

Location-based safeguarding in a lower tier authority

A Case Study

This case study is written by Sophie Whitehouse, Lead for Early Help and Wellbeing, Adur & Worthing Councils.

When we think of Contextual Safeguarding, it is usually in terms of social work practice or educational settings. Lower tier authorities are not always offered a seat at the table when we talk about safeguarding children but they can hold really valuable information and an understanding of local communities that is key to reducing extra-familial harm and making communities safe for our children to enjoy.

Here in Adur and Worthing, we have been looking at the role our local council services can play in keeping young people safe whilst they are out and about in our community. As a lower tier authority, we work in partnership with social care and education but they sit within the County Council so our work has very much focused on how the services we do provide can contribute to this agenda.

Based on the principles of creating spaces that are safe for young people, deterring those who may do them harm and empowering the community to respond to harm, we have enlisted services like Licensing, Planning, Environmental Health and Park Rangers to take an active role in this work. The Contextual Safeguarding concept of community guardianship has been the main inspiration in approaching other services – on a very simple level, how can we increase the number of people and services that can identify and respond to situations and locations where young people might be at risk of harm?

The case study below shows how these services can play a key role in reducing harm and risk to children.

The concern:

Two years ago, concerns started to grow around several young people spending time in and around a local takeaway. This takeaway was one minute from the main line train station, close to two local high schools and one local children's home.

Reports were coming in from neighbouring businesses, police and taxi drivers and suggested that several harmful activities were taking place. We had reports of young people getting into the cars with delivery drivers, anti-social behaviour, drinking, cannabis use and also concerns that people involved in abusing young people via county-lines drugs distribution were heading to the takeaway, straight from the train, to befriend local children.

Our response:

Understanding the context

Whilst we knew there to be core members of the group, there were also regular additions and changes to those spending time at the location. In addition, due to the nature of the business, other children not connected to the group were regularly spending time at the location.

Previously, our work had focused on trying to identify individual children at risk and make individual safeguarding referrals. We recognised that many children would not meet thresholds for any intervention but could be at risk by being in the location. This was a new approach for us and one that could potentially increase the safety for all of those gathering and using local amenities. Using the [neighbourhood survey tools](#) from the Contextual Safeguarding Network website, we were able to engage local businesses to better understand the types of behaviours that were causing concern in the area, and the days and times on which these occurred. We called a multi-agency meeting, trying to think creatively about who could be involved in reducing the risks. The meeting was attended by our Environmental Health Team, Licensing, the police, staff from the children's home and our Communities Team.

Our first step was to understand the draw of the location – our licensing team set out to investigate the allegations of underage alcohol sales, whilst our Environmental Health team found that a food hygiene visit was due so used this as an opportunity to engage with the staff and owners of the premises. This revealed that the adults involved in criminal exploitation had been threatening the staff, who felt they had to comply with requests for alcohol, free food, etc.

On this basis, the local Police Community Support Officers added the location to their daily patrols and made a point of checking in on the staff. Their increased presence was a deterrent to those involved in exploitation. The staff from the children's home also agreed to take a walk past the location most evenings and check in on the children there in a low key way. Staff were able to initiate discussions with children based on what they noticed whilst in the area, to understand the relationships between the people spending time at the location and discuss strategies for keeping safe.

The Communities Team informed the local schools about the concerns and staff from the school were then able to talk to students known to be spending time there. This enabled school staff to consider the additional risks faced by one particular child known to be spending time at the location and was subsequently included in a referral to Early Help.

New opportunities for community guardianship

The Communities Team identified two great opportunities for increasing community guardianship – the taxi drivers who were always lined opposite the location and a charity with offices next to the location. We held a meeting with the neighbouring charity, sharing our broad concerns and giving advice about what to look out for. This led to identifying the cars and drivers who were seen giving some children lifts in their cars.

This work also kick started a new programme to ensure every taxi driver can spot exploitation and understand where to report. This is now mandatory and we have trained over 500 taxi drivers. We receive a lot of information from taxi drivers around the station which has helped safeguard several children and identify adults who pose a risk of harm.

Key learning:

- Multi-agency meetings can provide a space for discussing safeguarding concerns in neighbourhood settings
- Lower tier authorities can build key partnerships with various law enforcement agencies to address location-based safeguarding concerns through regular information sharing and joint interventions
- Local businesses (such a taxi drivers) can become community guardians when trained on how to report safeguarding concerns and they can provide key information and build relationships with local services
- When assessing a location which presents safeguarding concerns, it's important to consider the following aspects of the space(s) that may be linked to experiences or risk of harm:
 - The risks, vulnerabilities, and safety young people can experience in this space
 - The opportunities for guardianship
 - Environmental and community factors such as policy and community resources that can improve the safety of that space