



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Harm Outside the Home
Process**

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Introduction

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of harm beyond their families and home. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers can often have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial pressures can also undermine parent-child relationships. In light of this, the Contextual Safeguarding approach recognises that children's practitioners need to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over (or within) extra-familial contexts, and that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces or locations are a critical part of safeguarding practices.

Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts.

Wokingham Borough Council has developed this document to clarify its multi-agency approach to working with young people within the harm outside the home (HOTH) context - where traditional safeguarding approaches may not fit, but where risk of harm to the young person still exists.

Under this approach, although children at risk will continue to be managed within existing Child in Need, Child Protection and Child in Care frameworks, flexibility is provided to ensure that the multi-agency response fits the context and individual needs of the young people involved.

Thresholds and Levels of Need

Wokingham's Threshold guidance document provides examples of risk indicators for harm outside of the home to inform the level of intervention needed. This document can be accessed in full via the Berkshire West Safeguarding Partnership website [here](#).

As with any other case, should a child or young person meet the threshold criteria in respect of a harm outside the home risk indicator, the case should be referred to the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) team at Wokingham Children's Services.

A flow chart providing an overview of the processes that practitioners should follow when considering a harm outside the home risk indicator can be found under [Appendix 2](#) of this guidance document.

An overview of the meetings where HOTH may be a consideration is also included under [Appendix 1](#).

Making a referral

When professionals wish to make a referral for a young person considered to be at risk of harm outside the home, they should consult the [Pan Berkshire Child Protection Procedures Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Indicator and Analysis Tool](#).

This tool will support the referrer to identify any relevant risk indicators when completing the [Multi Agency Referral Form](#) (MARF).

The MARF is used for referring individual children. However, where HOTH is considered as a risk, professionals will also need to include information about associates and the contexts of concern, where this is appropriate. A revised version of Wokingham's MARF document is currently under development, which upon completion will include specific questions around these subjects.

On receipt of the MARF, the MASH team may need to contact the referrer to clarify or seek further information. They will then contact relevant agencies to seek their input, which will inform their decision making around threshold.

Threshold decisions can include:

- Advice, information and/or signposting to services.
- Referral to Early Help Hub.
- Strategy Meeting.
- Allocation for a Child and Family Assessment.

Early Help

When referrals are received through our MASH team that include harm from outside the home as a possible risk factor, consideration is given to whether Early Help

Interventions can reduce any vulnerabilities associated with:

- Children going missing from home.
- Exclusion from school.
- Involvement in anti-social behaviour and offending.
- Child exploitation.

Referrals for Early Help support are discussed in a weekly Multi-Agency Early Help Hub where other specialist or community-based support may be offered to families.

For children who are already the subject of Child in Need or Child Protection plans, a referral for targeted intervention from Early Help Services can be made where specific pieces of preventative work are needed.

Children's Social Care

Work with children and young people at risk of harm from outside the family may take place within existing Child in Need, Child Protection and Child in Care procedures. New information relating to harm outside the home can trigger a Strategy Meeting and subsequent assessment under S17 or S47 at any point in these cases.

Strategy Meetings

A Strategy Meeting will be convened whenever there is information to suggest that a child or young person has suffered or is at risk of significant harm. This can include instances where young people have been linked with a context of concern.

The Strategy Meeting should be held on the same day that the new information is received, and will be chaired by an Assistant Team Manager or Team Manager. If the Strategy Meeting is held outside of timescale, the reasons for this and the rationale for accepting the delay should always be clearly recorded by the manager as a Management Oversight.

Guidance is available for practitioners to support them structure an agenda for a Strategy Meeting, including cases where risks from HOTH may be a consideration for the child or children involved. Please see Wokingham's [Guidance Note on Strategy Meetings](#) for more details.

Assessment (or subsequent assessment if an open case)

Before undertaking an assessment for a case where harm outside the home is a feature, practitioners should consult Wokingham's [Best Questions](#) guidance document, which provides an overview of how Wokingham's practice model should be applied in order to assess and respond to these kinds of risks and vulnerabilities. Cases of this nature may also need to be reviewed against the Pan Berkshire [Child Exploitation \(CE\) and Serious Youth Violence \(SYV\) Indicator and Analysis Tool](#), with any findings then incorporated into the resulting Child and Family Assessment (whether this is undertaken under S17 or S47 of the Children Act).

An additional consideration during the assessment process, or as an outcome of the Child and Family Assessment, might be that a **Context Assessment** is required. For additional guidance on the use of Context Assessments, please see the University of Bedfordshire and Contextual Safeguarding Network resource on [Context Assessment Triangles](#).

Consideration will also need to be given as to whether a **Context Meeting** needs to be held to develop the Context Assessment and safety planning for the child, or whether this can be addressed as part of the existing CIN or CP planning. If taken forward, a Context Meeting will need to be chaired by a Social Work Manager, or an equivalent manager from within a partner agency. For more information about how these meetings should be structured and planned, please see Wokingham's [Guidance on Context Meeting Agendas](#).

During or upon completion of the assessment, if the risk is substantiated, a referral must be made to the **Exploited and Missing Risk Assessment Conference** (known as EMRAC) and a Child of Concern form will be completed for discussion at EMRAC. The Case of Concern Reporting Template form for EMRAC can be found [here](#). Upon completion of the assessment, and the analysis of risk, a threshold decision will be made together with the identification of next steps. Threshold decisions may include:

- Child in Need Plan
- Initial Child Protection Conference
- Step down to Early Help Services,
- No further action and/or signposting to universal services, advice and information.

[Child of Most Concern Protocol](#)

The upward sharing of cases that are of “most concern” is an integral component of our approach to safeguarding in Wokingham. An effective protocol for sharing these types of cases ensures an appropriate level of leadership oversight of our most vulnerable children. It also promotes a collective understanding of our vulnerabilities as an organisation.

Ultimately, it means that our management and mitigation of risk is a shared responsibility. Consideration of whether a child meets the criteria for a child of most concern should be undertaken with the Team Manager in accordance with the protocol.

The child of most concern protocol should always be considered for children and young people at risk of significant harm from outside the home, who are assessed at EMRAC

as high risk and/or where there is concern that the plan for the child is not effecting change or managing the risk.

Please see Wokingham's current [Cases of Most Concern Protocol](#) for more information.

Child In Need and Child Protection Plans

Where concerns arise around harm outside the home for children subject to Child in Need and Child Protection processes, Wokingham's practice standards¹ will continue to be applied. However, additional guidance is available to support practitioners in their consideration of these risks, including a [Best Questions Guide](#), and Wokingham's [Guidance on Context Meeting Agendas](#).

A decision will need to be made on a case-by-case basis as to whether a separate meeting is required to consider the context of concern. Examples of where this might be necessary include where there are concerns that the context involves a number of other young people or where the context involves partners outside of the safeguarding context (e.g. hotels, taxis, shop owners).

Early childhood trauma can increase vulnerability to exploitation and harm outside of the home, but the harm is not directly attributable to parenting. Traditional Child Protection and Child in Need processes have developed where there is risk from inside the home, often attributable to the parenting that the child has received.

For young people at risk from harm outside the home, attention needs to be given to the *context* of concern and this might significantly change the agencies that are involved. Parents and carers are part of the safety planning but are unlikely to be able to apply the same boundaries or have the same influence over their child.

Relationship based work (alongside context disruption activity) is key to working with young people at risk of HOTH. It is important to note that it may **not** be the allocated Social Worker that is best placed to develop the kind of relationship required, and

¹ Wokingham's latest Practice Standards document for Social Care and Early Help practitioners can be accessed via our local [Guidance Library](#), under the *Children's Services Practice Standards* bracket.

adopting 'routine' statutory visiting requirements might conflict with the type of intervention needed and the identified plan.

If a plan does entail varying our usual child protection visiting requirements in order to facilitate a HOTH related intervention, then this must be agreed by the Child Protection Chair and the responsible Head of Service, with a rationale clearly recorded on file.

The child or young person's plan should carefully set out:

- who in the professional network will be seeing the young person;
- where this visit should take place and how often;
- the rationale and risk assessment for how the decision has been reached; and
- how the professional network will be kept informed, and the plan reviewed.

Child in Care Plans

Where concerns arise about harm outside of the home for children in care, the normal process will apply for threshold decision making.

If the initial concerns meet level 4 threshold, a Strategy Meeting must be convened, and a decision made about whether assessment should be undertaken under Section 47. If the decision is that threshold is met for Section 47, the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be informed.

On completion of the assessment, consideration should be given as to whether the concerns meet the Level 4 threshold criteria. If met, an Initial Child Protection conference should be held within 15 working days of the date of the Strategy Meeting, to review and amend the Child in Care plan, incorporating the actions needed to address the harm outside the home concern and to agree the members of the safety planning group.

Safety planning meetings, which are chaired by a social work manager, should be held every six weeks until the risks are mitigated, with the IRO kept updated.

Appendix 1: Types of Meetings

The following provides an overview of the meetings where HOTH may be a consideration.

NB: Requests for police attendance at Strategy Meetings should be made via the PECS number.

Requests for police attendance (where appropriate) at Core Group meetings, Safety planning meetings or context meetings should be made to the Local Police Area (LPA).

Strategy Meeting

The Strategy Meeting or discussion is a forum for relevant agencies to share as much of the available information as possible between participants to inform the next steps. In addition to sharing information, the meeting/discussion should be used to:

- agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation and/or disruption activity;
- decide whether an assessment under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (section 47 enquiry) should be initiated, or continued if it has already begun;
- consider the assessment and the action points, if already in place;
- plan how the section 47 enquiry should be undertaken (if one is to be initiated), including the need for medical treatment, and who will carry out what actions, by when and for what purpose;
- agree what action is required immediately to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, and/or provide interim services and support,
- agree whether and when the social worker will see the child alone and the methods by which the child's wishes and feelings will be ascertained so that they can be taken into account when making decisions;
- consider how the race and ethnicity of the child and family should be taken into account and establish whether an interpreter will be required;
- consider the needs of other children who may be affected
- determine what information from the strategy meeting/discussion will be shared with the family, unless such information sharing may place a child at increased

risk of significant harm or jeopardise police investigations into any alleged offence(s);

- determine if legal action is required.

Child in Need Meeting

Child in Need meetings are held under Section 17 of the Children Act and are intended to bring together the 'network' around the child/young person. The meeting typically includes the young person, the parent/carers, agencies involved with the family, and significant friends or family members identified as supporting the family.

The purpose of the meeting is to develop and review the plan for the young person, consider the context of concern and importantly, include safety planning with the young person. Everyone will be asked to update on how the plan has been progressing from their point of view, to review the support and interventions and to amend or add to the plan accordingly. The plan should describe what the support provided should achieve and a timeframe.

Child Protection Conference

A child protection conference brings together family members (and the young person where appropriate), supporters / advocates and those professionals most involved with the young person and family to make decisions about the child's future safety, health and development.

The tasks for all conferences are to:

- Bring together and analyse the information which has been obtained about the young person's developmental needs in an inter-agency setting;
- Assess the parents' capacity to respond to these needs, to ensure the young person's safety;
- Promote the child's health and development within the context of their wider family and environment;

- Decide whether the child is at risk of significant harm, taking into consideration the evidence presented to the conference, such as the child's present situation, information about their family and the context of concern;
- Recommend what future action is required in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. This may include the child becoming the subject of a child protection plan, what the planned developmental outcomes are for the child, and how best to intervene to achieve these.

Core Group Meeting or Safety Planning Meeting (for Children in care)

The core group or Safety Planning Meeting (CIC) is the Interagency Forum for achieving the outcomes of the child protection/Child in Care Safety plan. It is comprised of the professionals responsible for delivering particular aspects of the plan and is attended by the parents and the young person where appropriate.

The membership of the core group/Safety planning network is agreed at an initial child protection conference/Child in Care Review, although this may be amended to include all relevant individuals jointly responsible for delivering the child protection/Safety plan.

Context Meeting

A Context Meeting is a forum that brings partners together to make a safeguarding plan around a specific context. There are some differences between Context Meetings and multi-agency panel (EMRAC) meetings.

Firstly, multi-agency panels are on-going and regular meetings, where more than one context and/or young person is discussed. Context meetings, on the other hand, are held in order to make a particular context safer (such as a peer group, school or other location) and meet only for that purpose.

Secondly, in context meetings, practice discussions and plans are discussed in more depth and detail compared to multi-agency panel meetings, where the focus is strategic and/or operational oversight.

Lastly, discussions at panels can take place at any stage, while context meetings should generally take place either to assist in the context assessment or once an assessment of a specific context has happened.

EMRAC

This meeting has been established to share information regarding vulnerable children in Wokingham who are exposed to, involved in, or are victims of sexual or criminal exploitation, as well as those who frequently go missing.

The aim of the conference is to ensure that information is used to protect those children highlighted to be at risk of exploitation through a coordinated approach to ensure that:

- multi-agency interventions are offered at a strategic level to strengthen pre-existing safety plans;
- those involved in exploiting children and the locations where exploitation is taking place are being identified and targeted in coordinated way to reduce risk; and
- prosecutions can be supported as appropriate.

Appendix 2: Process Flowchart

