## North Somerset Context Conferences Guidance 2025

## 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 Devon Children and Families Partnership, based upon the Hackney Children and Families Services model with the University of Bedfordshire to support practitioners to consider how to carry out a Context Safeguarding Conferences. 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.

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: Example intervention plan
* Appendix B: Exemplar minutes of Context Safeguarding Conferences

This guidance should be used alongside the Terms of Reference and Information Sharing Agreement for Context Safeguarding Conferences. Both are available on the DCFP website.

## Planning for Context Safeguarding Conferences

### Structure of meeting

Roles and representation within the meeting will vary between contexts but should include those able to influence the context in question. Context Safeguarding Conferences are chaired by an Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Officer in the case of peer-group conferences, in the case of neighbourhood conferences, a Community Safety Partnership chair and in the case of school context conferences, the Headteacher or DSL with cases presented by a lead practitioner who oversaw assessment that is being presented.

### Pre-conference: assessment and report

Before holding a Context Safeguarding Conference an identified social worker or other lead practitioner should carry-out a Safer Me 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 and carers within the context and external agencies to ensure the assessment identifies a range of factors and partners that could increase safety.

In the case of school and neighbourhood context conferences, additional assessment tools should be used to build a more detailed picture of contextual factors.

Guidance and tools to carry out a Safer Me assessment and to support more detailed context assessments, can be found on the DCFP website. The assessment findings should be circulated to attendees prior to the meeting by the Lead Professional.

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 and should not stray into individual case planning. 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

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 A 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 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 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 focused 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 be determined by discussion between the lead Practitioner and Chair. Attendance 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
* Council representatives (councillors or officers)
* 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

See separate document.

### 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 on the DCFP website, 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 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 should be contained within minutes, distributed by the Chair following the meeting.

## Actions

### Intervention plan

Following the meeting the agreed intervention plan should written-up and disseminated by the Chair, 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 MASH, social care team or early help service 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 an agreed period (no longer than 20 weeks) to review the plan and actions. Individual meetings can also be held with different partners or at multi-agency review meeting.

## Appendix A: Example Intervention Plan

Fill in these relevant dates:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assessment period: |  |
| Mapping meeting date: |  |
| Conference date: |  |
| Context: |  |
| Date of review: |  |
| Attendees: |  |

Fill in the following details below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What are we worried about?**  **(and impact)** | **What is helping to keep children safe?** | **What is the safety goal?** | **Intervention to be offered** | **Agency/Team**  **responsible** | **Timescale** |
| **Normalization of harmful sexual behavior/ 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 behavior ensuring links between behavior 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 behaviors in school. | School | Annually |
| **Young people feel unsafe in local neighborhood locations** |  |  | Further consultation with students to be undertaken including safety mapping local neighborhood and routes to school. | Lead Social Worker |  |
|  |  | Following consultation, discuss issues raised and concerns and plan with Safer Neighbourhoods/ Community safety:  enforcement response XXX where students have reported XXX  increased lighting and supervision in identified areas | Safer neighborhoods |  |