

CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING PILOT GUIDANCE



Document Name:	Contextual Safeguarding Pilot Guidance
Date:	
Last Reviewed:	
Agreed by/date:	20/08/2026
Review Date:	August 2027
Version:	V1.0

Contents

1. Introduction and Purpose	3
2. Governance and Oversight	3
3. Referral Threshold and Pathway	3
4. Contextual Safeguarding Panel.....	4
5. Contextual Safeguarding Process.....	6
6. Structure of Panel - Open and Closed Discussion	9
7. Decision-Making Principles	10
8. Post-Panel Communication	10
9. Review	11
10. Closure.....	11
11. Contextual Safeguarding Plan	11
12. Participation and Communication.....	12
13. Decision-Making and Escalation	14
14. Information Sharing	15
15. Quality Assurance and Learning	15

1. Introduction and Purpose

Contextual Safeguarding (CXS) is a multi-agency approach to identifying and responding to risks to children and young people that arise outside the family home, including peer groups, schools, community environments, and online spaces. It compliments existing safeguarding arrangements by enabling a coordinated response to extra-familial harm such as:

- Child sexual and criminal exploitation
- Peer violence and harmful group dynamics
- Missing and exploitation-related risks
- Radicalisation
- Other forms of significant contextual harm.

A child does not require to be in another safeguarding process, such as CARM or Child Protection, to be referred to IRD to consider Contextual Safeguarding. The CXS process does **not replace statutory child protection or safeguarding procedures**, which must continue to manage risk to the individual child.

2. Governance and Oversight

Strategic oversight of the pilot sits within Child Protection Committee (CPC) governance arrangements. This will be delegated to a Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Oversight Group (SOG), comprised of service managers drawn from the partnership.

The SOG is responsible for:

- Monitoring implementation and adherence to the model
- Providing assurance on governance and information sharing
- Identifying learning and emerging themes
- Informing future development and evaluation.

The Strategic Oversight Group does **not manage individual cases**. Operational responsibility sits with the Contextual Safeguarding Panel.

3. Referral Threshold and Pathway

Relationship to Other Processes

The Contextual Safeguarding process operates alongside, and does not replace, existing safeguarding and statutory processes. These processes remain the primary forums for assessing and managing risk to the individual child or young person.

The following processes may identify contextual risk factors but do **not act as direct referral pathways**:

- **Child Protection Planning Meetings (CPPMs)** - responsible for assessing risk to the individual child and overseeing the Child Protection Plan
- **Care and Risk Management (CARM)** - for managing complex risk, including harmful behaviour and vulnerability
- **Adult Support and Protection (ASP)** - for young people aged 16-17 where adult protection criteria are met
- **Prevent considerations** - where there are concerns regarding radicalisation or vulnerability to extremism.

Where contextual risks are identified within these processes, the concern must be progressed via an **Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD)** to ensure:

- Consistent application of thresholds
- Appropriate multi-agency oversight
- Alignment with statutory safeguarding duties.

4. Contextual Safeguarding Panel

Purpose

The Contextual Safeguarding Panel is a multi-agency operational forum that brings together key partners to develop a shared, intelligence-informed understanding of contextual risk affecting children and young people. The panel membership is static. Its' purpose is to:

- Analyse how environments, peer relationships, and social contexts contribute to harm
- Agree coordinated, proportionate, and targeted multi-agency actions to reduce, disrupt, or manage those risks
- Support a consistent partnership approach where no single agency can effectively address the contextual concern in isolation.

The panel operates at an operational level and does not replace other decision-making relating to individual children.

Membership

Core members:

- Police Scotland
- Social Work
- Health
- Communities and Neighbourhoods
- Housing and Safer Communities Team

Additional participants (as required):

- Education
- Community and Neighbourhoods
- Allocated Social Worker
- Allocated Health Professionals
- Youth Intervention Service (and Justice for 16 & 17year-olds)
- Youth Work
- Housing
- Third Sector
- Other relevant professionals.

Quorum

A meeting is quorate where:

- Police Scotland, Social Work, and one additional partner are present
- Representatives have authority to make decisions.

Chair - In The Panel

The Chair is responsible for ensuring safe, structured, and effective multi-agency discussion and decision-making. The Chair will usually be a representative from Police Scotland but can rotate between Core Members, by exception. The Chair will:

- Provide clear structure and direction to panel discussions
- Ensure all relevant information is considered proportionately
- Maintain a focus on contextual risk rather than individual risk
- Enable full participation from all agencies
- Support professional curiosity, challenge, and constructive disagreement
- Ensure decisions are clearly recorded with actions, ownership, and timescales.

Where part of the meeting moves into a closed session, the Chair must:

- Explain to the child, young person, and/or family that a closed section is required
- Clearly outline the rationale for this, where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

If consensus cannot be reached and delay would increase risk, the Chair may determine the course of action. The rationale must be clearly recorded, along with any professional disagreement (see [section 7](#) and [8](#)).

5. Contextual Safeguarding Process

5.1 Entry (via IRD)

The single point of entry to the Contextual Safeguarding process is through an **Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD)**.

At IRD:

- Partners consider whether contextual harm meets a threshold of risk of significant harm¹
- A decision is made regarding referral to the CXS Panel
- A **Contextual Safeguarding Link Person (CXLP)** is identified
- The referral is submitted via secure email to the **Contextual Safeguarding Coordinator** to [REDACTED] who will initiate coordination of the Contextual Safeguarding process, which includes providing the CXLP with relevant information and writing to the child and their parent(s) to let them know of the referral and next steps.

The CXS Panel will be within 28 days of the IRD being raised.

5.2 Role of the Contextual Safeguarding Link Person (CXLP)

The **Contextual Safeguarding Link Person (CXLP)** is the practitioner identified by the multi-agency team working with the child or young person. The CXLP is responsible for:

- Making contact with the child or young person and their parent(s) or carer(s)
- Explaining the Contextual Safeguarding process to the [child or young person](#) and their [parents or carers](#)
- Gathering initial views and supporting engagement
- Coordinating communication and participation across agencies
- Coordinating of who is undertaking the mapping process and providing that professional with the resources to undertake the task.

5.3 Mapping Activity

Contextual Safeguarding mapping activities are used to support understanding of the child or young person's experiences, relationships, environments, and risks.

The CXLP will **coordinate** the mapping process. However, the child or young person should be supported, by the CXLP to **identify who they feel most comfortable working with** to complete the mapping tools.

This may be the CXLP or another trusted professional.

¹ [national-guidance-child-protection-scotland-2021-updated-2023.pdf](#) 1.55 – 1.58 P15 – 16

All mapping activities should be completed in line with the [Contextual Safeguarding Mapping Tools](#) and the accompanying [practitioner guidance](#).

5.4 Role of the Contextual Safeguarding Coordinator

The Contextual Safeguarding Coordinator provides a central administrative and coordination function for the process.

Following an Inter-Agency Referral Discussion (IRD):

- Referrals to Contextual Safeguarding are submitted to the Coordinator via the agreed secure email address to:
[REDACTED]
- The Coordinator is responsible for:
 - Logging and managing incoming referrals
 - Initiating standard communication processes
 - Distributing requests for relevant information to partner agencies
 - Supporting the timely organisation of panel activity
 - Providing outcomes from panel to child, family and professionals
 - Ensuring that parent(s), carer(s), and children are offered a chance to participate in process feedback
 - Logging the data on the Minimum Data Set for Contextual Safeguarding.

The Coordinator will:

- Issue standardised information requests to relevant professionals to support multi-agency information gathering
- Issue notification and preparation letters to:
 - The identified **CXLP**
 - The child or young person and their parent(s) or carer(s)
- Support the scheduling and coordination of panel meetings.

The Coordinator role is administrative and facilitative. It **does not hold case responsibility or make operational decisions**, which remain with the multi-agency panel and relevant safeguarding processes.

Information Management and Preparation for Panel

The Contextual Safeguarding Coordinator will ensure that all multi-agency information is received in advance of the panel.

All agencies must provide information in a structured format which clearly distinguishes between:

- **Information that can be shared with the child, young person, and family**
- **Information that is restricted and not suitable for sharing**

The Coordinator will review all information prior to the meeting to:

- Identify key themes of risk
- Assess any sensitivities or restrictions on information sharing
- Plan the structure of the Panel, including open and closed sections.

5.4 Preparation

Prior to the panel meeting:

- We are working to a timescale of 28 days between the IRD being raised and the CXS Panel
- The Coordinator will issue initial communications and information requests and secure a room booking or arrange for the panel to be online
- The CXLP will then make contact with the child, young person, and parent(s)/carer(s) to:
 - Explain the process and purpose
 - Provide reassurance that the focus is on safety, not blame
 - Offer opportunities to participate
- Contextual Safeguarding Mapping Tools may be completed with the child's chosen professional:
 - With the child or young person, where appropriate
 - To support understanding of lived experience, environments, and risks
 - To ensure that their voice is heard within the panel particularly if they do not attend the panel
 - In line with the accompanying [practitioner guidance](#), which should be used alongside the [CXS Mapping Tools](#)
 - Parent(s) or carer(s) will be:
 - Provided with information about the process
 - Offered the opportunity to contribute their views and relevant information.

5.5 Panel Meeting

The panel will:

- Hear the voice of the child which will be the paramount consideration on informing risk and protection
- Consider multi-agency information
- Develop a shared understanding of contextual risks
- Identify themes such as locations, peer groups, and patterns of harm
- Confirm that individual safeguarding arrangements remain in place
- Agree a coordinated Contextual Safeguarding Plan.

5.6 Planning

The Contextual Safeguarding Plan will:

- Clearly identify contextual concerns
- Set out specific actions to reduce or disrupt risk
- Identify responsible agencies
- Include timescales and intended outcomes
- Align, where appropriate, with other safeguarding plans.

6. Structure of Panel - Open and Closed Discussion

Contextual Safeguarding Panel meetings will be structured to ensure that sensitive information is managed safely while supporting meaningful participation from children, young people, and families.

The Panel will ordinarily take place in two stages:

1. Open Participation Session

The child or young person and their parent(s) or carer(s) join the meeting, where appropriate.

This session will:

- Develop an understanding of contextual risks
- Identify themes that can be safely explored with the child and family while enabling them to share their views
- Allow professionals to explore relevant themes in a safe and proportionate way
- Focus on understanding experience rather than disclosing sensitive intelligence.

2. Closed Decision-Making Session

Following participation, the child and family will leave the meeting.

Professionals will:

- Consider the closed information
- Finalise their analysis of risk
- Agree a Contextual Safeguarding Plan
- Identify both shared and restricted actions.

7. Decision-Making Principles

Decision-making within the Contextual Safeguarding Panel takes place throughout the structured Panel process described above and is underpinned by the following principles:

Decision-making is:

- Multi-agency
- Evidence-informed
- Focused on reducing contextual risk.

Where agreement cannot be reached:

- The Chair will seek to resolve differences through discussion
- If unresolved and risk remains, the Chair may determine the action.

Where disagreement persists:

- This must be clearly recorded
- Consideration must be given to escalation through the [Fife Multi-Agency Escalation and Dispute Resolution Protocol](#) (see [section 13](#) below).

8. Post-Panel Communication

Following the meeting:

- Decisions and actions are recorded and shared with relevant professionals
- The **CXLP** communicates key outcomes to the child, young person, and parent(s) or carer(s), unless doing so will increase risk to the child or young person.

Communication will:

- Focus on outcomes and agreed actions
- Be proportionate and accessible
- Support understanding.

The Coordinator will review the plan weekly to monitor progress.

9. Review

Reviews will normally take place within **12 weeks**, or sooner if required. Reviews will:

- Assess the impact of agreed actions
- Consider any changes in contextual risk
- Revisit mapping tools where appropriate
- Ensure the child, young person, and parent(s) or carer(s) are given a further opportunity to contribute views.

10. Closure

Closure will occur where:

- Contextual risks have reduced or are effectively managed through other processes.

Closure will:

- Be clearly recorded
- Be communicated to the child and family, where appropriate to do so.
- Not prevent re-referral if risks re-emerge.

11. Contextual Safeguarding Plan

The Contextual Safeguarding Plan provides a structured framework for coordinated multi-agency action focused on reducing harm within environments and contexts.

The plan:

- Addresses external risks rather than attributing responsibility to the child or family
- Complements, but does not replace, individual safeguarding and or child's plans.

Actions may include:

Disruption

- Targeting harmful activity, individuals, or environments.

Diversion

- Supporting access to safer activities, relationships, and opportunities.

Contextual Interventions

- Addressing risks within locations, peer groups, or community settings.

Plans must be:

- Clearly documented
- Proportionate and outcome-focused
- Time-limited
- Regularly reviewed.

Shared and Restricted Elements of the Plan

The Contextual Safeguarding Plan will include both:

- A **shared plan**, which is provided to the child, young person, and their family
- A **restricted operational plan**, which is retained for professional use.

The shared plan will:

- Be written in accessible language
- Focus on risks, support, and agreed actions
- Support understanding and engagement.

The restricted operational plan will include:

- Sensitive or intelligence-led actions
- Disruption activity
- Information that cannot safely be shared.

Under no circumstances should restricted information be shared where this would increase risk or compromise safeguarding activity.

12. Participation and Communication

Principles

Children, young people, and families are **partners in the Contextual Safeguarding process**. The child's voice must be heard and considered.

Engagement should:

- Be transparent, respectful, and proportionate
- Support understanding of risk outside the home
- Enable meaningful participation in planning and decision-making.

Contextual Safeguarding Link Person (CXLP)

The CXLP:

- Acts as the main point of contact
- Builds a relationship with the child and family
- Explains processes, decisions, and expectations
- Ensures views are sought and accurately represented
- Supports preparation for and follow-up from panel meetings.

Key Communication Points

Communication with the child and family will occur at:

- Referral
- Pre-Panel
- Post-Panel
- Review
- Closure
- Feedback.

Agreed letters and templates have been prepared - the coordinator holds the master copies.

Attendance at Panel

Children, young people, and parent(s) or carer(s) will usually be invited where:

- It is safe
- It is appropriate
- It is in the best interests of the child.

Attendance will:

- Be planned and supported in advance
- Include clear information about the meeting
- Ensure individuals are not questioned or placed under pressure.

Non-Participation

Where a child or family chooses not to engage:

- This decision will be respected
- The panel may proceed where there is a safeguarding rationale
- Their view and voice can be supported in other ways.

In these circumstances:

- Decisions will be based on available information
- Previously expressed views will be considered
- Opportunities for future engagement will remain open.

13. Decision-Making and Escalation

Decision-making is shared across agencies and informed by professional expertise and available evidence.

Where disagreement arises:

- Different views will be explored and recorded
- Efforts will be made to reach consensus.

Where agreement cannot be reached:

- The Chair may determine the course of action where delay would increase risk
- Professional disagreement must be recorded
- Escalation should be considered using the [Fife Multi-Agency Escalation and Dispute Resolution Process](#).

Where safeguarding risk increases:

- Immediate action must be taken through established processes such as referral back to IRD:
 - for [Child Protection](#)
 - [Adult Support and Protection](#)
 - [Care and Risk Management \(CARM\) Protection](#), or
 - to the [Prevent Coordinator](#) for matters relating to concerns about radicalisation and terrorism. Such concerns **will also** be referred to IRD if those concerns reach a tariff of risk of significant harm (CP) or Risk of Serious Harm to another (CARM) or risk of harm for a child aged 16 or 17 where they are unable to safeguard their own wellbeing and there is a risk of harm to their own wellbeing, property, rights or other interests. (Adult support and Protection)
- This must not be delayed by the Contextual Safeguarding process.

14. Information Sharing

Information sharing is essential and must be:

- Lawful
- Necessary
- Proportionate.

The lawful basis is **public task in safeguarding children**. Information will:

- Be limited to what is relevant
- Be shared securely
- Support decision-making and risk reduction.

Agencies remain responsible for:

- The accuracy of their information
- Their own recording and retention.

Access will be restricted to those with a role in managing risk.

15. Quality Assurance and Learning

Learning will be gathered through:

- Feedback from [children, young people](#), and [families](#)
- Panel activity and review processes
- Practitioner experience.

Feedback will:

- Identify strengths and areas for improvement
- Inform service development
- Be considered at a thematic and systems level by the Strategic Oversight Group who report to the Child Protection Committee.

Feedback will not be used to revisit individual case decisions.