CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING
SYSTEM REVIEW GUIDANCE

A SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR ORGANISATIONS

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Contextual Safeguarding

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PURPOSE OF THIS TOOL

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It requires that whole systems/services, and individual practitioners, respond to extra-familial harm by creating safety in the contexts and relationships where such harm occurs. When we work in local areas, services and organisations we use 'system reviews' as opportunities to pause and reflect on the extent to which children's social care, and wider safeguarding partnerships are implementing a Contextual Safeguarding approach. This System Review Tool mirrors the approach used by our researchers during system reviews. By sharing this tool we aim to support service leaders and/or other researchers who are evaluating, or exploring, the use of Contextual Safeguarding to identify and assess an organisations/partnership's progress in implementing a Contextual Safeguarding approach.

RESOURCES TO ASSIST WITH COMPLETING THE SYSTEM REVIEW TOOL

During system reviews we evaluate system responses across three key points: the **four domains of Contextual Safeguarding**, the **two Levels of implementation** and the **values** that underpin a Contextual Safeguarding Approach. The tool is supported by an online tutorial which is available on the Contextual Safeguarding Network.
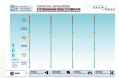
This guidance accompanies the following resources to assist leaders and evaluators in completing Contextual Safeguarding system reviews:

– A Traffic Light Tool to track implementation of Contextual Safeguarding across a local system (**CS System Review Traffic Light Tool**)

– Guidance to assess the extent to which the Values underpinning a Contextual Safeguarding approach are evident (**CS Values Checker**)

– An example of a completed System Review results tool (**Appendix A**)

– A blank recording template for System Review results (**Appendix B**)

The Contextual Safeguarding team will continue to pilot and revise the System Review tool until the close of our current pilot period in early 2022.

THE FOUR DOMAINS OF CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING

For a Contextual Safeguarding approach to be evident (whether that be at an individual-response or whole-system level), extra-familial harm needs to be addressed:

TARGET

By identifying, assessing and intervening with the social conditions of that harm (i.e. target the contexts in which the harm occurred as well as the individuals affected)

LEGAL & POLICY FRAMEWORK

By drawing extra-familial contexts into traditional child protection and broader child welfare and safeguarding processes (which have traditionally focused on families) as opposed to responding to extra-familial contexts solely through community safety and policing

PARTNERSHIPS

In partnership with individuals, organisations and sectors who can influence extra-familial contexts (such as young people, parents and their wider communities, and those responsible for the management of schools, transport services, retail, libraries and hospitality)

OUTCOMES

By measuring the impact that such responses have on the contexts where young people have been harmed (rather than solely measuring impact on the behaviour of identified young people)

THE TWO LEVELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The four domains of the Contextual Safeguarding are implemented at two levels:

LEVEL 1

The extent to which social care approaches to individual young people and their families are contextual; for example, young people are given the opportunity to talk about levels of safety and risk that they experience in a range of social contexts beyond their family home

LEVEL 2

Responses are developed/delivered to extra-familial contexts themselves. For example, if multiple young people identify the same location as unsafe during their own individual assessments, a welfare-based assessment of that location may be initiated which would underpin a plan to build safety in that setting

THE VALUES UNDERPINNING A CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING APPROACH

As the Contextual Safeguarding framework has undergone various stages of implementation, articulating the values that underpin it, and separating it from other approaches to extra-familial harm, has become increasingly important. These five values require the approach to be:

- **Collaborative:** achieved through collaboration between professionals, children and young people, families and communities
- **Ecological:** considers the links between the spaces where young people experience harm and how these spaces are shaped by inequalities
- **Rights-based:** rooted in, and seeks to protect, children's rights and human rights
- **Strengths-based:** builds on the strengths of individuals and communities to achieve change
- **Evidence-informed:** grounded in the reality of how life happens. Proposes solutions that are informed by the lived experiences of young people, families, communities and practitioners (Firmin, 2020; Firmin and Lloyd, 2020; Wroe, 2020)

HOW TO USE THE SYSTEM REVIEW TOOL

The System Review tool offers services leaders, and researchers who are evaluating services, a framework to track progress in implementing a Contextual Safeguarding approach across an organisation or partnership. This strength-based tool supports professionals to identify where their service response to extra-familial harm currently aligns to a Contextual Safeguarding approach and where there is room for further development. We recommend that those using the tool, and coordinating a system review, work alongside front-line professionals in a group to discuss the capability of children's social care, and the wider safeguarding partnership, in delivering a Contextual Safeguarding approach.

TRACKING IMPLEMENTATION USING THE TRAFFIC LIGHT TOOL

Starting with the **Traffic Light Tool** begin at the first domain of the Contextual Safeguarding framework

TARGET

Use the Traffic Light Tool to guide a discussion about whether the service Targets the social conditions of extra-familial harm.

Taking Level 1 as an example, reflect on and discuss how the organisation/partnership supports young people and families in ways that target the contexts (and social conditions) in which they experience extra-familial harm, by asking:

REFERRAL

– Can the system consistently log locations of harm and any relevant peer associations to a young person who has been referred into children's services due to extra-familial harm?

ASSESSMENT

– Do assessments of young people and families consider how peer, school and neighbourhood dynamics around them impact on a parent's capacity to keep a young person safe?

PLANNING

– When planning support, is the weight of influence that different contexts have on a young person considered in order to prioritise interventions?

RESPONSE

– Are young people and their families supported to understand the contextual dynamics of the harm they experience, and do professionals advocate/recommend actions to address those dynamics as part of their response?

If all of the above were being achieved a service would be operating at green – in regards to the first domain of the Contextual Safeguarding Framework (Level 1). If any of these areas requires development, participants can use the tool to consider whether the system currently meets the 'amber' or 'red' performance levels.

CONSULTING THE CS VALUES CHECKER

Where organisations/partnerships identify they are operating at 'green' it is important that they also consider whether this performance aligns to the values underpinning a Contextual Safeguarding approach. Consulting the **CS Values Checker** is a helpful way to review this. The CS Values Checker assumes that the area of the system being reviewed is otherwise rated as 'green'. Sticking with Domain 1, Target, for example, it would assume that the system appears to be able to target the social conditions of abuse as outlined above. If this is being achieved then professionals may also want to reflect on whether that approach to targeting contexts/social conditions:

– Profiles and creates safety as well as profiles and disrupts risks (strength-based)

Or

– Engaging young people, their families and wider communities to identify solutions for contexts that are being targeted (collaborative and hopeful)

Engaging with the values of Contextual Safeguarding in this way offers organisations an opportunity to elevate their practice and maintain integrity to intentions behind the Contextual Safeguarding framework.

Combined, the Traffic Light Tool and CS Values Checker provides partner agencies with a shared language for identifying areas for improvement/development on their journey to adopting a Contextual Safeguarding approach.

METHODS FOR EVIDENCING YOUR PROGRESS

As an initial step, professionals and/or researchers can use this System Review tool to guide table-top exercises for assessing an organisation/partnership's performance. Where points of disagreement emerge or further clarity is needed additional work can be undertaken to evidence the progress that an organisation/partnership has made.

The research team use a range of methods to evidence the progress being made across a service prior to undertaking a System Review. This may include sampling assessments to ascertain patterns related to social work decision-making in cases of extra-familial harm; observing multi-agency meetings to identify the target of plans and planning discussions; reviewing documentation used by professionals to guide their practice (for example assessment frameworks, referrals forms and so on); or engaging directly with young people and/or parents. A number of these methods can be found on the Contextual Safeguarding Network, and more will be published throughout 2021 and 2022 as the Contextual Safeguarding Implementation Toolkit is updated.

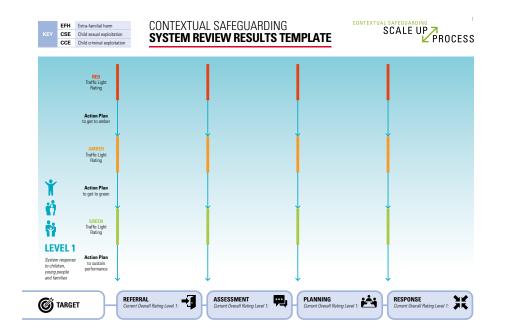## DOCUMENTING THE RESULTS AND TAKING ACTION

During the system review exercise the research team often records results on flipchart paper based on feedback from participants. If working remotely you may want to do this on a virtual whiteboard and slide deck.

After the system review, session notes can be compiled onto the **System Review Results Tool**; a blank version of this tool is available alongside this guidance – as is a completed version of the tool for illustrative purposes.

When completing the tool professionals/researchers can identify the current performance level for each of the four domains, at the two levels of implementation and at different points of the system. They can record:

– The summary of why the organisation/partnership has been allocated a red, amber or green rating at various points

– Any key actions identified by participants that would support the organisation/partnership to move from red to amber or amber to green

In doing so the document can form the basis of a system-change action plan, and can be monitored and amended at future system review sessions. In pilot sites the research team has held system reviews every six months. Many pilot sites have reviewed performance against their action plan at their own local governance arrangements at interim points between the bi-annual system review processes.