



EDINBURGH'S CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING PILOT: EVALUATION REPORT

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The researcher would like to acknowledge all participants who took part in the study, including those who shared their experiences in the interviews and focus groups, and those who responded to the evaluation survey, along with the pilot team who helped facilitate the research.

INTRODUCTION

This report provides an evaluation of a Contextual Safeguarding pilot that ran in the Northwest locality of Edinburgh, from July 2022 to June 2023. The pilot was funded through the Promise Partnership: A Good Childhood, with Action for Children the lead partner for the development and delivery of the pilot, alongside the City of Edinburgh Council. The pilot sought to introduce a Contextual Safeguarding approach to Northwest Edinburgh, focusing specifically on using this approach as a response to Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). The pilot was overseen by a steering group made up of representatives from Action for Children, City of Edinburgh Council and Police Scotland, and was led by the below key objectives:

- Identify contexts, places and spaces of safety and risk
- Develop systems, guidance and policies for a Contextual Safeguarding approach
- Build participation and raise awareness amongst community partners and guardians
- Provide inputs to schools on CCE and Contextual Safeguarding
- Develop training for professionals

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice were commissioned by Action for Children and the City of Edinburgh Council to run a small-scale evaluation of the pilot. The aims of this evaluation were to:

- Describe the Edinburgh Contextual Safeguarding Pilot
- Document the context in which the Pilot was implemented
- Understand the perspectives of professionals with experience of the Pilot
- Consider how the Pilot has influenced narratives and awareness of contextual safeguarding
- Identify the lessons for sustainability in Edinburgh and recommendations for roll-out in other locations, settings and organisations

In order to achieve these aims, interviews and focus groups were conducted with members of the steering group who delivered or oversaw the pilot. A survey was also sent to external partners who had received inputs or were involved in the pilot. Alongside this, data and documentation collected throughout the pilot was shared with the researcher for analysis. Further details of this can be found within the Method section. The report will first provide a brief review of the literature related to Contextual Safeguarding. Findings will then be discussed, before presenting five key recommendations for the continued incorporation of a Contextual Safeguarding Approach in Edinburgh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THE NEED FOR CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING

Contextual Safeguarding as an approach arose following Firmin (2017a) three year review of nine cases, relating to 145 children and young people, of peer on peer abuse in England and Wales. Firmin (2017a) identified that social work and child protection processes consistently failed children and young people who were experiencing harm outside of their family or home (extra-familial risk and harm (EFRH)). Firmin (2017a) found that when extra-familial harm occurred, services and social workers framed this as a result of the individual parent/carer's (in)action and thus focused their assessment and intervention on the child and their family. This, critically, missed the significance of contextual factors that were outwith parental influence, and meant harm experienced by children and young people in their peer groups, schools, neighbourhoods and online spaces, continued to escalate without effective intervention (Firmin, 2017a).

Social work departments have, traditionally, been designed to offer intervention and support at the individual and family level. Firmin (2017a) argues, however, that as children move into adolescence, contextual and relational factors that occur outside of the family home become more central to a young person's everyday life, and can be sites of significant risk and harm, including serious violence, harmful sexual behaviour, CCE and child sexual exploitation (CSE). Should we seek to keep children safe in these spaces, it is not sufficient for social work and child protection processes to focus assessment and intervention on the family home. Instead, a framework was required that emphasised our collective responsibility to safeguard children and young people in public spaces. This was outlined by Firmin (2017b) as Contextual

Safeguarding - an approach that requires practitioners and services to assess the contexts in which EFRH is occurring, identify the conditions contributing to harm, and focus interventions on addressing those contextual conditions, rather than exclusively on the individual behaviour of the child or parent. This goes further than an ecological model, wherein practitioners are asked to see the child in the context of their family, peers, communities and wider society (Firmin, King, Mannister, & Bradbury, 2023). Contextual Safeguarding, Firmin et al. (2023) argue, therefore requires transformational change at the policy, practice and cultural level, to create a system where EFRH is responded to through child protection processes that seek to address the contextual conditions of abuse.

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING THEORY AND APPROACH

Contextual Safeguarding, as Firmin and Lloyd (2020) emphasise, is not a model or specific set of practices, but an approach to responding to extra-familial harm that should be adapted by services to match their specific local area and needs.

Incorporating this approach involves working towards transformational system change, which should take place within four domains (Firmin & Lloyd, 2020, pp. 4-5):

1. **Target:** When Contextual Safeguarding is incorporated, child protection systems and processes must target the context in which children and young people experience risk and harm, and the social conditions which create risk and harm in these contexts. Through this, the context itself is assessed and, if appropriate, subject to intervention.
2. **Legislative framework:** Within a Contextual Safeguarding approach, whilst criminal justice responses might still occur (for example, a criminal investigation), the primary response to extra-familial harm should be through child protection.
3. **Partnerships:** Through Contextual Safeguarding, social work must strengthen their partnerships with other statutory agencies, as well as extensively engaging with 'non-traditional' partners like a child's peer group, community organisations, transport providers, library staff, local businesses, etc. Interventions directed towards contexts must be conducted alongside these 'non-traditional' partners, who can support in making contexts safer for children and young people.
4. **Outcomes:** In a Contextual Safeguarding approach, the effectiveness of the response/intervention is measured not just in terms of whether the individual child or young person is safer, but whether the context itself has become a safer space for all children and young people.

As Firmin and Lloyd (2020, p. 5) outline, incorporating Contextual Safeguarding across these four domains requires practitioners and services to identify the interplay between relationships and contexts, and to assess, through 'context weighting', the different impact these contexts are having on a child or young person's experience of risk and safety, the results of which can help services prioritise intervention.

Drawing on learning from initial pilot sites of Contextual Safeguarding, Firmin and Lloyd (2020, p. 7) outlined how the application of this approach within local authorities typically falls within two levels, which support and feed into each other:

Level 1: Intervention is still predominantly focused on children and families, but considerable attention is given to the ways in which experiences have been influenced by the contexts and relationships children and young people have outwith the family home. Interventions with the child and family are then directly informed by this. Work at level one can be undertaken by all practitioners and individuals with a responsibility for children and young people.

Level 2: At level two, services develop and embed welfare-led systems for identifying, assessing and responding to contexts where children and young people are at risk of harm; the contexts themselves are subject to intervention through partnership work with individuals, communities and other agencies. Work at level two must be driven forward by strategic leads who have the ability to change process and policy within their area.

Following learning from initial pilot sites, and concern that some of these were adopting Contextual Safeguarding in a way that had drifted from the approach's original intentions, the Contextual Safeguarding Network (2020b) identified five principles that should underpin implementation efforts (developed further in Firmin and Lloyd (2023)):

- **Collaborative:** Responses to extra-familial risk and harm must take place in collaboration with: children and young people, families, 'traditional' statutory partners, and 'non-traditional' partners
- **Rights-based:** Responses must uphold the rights of children and young people, and where their rights are perceived to conflict with the need to safeguard the child (i.e., the right to privacy), these conflicts must be acknowledged and addressed

- **Ecological:** Responses see children and young people within the context of their relationships and spaces, and see these relationships and spaces within the context of wider structural drivers of harm including poverty, racism, patriarchy, ableism, etc.
- **Strengths-based:** Responses focus on building safety within a child's relationships and the spaces they frequent by drawing on their protective factors, rather than solely disrupting risk or removing them from these contexts
- **Evidence-informed:** Responses are informed by an understanding of children and young people's lived realities

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING IN PRACTICE

Following the introduction of Firmin's (2017b) Contextual Safeguarding approach, several social work services across England, Wales and Scotland have begun incorporating Contextual Safeguarding into their response to EFRH. The first pilot site to test this approach was the London Borough of Hackney, and learning from this was used to develop a Scale-Up implementation toolkit, published in 2019 and updated in 2022 (Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2022). Nine further pilot sites have been launched since, with the Contextual Safeguarding research team also working alongside 59 other local authorities where a commitment has been made to Contextual Safeguarding (Firmin et al., 2023).

Within these sites, local authority areas have deployed a range of resources, assessments and tools to implement Contextual Safeguarding within their practice. Examples of the form this work has taken include:

- Setting up **referral processes** for peer groups and locations to be referred for social work assessment and intervention (Lefevre et al., 2020). These referrals led to case files being set up for locations and groups where EFRH had taken place, in addition to the case file set up for the individual child or young person
- Amending guidance on how services **record peer and neighbourhood factors** relevant to the risk or protection of a child or young person (Firmin & Lloyd, 2020)
- Conducting **safety mapping** activities with children, young people and families that encourage them to discuss where they feel safe or at risk, and using this to inform interventions (Firmin & Lloyd, 2020)
- Conducting **school assessments**, led by social work in partnership with schools, youth work and local businesses (Firmin & Lloyd, 2020; Lefevre et al., 2020)

- **Group work** that involves working with a peer group, rather than an individual, when harm has been experienced or perpetuated by children and young people in a group (Firmin et al., 2023)
- Establishing **Contextual Safeguarding Conferences**, or adapting Child Protection conferences to allow contextual risks to be addressed (Parkinson, Khan, & Ash, 2022).

Research into the application of Contextual Safeguarding in these sites has identified key service improvements. In Hackney, the pilot led to a more robust system for addressing EFRH, with increased partnership working and shifts in language and culture that reflect the need to see EFRH as a welfare issue (Lefevre et al., 2020). There were also examples of interventions directly addressing the contexts in which EFRH was occurring, with attempts to make these spaces safer through environmental changes. Parkinson et al. (2022) found that in Richmond and Kingston, adopting Contextual Safeguarding led to practitioners being more responsive to EFRH, and made them better at identifying who was best placed to provide support to a child or young person. Firmin et al. (2023) also identified key areas of opportunity within youth justice services in England and Wales, with strong support for Contextual Safeguarding among practitioners they interviewed. Practitioners within these services also demonstrated a significant level of local knowledge and expertise, and an established record of building relationships with children and young people, both of which can prove key facilitators for Contextual Safeguarding (Firmin et al., 2023).

Despite these achievements, several ongoing challenges have been identified across areas and services that are implementing Contextual Safeguarding. Importantly, responses to EFRH have often remained highly individualised, with practitioners focused primarily on changing the behaviour of children, young people and families (Firmin et al., 2023; Lefevre et al., 2020; Wilson & Diaz, 2021). In Wilson and Diaz's (2021) study of one local authority area, this was due in part to resistance amongst frontline staff who felt that ultimate responsibility for safeguarding children should remain with parents and carers; Contextual Safeguarding was perceived to undermine this, by focusing attention outside of the home. Reflecting on these perspectives more broadly, Firmin and Lloyd (2023) argue that these ideas are 'hardwired' into the social care system and require significant attention to overturn. In their review of youth justice services in England and Wales, Firmin et al. (2023) highlight that the persistence of individualised responses might also be driven by a lack of understanding of Contextual Safeguarding amongst practitioners, with a significant gap identified between their self-reported knowledge and understanding of the approach, and how

they described it to researchers. The term Contextual Safeguarding was often conflated with EFRH (including in the services' guidance and policy), and/or was seen only as a way to think about a child in their context, rather than as an approach that requires contexts themselves to be assessed and subject to intervention (Firmin et al., 2023). This lack of understanding led many practitioners to believe they were conducting Contextual Safeguarding, whilst still focusing interventions on individuals. This focus on individual responses both influences, and is influenced by, the lack of change in the fourth domain of Contextual Safeguarding - with outcomes consistently still being measured in terms of their ability to keep individual children and young people safe, rather than increasing the safety of the space itself (Firmin et al., 2023; Firmin & Lloyd, 2023; Lefevre et al., 2020)

Further, in cases where contexts are being responded to, these responses often align with traditional criminal justice responses, focusing purely on disrupting risk rather than on building safety within a young person's peer group or neighbourhood (Firmin et al., 2023; Firmin & Lloyd, 2023). Firmin and Lloyd (2023) describe how this has manifested in Contextual Safeguarding being used to monitor young people's friendships rather than as a means to collaboratively challenge harmful social norms and develop young people's protective factors. It has also led to Contextual Safeguarding being used as a justification for increased police presence or CCTV in a local area. This has led to concern that Contextual Safeguarding will expand state surveillance over children and young people's lives and widen the net of those subject to statutory intervention (Wroe, 2021). This is especially problematic when practitioners and services have not grappled with the ways in which structural, intersecting inequalities like race and class are shaping young people's experiences of risk and harm. As Manister, Wroe, and Adams Elias (2023) argue, practitioners working within a Contextual Safeguarding approach must consider who is made to feel more or less safe as a result of their interventions, and how their practice might be perpetuating rather than mitigating, the structural inequalities faced by the individuals and communities they are working with.

Another key concern identified within areas implementing Contextual Safeguarding has been the uneven engagement between social work departments and the partners they need to collaborate with through Contextual Safeguarding. Services have often focused on development with their statutory partners - in particular, with the police - whilst neglecting to engage with children, young people and their families in the development of interventions (Firmin et al., 2023; Firmin & Lloyd, 2023). In addition, services have often spent significant time and resource on training their partners to

spot the signs of EFRH, and instructing them on how to share this information with social work and police. As Firmin and Lloyd (2023) argue, this does not go far enough, and does not emphasise that safeguarding is the responsibility of all partners, who must be involved not just in the identification of EFRH, but also in designing and implementing interventions within the spaces and contexts in which they have influence. A final key challenge faced by pilot sites has been the serious lack of funding and resources available to services to drive forward the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding, with local authorities often struggling with existing workloads following over a decade of budget cuts and high staff turnover (Lefevre et al., 2020; Wilson & Diaz, 2021). Following an evaluation of the first pilot site in the London Borough of Hackney, Lefevre et al. (2020) emphasised the need for future pilots to be realistic about the timescales and resources required to implement what amounts to transformational change at the system, cultural and practice levels, and to build this into their funding.

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING IN SCOTLAND

Contextual Safeguarding is significantly less embedded as an approach to dealing with EFRH in Scotland than it is in England and Wales. This is despite the close alignment of a Contextual Safeguarding Approach with Scotland's national policy and legislative framework, that has long advocated for a welfarist-lens to be taken with children and young people who experience and cause harm. In particular, it fits well with: the Scottish Government's Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) policy framework; the incorporation of UNCRC; Scotland's National Risk Framework to Support the Assessment of Children and Young People that emphasises the importance of context; and with the calls made in the Promise.

There has, however, been some movement towards Contextual Safeguarding in Scotland, with a coalition of organisations forming the Scottish Contextual Safeguarding Core Group who are committed to promoting more effective approaches to child protection for EFRH. In 2020, Kirkman's (2020, p. 13) research recommended that contextual safeguarding must be embedded across the children's sector in Scotland in order to address CSE and other EFRHs:

“to ignore this [contextual] set of risks and focus interventions only on the child and their family would be an extension of a victim-blaming model which does not take account of the child's context”.

The following year, Contextual Safeguarding was referred to in National Child Protection Guidance, with the Scottish Government (2021) stating that this approach could add depth and understanding to existing child protection processes, and recommending that:

“social work plans seek to create the conditions in which young people can make safer choices rather than simply focusing on changing young people’s behaviour in persistently harmful contexts” (Scottish Government, 2021, p. 79).

North Lanarkshire is currently the only local authority in Scotland to have embedded a Contextual Safeguarding approach, with work undertaken at both level 1 and level 2, including: supporting social workers to assess risk contextually through safety mapping, peer mapping and context weighting; setting up practitioner forums and champion groups to guide Contextual Safeguarding practice; replacing a CSE operational group with an EFRH panel, through which inter-agency referral discussions can refer groups of children and young people to panel for discussion and potential response (Contextual Safeguarding Network, 2020a; Gillies & McKerley, 2020). Action for Children have also, since 2018, adopted a Contextual Safeguarding approach in their CCE work, which has involved peer mapping and the assessment of contextual factors within risk assessments. As Maciver (2020) notes, however, the third sector is limited in the extent to which it can drive forward system change, power over which lies at local authority and national government levels. This, in part, was the impetus for a pilot of Contextual Safeguarding in Northwest Edinburgh, as the next section will now discuss.

OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT

There had been growing interest in Contextual Safeguarding in both pilot partners’ organisations following the concept’s introduction by Firmin (2017a). As discussed in the *Literature Review*, Action for Children had already begun incorporating a Contextual Safeguarding approach within their CCE projects. However, it was felt that this approach could be further enhanced with strategic buy-in from local authorities. This led Action for Children to approach City of Edinburgh Council about working together to develop a Contextual Safeguarding pilot in Edinburgh.

Simultaneously, interest in Contextual Safeguarding had been growing in the social work departments of City of Edinburgh Council, specifically within the Young People’s Service, where social workers had attended events led by the Contextual Safeguarding

Network. A bid had been submitted for funding to pilot a Contextual Safeguarding approach across the whole of Edinburgh, However, this had been unsuccessful. It was then decided that funding could be used to develop a smaller-scale pilot, through the Promise Partnership: A Good Childhood Fund, with Action for Children as the lead partner alongside the City of Edinburgh Council.

This meant narrowing the focus of the pilot, and it was decided that this should focus on CCE within the Northwest locality area. This allowed both partners to build directly on the existing experience of Action for Children's CCE projects. The decision was also influenced by rising concerns about CCE at both the local and national level. Across Scotland, as Dixon's (2023) scoping review highlights, children who are being criminally exploited are often not viewed as such, and are instead criminalised and held responsible for their own abuse. Further, within Edinburgh, and particularly within the Northwest locality area, the Young People's Service had increasing concerns around CCE within their caseload, and the sense that a new approach was needed.

The pilot was thus developed to take learning from Action for Children's existing Contextual Safeguarding work, the pilot sites across England and Wales, and developments in North Lanarkshire, to introduce Contextual Safeguarding in Northwest Edinburgh as a response to CCE. Critical to this was shifting the narrative and culture surrounding CCE and EFRH amongst practitioners and partners. A steering group was set up to oversee the delivery of the pilot, with representatives from Social Work, Action for Children, Lifelong Learning, Family and Household Support, and Police Scotland. An action plan was devised to specify the main objectives that would structure the pilot work, which included:

- Identifying contexts, places and spaces of safety and risk
- Developing systems, guidance and policies for a Contextual Safeguarding approach
- Building participation and raising awareness amongst community partners and guardians
- Providing inputs to schools on CCE and Contextual Safeguarding
- Developing training for professionals

The pilot team conducted a range of key activities to achieve these objectives:

- Providing awareness-raising inputs to a wide range of organisations and teams
- Developing resources about Contextual Safeguarding and CCE
- Building relationships with new and existing partners

- Running safety mapping activities with children, young people, families and wider community members
- Supporting one school in the identification of places of safety and risk.

The next section will discuss the methods used to evaluate the pilot, before discussing the evaluation's findings, with findings split up into four key areas of work: Awareness Raising, Partnerships, Safety Mapping, and Policy and Process.

METHOD

RESEARCH AIMS

Action for Children and City of Edinburgh Council commissioned the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice to conduct an evaluation of the Edinburgh Contextual Safeguarding Pilot. The aims of this evaluation were to:

- Describe the Edinburgh Contextual Safeguarding Pilot
- Document the context in which the Pilot was implemented
- Understand the experiences and perspectives of professionals with experience of the Pilot
- Consider how the Pilot has influenced narratives and awareness of Contextual Safeguarding
- Identify the lessons for sustainability in Edinburgh and recommendations for roll-out in other locations, settings and organisations

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews and focus groups

Interviews and focus groups were held with eight participants, all of whom were members of the steering group that oversaw and drove forward the pilot. One focus group was held in person, and the remaining focus group and one-to-one interviews were held online via Microsoft Teams. Members of the steering group were introduced to the researcher via the Pilot leads.

Evaluation Survey

The evaluation had hoped to run focus groups with individuals who had received inputs or otherwise been involved with the pilot in some way. Unfortunately, this was not possible, primarily because data collection took place over the summer, which meant potential participants' capacity was stretched and they were unable to make

time for the evaluation. To ensure these people's perspectives could still be gathered, a survey was designed via Qualtrics and shared with all those who had received ongoing inputs and support from the pilot team. The survey was completed by nine participants. This included professional participants from social work, police, education, local youth groups and third sector organisations.

Feedback forms

Following awareness-raising inputs that the pilot team delivered to social work teams, feedback forms were sent to attendees for them to complete and return. 11 forms were completed, and these were shared with the researcher for inclusion in the evaluation.

Scoping survey of professionals

At the beginning of the pilot, the pilot team shared a survey with 68 professionals from social work, education, police, third sector and law. Responses were anonymous; participants were asked questions about their awareness and understanding of Contextual Safeguarding and CCE, and how confident they were in identifying and responding to the latter. The results of this survey were shared with the researcher for inclusion in the evaluation.

Project documentation

The pilot team also shared with the researcher a range of documentation relating to the project. This included the suite of resources about Contextual Safeguarding and CCE that was developed by the pilot, along with the pilot's Action Plan, Terms of Reference and the results of the pilot's safety mapping exercises.

ANALYSIS

Data from the above five sources was uploaded to, and analysed in, Nvivo. Initial 'topic summary' themes were identified following an initial review of data collected. These themes represent the four key areas of work within the pilot, and form the subsections of the Findings and Discussion section. Working within these topic summaries, the researcher then conducted inductive, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023), using a variety of coding methods, including evaluation coding, axial coding and structural coding methods (Saldaña, 2016). Following the first round of coding, codes were brought together into wider themes (within their topic summaries), before the data was analysed again to check for theme fit. There was very little quantitative data gathered throughout the pilot and within the evaluation. Descriptive statistics were generated from this data using Microsoft Excel.

ETHICS

This research was approved by the School of Social Work and Social Policy Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde.

LIMITATIONS

Findings from this evaluation should be understood in respect of its limitations. Importantly, the evaluation was unable to hold focus groups with external partners who had received inputs from the pilot (reasons discussed above). Instead, these people's perspectives were gathered via an Evaluation Survey. Responses to this provided important insights, but were likely more limited in breadth and depth than if they had been gathered through interview or focus group. The interviews and focus groups that did take place were all held with steering group members, whose relationship to the pilot was different to those who had received input from it. Despite these limitations, however, data was gathered from a wide range of sources, meaning findings reflected perspectives from those with varied relationships to the pilot, alongside the researcher's analysis of existing documentation.

FINDINGS

AWARENESS RAISING

Pre-pilot awareness and understanding

The pilot team initially conducted a survey of 68 professionals working in Edinburgh from Education, Law, Police, Residential Childcare, Social Work and Youth Work to assess their awareness and understanding of Contextual Safeguarding. Responses from this illustrated a lack of consistency in people's understanding of the approach, as shown below in Graph 1. The majority of those who agreed or strongly agreed were from Social Work, and of these a significant proportion were from the Young People's Service (where interest in the approach had been growing for some time). Importantly, these responses represent people's self-reported level of understanding, with the pilot team often finding that those they were engaging with assumed they already 'did' Contextual Safeguarding. This reflects findings from Firmin et al. (2023), who similarly found youth justice professionals often assumed that they already took a Contextual Safeguarding approach by seeing the child within the context of wider factors. Contextual Safeguarding goes much further than this, and these misconceptions underline the need for comprehensive awareness-raising and training that ensures consistency across agencies in terms of their understanding of what is required of them through this approach. As one participant reflects:

"I think what we've recognised as well is that a lot of people like, so we did the input to the police, and they were like, we already do all this. And there's quite a lot of people that say that they're doing it but don't really know"

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

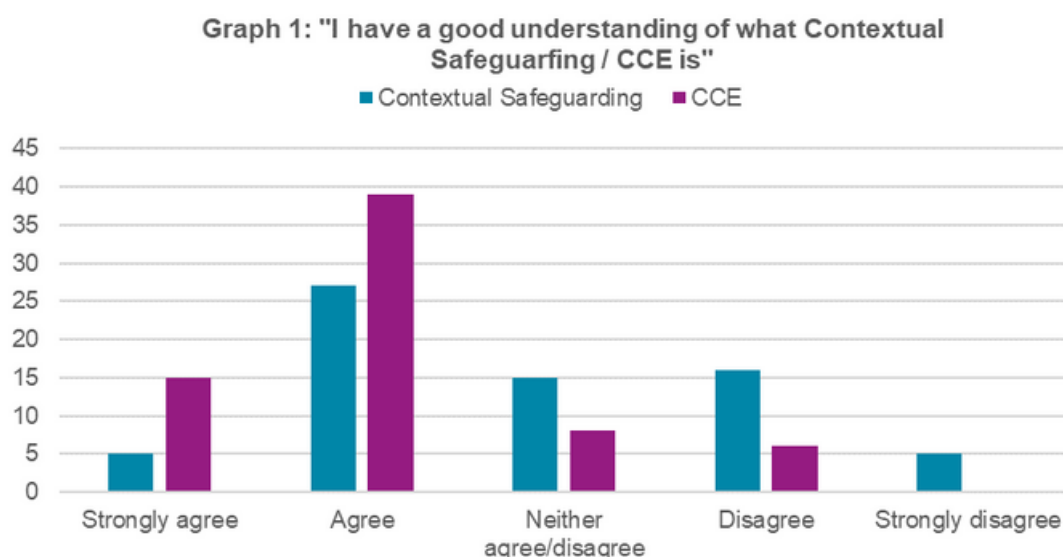
There was markedly more self-reported awareness and understanding of CCE amongst the same survey respondents, as demonstrated in Graph 1, although respondents were significantly less confident in their ability to identify and respond to the warning signs of CCE. Prior to their pilot involvement, youth groups and other community partners were often acutely aware of the risks facing children and young people in their local area, with this knowledge gleaned from their proximity to these risks, and through their close relationships with the children and young people they worked with. As two interview participants emphasised, however, community partners often did not have the language to describe what their children and young people were experiencing as CCE, and/or how to respond to it:

"I think there was an awareness of young people involved in stealing bikes for sort of criminal gangs. So I think they're, you know, it was maybe not named as much, but there would have been some awareness of that."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

"I think the youth groups were pretty much aware of what criminal exploitation was. Maybe not so much knowing the signs of it like the early signs or really how to talk about it to young people or their families. But they definitely had an understanding that kids were at risk."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)



Activities and impact

Raising awareness about Contextual Safeguarding and CCE was therefore seen as an essential first step for the pilot, and the team undertook several key activities to address the inconsistencies and gaps that had been identified. Short, one-off inputs were delivered to a wide range of organisations and groups, including teams in social work, Police Scotland, lifelong learning, throughcare aftercare, housing, residential childcare, community safety, third sector organisations and youth groups. These lasted around two to three hours, and involved the pilot leads providing an overview of Contextual Safeguarding as a response to EFRH, and a discussion of CCE and how this was impacting children and young people in Northwest Edinburgh. Fictional case studies were also developed, with space for attendees to discuss how they would identify CCE and respond using a Contextual Safeguarding approach. Alongside these inputs, the pilot developed and shared a suite of resources, including introductory guides to Contextual Safeguarding, an FAQ document, a Language document, case studies and a toolkit which provided templates for risk assessments, context weighting and safety mapping. Inputs and resources were tailored to the needs of each group, with data from both the post-training feedback forms and the evaluation survey suggesting that attendees responded positively to the learning the pilot had offered. The previous experience of the session leads was seen as a considerable strength of this awareness raising activity, with leads being able to provide “essential insight” into the needs and complexities of the local area, and creating space for open discussion around how Contextual Safeguarding could improve organisational responses to CCE and other EFRH.

“Well presented, relevant and informative training. It was good that the facilitators adapted the training to focus on elements that would impact on our client group and encouraged open discussion and engagement throughout.”

(Feedback Form)

“Because the practitioners already carried established roles within Edinburgh it was clear that this essential insight into current and local issues we are all faced with the young people we support in the area, enriched the delivery and learning from the training. This made it easy to learn what was being raised in the training session as it was relevant, relatable and informative.”

(Evaluation Survey)

Through delivery of these inputs and dissemination of these resources, the pilot can be seen to have raised awareness of CCE and Contextual Safeguarding in the

Northwest and wider Edinburgh area. Data from the evaluation survey, feedback forms and interviews highlights how the pilot was able to really shine a light on the prevalence of CCE and its impact on children and young people in the area, with one survey respondent saying they had no idea “just how prolific it was”. The pilot also shared vital information on the key warning signs of CCE, with data suggesting this has increased people’s confidence in identifying and responding to CCE amongst the children and young people they work with:

“I'd asked like how are you finding things [after their input] and I think their biggest bit of feedback that was helpful was that they were saying because staff are now aware of the signs, they've since felt more confident to approach and address things when it's come up for them which they maybe wouldn't have done before and they've then spoke about specific examples of we actually recognised one and this is what we've done because we were better equipped.”

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

In addition to raising general awareness, the pilot subsequently appears to have gone some way in shifting the narrative and culture around CCE in the area, with data suggesting the pilot has helped change how people are viewing and treating criminally exploited children. In line with a Contextual Safeguarding approach, the pilot inputs and resources framed CCE as a child protection issue in need of a welfare response; said response would be underpinned by a shared understanding that children who are being criminally exploited are not responsible for their abuse and, further, that this abuse is largely outwith parental influence. As such, awareness raising activity highlighted the need for responses to CCE to go beyond attempting to change the behaviour of an individual child, young person, or parent. This learning point appears to have been particularly impactful for those involved in the pilot, as exemplified below:

“Taking a welfare approach, not blaming them, not focusing on child's behaviour but looking at what else is going on for them”

(Feedback Form)

“The fact that young people involved in criminal activity are victims themselves (never fully appreciated this previously)”

(Feedback Form)

“Valuable interesting way of looking at it and also just shifting the focus that took it away from the behaviours of the young person and just you know, I just thought that that reframing of it was really helpful. And I I certainly had not, you know, heard anything about it before.”

(Feedback Form)

Within a national context where children are consistently held responsible and criminalised for the exploitation they experience (Dixon, 2023), the importance of these shifts in how people are understanding and responding to victims of CCE cannot be overstated. A key facilitator of these shifts was the Language document shared by the pilot team early on in the project, which was repeatedly mentioned by participants across datasets as critical to their own learning. The Language document was based on material the pilot team collated from a number of sources, including the Contextual Safeguarding Network. It provides clear and succinct definitions of terminology related to Contextual Safeguarding and CCE, as well as examples of commonly used, victim-blaming language and alternative, welfare-focused language that we should be using instead, for example:

We will try not to use...	We will try to use...
<p>Putting themselves at risk</p> <p>This implies that the child is responsible for the risks presented by the perpetrator and that they are able to make free and informed choices.</p>	<p>The child may have been groomed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The child is at an increased vulnerability of being abused and/or exploited. ● A perpetrator may exploit the child’s increased vulnerability. ● The child is not in a protective environment. ● The situation reduces the child’s safety. ● The location is dangerous to children. ● The location/situation could increase the opportunity to abuse them. ● It is unclear whether the child is under duress to go missing. ● There are concerns that the child may be being sexually abused/exploited. ● It is unclear why the child is getting into cars. There are concerns that there is a power imbalance forcing the child to act in this way. ● There are concerns regarding other influences on the child.

This has encouraged practitioners to question the language they use about the children and young people they work with, challenging them to both speak and think differently about CCE and EFRH within their practice. This can be seen to have led to tangible changes in professionals’ day-to-day practice:

"From a Police perspective I feel the terminology document was very useful and how we need to get away from language which implies the young person is implicit and willing in the behaviours instead referencing the fact they are being exploited"

(Evaluation Survey)

"[...] just really the reframing and having professionals working with young people use a different language and seeing the young people as a victim and not the perpetrator. And I think even hearing staff within your own environment talk about the young people as victims more. And definitely that's just purely down to the raising awareness."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

Whilst these are important shifts, data from across interviews and the feedback forms suggests that learning around CCE overshadowed more specific learning around Contextual Safeguarding. When discussing the key achievements of the pilot, or the key learning points that people took away from it, respondents typically focused on CCE and their heightened awareness and confidence around warning signs and how to report them. Whilst this learning is essential for the adoption of Contextual Safeguarding, (practitioners need to be able to view those experiencing CCE as victims to understand that a child protection response is needed) it was notable that far fewer participants spoke about learning points specific to Contextual Safeguarding that were included in the sessions and resources, for example safety mapping tools, context weighting, peer assessments and so on. One example of this can be seen below, from a feedback form completed by a respondent following an input they received:

"Please identify 3 learning points that you will take back to your service following the training.

1) Signposting to services for parents/carers

2) Importance of prevention

3) Increase in the 12-17 age range so need to target here/before this age"

(Feedback Form)

The small-scale nature of the pilot led to the decision amongst partners to focus the pilot on CCE, as discussed above in the Overview of the Pilot section. This was beneficial in a number of ways: it allowed the scope of the pilot to remain manageable within the resources allocated by focusing on a specific issue of serious concern within the local area, and it provided a case example from which some of the more abstract ideas of contextual safeguarding could be understood in practical terms, in relation to a specific EFRH. There is, however, potential that focusing on CCE has, or will, lead to

Contextual Safeguarding in Edinburgh being associated exclusively with CCE, rather than as a broader approach to deal with all forms of EFRH and make contexts safer for all.

That learning around CCE appears to have been more impactful than specific learning around Contextual Safeguarding is perhaps understandable given that the pilot team had limited time to discuss both topics and their relationship to each other. It was notable that, in the evaluation survey, (which was completed by respondents who had more ongoing contact with the pilot), Contextual Safeguarding concepts were significantly more prominent. To advance a comprehensive understanding of Contextual Safeguarding, it is essential that further training is provided for practitioners and community partners around this area, on an ongoing and/or more in-depth basis; ways in which Contextual Safeguarding could be used to address other forms of EFRH should be explored as part of this. This was not possible in the short period of time the pilot ran for, and with the limited resources available, but would be critical for any future embedding of Contextual Safeguarding. The need for this was expressed by several participants:

"I think a longer input could be really beneficial. An opportunity for a longer session in a multiagency forum could be helpful to understand different perspectives and how different roles can contribute. An acknowledgment to CSE would also be helpful for partner agencies to understand that child exploitation can present in many forms, often concurrently, and how CS can help to tackle this issue also."

(Evaluation Survey)

"I think from my perspective, if they had more capacity or it was a longer pilot it would be about revisiting everyone because I mean, I think the worry about these things is that people hear it and then if they're not actively kind of involved in or hearing about it, then it goes off their agenda. It takes a long time to embed these things."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

Whilst there were some limitations to people's learning around Contextual Safeguarding, what is clear across datasets is that the pilot team were able to engage with a wide range of groups through their awareness raising activity, many of whom demonstrated a strong appetite for adopting Contextual Safeguarding as an approach more broadly. Through the focus on CCE, practitioners and community partners have developed further understanding of the risks facing children and young people in the community, and the need for an approach that can assess and respond to harm that

occurs outside of the home. Although no policy or process has been put in place (yet) that would facilitate Level Two contextual safeguarding work, several participants discussed clear examples of how the awareness raising inputs they received had encouraged them to begin Level One work within their own practice:

"[The pilot has] reminded us to look at wider context and not just the individual. Contextual Safeguarding is something we are now discussing at wider team meetings as well as individual case discussions. Exploring what impact we can have and what reach we have to support these changes."

(Evaluation Survey)

PARTNERSHIPS

Steering Group

Another key strength of the Edinburgh Contextual Safeguarding pilot was the effective partnership work that took place at several levels, including via its steering group. The steering group was set up and chaired by the two pilot leads, and attended by strategic representatives from a wide range of groups including: social work; Action for Children; Lifelong Learning; Family and Household Support; and Police. With the exception of Education (discussed further below), the steering group was felt to be well represented, with significant buy-in across organisations, and steering group members committed to working together to drive forward the pilot's success and share learning from the pilot within their own teams. It was noted by several participants that partners were *"singing from the same hymn sheet"* (Interview/Focus Group participant), when it came to CCE, understanding their shared responsibility and the need for a collective response, in line with the principles of Contextual Safeguarding. There was also discussion of how some of this partnership work has continued despite the end of the pilot, with participants highlighting how the relationships they built across the steering group have been maintained. This has allowed them to continue working closely with one another when responding to CCE in their day-to-day roles:

"But also having the police on it [the steering group], it was helpful because that really helped forge links. And I know from [our] point of view, our links now with the police in that area have never been stronger. And it's so much easier now just picking up the phone being like we've got concerns about so and so. Are you aware? Can you tell us anything? And I suppose even that as a result of the pilot going forward, whether it's contextual safeguarding or otherwise, has been massive."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

Furthermore, pilot leads emphasised how the steering group's commitment had provided them with practical support and an open space to discuss ideas as the pilot progressed:

"And occasionally we would get bits of guidance like "why don't you try this" or we would say "this hasn't worked, any ideas?" and just to sort of bounce off and it always felt quite productive. It always felt well received. It was, it was a good support as well because you know we were navigating something that we had never done before."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

In particular, the steering group was seen to be vital in terms of using their professional connections to link the pilot team in with a wide range of statutory and external teams, for the pilot to do inputs and sessions with. This was especially beneficial when it came to engaging with the local youth groups (discussed further in the next section).

Although the steering group was considered amongst interview participants as a key strength of the pilot, it was also expressed that this could be quite *"top heavy"* *(Interview/Focus Group Participant)* and that the pilot was missing a more practitioner-led forum where those working on the ground could meet to reflect and share learning on Contextual Safeguarding and CCE:

"I understand you've got your steering group that's looking at things from a strategic level. But actually having a group that are on the ground and, you know, just that opportunity to reflect on the bits that are going well or some of the surprises and actually having time to do something about that."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

The need for a more practitioner-led group was also reflected in several responses to the evaluation survey and feedback forms, where respondents noted that a reflective space for multi-agency discussions, with representatives who could act as 'early adopters' within their organisations, would be really useful when it came to embedding a Contextual Safeguarding approach further.

Relationship Building

In addition to the partnership work of the steering group, the pilot team were also able to develop relationships and collaborate with new partners through their awareness raising and safety mapping activities. As discussed in the Awareness

Raising section, this involved meeting and engaging with a wide range of agencies, including teams from children's houses, third sector organisations, libraries, police and social work. The relationships developed between the pilot team and the local youth groups were particularly impactful, with the team linked into these groups via a steering group member. This facilitated much of the safety mapping work conducted by the pilot, and also supported increased information sharing between the youth groups and social work/Action for Children (discussed further below). Throughout the pilot, the team maintained communication with these groups, attending their regular network meetings and holding ongoing discussions around CCE in the local area and how a Contextual Safeguarding approach could support this. As highlighted by one youth worker who responded to the evaluation survey, this commitment was hugely valued:

"[The pilot leads'] commitment, passion for change and availability to discuss matters was really infectious. It was great that there was time and space dedicated to this."

(Evaluation Survey)

Critical to this relationship building was also the passion shown by youth workers, who were acutely aware of the risks children and young people they worked with were facing in the area, and were eager to find more effective means of collectively responding to this within their communities:

"They definitely had an understanding that kids were at risk and they were like, the youth groups were fantastic and really engaged with the whole mapping exercises and really wanting to protect the young people within their communities and make the place safer."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

"There was a real sort of passion that shone through from the youth organisations. I mean they've got people in post who are from the area, live and breathe sort of community spirit like really sort of fight for positive outcomes for young people. So it was really well received by them and they were, they were really welcoming. So they were only too happy to try and facilitate the safety mapping so that it could contribute to something about making the streets and spaces around them safer for their young people."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

The development of these relationships is a crucial step towards incorporating Contextual Safeguarding in Northwest Edinburgh; a key principle of this approach is the need for social work and other statutory services to work collaboratively with

'non-traditional' partners - including youth groups - who hold a uniquely important position in terms of their strong relationships with children and young people and their ability to effect positive change within extra-familial contexts. Whilst the pilot has demonstrated excellent collaborative working with these groups, it did not forge similarly strong links with children and young people, families and/or other 'community guardians' (i.e. transport providers, local businesses, etc.). Firmin and Lloyd (2023) discuss how this is common across pilot sites that have sought to incorporate contextual safeguarding, with pilot leads focusing on developing their relationships with other practitioners and professionals, and failing to see children, young people, families and community guardians as equally valuable partners in Contextual Safeguarding work.

The Edinburgh pilot's limited engagement with these groups did not appear to be due to a lack of recognition of their value, however, with the pilot team initially developing ideas around drop-in sessions at parent's nights, setting up young-person-led Champions boards and pitching awareness-raising sessions to taxi drivers, bus drivers and retail workers. Actualising these ideas, however, proved challenging within the pilot's timeframe and with the limited capacity available. Some work with children and young people and families was still completed, primarily through safety mapping activities that involved these groups completing a survey. This was a really important piece of work that allowed these groups to have their perspectives heard; it led to some tangible changes to contexts (discussed further in Safety Mapping section) but was ultimately more extractive than collaborative. Whilst it is understandable that the pilot made the decision to focus efforts on raising awareness and developing relationships with stakeholders who largely already played an active role in child protection, future work that seeks to embed Contextual Safeguarding should go further in engaging children and young people, families, and community guardians as key partners in this approach.

Education

One of the most consistent issues raised by interview and focus group participants was the lack of involvement from education throughout the pilot. The intention at the beginning of the pilot had been to engage with three schools in the local area to deliver awareness raising sessions, conduct safety mapping with pupils, support school self-assessments with senior teachers, and to work together to consider what schools could put in place to make their contexts safer. This was a key priority for the pilot team. However, a range of issues within education meant that they were only able to achieve this with one school.

Whilst schools approached by the team showed a real appetite for the pilot, a serious lack of resources and time, and a range of competing priorities within a year period that was disrupted by Covid-19 and school strikes, meant that (with the exception of one) they ultimately did not engage with the pilot:

“And with the schools, again, it was one of these things where there was so much going on for the schools. They're under understaffed. There were strikes. There's COVID. There's all these different things going on. It just made it really difficult to get them to get fully on board.”

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

This situation was worsened by the absence of a representative from education on the steering group, with the initial group member changing post and a replacement not found for the duration of the pilot. One school was, however, able to engage and the pilot team were able to run surveys with a small cohort of pupils to identify where in the school and surrounding areas children and young people felt (un)safe. Through this they also gathered data on key aspects that undermine or facilitate children and young people's experience of risk and safety, including information about their peer groups and access to extracurricular activities. This data was then shared with senior leaders in the school, to see whether it matched their perceptions of spaces where pupils felt (un)safe. This was a really impactful piece of work, and whilst the school's resources were limited in terms of tangible changes they could make to contexts where children were at risk, they worked alongside the pilot team to consider how changing staff rotas might ensure a protective adult was in these spaces at times where risk or harm might be experienced.

“In the school we were saying the stairwells were coming up, but they've not got cameras in those stairwells. But that costs money to put cameras in the stairwells and although we were saying what you need then is maybe the janitors to be working in that area a little bit more and trying to do where it doesn't cost money, but they don't. Again, they don't have this, the resources, they don't have the staff. But it did give them food for thought. And so they were like, well, maybe we could actually change the janitors or the cleaners rota to cover those that are coming up as places that kids are feeling unsafe about at certain times.”

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

This school was, unfortunately, the exception, though. Whilst participants who discussed issues with education expressed their understanding of the structural

challenges facing schools, and that this was not the result of a lack of interest or care from teachers or staff, education's limited engagement with the pilot is nonetheless a key limitation. Schools are a key context where children and young people can be either protected from, or can be put at risk of, extra-familial harm, and thus their involvement in the incorporation of Contextual Safeguarding is critical. This is particularly the case given the focus of the pilot was on CCE; children who are not attending school or who are on alternative curriculums are typically considered one of the groups most vulnerable to criminal exploitation (if not the most vulnerable group) with exploiters taking advantage of the fact that they often spend significant periods of time in the community unsupervised (Dixon, 2023; Wall, 2023). Addressing CCE therefore needs to be a priority for schools, with Contextual Safeguarding a key way through which they can work to make the school context safer, inclusive and more accessible for all pupils. As participants identified, whilst the schools the pilot team tried to engage with did show a keen interest in addressing these issues, the commitment to this has to come from a strategic and senior level, with significantly more funding and resource provided:

"It's got to come from the top and absolutely know that schools are under the cosh and all of this. But this is so important, I think, and important from a school point of view because in schools, you know that whole example that Carlene Firmin gives. Schools are primary areas where young people feel unsafe, so I think it's so important to get buy in from schools at a senior level."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

"I think even in terms of CCE as well as a Contextual Safeguarding approach. For that to be successful there needs to be considerable buy in and resource provided to education. Because I mean, almost every young person that is criminally exploited is either not attending school, is on a reduced timetable or on an alternative education provision. And whilst the North West is maybe a bit more resourced than other areas in the city, it's still not cutting it, And to divert young people away from exploitation and protect them from serious organised crime groups and reduce that vulnerability, there needs to be more resources."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

Information Sharing

A key aspect of partnership working is the sharing of information at both the individual level (between practitioners, community partners etc.) and at the organisational level. The pilot has largely demonstrated effective information sharing

in respect of CCE and other EFRH in the Northwest and wider Edinburgh area. Critically, the pilot's engagement work with children's houses, third sector organisations and youth groups provided these partners with the language and knowledge they needed to fully understand the risks facing children and young people they work with, and a way to share these concerns, however small or half-formed, with the pilot team. Improving these lines of communication is critical for Contextual Safeguarding, as many of the external partners - and particularly youth groups - have oversight of extra-familial contexts alongside positive relationships with children and young people, and are subsequently likely to have access to information that statutory services do not. As one participant reflected, the creation of space to come together to discuss and share these concerns as part of the pilot was like opening 'pandora's box':

"[the pilot] kind of gave an opportunity to share what was going on and for people to know where to take it. I remember the very first steering group that we had, there was some community partners there and honestly it was like pandora's box the stuff they could have told you about what was going on in the community. And they absolutely understood the responsibility to report on safeguards and issues, but how much do you drill down a number plate that you're a bit concerned about or an individual that you know, how do you kind of package all that together to then make it into something that you then pass on."

(Interview/Focus Group participant)

The development of these links is a significant achievement of the pilot, with increased information sharing having both an immediate and long-term impact on the ability for CCE to be effectively identified, assessed and responded to, as one participant highlights:

"So I think there's a wider understanding of that kinda, no matter how small the information might be, it can still be really relevant, and I think that sometimes people miss that in terms of what we've created this new system or process or assessment, but actually that in itself sharing that information that then kind of creates the wider picture and has been great"

(Interview/Focus Group participant)

Despite this, though, several participants reflected on barriers to effective information sharing that impacted the pilot throughout its duration. In particular, there was frustration that information sharing typically went one-way: from community, to statutory services, and to police, with little feedback coming back down the chain as to

how information was being acted upon:

“Then it [information] comes into police say, for example, and is graded as intelligence. So I suppose for a community partner who's reporting in, I don't know concerns about a known organised criminal, the minute that is reported and it lands somewhere, then it means something. It then becomes sensitive or official data. So then the police are saying, well, are we going to really share that back in terms of what we are doing?”

(Interview/Focus Group participant)

This has potential to create real tension in the relationship between community partners and social work/police, if they are unable to see any change as a result of the concerns they are reporting. Furthermore, participants expressed that police were limited in what information they shared with social work about the children and young people they were working with, with this considered a critical barrier to social work's effective identification, assessment and response to CCE and other EFRH. These frustrations are not unique to the pilot and reflect wider issues in multi-agency responses to CCE (Dixon, 2023), with police often unable or unwilling to share information about ongoing criminal investigations; this is further complicated in situations where information sharing might inadvertently put the child at increased risk. Despite these challenges, though, and as Firmin and Lloyd (2023) warn, it is essential that the incorporation of a Contextual Safeguarding approach is not used simply as a means to gather more 'intelligence' from the community to support criminal justice operations. In a Contextual Safeguarding approach, community partners need to be valued as more than just a means of extending social work/police's oversight into areas where risk and harm is occurring; instead they should be understood as critical to increasing safety within these areas, and actively involved in the design and delivery of interventions set up to achieve this. There were some positive examples of this occurring throughout the pilot, as the next section will discuss.

SAFETY MAPPING

Another key strand of work the pilot undertook was a safety mapping exercise of the Northwest area. This involved collating data from a wide range of sources. Some of this data had been collected through previous projects, but the majority was collected by the pilot team, including:

- Safety mapping activities with over 30 children and young people, facilitated alongside local youth groups

- A survey completed by:
 - 38 children and young people from the area
 - 20 professionals working in the area
 - 11 parents or carers
- Information gathered through discussions with members of a support group for parents of children experiencing or at risk of criminal exploitation
- Information collected from various meetings with practitioners, youth workers, teachers, etc.

Through these activities, discussions, and surveys, the pilot team were able to ask children and young people, families, and practitioners about contexts of safety and risk in their local area. This provided really vital insights into what was happening in the Northwest area – not just where was (un)safe, but also why this was the case, and what might be needed to make contexts safer. Although some of the contexts highlighted as unsafe were already known to the pilot team as local ‘hotspots’, other areas were surprising, with children, young people and families providing specific information about the shops, streets, areas within parks, and so on, that they perceived as particularly “*dodgy*”.

Moreover, those who took part in these activities and surveys provided detail about the nuances of (un)safety in the area, including what times certain contexts were safe or unsafe, and how the same context might be experienced differently depending on the person or group. Importantly, the approach of the pilot leads appears to have been a key strength to this work, along with the support of the local youth groups in facilitating the safety mapping activities. Some children and young people were initially reluctant to engage in these activities, saying that they didn’t want to be a ‘grass’. The pilot team were transparent in this respect, informing children and young people that they were working in collaboration with police but that the focus was on spaces rather than individual people. The majority of children and young people agreed to take part, and soon relaxed into the process. These safety mapping activities thus demonstrate the potential of engaging in a Contextual Safeguarding approach. Given that a key challenge in responding to CCE is the understandable reluctance amongst children and young people to share information with authorities, using these kinds of activities allow practitioners to focus attention on context rather than individuals, increasing the likelihood of children and young people engaging, and sharing information that can then be used to increase safety in those spaces.

Following data collection, the pilot team collated this information into a safety map of

the Northwest area, using a RAG system to denote contexts of risk, neutrality/mixed, and safety. This map was then shared with the steering group, external partners and youth groups, with pilot leads discussing key findings from this process. Across interview participants and evaluation survey respondents, this safety map and the insights gathered from it were considered particularly impactful:

“And I mean there is quite a lot of serious and organised crime in North Edinburgh, but it's good to hear from a young people's perspective about, you know, where they feel safe. Or where they maybe don't feel safe which is potentially somewhere that you would think well, that should be a safe space for them.”

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

In addition to providing valuable insight, the results of the safety mapping activities have also been used to inform context-focused interventions, most significantly following a presentation of findings to the network of youth groups operating in the area. Within this, it was noted that one of the local parks had been highlighted as a key context of risk and harm; conversely, the youth groups were seen as key contexts of safety. The youth groups were eager to take action as a result of these findings; they worked alongside the pilot team to rejig their schedules and ensure a consistency of youth group presence in the park each evening. This means children and young people spending time in the park have something positive they can engage with each night. It also ensures the presence of a protective adult(s) in the area each evening, meaning children and young people have someone they can go to if they need to, with harm potentially less likely to occur if those perpetuating it are aware of this presence. Findings from the safety mapping also informed the delivery of youth groups' other street work, as one participant describes:

“They did that mapping exercise and they, you know, from the information gathered from their focus groups with the young people they then informed like the youth agencies. So that helped them plan their delivery of activities and where to focus, and where to focus street work. You know what areas to go and visit. So yeah you can already see tangible benefits from it.”

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

These kind of outcomes as a result of the pilot have the potential to be really impactful for children and young people in the area, and clearly demonstrate the principles of a Contextual Safeguarding approach in action: organisations collaborated

to make the context of the park safer, informed by what children and young people had told them. Moreover, this work was strength-based: it focused on extending the protective qualities of the local youth groups, rather than trying to remove children and young people from the park altogether.

Despite these positive outcomes, several interview participants highlighted frustration that the safety mapping activity was undermined by the inability of the police to share information with the pilot about where crime and/or anti-social behaviour was known to be occurring. By the point at which the pilot finished, this information had still not been shared. There was a sense amongst participants that because they did not have 'facts' from police about where harm and crime was occurring, they were unable to take the results of the safety mapping further.

"So what we really wanted to know is where were the hotspots of anti-social behaviour, where were there increased risks or incidents of drug dealing, just to try and look at where children were being drawn in because, anecdotally we were able to get some information about certain shops or barbers where there's an increased risk, but we just never got to that point [of getting information from police]"

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

In particular, participants reflected on how it would have been challenging to approach community guardians and ask them to make their contexts safer, without the statistics from police to back-up their safety mapping findings:

"I mean but we just didn't get to that point I think because what we needed was, whilst we had the perception from the young people about where was unsafe, we needed like back up to then say right well we need to take it to those shops at the road because we know for a fact that this is a problem. And what can the shops then do. But I guess without that it kind of felt we would be easily challenged."

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

Although it is unfortunate that police were unable to share this information with the pilot team, and that this inability runs counter to the principles of collaboration required of a Contextual Safeguarding approach, this should not undermine the impact or validity of the safety mapping results. Whilst information from police is undoubtedly useful, it is well documented that this kind of 'official' information will only show us a proportion of crime or harm occurring in an area (Biderman & Reiss,

1967; Buil-Gil, Medina, & Shlomo, 2020; Fohring, 2014). Insights gleaned from the perspectives and experiences of children, young people, families and community members about what is happening in these spaces should be considered just as vital when it comes to designing and prioritising interventions that seek to make the local area safer. Although it is quite possible that community guardians may have tried to dismiss the results of the safety mapping without the 'facts' to back it up, it is the responsibility of the pilot and future Contextual Safeguarding work to challenge these attitudes and emphasise the importance of listening to the perspectives of children, young people, families and fellow community members, and take collective action based on these.

POLICY AND PROCESS CHANGE

A key strand of work initially planned for the pilot was around developing systems, guidance and policies. This work would contribute to the implementation of a Contextual Safeguarding approach at 'level two'. The pilot aimed to set up procedures for partners who have identified EFRH to have joint, multi-agency responses, including the use of Interagency Referral Discussions (IRD), National Referral Mechanism and Vulnerable Young Person processes. The pilot also hoped to set up and implement a process for the recording of groups and places within Care and Risk Management meetings, Early and Effective Intervention meetings, Young People's Service screenings and within Risk Assessments, Child's Plans, Court reports and Hearings reports.

These ambitions have, however, remained largely unrealised. As yet, there have been no changes to referral or recording processes, although the pilot team is continuing to work on revising the Vulnerable Young Person process to incorporate Contextual Safeguarding. There have been no joint IRDs, and no setting-up of contextual safeguarding conferences. The pilot team have developed and disseminated a toolkit for practitioners to use for Risk Assessments where EFRH has been identified, which includes information about how to use tools like safety mapping, peer mapping and context weighting. Importantly though, whilst this toolkit has likely been used by some practitioners in their work with children and young people, this has not been formalised in local guidance or policy as a necessary or recommended approach when assessing and responding to EFRH. As one respondent to the evaluation survey notes:

"I have welcomed the Toolkit and resources shared by [the pilot], but am still interested to see how this is incorporated into our policy, procedure and how it is used in practice day to day and embeds in in Edinburgh."

(Evaluation Survey)

That the aims around changing policy and process were not achieved by the end of the pilot was not the result of a lack of drive or commitment from the pilot team or wider steering group, who were passionate about pushing forward this change. Instead, it could be argued that the pilot was overly ambitious in terms of what it initially set out to achieve within the very small timeframe it had. As Lefevre et al. (2020) identified in their evaluation of the first Contextual Safeguarding pilot site, the implementation of a Contextual Safeguarding approach takes a considerable amount of time, and there needs to be space built into funder's timeframes that allow for pilot leads to experiment and design an approach that is specific to the needs of the local area. Given the lack of awareness around Contextual Safeguarding in the Northwest and wider Edinburgh area, the pilot was essentially starting from scratch, with only two pilot workers who were both part-time. In this context, a year is too brief to design and implement system, policy and process change when the team were first having to scope what was needed, through their awareness raising work, relationship building and safety mapping exercises.

Whilst there has been no official change to policies or processes, the pilot has generated a significant amount of appetite and momentum for Contextual Safeguarding in the Northwest and wider Edinburgh area. There was a sense across responses that Contextual Safeguarding was needed, with participants expressing their desire for this work to be rolled out further:

"There's loads of pilots that people do and it just comes to an end and then nothing. But now it's like, I mean, we're still receiving emails about contextual safeguarding meetings. We're like, "they don't exist" [...] "we're not at that stage yet""

(Interview/Focus Group Participant)

"I think that it has been really well carried out and it is a fantastic opportunity to create change within our city, drawing upon years of research and success carried out elsewhere previously. I hope we are all able to continue the amazing work the pilot achieved by building on the momentum of prioritising contextual safeguarding in response to child exploitation."

(Evaluation Survey)

This evaluation has identified a number of key strengths within the Edinburgh Contextual Safeguarding pilot, along with areas in need of further development. Importantly, as discussed in the Policy and Process section, the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding at 'level two' has not commenced. A Contextual Safeguarding approach has not been officially incorporated within system processes for the referral, assessment or response to CCE, and outcome measures are still focused exclusively on the protection of individuals rather than whether contexts have been made safer. The pilot has, however, created ripe conditions for this work to be embedded going forward.

The impact of the awareness raising activities undertaken by the pilot team has been important in shaping individual practice at 'level one'. There were clear examples of the pilot raising the profile of CCE and increasing professionals' confidence in identifying and responding to it. Linked to this, the excellent partnership work conducted by the pilot team and wider steering group has established lines of communication that have facilitated the sharing of concerns amongst partners, with this increased information having potentially huge protective impacts for children and young people at risk or experiencing harm. There were also examples of changes in culture and narrative surrounding CCE, with practitioners and partners re-evaluating how they think and speak about the issue and recognising that children and young people being criminally exploited are victims in need of care and protection. These shifts are absolutely essential in the incorporation of a Contextual Safeguarding approach, particularly within the current national landscape where children who are criminally exploited are too often held responsible for their own abuse.

The evaluation identified that one of the most impactful pieces of work undertaken by the pilot team was the safety mapping activity conducted on the whole Northwest area. This demonstrated excellent engagement with children, young people, and families, who shared vital insights into issues in the local area; these findings were then actioned by youth groups who worked collectively to make a local park safer for children and young people. This exemplifies the potential that a Contextual Safeguarding approach can have, and was underpinned by the approach's key principles, with the intervention strengths-based and focused on increasing the safety of the park, rather than simply trying to remove children and young people from it.

Cutting across the main areas of work was the challenge of incorporating a Contextual Safeguarding approach with very little resource. The pilot team showed a real passion for, and dedication to, bringing Contextual Safeguarding to the Northwest, but pilot

timeframes, coupled with a lack of any baseline knowledge about Contextual Safeguarding in the area, meant they had to prioritise awareness raising and relationship building work before policy and process change could be attempted. Embedding a Contextual Safeguarding approach requires transformational culture and system change. Without proper funding and resources, there is a real risk that the radical potential of Contextual Safeguarding is diluted, becoming merely a way in which criminal justice responses to EFRH are improved through increased awareness raising and information sharing.

The pilot has generated a significant amount of momentum for Contextual Safeguarding, with new and existing partners extremely enthusiastic about the approach. Partners were aware of the risks facing children and young people in their caseloads and communities, and eager for a new approach to help them respond to this. A repeated desire across participants was for this pilot to be rolled out further, to be taken city-wide and for it to look at other forms of EFRH. Should the partnership seek to roll this work out further, the evaluation makes the following five recommendations, informed by the findings within this report:

1. Prioritise changing policy and process to formally embed a Contextual Safeguarding approach in terms of the referral, assessment and response to CCE and/or other EFRH. Building on learning from pilots in England and Wales and the work undergone in North Lanarkshire, they should develop changes in the referral and recording of CCE/EFRH, embed Contextual Safeguarding assessment tools and consider setting up multi-agency contextual safeguarding meetings/conferences. Critically, changes need to be made to how outcomes are measured, with these focused on how contexts have been made safer, and how individual children and young people have been protected.

2. Understand and incorporate children, young people and families as key partners in a Contextual Safeguarding approach. Building on the achievements of the safety mapping work in this respect, these groups' perspectives should be regarded as vital to informing interventions, and not secondary to official/professional perspectives. Consideration should be given to bringing forward some of the initial pilot ideas around involving these groups in both design and implementation, for example the development of a young person-led Champions board or peer-led awareness raising sessions.

3. Continue the excellent relationship building work that the pilot team undertook, particularly in relation to the youth groups who are uniquely well placed to inform and drive forward interventions in a Contextual Safeguarding approach. This work should be extended to other community partners and guardians, through engagement with local transport providers and business owners who have scope and influence in contexts that children and young people spend time in. Whilst the focus of interventions in a Contextual Safeguarding approach is to make contexts safer for children and young people experiencing EFRH, these interventions ultimately make the community safer for all, and this can be a key means for engaging non-traditional partners in this work.

4. The involvement of Education in any future attempts to incorporate a Contextual Safeguarding approach is essential. It is difficult to know what more the pilot team could have done in this respect, with local schools facing a number of structural issues and competing priorities that made engagement with the pilot particularly challenging. It is critical that future work in this area is able to secure buy-in from Education at the steering group level.

5. Any future work seeking to roll out a Contextual Safeguarding approach in Edinburgh needs to think critically about the value and risk of focusing on CCE rather than encompassing all forms of EFRH. To undertake the latter, significant resource is required to embed this at 'level one' and 'level two' across the city; funding and project plans need to be realistic about the time that it takes to develop and incorporate this work.

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