment are aware of its purpose, their role, and how the information they share will be used. Think about ways to share this information with those who participate and how to uphold their right to privacy.

Its best to make this clear from the outside, for example by including it on any written material (i.e. leaflets), by making this clear whenever you talk to someone in the community and by reading out a statement at the start of a community meeting.

Deciding what to ask

Taylor your questions and plan your approach according to what you know about the needs of the different groups you are approaching. You may need to develop different surveys for different parts of the community e.g. with questions for young people questions, questions for community members, questions for VCS professionals etc.

Frame questions by asking what you are hoping to learn from each group. For example, if you want to scope the capacity within local businesses for community guardianship capacity, as well as find out how they risk for young people, ensure there are appropriate questions for businesses about both of these elements.

Feeding back and maintaining engagement

Community members who are engaged in location assessments might value feedback on how their input has helped create safety, particularly if it was an extensive assessment. Consider what doing this might mean in terms of respecting their contribution and recognising their investment in the outcome.

Think about what and how to share with participating young people and families, as well as businesses and others who may have engaged in guardianship roles.

It isn't always necessary or appropriate to feedback, but continued communication with those implicated in the work will help foster respectful relationships. These in turn may lead to community members reporting any changes in the location, and enhance their engagement in future safeguarding activities.

How to develop a survey

Surveys are a great way of gathering the views of local residents, business owners, and community members to inform a location assessment. We have provided some example questions and topics that can be adapted as you develop a survey that fits your situation.

General Questions

Start by asking the person/group about their role in the community and links to the area.

Find out what they think generally about the area.

Make sure the person or group understand though that you are interested in the safety and harm of young people and cannot respond to general issues about the neighbourhood (i.e. dog litter).

Next ask questions about how the person or group interacts with young people in the area and their views on safety. The purpose of this is to explore how they interact with local young people, whether they think young people are safe in the community and whether they have any worries for young people who spend time in the community

What is the survey about?

Start with a description of who you are, what you are aiming for and what you are asking people to do. You might want to write a 'script' for a distributor to read out loud, or a paragraph with information for respondents to read themselves. Tell participants how their answers will be used – for example, is this going to inform an investigation or assessment. .

How long have you lived and worked here?

Do you consider yourself a leader in the community?

What do you like about the location?

What do you dislike about the location?

Young people specific questions

Do young people come into your business often?

What is your experience of interacting with young people in [the location]?

Have you ever seen a young person in danger or at risk?

Do you think this is a safe place for young people to spend time?

Questions about guardianship

These questions are to find out how the person or group sees themselves in relation to young people. It is an opportunity to gauge whether they have guardianship capacity, find out if they know about any positive activities and safe places in the location and if they know of other potential people who may be able to support your assessment.

It might be helpful to include a description of what being a community guardian might mean. If you do this, make sure you emphasise increasing safety rather than the surveillance of young people

Do you have ideas of how to address safety concerns for young people? Or who you could speak to about these concerns?

Do you see yourself as having a protective role over young people?

Do you know about activities or services for children in the local area?

Do you think there is enough for young people to do in the area?

Would you be interested in becoming a community guardian?

Would you be prepared to take part in free training to learn how you can keep children and teenagers safe in your community?

Final thoughts and comments

To end the survey, check they have shared everything they want to, remind them of how you may follow up in the future and that this is all confidential.

Ensure data protection and GDPR requirements are followed if you take any information e.g. for future guardianship engagement.

Is there anything you thought we would ask about that we haven't?

Are there any further suggestions you have to help us make this location safer for young people?

How to write up a location assessment

What are the key considerations for writing up a location assessment? To support with this, we share here some of the learning from Scale-up sites.

Using a narrative approach

Think about using a **narrative approach** to writing up your location assessment, where you set out the 'story' of the assessment. Although it's fine to use bullet points and headers structure, the main idea here is to give yourself space to reflect, and not be restricted to a form or boxes - especially in the analysis. When it comes to the conclusions and next steps, you can draw on practice research (like the material on the Contextual Safeguarding website) to support your recommendations. Here's an example of what might be covered in a narrative style write up :

- **Introduction** – outline how the location was identified and the referral/pathway route (justifying how it met the threshold for a response)
- **Most significant identified risk/safety** – where and how harm/safety was happening for young people
- **Community and wider context** – explain relevant information about the location e.g. is it rural/urban, what are attitudes toward young people like in the community etc.
- **Identified strengths** – such as how people in the area already help to keep young people safe and resources are there
- **Analysis and recommendations** – a detailed paragraph by the assessor on the nature of the harm in this location and what the goals of a response plan should be
- **Action planning** – a description of what will happen, who will do it, by when and the review

and conclusion process of recording location work. When conducting a location assessment, sites have taken different approaches to how they write up and present their findings. In this section we look at some of the ways we can approach recording our assessments, and consider when these different approaches might be appropriate depending on the qualities of the assessment.

Using a structured approach

A structured approach follows a tighter format, with set sections and sometimes prompts. Here's an example how a structured approach might be laid out:

- **Referral** – or how location was identified
- **Method** – outlining who was consulted, how, and when/where
- **Findings** – can be sectioned or categorised e.g. what young people, businesses, community members have reported
- **Actions and ownership of actions** – some sites have used Danger and Worry statements to prompt actions linked to findings
- **Monitoring and outcomes frameworks** – this can include dates as to when a location might be reviewed or re-assessed

Some sites prefer to have a basic structured format that they then use for all location assessments. These remain flexible so that they can be adapted to new locations, depending on risk type, size of location etc.

Using a 'rapid review' approach

Some sites have conducted location assessments with no formal write-up process in place, for example if the assessment is for a very specific and contained location or is done quickly in response to a concern/issue. These types of assessments have been recorded informally using processes like electronic case notes. Here's an example of how a 'rapid review' type assessment could be laid out:

- Problem identified (such as incident of perceived anti-social behaviour) and those at risk
- Strengths
- Agency responsible
- Actions taken
- Outcomes

This approach can be useful for organisations outside social care, such as VCS organisations, who are doing location assessments that may not meet the threshold for formal social care assessment and response. Having a shorter write up can facilitate a level of flexibility and creativity in the response so that responses can be put in place quickly and risks prevented from escalating further. Of course its always important that this activity is recorded, however simply it done, to avoid the loss of knowledge and learning for future assessments.

Case Study: rapid review of location

Reports of 'anti-social behaviour' on a housing estate were brought to the attention of police and a local VCS organisation. Youth workers swiftly reviewed their capacity to conduct detached youth work in the evenings, to observe and speak with young people and understand how they were operating in the area.

The youth workers assessed the risk and asked young people what they wanted to see change. They arranged further detached youth work at their request, and some group sessions with the young people. They saw a swift improvement in the levels of 'anti-social behaviour' and increased guardianship capacity.

How to apply the values

Contextual Safeguarding is underpinned by five values. These help us to work in a way that is ethical and orientated towards social justice. Here we explain how we can keep the values at the heart of Contextual Safeguarding location assessments.

Collaborative

When we run location assessments, we work with young people, their families, and their communities, rather than 'doing to'. We prioritise consulting young people and others who live and work in a location, and we include them in the decisions made to create safety in a context.

Grounded in lived-experience

In our assessments we prioritise the experiences of those who are impacted by safety and harm in an area - particularly those of young people - and not, for example, crime data. Sometimes this can mean that adult or professional perceptions differ from those of young peoples. We respond by acknowledge these differences, but work hard to keep the experiences and views of young people, their families and people in the community central to the assessment.

Ecological

We consider the structural inequalities that shape the spaces, locations that young people spend time in, and how they experiences those places. We reflect on how inequality and poverty, as well as specific forms of discrimination such as racism, misogyny and classism could be impacting on the abuse and harm in the context. We design responses that seek to alter these 'social conditions' by altering the environment.

Strengths-based

Our assessments focus on building on existing and potential strengths in a location, and just on responding to and changing those things that cause concern. Examples of this might be identifying and strengthening existing peer relationships, protective guardian relationships, policies, or services that could be bolstered or further drawn on, to keep young people safe.

Rights-based

We take young people's rights seriously throughout the assessment process. We commit ourselves to challenging assumptions - particularly when it comes to young people's rights to chose who to spend time with in their community. Particularly relevant to location assessments are: ensuring surveillance over young people is not increased in the pursuit of "safety"; that young people are not prevented from spending time with their friends (as long as this does not infringe the rights of others) ;and ensuring that young people are not be subject to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy.

Next Steps

Assessments can provide excellent learning about safety and harm in a community. They are informed by people who live in, and are affected by, issues in that place. Here we set out where to go with this knowledge, once your assessment has been completed.

Developing a response

Once an assessment has been conducted, it's time to develop a response. Everything that comes next should be linked to what the assessment has revealed. Try to resist opting from your menu of familiar interventions and really think about what is needed to create safety in this location. Think beyond traditional social care activities to those things that will really enable you to address the social dynamics and conditions of abuse. *For more ideas and support in developing response, see that section on the Scale-up toolkit.*

Increasing guardianship

Your location assessment plan may include increasing the role of safe adults in the location. It's possible that there are people you can partner with in this who would have been overlooked in the past. Think about how you can bolster the role of guardians in creating safety. Reach out to those who have expressed an interest in doing this during the assessment e.g. those who responded to surveys and discuss with them what it would involve and what support they need.

Developing partnerships

Consider responses that will be sustainable and have a long-term impact in a location. Think about whether there are VCS and other organisations in the community who could eventually take ownership of the response plan in the longer term.

Measuring outcomes

The Contextual Safeguarding approach asks child safeguarding systems to measure how contexts have been made safer. This extends practice as usual where we consider how individual children and their families are safer following intervention. So, alongside your response plan, agree how you will know when your goals have been achieved and the ways that you will measure this. *See the Outcomes section of the toolkit to support.*

Feedback

In some cases, reporting back to people in the community who were involved in the assessment process can be valuable. While it is not necessary for all assessments, it can be a good way of showing people that their contribution was valuable. It also holds professionals accountable to those who were engaged in keeping young people safe in their community.

Reflection

Reflect on how you can embed location assessments into your child safeguarding system. Think about what could be adapted for the next time a location of concern emerges.