	Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee 30 January 2019
	Report from the Strategic Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships

Feedback Report: Members' Overview and Scrutiny Task Group to Review Contextual Safeguarding in Brent

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Non-key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt:	Open
No. of Appendices:	Two: • Work Plan and Activities • The Contextual Safeguarding Model Diagram
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To update committee members with interim feedback from the members' overview and scrutiny task group which was set up by the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee to review contextual safeguarding in Brent.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 Members of the committee to discuss and note the contents of the report, particularly the findings so far and emerging areas for recommendations.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Background

3.2 The approach of contextual safeguarding has been developed in recent years by Dr Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire's International Centre. The model asks practitioners working with adolescent children to recognise the

limits of safeguarding approaches which just focus on risks within the family and to also address the risks from 'contexts' outside of the family such as peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods in which an adolescent child lives.[1] Contextual safeguarding is increasingly influential and with the support of the Contextual Safeguarding Network local authorities are adopting the model into their work. The most ambitious introduction of contextual safeguarding is at the London Borough of Hackney, which with the University of Bedfordshire has been awarded £2million by Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Fund to introduce a contextual safeguarding framework over two years.[2]

3.3 In July 2018 the Government's statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' was updated and there is now a section just on contextual safeguarding.[3] The London Safeguarding Children Board is expected to update its own policies and procedures to incorporate this new national guidance. Practitioners in Brent Council's Children's Services Department, as well as officers in other departments and partner organisations, are now working with contextual safeguarding and the local authority is developing its own approach.

3.4 For the above reasons, the Community and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee proposed that its 2018/19 work programme would include a members' overview and scrutiny task group to review contextual safeguarding and how this new approach could be introduced more widely with support from across the council. The committee's work programme was subsequently agreed by Council and the committee formally set up the members' task group on 8 October 2018. Committee agreed Councillor Hylton would chair the task group, and the other members would be Councillor Patterson and Councillor Donnelly-Jackson.

3.5 According to the terms of reference agreed by the committee, which are set out in Appendix A, the task group has been asked to take an overview of contextual safeguarding in Brent and develop suitable recommendations for the council's Cabinet. The work plan of the task group, which sets out its meetings and activities, is in Appendix A. Its full report with detailed findings and final recommendations for Cabinet will be made to the committee on 18 March 2019; however, it was felt that a feedback report would be made to the committee before to allow members of the scrutiny committee to hear back from the task group about their headline findings and possible areas for recommendations so far. A feedback report was done previously by the Pupil Premium Grant Task Group in 2015, and the Individual Electoral Registration Task Group in 2016.

4.0 Methodology

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[1] Dr Carlene Firmin, *Contextual Risk, Individualised Responses: An Assessment of Safeguarding Responses to Nine Cases of Peer-on-Peer Abuse*, Child Abuse Review Vol. 27:42–57 (2018); Published online 21 February 2017 in Wiley Online Library, p43

[2] www.hackney.gov.uk/contextual-safeguarding

[3] 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A Guide to Inter-Agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children (HM Government, July 2018) pp.23-24

4.1   As part of this review the task group has focused on face-to-face meetings to gather evidence and inform its understanding of contextual safeguarding. So far, the committee has met three times and is planning to hold a further meeting in February. As set out in the appendix, those who have met with the task group include the Strategic Director for Children and Young People, Operational Director Safeguarding, Partnerships and Strategy, Operational Director Integration and Improved Outcomes, and the Cabinet Member for Safeguarding, Early Help and Social Care. The task group has also met with Brent Council's senior officers including the Head of Community Protection, Head of Planning, Transport and Licensing and the Head of Early Help in early January as well as representatives from secondary schools, the pupil referral unit and the Independent Chair of the Brent Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in late January. The task group meetings have focused on different aspects of contextual safeguarding. Broadly, the first meeting looked at understanding the approach of contextual safeguarding and the development of Brent's approach at this early stage; the second meeting looked at implementing the approach across the council, and the third meeting focused on working with the community and local schools. A fourth meeting, which will take place next month, will be with the Strategic Director and Cabinet Member and look at resources and strategic thinking.

4.2   Where relevant the task group is also considering the council's existing strategies including the Borough Plan 2019-2023, Digital Strategy 2017-2020, and Safer Brent Community Strategy 2018-2021 and how contextual safeguarding has influenced them. At the time of writing this report, the Borough Plan was in draft and is to be agreed by Council on 25 February 2019. The task group will also be considering the 2017-18 annual report of Brent LSCB.

4.3   As noted, the London Borough of Hackney is attempting the most comprehensive introduction of contextual safeguarding and the task group members are keen to understand what they have learned so far. The borough has been approached to arrange a members' visit to help inform their report.

5.0   Emerging Findings

5.1   The model has been developed by the International Centre based on research examining adolescent children's lives and existing safeguarding practices. Contextual safeguarding emphasises the adolescent child, and the risks they can experience outside the family, stressing that adolescent children will increasingly socialise and be involved in peer groups outside the home and that this needs to be accounted for in safeguarding. So, as well as working with a family, it looks at risks which might exist outside from the 'contexts' of peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods. These contexts are often outside families but can have an effect on them. For clarity, a diagram of these 'contexts' is in Appendix B.

5.2   According to the model, risks, which can overlap and be multiple, in these contexts include youth violence, radicalisation, gangs and child sexual exploitation. In the context of neighbourhoods the risks to adolescent could be from street victimisation and robbery as well as being targets for exploitation in

areas of neighbourhoods such as parks and shopping centres. Within schools there can be risks from bullying, including sexual bullying, 'corridor culture', peer recruitment and issues with social media. Within the context of peer groups the risks can include partner violence, gangs, peer group violence, and harmful sexual behaviour. It appears that the online context is not being thought of separately and that social media is considered in the context of schools. [4]

5.3   While contextual safeguarding is a model developed by academics the Contextual Safeguarding Network works to help implement it on the ground. The Network has led the development of practical toolkits such as a Neighbourhood Assessment Toolkit, and a School Assessment Toolkit, for putting the approach into practice. There is also the opportunity for practitioners to learn from each other and from information and learning in the Network.

5.4   The task group members believe that the approach of contextual safeguarding is important and that it is right to stress the importance of particular risks to adolescent children and to shift thinking to possible risks outside of the home. It could further improve how adolescent children are safeguarded in Brent. Regrettably, the borough has seen high-profile incidents in recent years, particularly related to serious youth violence, and there is an understandable concern among Brent residents about how we can look after teenage children. As elected members the task group thinks this new approach should be part of the response to the risks highlighted above which exist in too many local communities. The task group has noted that Dr Firmin has already addressed a training event in Brent, organised by Brent LSCB in January 2018, which looked at the key themes emerging from incidents of serious youth violence in the borough.

5.5   Contextual safeguarding is a generic model which can be adapted to suit the particular risks and needs of adolescent children in a local authority area. For its approach, Brent is more closely defining adolescent children as those at secondary school, starting from Year 7. The approach is also thinking about adolescent children as two discrete groups: the most high-risk, which is smaller in number and who will probably already be in contact with services. For the high-risk group it is about adapting existing front-line work with those children so it is informed by contextual safeguarding. The second is a wider 'global' group which in effect encompasses every child. The approach with this group is emphasising public realm, and neighbourhood initiatives to minimize risks which they may face in their everyday environment. In terms of risks which may be present in Brent's different contexts, the main focus for Brent's approach so far is on gangs, serious youth violence and child sexual exploitation (CSE).

5.6   The development of Brent's approach to contextual safeguarding is at an early stage, but a number of principles have been developed to inform the approach. A key principle is that Brent's approach is both preventative and responsive, and is in line with the 2018 updated government guidance 'Working Together'. There is also a commitment to the council working in partnership with Brent

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[4] Dr Carlene Firmin, Contextual Safeguarding: An Overview of the Operational, Strategic and Conceptual Framework (University of Bedfordshire International Centre, July 2017), p2

LSCB and the Safer Brent Partnership in terms of identifying needs and responding to issues which a contextual safeguarding approach may identify. As part of developing the approach the task group has been told that the views of children and young people and their families will be of paramount importance, and that the Brent approach is to listen to children and families through everything it does.

5.7 Brent's approach is also emphasising the need for a cross-council initiative rather than one which is seen as solely the concern of the Children's Services department. There's a strong emphasis on all departments contributing where they can, but there will be a particularly important role for the Regeneration and Environmental Services department, which is oversees the council's responsibility for neighbourhoods and community safety. However, so far the development of a cross-council way of working has been only at the senior management level and is still largely at the discussion stage. The task group has found that senior officers and the Cabinet Member are also keen for there to be a greater role for the wider community and community groups in the borough in contributing to improving adolescent children's lives by helping to provide more activities and support outside of school hours than exist at present. This would help to complement Brent Council's approach to contextual safeguarding.

5.8 Contextual safeguarding has already started to influence practice and work in the local authority before any formal plan to strengthen it has been put in place. For example, the Youth Offending Service has already introduced Safety Mapping. Adolescents it works with are asked to indicate the neighbourhoods in the borough which they feel safe, using a red-amber-green system, and if a young person feels unsafe, for example, in travelling to school or attending an appointment then an appropriate plan is put in place while they are in the area.

5.9 The Vulnerable Adolescents' Panel has been one body in which the approach is being developed. The Panel, chaired by the Operational Director for Integration and Improved Outcomes, has led a multi-agency response to children who are vulnerable to exploitation, go missing from home and care or are involved with serious youth violence. It is developing joint responses to issues which are underpinned by an understanding of contextual safeguarding. The council is recruiting for a Vulnerable Adolescents' Analyst to support the Panel's work.

5.10 It has been pointed out that what could be called contextual safeguarding has already been in place for some time in regards to improving neighbourhoods. Working jointly with the police there are ongoing initiatives to improve the public realm and tackle issues of anti-social behaviour, crime and tackling safety issues. Often, this is done in response to what residents say about a neighbourhood, and what makes them feel at risk about a particular area.

5.11 Brent's schools also have been doing a considerable amount of work to improve children's safety in local neighbourhoods as well as within the school. The task group has heard about the concern many schools have about children in the immediate after-school hours between leaving school and returning home. In

Brent, there appears to be a significant concern around children travelling on the bus network and the considerable numbers travelling at any one time. In these immediate after-school hours, children may not always feel safe. Some schools are also aware, and are working to reduce the risks, to their children in parks and high streets and have put a considerable amount of resources into this.

5.12   Schools have also reported to the task group the problems presented by social media and children's use of digital technology. Issues can include behavioural problems being made worse in a school because of social media and a resulting increased vulnerability for some children. Often, this can be because of a child's or even a parent's lack of knowledge in using smartphones and their settings.

5.13   As well as looking at risk in neighbourhoods there has been thinking in the council about places which are safe or free from risk for adolescent children. This includes looking at which adolescents are using libraries in the borough, and how greater use could be encouraged. Also, there is the development of the Safe Spaces project, which is looking at how places in neighbourhoods in which adolescents feel secure, for example shops or public buildings, can be developed and promoted.

6.0   Emerging Recommendations

6.1   On the basis of the emerging findings so far, set out above, the task group is minded to develop recommendations in a number of areas for its final report which will be presented to committee on 18 March 2019 and then to Cabinet.

6.2   Firstly, the task group is considering if the project should be clear that the online context should be distinct from neighbourhoods, schools and peers. Digital technology is playing an increasingly important role in the life of adolescent children. The task group was told that a school-age child can spend as little as little as 15% of his or her life in school. The task group is looking at whether online deserves to be a standalone context to provide greater clarity and focus to Brent's approach to contextual safeguarding and developing responses to risks. The possible addition of this separate online context is set out in Appendix B.

6.3   Secondly, Brent's approach needs to consider how an academic model can be translated into something which will inform how everybody working or living in the borough is made more aware of safeguarding adolescent children and have the knowledge or skills about what to do in order to raise a concern. While there is already emphasis placed on raising awareness of safeguarding, the task group will look at a recommendation about whether this needs a new approach through, for example, a different public information campaign.

6.4   Thirdly, children's use of transportation, and particularly the bus network, is clearly a part of the neighbourhood context which requires more attention. The task group is looking at a recommendation about how everyone involved from bus companies, Transport for London, the council, and schoolchildren can be brought together to review this issue and agree possible solutions.

6.5   Finally, the academic-led model identifies schools as a context for risks, but from what the task group has learned so far in Brent, schools are as much places of safety in which adolescent children feel protected. However, there is concern about adolescent children's time outside of term time during the school holidays, particularly in the summer holidays. Another area for developing a final recommendation is how schools, the council and community groups can be brought together to address this concern and agree a way forward or possible solutions.

7.0   Financial Implications

7.1   There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8.0   Legal Implications

8.1   There are no legal implications from this report.

9.0   Equality Implications

9.1   There are no equality implications arising from this report.

10.0   Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

10.1   Ward members who are committee members have been involved in this report.

Report sign-off

PETER GADSDON
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