Last updated: November 2026

Contextual Safeguarding Local Area Interest Network Terms of Reference

Contextual Safeguarding is a conceptual, strategic and operational framework being used to develop safeguarding responses to extra-familial contexts and relationships in which young people experience, or at risk of, significant harm. In 2025 the team behind the concept launched the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding (GCCS), based at Durham University[1], to facilitate the ongoing development and implementation of the idea.

The GCCS is the world's first research centre dedicated to Contextual Safeguarding. Bringing together expertise from across disciplines, it aims to transform how societies understand and respond to harm beyond the home by developing systems that look beyond parental capacity and make safeguarding a shared responsibility.

The centre is committed to reshaping how safeguarding is understood, researched and practiced. It does this by advancing interdisciplinary research, influencing policy, education and practice and building partnerships that extend beyond traditional safeguarding sectors to support lasting change.

Our Local Area Interest Network (LAIN) brings together over 100 local authorities across England, Wales and Scotland. The LAIN provides a space for local authorities to connect and share learning together and it is the main route through which they can access structured support to ensure that their implementation of Contextual Safeguarding is aligned with GCCS research and resources.

Terms of Reference

This document sets out the Terms of Reference for both the regional strategic groups and the regional champions group, collectively referred to as 'GCCS LAIN groups'.

The Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding (the GCCS) leads the development of Contextual Safeguarding and oversees the GCCS LAIN.

1. Aim

[1] Previously the Contextual Safeguarding Research Programme

The GCCS LAIN groups bring representatives from local authority's children's services together online to share learning, identify opportunities and challenges in implementing Contextual Safeguarding, and exchange information with the GCCS.

2. Objectives

- Connect local authorities to share progress, learning and effective practice.
- Support local authorities to embed and promote Contextual Safeguarding approaches.
- Ensure local authorities remain informed about the latest GCCS research, resources and opportunities.
- Identify and address implementation challenges, knowledge gaps and workforce development needs.
- Support strategic leads and practice champions to build local knowledge and capacity.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration between local authorities.
- Discuss relevant policy, strategy, commissioning and practice developments.
- Share local learning and emerging themes with the GCCS.

3. Group structure

Each member local authority nominates one strategic lead as its main contact. The strategic lead may nominate up to five practice champions.

Feature	Strategic Group	Practice Champion Groups
Membership	One nominated strategic lead from each member local authority's children services	Up to five practice champions from each member local authority's children service. Practice champions are nominated by each strategic lead
Purpose	Share learning about the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding across local authorities' children's services	Share practice learning about the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding in practice
Frequency	Quarterly	Bimonthly or quarterly as agreed by members
Chairing	A volunteer strategic lead	A volunteer practice champion
Administration	GCCS	GCCS

4. Distinct focus of each group

- **Strategic Group:** focuses on service implementation, strategy and policy, including how the framework and its values are embedded across children's services.
- **Practice Champion Groups:** focus on frontline and operational practice, including the use of Contextual Safeguarding approaches and GCCS resources.

5. Responsibilities and accountability

The local authority, rather than the individual representative, is the LAIN member. Strategic leads and practice champions are accountable to their member local authority.

Strategic leads commit to:

- Attend meetings or nominate a substitute when they cannot attend.
- Use the Contextual Safeguarding framework accurately, in alignment with its underpinning principles and values, and support its local implementation.
- Share local learning at meetings.
- Nominate and support local practice champions.
- Complete the annual GCCS LAIN survey.
- Update the GCCS about membership changes: gccs.lain@durham.ac.uk
- Lead discussions or present local work when appropriate.

Practice champions commit to:

- Attend meetings, with at least one practice champion from each local authority represented.
- Use the Contextual Safeguarding framework accurately, in alignment with its underpinning principles and values, and support its local implementation.
- Share local learning at meetings.
- Update the GCCS when they stop acting as a practice champion: gccs.lain@durham.ac.uk

Chairs commit to:

- Chair meetings.
- If they cannot chair one meeting, identify someone else to chair on their behalf.
- Notify the GCCS if they are no longer able to chair.

Strategic leads and practice champion have access to:

- Annual online introductory training hosted by the GCCS.
- Regular written GCCS updates
- Opportunities to engage in GCCS research project, events, wider communities of practice, etc.
- Chairs can receive a CPD certificate from the GCCS after a year of chairing.

6. Functioning

Meeting frequency and administration

- The Strategic Group meets online quarterly.
- The Practice Champion Groups meet online bimonthly or quarterly, as agreed by members.
- The GCCS schedules meetings and sends invitations.

Membership

- The GCCS coordinates membership of GCCS LAIN groups and keeps the membership list up to date.
- The GCCS contact is gccs.lain@durham.ac.uk

Chairing and minutes

- A volunteer member chairs each group.
- Meetings will be transcribed.
- The GCCS will circulate minutes, including GCCS update, to the group after each meeting.

The emphasis of each item will vary by group. The Strategic Group will focus mainly on service implementation, strategy and policy. The Practice Champion Groups will focus mainly on practice.

Standing agenda

- **Local authority updates:** Brief updates from each member local authority on Contextual Safeguarding activity since the previous meeting. Examples include trialing contextual approaches, such as contextual assessments; trialing resources, such as the safety mapping tool; embedding Contextual Safeguarding across the workforce; relevant strategic or service developments; and engagement with partners.
- **Implementation challenges:** Challenges such as aligning practice with the Contextual Safeguarding framework and values, ensuring consistency across the workforce, and engaging multi-agency or non-traditional partners.
- **Policy matters:** For example, changes to guidance, opportunities to contribute to consultations or policy developments.
- **GCCS updates:** Updates provided by the GCCS

Additional agenda items

- Groups may agree on thematic issues for discussion.
- Member local authorities may present their work or introduce a topic. For example, sharing learning from piloting a neighbourhood assessment or developing community guardianship by engaging local businesses.
- Practice champions may ask the GCCS to refer strategic or policy matters to the Strategic Group.

Meeting principles

- Psychological safety when discussing harm
- Trauma-informed practice
- Reflective practice
- Respectful engagement
- Non-hierarchical participation
- Discussion of non-identifiable cases only
- Anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice

7. Information sharing and confidentiality

Contact details collected and used

Members' names, professional roles, organisations or local authorities, and work email addresses may be used and shared with the GCCS to administer the network, facilitate communication with members and support LAIN activities. Information will be used in accordance with Durham University's privacy notice.

Sharing contact details

In addition to the GCCS, members' professional contact details may be shared with:

- Strategic leads and practice champions in the same local authority, so local participants can identify and contact one another; and
- Members of the specific LAIN group or groups to which they belong, to support communication, networking and shared learning.

Introductions outside a member's group

Membership and contact information will not be shared with members of LAIN groups to which the individual does not belong. If a member requests an introduction to someone outside their local authority or their LAIN group, the person's consent will be obtained before their contact details are shared.

Members' responsibilities

- Members must use other members' contact information only for LAIN-related purposes.
- They must not share or circulate another member's contact details outside their LAIN group without that individual's permission.
- They must avoid discussing identifiable information about children, young people, parents, carers or families.

Agreement on joining

By joining the LAIN, members confirm that they understand and agree to their professional contact details being used and shared in this way as part of their participation in the network.

8. External governance

Nominated representatives from member local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales represent the LAIN on the GCCS Advisory Panel, which forms part of the GCCS external governance structure.

9. Complaints

To make a complaint about the GCCS, contact Professor Nicole Westmarland, Director of Research in Durham University's Department of Sociology: nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk.

10. Review

The GCCS will review this document at least annually and whenever else required.