



Merton
Safeguarding
Children Board

Contextual Safeguarding Strategy

Draft Date	Author	Date Of the Next Review	Lead Manager
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Introduction

Through this 3-year strategy, Merton is seeking to expand its response to vulnerable young people to safeguard them from the risks and negative influences they may encounter outside the family home. Although time spent in different contexts, such as with peers, in schools and in public places, are an important part of growing up, young people may also be vulnerable to exploitation and risk in relation to these. This can include physical or emotional abuse, sexual or criminal exploitation, online abuse or violence. This strategy is about what Merton will do to prevent and address these issues so that all its young residents remain safe and enjoy positive experiences in the borough.

In 2018, the Government updated its statutory guidance *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and *Keeping Children Safe in Education* to include contextual safeguarding. This is the framework for understanding, assessing and reducing the risk of harm a young person may experience outside the family home.

Nationally, findings from learning reviews indicate that traditional responses to safeguarding are inadequate where exploitation and abuse is extra-familial. The partnership has both reviewed and seen evidence of keeping young people safe through this approach and considers this an area where changes need to be made to enhance our policies and practice.

Adolescent vulnerability has been a key priority of the safeguarding partnership and part of the Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) business plan for a number of years. Recently, the borough was successful in its application to the Scale Up Project led by the University of Bedfordshire which will ensure that its practice approach to contextual safeguarding is informed and evidence-led with dedication from partners.

We will only achieve our objectives if agencies work collaboratively and with accountability to tackle these issues. Merton has historically had committed partners and good joint working with many teams co-located, strong relationships with schools and a variety of forums and channels in which consultation and engagement with young people and their families can take place.

Concern around adolescent vulnerability and risk are shared by the Council and its partners which include agencies belonging to the Health and Wellbeing Board, Safer and Stronger Partnership and the MSCP. All are supportive of the move to and implementation of contextual safeguarding as an approach to protect young people and keep them safe in their communities.

We know that in adolescence, young people can be increasingly affected by peer relationships and that schools, neighbourhoods and public spaces may influence their safety more as they spend more time in these contexts as they grow older. The Everyone's Invited testimonials and subsequent Ofsted review on sexual violence in schools demonstrate the importance of extra-familial risk. Therefore, our strategy addresses the risks faced in each area (*Child and Family, Peer Groups, Locations-Based, Schools-Based*) in delivering its outcomes of **Identify, Prevent, Support, Protect and Disrupt**.

We want our strategy to be broad-ranging and inclusive of well-being in young people. This will ensure that all young people become resilient, are able to build trusted relationships and remain safe in the locations they frequent.

The vision of Merton's Safeguarding Children Partnership is that *everyone does everything they can to ensure that each child is safe, supported and successful*. It is now not just safeguarding that is everyone's business, but contextual safeguarding too.

The Bigger Picture

Contextual safeguarding focuses on the harm that young people may experience beyond their families. It is an approach that recognises how different relationships and interactions outside the home in communities, schools, with peers and in public places can feature violence and abuse. As a partnership, we want to improve the way we work together so that young people across Merton remain safe in their environments and reduce the risks they face.

Schools

- Identification of vulnerabilities and risks
- Additional staffing and behaviour programmes
- PSHE and diversion offer
- Anti-bullying work
- Changes to culture or physical layout
- Safety planning and guardianship

Police

- Targeted visits, notices, warnings and prosecution
- Data and intelligence sharing
- Community engagement
- Victim support and specialist teams
- Removal, disruption and restrictions

Health

- Identification across universal to specialist physical and mental health
- Support through physical and emotional health services
- Universal health offer
- Specialist intervention in safety plans
- Commissioned services (sexual health, risk and resilience, counselling)

Children's Social Care

- Identification of emerging risk through single front door
- Coordinated assessment of contextual high risk harm and abuse
- Protection measures and interventions
- Reduction of case escalation through integrated planning and supports

Public Spaces

- Used for positive activities and/or increasing presence of guardians
- Monitoring litter, signs of alcohol / drug use and damage to sites
- Information posters for getting help or location of safe spaces
- Changing hidden areas

Transport

- Identification of risks through monitoring behaviour
- Mentoring around safe travel
- Provide bystander safety
- Information posters for getting help or location of safe spaces

Youth Services and Voluntary/Community Sector

- Positive activities, peer groups and role models
- Identification of risks through engagement, observation and reporting changes in behaviour/attendance/peer groups
- Community led and based identification of needs/vulnerabilities
- Workshops and group activities (can include funding for specialist based provision)
- Engagement and monitoring outside youth clubs to provide adult presence
- Ensuring good lighting and CCTV around activities
- Key workers engaged in safety planning
- Trusted adults and guardians offering safe space and protection

Safer Merton

- Partnership oversight of community safety
- Domestic violence support
- Anti-Social Behaviour and licensing legislation
- Identification and joint planning via the Locations Board to prevent escalation

Businesses

- Opportunities to identify high risk activity/groups/locations
- Potential to provide bystander safety, offer safe space or positive engagement
- Information posters for getting help

Housing

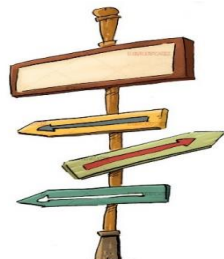
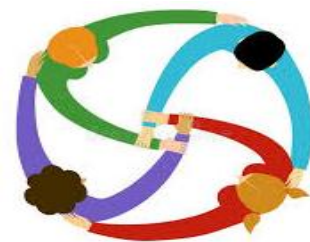
- Identification of vulnerabilities/ risk reported by housing wardens and neighbours
- Support of housing wardens
- Good lighting, CCTV and secure areas
- Disruption of exploiters through partial closures
- Support with safety plans and sanctuary scheme to increase safety at home without needing to move

Building Strong Foundations

There are a number of important themes that underpin this strategy which will improve our work with vulnerable young people and contextual safeguarding practice.

Develop trusted relationships with young people

We know that young people may be reluctant to access advice or services and therefore continue to engage in risky behaviour or potentially unsafe environments. We will continue to build trust and communication so that our good relationships enable early identification and the right support.



Divert young people from negative influences

Learning from serious case reviews has highlighted the importance of contextual safeguarding as an approach in keeping young people safe from harmful adults, groups or in public spaces. We will intervene early as a partnership to provide support when exposed to dangers in peer relationships, school and community contexts so that young people are less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviour and make positive choices.

Integrate policies and practice across the partnership

It takes all agencies working with young people and families to deliver this new framework. We will make sure that our policies and procedures are cohesive and connected so that there is shared understanding of our collective roles and responsibilities.



Empower young people and help to build emotional resilience

We want young people to be aware and confident in stepping away from contextual safeguarding risks. We will support those who experience exploitation to overcome their circumstances for a stronger and brighter future.

Shared accountability in delivering priorities

A common understanding and mutual commitment is vital in identifying and solving the problems faced by young people outside the home. We will continue to strengthen our partner relationship and forge new ones in order to promote and embed contextual safeguarding across the borough.

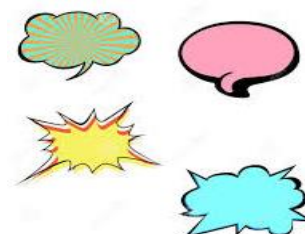


Ensure youth and community voices are listened to

It is important to hear and learn from our (young) residents about their issues and day-to-day experience of safety in the borough. We will continue to build on participation-related work with young people and engage our service users and wider community through various channels and forums to build relationships, respond to concerns and deliver support in the way they need.

Collaborative safety planning, intervention and information sharing

Strong and coordinated partnership work is needed to effectively prevent and tackle exploitation. We will continue to develop assessment tools and guidance, refine our pathways and be clear on who needs to do what to keep young people safe.



Our Youth and Community Voices

Merton has had a long-standing child-centred approach which values and seeks out young people and family feedback on their experiences as service users. The Council and its partners continue to use established consultation pathways, regular engagement at public forums and survey activity so that youth and community voices are able to tell us about the issues that affect them and how we can improve services to meet their needs.

“I knew what he was doing wasn’t what it’s supposed to be like but I had no one else well it felt like I had no one else”

“It was a way out but it didn’t turn out that way”

“It’s a nightmare you think you’re getting something free and it turns into a nightmare”

Young people do not see the exploitation. Those that do feel trapped and unable to see a way to get out of it.

Our **Tackling Exploitation Team (Text)** works with young people without specific time frames, allowing the work to offer a holistic package and move at the pace of the child.

“They stick with you through it and not once judged me or blamed me just took me for me and actually listened and helped.”

“It works cause they know what’s happening out there for real and they real about it with you.”

“The only person who was there through it all from start to finish other professionals kept changing.”

Merton Residents Survey – 2019

Most residents felt safe in their local area both during the day (98%) and at night (84%). Feelings of insecurity increased during darker hours.

There was an increase in residents feeling that people using or dealing drugs is a problem (11% in 2017 to 20% in 2019).

Young residents’ ratings for parks, playgrounds, and open spaces as well as public transport increased.

16-17 year-olds more concerned about not enough being done and anti-social behaviour compared to 11-15 year-olds.

11-15 year-olds more concerned about groups hanging around the streets compared to 16-17 year-olds,

Merton Children and Young People’s Plan

27% identified crime as being the area that needs most improving

Only 17% disagreed with the statement ‘I feel safe in my area’.

Commissioned Services: 100% of young people said they felt safer as a result of their contact with commissioned services.

Commissioned services: 100% of young people said they felt more confident in their ability to make positive choices as a result of their contact.

Locations work with schools revealed young people’s views on relationships and violence

Most felt safe in schools but less safe in the community due to ‘gangs’, ‘knives’, ‘robberies’ and ‘not knowing who to trust’ and ‘not knowing what to do if they knew another young person was involved in a difficult situation including using or dealing drugs and violence’.

Here in Merton

Trends in the borough highlight increasing risks to young people related to contextual factors. Our data tells us that contexts of harm have been primarily centred in locations, family and peer network contexts. Compared to last year, there has been a rise in the family context relating to 'push' factors (e.g. young people who have been victims of abuse, from households where domestic violence or substance abuse feature, parents with high levels of vulnerability or family breakdown) which then lead to exploitative and coercive controlling environments.

Concerns in relation to locations and peer groups have increased with issues mainly around the child's own identify, substance misuse and mental health, and inclusion. Sexual exploitation is predominantly experienced by girls while criminal exploitation is mainly associated with boys and includes a strong association with peers and networks.

Merton has witnessed a rise in county-lines drug dealing since 2016. Mapping of these young people identified common issues such as older siblings / cousins involved in criminal behaviour, additional education needs and family vulnerabilities. In several/some cases parents have admitted to giving up reporting their children as missing, particularly when they turn 16 years old, often because there is no resolution when their children return home.

In 2018-19, Merton experienced a rise in reports of sexual assaults. In some cases, relationships initiated in schools but abuse has occurred in various locations (e.g. local parks), occasionally in young people's homes. Re-offending rates have risen and custodial sentences for knife crime and serious offences increased – in some cases due to long-standing cross-border issues and gang violence. The borough has experienced significant spikes in serious youth violence in the past.

Merton's Children Social Care has been successful in its bid to be a part of the London Scale Up project to develop contextual safeguarding systems across the borough. This has resulted in pilots of contextual harm assessments and a review with development of new protocol, guidance and tools to intervene and assess contextual harm. This brings together all the presenting needs of exploitation (coercion/control), missing, online harm, violence/offending, sexual and harmful sexual behaviour, mental health and wellbeing, and substance misuse, in one assessment matrix alongside an assessment of contexts (places/spaces, professional engagement, schools, peer network, family and child).

Partnerships

Currently, the partnership is well-placed to be able to identify vulnerable young people across wider contexts. Our commissioned services, which deliver detached youth work among other activities, have worked in the borough for a long time and are highly-skilled and visible to its users. Merton works collaboratively with other local authorities and key safeguarding partners to implement best practice in contextual safeguarding. There is strong collaborative working between agencies in Merton which come together via a number of panels to share information and intelligence and agree mechanisms to address exploitation and risks to young people. This includes:

- **Multi-Agency Risk, Vulnerability and Exploitation (MARVE) Panel** that responds to contextual harm.
- **Missing Meeting** which takes place weekly to review all children and young people missing in the previous week. This ensures police and safeguarding data is reviewed, safe and well checks carried out and Return Home Interviews actioned.
- **Children Missing Education Panel** which reviews all children of statutory school age where attendance is a concern. Engagement and support activities are identified to re-engage and increase school attendance.
- **Liaison and Diversion Meetings** take place weekly to review police reports around young people who have been arrested or had significant contact with the police (Merlin reports). This includes screening and identification of early opportunities for diversion and informing social work plans to address vulnerabilities and risk.

We know that schools are vital to multi-agency provision of a contextual safeguarding approach and an important place where relationships are formed. Safer Schools Officers have been in place for a number of years - their presence helps young people in dealing with situations that may put them at risk of becoming victims of crime, bullying or intimidation, and assists with early identification and support. Schools continue to maintain strong connections through their work in keeping young people safe with Council departments such as Education Inclusion, Public Health and Safer Merton.

Locations

Work has taken place over the last few years to understand and address issues related to community and location contexts. It is clear that the build-up of environmental problems such as graffiti, poor lighting and rubbish/litter facilitate anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. Previous locations reports have highlighted:

- Contextual issues of substance abuse and drug dealing, physical lay-out and concerns over small numbers of young people potential engaged in serious youth violence and drugs;
- Risk to overall community safety where young people were either identified as victims or displaying anti-social behaviour and;
- Lack of nearby services, crime-friendly spaces and residents' relationships with partners and negative long-standing community reputation (e.g. drug use, domestic violence, gangs).

The complexity of these issues means that a diverse range of stakeholders is needed to support the delivery of contextual safeguarding: Parks and Green Space, Community Safety, Youth Services, Licensing, Public Health, Voluntary Services, Commissioning, local councillors, the Police, children's services, schools and Housing. Coordinated information-sharing and cooperation is crucial to resolve these issues together.

Peer Groups

Merton has recognised the impact of peers and external relationships on young people for several years. The Adolescent and Family Service has developed roles to support specialist targeted work with young people at risk of gangs and group violence, sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. Much of the work involves assessing the impact of peers and has included group work. This has been delivered alongside partners, including the Youth Justice Service, Youth Service and Education settings.

Online Safety

Young people are vulnerable online and unaware of the risks in sharing explicit images and/or these images being shared with others. There appears to be a growing trend of peer on peer exploitation in terms of sharing explicit images and/or pictures of one another. Commissioned services have identified online grooming as a common theme via social media snapchat and Instagram.

Online safety is taught in all Merton primary and secondary schools. Pupils' learning includes how to recognise risks, respectful online relationships, privacy and the risks of sharing sexual images. The MSCP website provides access to a range of information for children, young people and families. The Schools ICT team within Merton's School Improvement Service also runs online (e-safety) training for staff and parents.

Inequality

The damaging effect of poverty has been documented in association with child abuse or neglect. Evidence from serious case reviews have featured indicators of poverty or economic deprivation and the multifaceted ways in which domestic abuse, substance abuse and poverty are linked.

Merton's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-24 cites *Inequalities and the Health Divide* as a challenge in terms of the significant health differences that exist between the east and west of the borough. Headline data (2019-20) from Safer Merton also demonstrates division across Merton in terms of criminal activity with knife crime, gun crime and personal robbery highest in wards towards the east of the borough.

The Children, Schools and Families Department continues to sustain its commitment to reduce inequality in education and employment outcomes for its vulnerable cohorts. Services encourage take-up of early years education entitlement for vulnerable children, support schools to improve educational attainment for targeted groups and promote good attendance. Young people both at risk of and who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) are engaged through group and 1:1 work as well as other activities delivered through joint efforts to improve outcomes for this group.

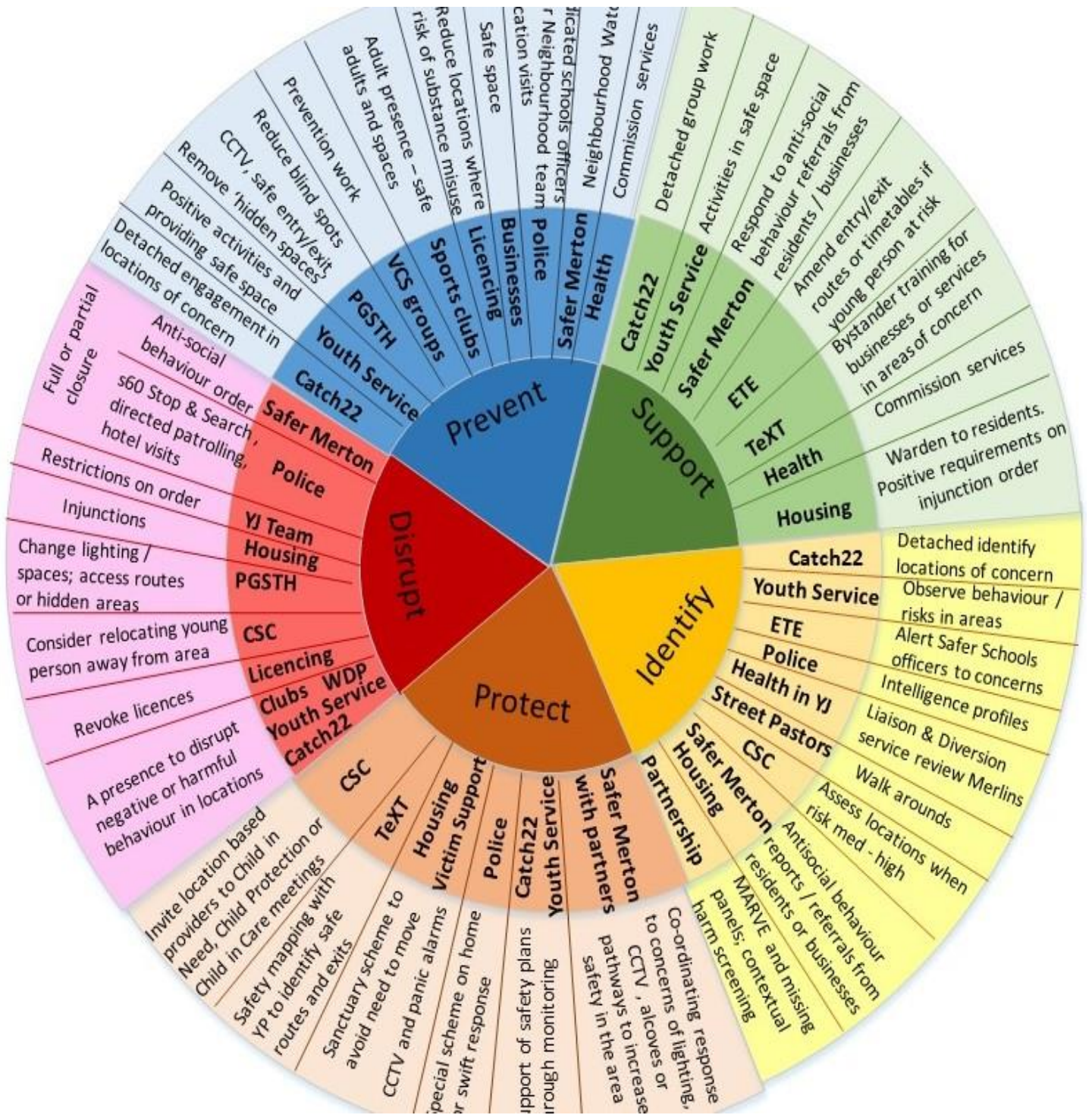
Mapping of Contextual Approaches for Peer Groups and Locations

There is a high presence of peer group and locations contexts and assessments for young people presenting with contextual harm.

Summary of Services for Peer Groups



Summary of Services for Locations Work



Priority: Identify

To identify the factors that increase risk of young people being harmed or exploited in different contexts.

Our Current Offer:

Child and Family	Peer Group	Locations-Based	Schools-Based
Review of police Merlins PNC markers on victims/vehicles to identify those at risk Missing Panel Assessment for young carers Youth Justice assessments	Detached youth work to identify peer groups of concern Groups referrals of at-risk young people Session observations Multi-agency risk Vulnerability and Exploitation Panel Contextual harm screening and assessment tools	Detached youth work to identify locations of concern Intelligence profiling and information sharing Anti-social behaviour reports/referrals from residents or business Locations assessments with medium-high risk Locations Board Contextual harm screening and assessment tools	Safer Schools Officers SNAP and Superzone projects Context assessment with schools
Professional Engagement	Multi-agency training for parents/carers, young people, hostels and young adults Safeguarding training for staff, specialists and volunteers Mental health awareness training Guidance on push/pull factors and Contextual Harm Matrix Assessment		

What more can we do?

- **Support young people to feel safe in disclosing information on risky relationships or situations.** Schools have related that there is reluctance to talk about harm from peers or friends in confidence. Using available evidence and an understanding of how contextual harm issues can manifest themselves in different settings and the steps to be taken, professionals will be able to create environments in schools and youth centres which help young people feel comfortable to tell trusted adults about adverse experiences.
- **Improve our understanding of multiple adolescent vulnerabilities and the connected issues.** We know that there is overlap across contextual risks (for example, 57% of sexual exploitation cases had at least one missing from home episode in 2019-20). Continuing to work in a data-driven way will support the partnership in its identification and service delivery across all priorities and further developing our analysis will help to achieve this.
- **Ensure youth service contribution to children social care case conferences.** Youth services provide positive activities, trusted adults to disclose a problem and help to access services so may therefore hold important information about young people's vulnerabilities. Including youth service input into case conferences means that agencies will have a fuller picture of presenting issues and be able to strengthen the support provided.
- **Deliver training on contextual harm tools and guidance for partners.** Following a pilot of contextual harm assessments, new protocol, guidance and tools have been developed. Professionals across the borough working with young people need to be confident and skilled in making referrals, using common language and delivering interventions to address contextual risks.
- **Map contextual safeguarding services to newly refreshed Merton Well-Being Model.** Merton's Well-Being Model provides a shared understanding of services at different levels of need. This model is currently being refreshed – partnership support services in relation to contextual safeguarding will need to be mapped against its thresholds so that all agencies provide a consistent response.

Priority: Prevent

To prevent the escalation of risk of violence and exploitation and the need for more intensive services.

Our Current Offer:

Child and Family	Peer Group	Locations-Based	Schools-Based
Advocacy and Independent Visiting	Education awareness raising and key work sessions	Physical improvements of localities	PSHE curriculum (anti-bullying)
Sexual health drop-ins and promotion of mental health support	Workshops and positive activities	Weapons sweeps in parks, green spaces and schools	Dedicated Safer Schools Officers
Grants for young carers to meet basic needs	Team building through sports	Specialist advice and support around multi-agency interventions	Promote positive friendships and respect
Liaison and Diversion service brief interventions	Children in Care Council activities	Commissioned partnership prevention work (MOPAC, VRU)	Policies and procedures to keep young people safe
Provision of food and resources to families in need	Victim support group work	Trading standards inspection visits	
Advice line for carers for sign-posting and referrals			
Domestic violence support			
Professional Engagement	Building trusted relationships with families and young people		
	Encouraging the voice and views of young people in service planning and evaluation		

What more can we do?

- **Strengthen detached work and community intervention through our commissioned services.** Commissioned services deliver vital activity within communities which prevent vulnerabilities from escalating. Detached work is of particular relevance to context and often these professionals have knowledge or concerns around young people that are not in the scope of social care services. We are therefore looking to provide services that focus further on prevention while continuing to provide safe, trusted environments.
- **Continue work to integrate the borough's Early Help Strategy with contextual safeguarding work.** Evidence has shown that early help is critical with a need for youth justice services, the police and other adolescent services to deliver preventative work. Merton is currently developing its early help strategy – planned activity under this strategy needs to complement this work programme.
- **Build links with the community via the Safer Neighbourhood Board and Safer Neighbourhood Watch.** While we have good links to young people via youth centres and engagement platforms, we want to improve our connection to local communities to promote awareness of contextual safeguarding and sustain two-way dialogue. The Safer Neighbourhood Board and Safer Neighbourhood Watch are important forums where we can start improving community links.
- **Develop a participation plan to inform and facilitate the youth response to contextual safeguarding.** In particular, a stronger understanding of young people's response to assessment and how they want services to support them is needed. As we move forward with the new strategy, a new participation plan will be progressed so that we can gain their views, especially from young people previously involved in contextual safeguarding issues.
- **Schools will review and update their safeguarding policies to ensure contextual safeguarding is effectively detailed.** The 2018 version of *Keeping Children Safe in Education* was updated to incorporate contextual safeguarding. Schools are important settings to raise awareness and coordinate effectively with partners as part of the multi-agency response – consistency and integration across Merton means more success in averting risks faced by our students.

Priority: Support

To deliver the right support needed for young people at risk or experiencing violence or exploitation.

Our Current Offer:

Child and Family	Peer Group	Locations-Based	Schools-Based
Direct work through Risk and Resilience Service	Youth club sessions and access to positive activities	Reporting of physical restrictions in locations	Schools-based counselling on emotional health and wellbeing
Person-centred support for young people with autism and learning disabilities	Workshops and positive activities for young carers	Safe adult presence and arrangements during activities	Anti-bullying response
Allocated police officer for each child exploitation case	Targeted intervention for specific group work	Bystander training for business/services in areas of concern	Mental health leads supported by borough-wide forum
1:1 specialist intervention with young people and families	Group work delivered via TeXT		
Return Home Interviews	Small group intervention for young carers		
Youth Justice parenting practitioner			
Independent Visiting			
Professional Engagement	Coordination to ensure early help processes and referral pathways are clear and accessible		
	Provision of trusted sources of help and dependable adults		
	Service users aware of safeguarding contacts for swift response and risk reduction		

What more can we do?

- **Provide a directory of services for young people under the youth partnership.** Merton already has a number of directories for children and families that provides information on accessing services from universal to early help level (Family Services Directory, Local Offer for SEND, CAMHS Local Offer). The partnership agrees that a similar online approach for adolescents involving services that relate to their specific concerns and risks would be a practical tool in seeking support.
- **Set up forums for practitioners and young people.** We hope that this will give professionals opportunities to learn, share experiences and practice issues and consider how to work together to improve approach. We also want young people to be able to meet each other in a supportive space where they can talk to each other about their worries/issues affecting them or their communities as well as potentially feeding views and ideas back into our services.
- **Roll out awareness raising and training for businesses across the borough.** Some local businesses in Merton are already aware of safeguarding young people and have built good relations with them. But as they are key to identifying criminal activity and exploitation on the streets, we need all businesses and licencing authorities to help keep young people safe in and around their premises. Awareness raising and training are important foundations for engaging these partners on the contextual safeguarding journey.
- **Develop a commitment pledge for partners around contextual safeguarding.** All partners need to be on board in order to improve contextual safeguarding practice. This means taking responsibility and giving assurance that our organisations are ready to work collaboratively, creatively and with perseverance until we have achieved our objectives. The pledge will reinforce the partnership's duties and positive action to embed contextual safeguarding within their organisations and wider communities as well as form a future basis for driving our work forward.

Priority: Protect

To take appropriate measures to protect young people from violence or exploitation and ensure their safety.

Our Current Offer:

Child and Family	Peer Group	Locations-Based	Schools-Based
Child in Need or Child Protection plans for moderate to significant risk	Restorative justice and mediation for rival groups involved in violence	Special schemes on addresses to indicate risky location and heighten police response	Involvement in Children's Social Care plans and safety planning
Multi-agency attendance at planning meetings	Partnership involvement in safety plans	Information sharing and coordinated partnership activity through Locations Board	Safeguarding leads in schools
Specialist engagement service for those at risk of county-lines	Safety plans and assessments	Provision of public safety CCTV service	
Specialist workers at hospitals			
Specialist intervention to reduce harm or risk including around grooming, coercion/control, missing and gangs			
Trigger plans for missing person enquiries and for exploitation cases			
Advocacy and independent visiting			
Professional Engagement	Building trusted relationships to develop safety plans		
	Providing a safe space for disclosure for young people with autism and learning disabilities		

What more can we do?

- **Strengthen the pathway for 18-25 year olds experiencing serious incidents.** Young adults at this age often present to hospital having experienced significant incidents. Although there are a number of relevant services that work till the age of 25 (Rescue and Response, Redthread, TExT, Catch22), the safeguarding pathway is not straightforward for them. We need to work together to establish a single, clear pathway for access to safeguarding services for young people in this age group.
- **Refresh and streamline inter-related multi-agency protocols and governance arrangements.** As contextual safeguarding develops in Merton, the partnership needs to ensure that its policies and procedures remain up-to-date with emerging practice and pan-London approaches. We will refine our documents so that contextual safeguarding is detailed with clear-cut roles and responsibilities in the most efficient and effective way.
- **Embed the use of assessment tools and safety planning.** A Contextual Harm Screening Tool and Contextual Harm Risk Matrix and Planning Tool have been developed alongside protocol and practice guidance. Integrating these into everyday practice will assist professionals with decision-making and safety planning so that young people and the community are protected from exploitation and violence with the right support to address contextual issues. The London Borough of Merton will also revise existing case management arrangements by establishing a specialist service and introducing safety plans.
- **New Children Social Care protocols to expand remit of safeguarding to contextual harm.** With updated national guidance and learning from serious case reviews highlighting the inadequacy of traditional safeguarding responses where exploitation and abuse is extra-familial, it is clear that assessment and intervention within contexts will feature significantly in forthcoming work. Therefore, the development of future safeguarding work within Children's Social Care will include contextual safeguarding as essential to its safeguarding sphere.

Priority: Disrupt

To disrupt those that are causing or increasing the risk of young people being harmed from violence or exploitation.

Our Current Offer:

Child and Family	Peer Group	Locations-Based	Schools-Based
Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWN)/Sexual Risk Order (SRO)/Sexual Harm Prevention Order (SHRO) to prevent engagement with victim and future harm	Anti-social behaviour injunctions	Direct patrols to monitor locations of concern	Safer Schools Officers
Arrests of offenders	Section 60 Stop and Search	Section 60 Stop and Search	Review of travel routes to and from school
Restrictions to court orders	Restrictions on court orders to cease links with associates	Restrictions on court orders to disrupt access to locations	Reviewing and amending building structure, timetables or entry/exit routes
Specialist interventions to disrupt coercive relationships	Targeted, intelligence-led work and arrests around county lines	Closures and Injunctions	
Advocacy to assist disruption	Child Abduction Warning Notices (CAWN)	Joint hotel visits by police and practitioners	
Direct police work with vulnerable girls			
Support for parents around curfews			
Professional Engagement	Adult presence to instigate and engender disruption		
	Supporting disruption activity through coordinated response and intelligence-sharing		
	Empowering young people and families to make informed decisions and understand consequences of behaviour		

What more can we do?

- **Develop an accountability framework so agencies are clear on who does what.** While partners are fully committed to rolling out and embedding contextual safeguarding across the borough, we need to ensure that there is clarity on who does what – particularly in terms of locations-based work which often requires a range of partners to make a difference. Having an accountability framework in place will help us to adapt our approach, reassign resources if needed and make decisions together.
- **Continue to use enforcement actions such as Closures and Injunctions.** Enforcement actions to disrupt perpetrators of exploitation and violence is taken by the police. We want young people and the community to feel safe and confident that strong action is being taken to stem anti-social and criminal behaviour and maintain order.
- **Online safeguarding of young people.** While the internet is a great source of learning and knowledge for young people, it can also be a context where abuse can occur including bullying, sexting or grooming. With this connectivity essential for information and contacts, we must make sure that it is used safe, positive way. We want schools to ensure online safety in and out of school is taught by knowledgeable staff, parents are supported with information to engage with their children about the dangers, and young people are able to have open conversations with trusted adults as well as their peers to better understand the benefits and risks of the virtual world.
- **Engagement of transport hubs, business and retailers to develop an identification and referral route into Children's Social Care.** Our wider partners who witness or come into contact with young people at risk should know when and how to contact social care services quickly if necessary, particularly during out of office or night times. These locations, frequented by adolescents, need to have clear links into professional services that will be able to support and help disrupt harmful activity.

Governance

The Promote and Protect Young People’s (PPYP) subgroup of the MSCP is a multi-agency forum which responds to the agenda around behaviour issues and risks of exploitation. The PPYP reports directly to the MSCP and is one of the main working groups that drive and deliver partnership work in relation to safeguarding children and young people.

The PPYP monitors the local authority response to statutory guidance with regard to children missing from home or education, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, sexual health, bullying and serious youth violence and gangs as well as the effectiveness of inter-agency arrangements for identifying and supporting vulnerable people and commissioned services in Merton.

The progress of this strategy will therefore be monitored by the PPYP and overseen by the following strategic boards (in addition to the MSCP):

- **Children’s Trust Board** – this thematic Merton partnership has oversight of contextual safeguarding via the *My Merton* outcome in its Children and Young People’s Plan.
- **Safer and Stronger** – the thematic partnership under which Safer Merton operates. A number of sub-groups work within this that currently contribute to the contextual safeguarding agenda.
- **Youth Crime Executive Board** – this is responsible for the management, oversight and strategic direction of Youth Justice and Prevention services.
- **Health and Wellbeing Board** – its Health and Wellbeing Strategy prioritises ‘Healthy Place’ which revolves around protection from harm and providing safety through reduced violence.

