

Policy recommendations

Contextual Safeguarding: The Next Chapter (TNC) comprised four workstreams which collectively told us a lot about how to embed the Contextual Safeguarding Framework safely and ethically. Each workstream has made policy and practice recommendations specific to their area of focus (child protection processes, school exclusions, structural and system harm, and workforce development). This document outlines the collective policy implications of these workstreams, summarising what we consider to be imperatives for the safe and ethical adoption of the approach.

National and local, policies

We recommend that policies articulate that:

Children’s welfare and best interests must be paramount in decisions about extra-familial harm, and take precedence over community safety or justice objectives

2. Social care leadership is critical in coordinating interagency responses to extra-familial harm, with services delivered by the organisations and individuals that young people trust
3. All professional agencies must consider the ways in which the services they deliver, and systems in which they operate, can contribute to harm as well as safety. Any identified harms such as school exclusion or being over-policed are themselves safeguarding issues
4. Structural biases and discrimination mean that current, and even redesigned, safeguarding systems may not be experienced the same; steps must be taken to identify and mitigate this
5. Proportionality and parity remain a central feature of state intervention into private life – and that this pertains to young people’s social lives, as well as their family lives. Thresholds already in place in respect of significant harm go some way to maintaining this

National practice associations

6. Work with government departments across the four nations of the UK to agree consistent ways to record extra-familial forms of harm, both in child protection processes and in contexts where such harm occurs (such as in school recording systems)
7. Identify opportunities to provide peer support and contain anxieties that can be induced when responding to extra-familial harm and/or taking a Contextual Safeguarding approach; paying particular attention to tensions that can emerge between social care and policing professionals who respond to young people affected by extra-familial harm

National policymakers, commissioners, and funders

8. Invest in responses and practices that build safety for and around young people rather than solely funding interventions that disrupt, and intervene with, young people. This includes the creation of safe school environments, and the protection of relationships that young people select and trust, such as formal and informal community guardianship
9. Listen to where young people say they feel safe and/or included and invest in scaling up/replicating these contexts, rather than solely disrupting those that are identified as unsafe

All service providers

10. Use information from young people, their families, and wider communities to understand how/where they experience harm or safety; accept that this may at times counter information held in systems, or challenge the way services have been provided to date