Executive Committee and Council only
Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:
Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee:	**Joint Education and Learning and Social Services Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting:	**21st January 2022**
Report Subject:	**Contextual Safeguarding**
Portfolio Holder:	**Cllr John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**
Report Submitted by:	**Damien McCann, Corporate Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
		12.01.22			21.01.22			

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to present to Members the concept of Contextual safeguarding and the approach being taken across Gwent and Wales.
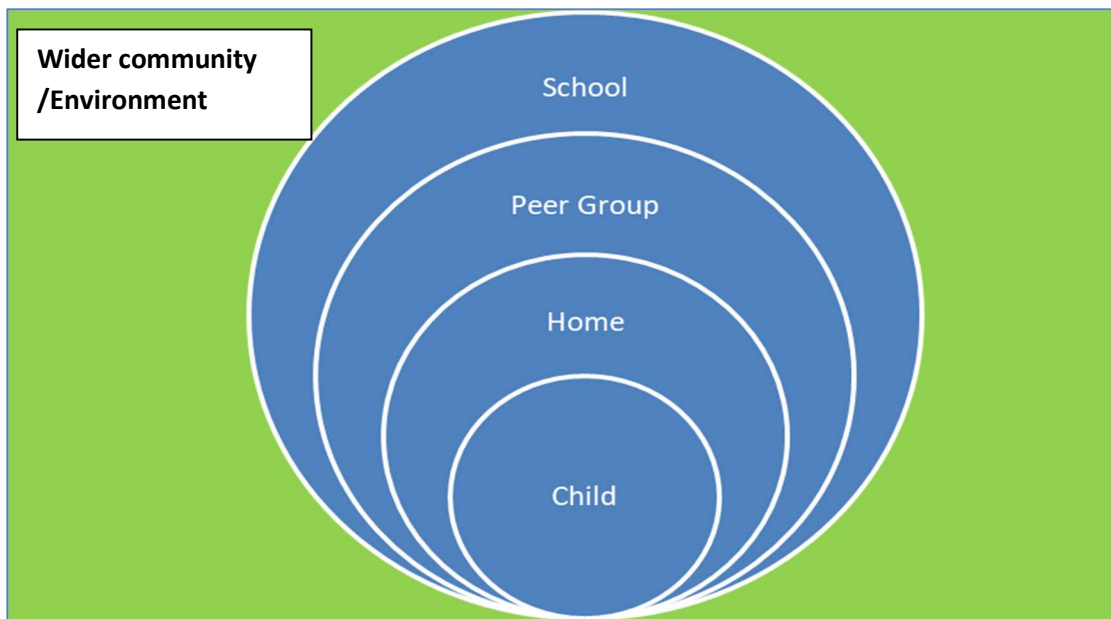
2. **Scope and Background**

2.1 Contextual Safeguarding is an approach and a term developed by Dr Carlene Firmin and colleagues at University of Bedfordshire. Dr Firmin, has shone a light on 'harmful environments' existing outside of the home and called for the rewriting of current child protection rules.

2.2 Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that as young people grow and develop they are influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside of their family. For example, in school or college, in the local community, in their peer groups or online. Children and young people may encounter risk in any of these environments. Sometimes the different contexts are inter-related and can mean that children and young people may encounter multiple risks.

2.3 Contextual safeguarding looks at how we can best understand these risks, engage with children and young people and help to keep them safe. It's an approach that's often been used to apply to adolescents, though the lessons can equally be applied to younger children, especially in today's changing world. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

2.4   Figure 1 Context interplay

2.5   Not all the risks that young people face will happen within their family or home and that's where contextual safeguarding comes in. The children and young people may be exposed to harm in different environments. And their experiences may also influence the way they behave and live their lives in other situations.

2.6   As an example, overcrowding at home means the young person spends a lot of time out in public spaces. When in those places, the young person is experiencing robbery and violence. These violent incidents impact the behaviour of this young person, and many others in school. The inability of the school to respond effectively further normalises violence amongst peer groups at the school. These peer groups have more influence over the young person's behaviour than their parents – and impacts the capacity of the parents to safeguard their child from the harm they experience in (and the pull of) public and peer spaces. We must not forget to consider online environments too. These might be related, for example gangs using social media to track or groom young people, but they will have an influence on children and young people. Every situation and context is different but whatever the issues and problems, contextual safeguarding aims to help provide an approach to help keep children and young people safe.

2.7   Context, therefore, is important for how we understand children's experiences of extra familial harm. Extra-familial contexts characterise:

       (i) where the harm occurs;
       (ii) where protective and harmful relationships form;
       (iii) the limitations of parenting as a source of protection; and
       (iv) a blurring of the lines between victimisation and perpetration.

2.8   Extending the remit of traditional child/family protection models and responding to young people's experience of harm outside of the home, has far reaching implications for child protection practice and processes, and adoption and implementation of a Contextual Safeguarding approach varies significantly across the UK. Its approach has been in the main adopted in some of the inner London Boroughs and large urban cities across the UK.

2.9   For Contextual Safeguarding to be identified in a local area, the safeguarding systems must be able to:

a) Target extra-familial contexts and relationships: proactively identify these contexts/relationships; accept them as referrals, assess them and intervene with them in accordance with a plan. This work runs alongside any direct work with children and families.

b) Reduce extra-familial risks through a child protection lens: in this sense policing disruption or community safety work may feature in interventions, but they are overseen by social work and driven by a primary goal to safeguard the welfare of children (rather than solely reduce crime) – as they would do when working with families.

c) Demonstrate active partnerships with those agencies who have reach into extra-familial settings: this includes partnerships between children's social care and sports/leisure, parks and recreation, licensing, private businesses, schools, youth clubs and young people/parents themselves.

d) Measure success by a reduction in contextual risk: outcomes are monitored not solely on behaviour change in young people but in reported sense of safety in extra-familial settings or wider datasets (such as behaviour logs in schools or crime/survey data) that suggest safety is increasing in contexts where young people were encountering harm.

2.10   When operationalised a Contextual Safeguarding framework it allows an area to do two things which feed into one another:

1) Recognise contextual risks during child and family work: record contextual issues related to referrals for children and families; collect information about extra-familial risks during child and family assessments, and; where extra-familial concerns are identified refer these in for their own consideration (as per tier 2 below);

2) Address contextual risk: Accept referrals for peer groups, schools and public space; screen these referrals against contextual thresholds; subject them to assessment (and identify if they are a context in which children are in need of support or experiencing significant harm); discuss this assessment at a multi-agency safeguarding meeting, and; action a plan to reduce the risk in these contexts. These actions feed back into the individual child and family assessments/plans for young people affected by that context.

2.11   The way a local area achieves this will differ related to local demographics as well as the partnerships and operating systems used by children's social care and their partners. As such Contextual Safeguarding is not a model. It is an approach that extends the parameters of traditional child protection systems, and its methods of referral, assessment, planning and intervention, to extra-familial settings and relationships.

2.12   Gwent Safeguarding Board is in discussion with Welsh Government and the other 5 Regional Safeguarding Boards in Wales are exploring the potential merits and other implications of this approach.

2.13   The Gwent Safeguarding Board has collated some introductory information on Contextual Safeguarding, which features video's, other resources and sources of information. As part of the Board's professionals and partnership network, the Board provided some 'Bite-size' Learning initiatives earlier in July 2021. (see link to websites below)

3.   **Options for Recommendation**
3.1   **Option 1**
       Scrutiny are asked to accept the report as provided.

       Option 2
       To seek further clarification on any areas within the report and/or to highlight any areas of interest or concern that need to be considered further.

4.   **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

       The Safeguarding agenda is considered as part of the Council's Corporate Strategies that includes:

       ☐ Corporate Plan;
       ☐ Single Integrated Plan;
       ☐ Corporate Risk Register;
       ☐ Safe Reduction of CLA Strategy;
       ☐ Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy.

       Social Services work to a number of regional and national safeguarding procedures which can be located on the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board website: **http:/sewsc.org.uk**

5.   **Implications Against Each Option**
5.1   *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*
       The contextual safeguarding approach is currently being assessed by the Welsh Government and the regions, if introduced locally it would require additional resources.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***
The Directorate Risk register identifies the highest risks for the Social Services Department. These are monitored as part of the quarterly report of the Director of Social Services.

5.3 ***Legal***
There are no legal implication within this report.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

6. **Supporting Evidence**
6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***
There are no supporting information or data within this report.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***
Those children who are assessed to be at risk of harm are protected and safeguarded, and that the Local Authority adheres to legislation regarding statutory intervention.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
The development of the Corporate Safeguarding Policy and the Departmental Safeguarding Leads meetings help ensure all departments within the Authority are aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and are kept undated with any emerging issues or trends within safeguarding.

The SEWSCB local Safeguarding Network group also reviews the safeguarding information to ensure all partner agencies are as fully aware as possible.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
The Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF) enables Social Services to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where the department is currently and where it needs to be in the future.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***
The work undertaken by the Social Services Directorate looks to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. Having a proactive rather than reactive approach to service planning can also help with planning resources.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
The South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board and its sub groups ensure a multi-agency collaborative approach to safeguarding. Blaenau Gwent fully participates in the Children's and Adults Safeguarding Boards.

6.7 **_Integration (across service areas)_**
All local authorities and partner agencies work together on safeguarding through the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board and Gwent wide Adult Safeguarding Board.

6.8 **_Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions_**
Not applicable.

6.9a **_Socio Economic Duty Impact Assessment_**
Safeguarding children can have an impact on ensuring those children who require to be safeguarded can thrive and grow and hopefully fulfil their ambitions, gaining skills and employment reducing socio-economic disadvantages.

6.9b **_Equality Impact Assessment_**
. Not applicable.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
7.1 The Local Safeguarding Network Group is a sub group of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board and Gwent wide Adult Safeguarding Board. This group is made up of multi-agency representation from within Blaenau Gwent who monitors and reviews the safeguarding information and performance.

Background Documents /Electronic Links
- _University of Bedfordshire: https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/en/about/what-is-contextual-safeguarding_