



Reading | West Berkshire | Wokingham

Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2023/2024



Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire
and Berkshire West
Integrated Care Board



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual report for 2023/2024, which provides a summary of activity for the work and progress undertaken by the multi-agency partnership to promote the safeguarding and wellbeing of children in Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham.

At time of writing the BWSCP operates with over 20 sub-groups in its structure (see Appendix 1). Through the last financial year there were roughly 100 multi agency related meetings that took place across the partnership.

As well as the national reforms concerning Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (WTTSC 2023), there were some significant changes to the BWSCP that have had an impact on the activity and progress during this reporting year.

Through May 2023 to October 2023 the Business unit (4 members) had 3 personnel changes resulting in 3 new members being recruited, including a new Strategic Partnership Manager (SPM). During the recruitment of the new SPM an interim manager was in place for 4 months. As of October 2023, the unit was fully staffed however a secondee in post has returned to their original agency during June 2024. The post is being recruited to time of writing. The financial details of the partnership are captured in Appendix 4.

Two new Directors of Children's services joined the BWSCP during November 2023 (West Berkshire) and April 2024 (Wokingham) replacing previous interim arrangements at each local authority. Thames Valley Police (TVP) representation changed during December 2023 with new colleagues joining the Partnership in September 2023 and from March 2024.

The Partnership entered 2023/2024 with five main priority areas:

- Creation of a Berkshire West Wide Neglect Strategy
- Extra-familial Harm: Contextual Safeguarding, Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence
- Establishing a Berkshire West wide Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) & Front Door Arrangements Leadership Group
- Development of the Partnership Learning and Development Group Training offer
- Continuing Development of the BWSCP Partnership

Progress against these priorities is discussed within this report. All are carrying over to financial year 2024/2025.

The BWSCP Independent Scrutineer, David Goosey, has remained in post but has stepped away from chairing the Executive group (now known as the Delegated Safeguarding Partners group) since March 2024, as per the guidance outlined in WTTSC 2023.

The BWSCP enters financial year 2024/2025 with a renewed vigour, guided by the new Partnership chair, appointed during July 2024. Furthermore, the BWSCP will be hosting its first in person wide Conference for several years, in October 2024. A key aim will be to establish the Partnership priorities for the next 3–5-year period as well as the opportunity for Safeguarding colleagues, including Education, to meet in person.

On behalf of the Lead and Delegated Safeguarding Partners in the BWSCP, we would like to thank those who continue to collaborate and support the BWSCP across our Tri Borough footing in what has been and continues to be a transitional period of activity.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2023/2024

Strategic Priority	Strategic Intent
Creation of a Berkshire West Wide Neglect Strategy	To develop an agreed Berkshire West approach to Neglect in relation to principles, training, and evaluation of service provision, enabling consistency but flexible enough to allow each area to deal with the issues relevant to their population.
<p>Update on actions and impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two Neglect 'Tools' (questions to use when engaging with families) for practitioners have been developed. One Tool is shared with Wokingham and West Berkshire Local Authorities. A second Tool has been created by Reading, Brighter Futures for Children. The need to differentiate between tools was due to local area needs. The three education engagement subgroups in the Partnership were consulted on the Neglect Screening Tools and if they might be useful as part of schools' own assessment processes. Colleagues found the Tools useful as it provides guidance on signs of neglect and could be used by schools to substantiate evidence as part of their referral processes to the local authorities. It was suggested that a simplified version for schools, and a section on Affluent Neglect would be useful. The strategy is due for completion in late 2024. Local authorities are already using the new Tools. Programme of multi-agency auditing to assess approach and impact. 	

Strategic Priority	Strategic Intent
Extra-familial Harm: Contextual Safeguarding, Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence	To work towards locality-based strategies for Extra-Familial Harm that are more aligned, supporting a more combined and collaborative approach across Berkshire West.
<p>Update on actions and impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This priority was particularly delayed however an in-person multi-agency workshop took place during May 2024. Safeguarding Partnership colleagues, including those across the 3 local authority community safety partnerships, discussed what alignment would be desirable. Data from all Safeguarding agencies has been shared. Public Health data was also provided. Colleagues agreed that alignment across the three areas would be beneficial. However, due to the disparities in local need, overall complexity, and the operational differences of the three local authority teams, it was decided that a single Berkshire West strategy was not currently a viable consideration. Police colleagues would value a more aligned approach. This topic will be revisited at the BWSCP October 2024 conference. 	

Priority	Strategic Intent
Establishing a Berkshire West wide Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) & Front Door Arrangements Leadership Group	Development of a Berkshire West MASH Oversight Group to provide scrutiny, advice, and challenge on how the MASH arrangements are working in each locality and identify improvements.
<p>Update on actions and impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group was formed with terms of reference as of October 2023. Meetings are quarterly. In person meetings – rather than Teams based meetings - have taken place across all 3 local authorities. Key MASH staff across the Partnership have been able to walk and engage with each local authority MASH departments. A Berkshire wide data dashboard has been created, with the aim to improve knowledge, practice, and outcomes for children. Regional benchmarking data has been included as part of the data dashboard. The group is responsible for the review of each local areas Threshold of Need guidance, which was initiated in April 2024 & will form part of the response to Working Together 2023. As of August 2024, this group was surveyed to establish views and direction on what the Partnership themes should be for its Multi-Agency audit cycle. 	

Priority	Strategic Intent
Partnership Learning and Development Group	Develop a comprehensive BWSCP Learning and Development offer
<p>Update on actions and impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant task of the partnership in this reporting year has been the relaunch of the learning and development programme due to staff changes, following the long-term chair stepping down. • A comprehensive Learning Improvement Plan has been produced - bwscp_lif_v3.pdf (berkshirerwestsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk) - providing a clear strategy on how learning is identified, disseminated, and implemented in practice within a multi-agency context across the partnership. • Co-Chairing arrangements have been taken on by the Brighter Futures for Children Local Authority Designated Officer and a Wokingham Borough Council Learning and Development Manager. A member of Thames Valley Police’s training team and a Director of Safeguarding from Newbury College are part of the membership. • The first partnership wide training offer will be for ‘Professional Curiosity’ with proposed delivery in September 2024. Following the recent National Review publication, a session on ‘Children with Disabilities and Complex Health Needs Living in Residential Settings’ has been identified as the next training offer proposed delivery in November 2024. Training following the finalisation of the BWSCP Neglect Strategy, and a focus on Domestic Abuse, will inform future topics. • It is acknowledged that there is more work to do to establish the Partnership wide live training offer. There is currently no dedicated role in the business unit to support the training activity however noted that each statutory agency has their own respective L&D offer. Work is to be undertaken to further understand synergies and opportunities to deliver across the partnership. • The Universal Safeguarding Training offered to the Partnership continues to be well received and accessed. Nearly 4,200 colleagues working with children across Berkshire West, completed the training. 	

Strategic Priority
Continuing Development of the BWSCP Partnership
<p>Update on actions and impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalise the relationship between those who are statutorily accountable for safeguarding and those that hold the delegated responsibility. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In anticipation of the amended WTTSC23, a ‘scheme of delegation’ was created in April 2023. The formation of the Delegated Safeguarding Partner and Lead Safeguarding Partner groups were formed with terms of reference during the last financial year (see appendix 1 for details of the subgroups). • Exploring a systems leadership approach/develop the Partnership leadership capacity to incorporate a systems perspective. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chief Executives and leaders from health and the police have been meeting prior to the introduction of the formal Lead Safeguarding Partners and so when WTTSC23 was published which required a Lead Safeguarding Partners group to take overall responsibility for the safeguarding system, the BWSCP was well placed and building on an effective strategic partnership. The group was joined by Public Health leaders since some safeguarding services are commissioned by those departments. This offered the group a wider perspective on the system and where intervention was needed strategically. • Actively respond to the Social Care Review and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 consultation when published, and proactively discuss and take forward the areas for joint agency and partnership ownership of work. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As indicated in the previous paragraph the changes to WTTSC23 were realised quickly in respect of Lead Safeguarding Partners. Other changes, relating to which practitioners could lead on child protection matters were resolved by each local authority resulting in minor changes only. The work emanating from the Social Care Review has generated a number of pilot sites and the BWSCP is awaiting developments from these sites before engaging with further structural changes. • Review the subgroup structure, form, processes, and practice to ensure the system remains fit for purpose, can support delivery of partnership priority areas of work, and that subgroups Chairs are in place and feel supported to lead the workstreams. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meeting subgroups have been reviewed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. A Partnership wide Independent Scrutiny and Impact group (ISIG) was formed in April 2024. This was in response to acknowledging that Health and Police updates across the Partnership were being

presented in triplicate across the 3 local area ISIGs. Senior level leaders, across the Safeguarding Partnership also now can discuss themes across Berkshire West.

- II. The Local area place based ISIG's are still in existence but are under review.
 - III. The 3 Education Engagement subgroups were consulted on moving to a single Partnership meeting during the early stages of 2024. This will for example allow sharing of themes and concerns. Police representation is currently limited for Reading. A Partnership meeting is planned to happen before the end of 2024.
 - IV. In response to the changes in WTTSC 23, the 3 Education Engagement groups, during July 2024 were asked to reflect on the value of the Education Engagement meetings and their effectiveness. The 3 Education Subgroups attendees represent a small percentage of schools in each local area (less than 10%). There are on-going discussions with the 3 groups exploring whether in the long term, the Education Engagement groups should cease and that the local area Primary and Secondary Education Forums, linked to the Education Partnership Forums – which are attended by a significantly higher percentage of schools in each local area – should be the platform and forum to take forward Education Safeguarding themes and concerns.
 - V. The 3 Education Engagement group chairs have been invited to attend the DSP group meeting from September 2024. This is the start of engaging Education partners at strategic level in the Partnership.
- Form closer links between the Executive (now DSP) and Subgroup Chairs by inviting the Chairs to periodically join the DSP to discuss how the work of the groups can be better understood and shared.
 - During financial year 2023/2024 this has not occurred. This is due to the personnel changes within the DSP. This topic will be revisited once the review of the subgroups above haven taken place.
 - Embed the Quality Assurance Framework, providing assurance and evidence of progress and impact.
 - At each ISIG meeting the Calendar of Assurance is referenced and reviewed. The Calendar of Assurance is a summary of Partnership annual agency service reports, working with children, expected through the year. This has given the Independent Scrutineer visibility of activity and the opportunity to challenge services and process, regarding the safeguarding of children.
 - Single-agency audits took place within the last reporting year however multi-agency audits at a Partnership level did not occur in the reporting year. Discussions with the DSP in June 2024 have resulted in the formation of a working group to address the shortfall. A day of auditing is planned for September 2024, with a programme being drafted in Autumn 2024.

LOCAL CHILD SAFEGUARDING REVIEWS AND RAPID REVIEWS – LEARNING

A Child Safeguarding Practice Review case is triggered when a child has died or been seriously harmed, and abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected. Prior to a Practice Review case being commissioned, a Rapid Review, involving the three safeguarding partners and any other involved agencies takes place first. During the 2023-2024 reporting year, two Rapid Reviews were undertaken. No new Safeguarding Practice Reviews were commissioned.

Rapid Reviews

Reading – a baby suffered probable non-accidental injuries whilst in the care of their family. One family member was known to probation for a prior offence. Identified learning included:

- Learning event focussing on 'safe uncertainty', risk assessments and checks when placing children with family and friends.
- Explore the need for Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) checks within the Children's Single Point of Access.
- Discussions to take place between specialist Mental Health Services to ensure specialist knowledge and support is provided when a parent is exhibiting mental health concerns.

Reading – a young person suffered a physical assault whilst out. They had been on a Child in Need Plan due to concerns around vulnerability and risk of exploitation. Identified learning included:

- Bespoke training for Paediatric Emergency Department staff to ensure that referrals are made when vulnerable young people (present with injuries that could be connected with exploitation, assaults, drug and alcohol, or mental health).
- Implementation of weekly checks on Hospital Emergency Department portal to check overnight reports for under 18's who have attended the Emergency Department, why they represented, and track back what happened to them. This should provide another layer of support for this age group to minimise risk and ensure referrals are made to other agencies.

To further learn from reviews BFFC held a multi-agency Workshop (August 2024) to explore learning from early life experiences, including but not limited to; the impact of Early Help services; adultification; police disruption activity and impact and how race and culture impact on practitioners working with children and young people.

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

There were no new Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews commissioned in the last financial year however there were legacy reviews on going as follows:

Reading 'Alex' – Following an incident in 2021, the final report was published in May 2024 - [overview report - reading_alex_cspr.pdf \(berkshirewestsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk\)](#) along with a supporting Learning review - [BWSCP CSPP Learning Briefing - Alex .pdf](#)

Alex suffered a serious injury and was also subject to neglect. The action plan generated during the review identified system learning which is being progressed during 2024 including:

- The need for a Partnership wide response to neglect via a neglect strategy.
- The need for a multi-agency audit to assist agencies to understand:
 - the impact when referrals are made late in the day, during the cross over period between the Children's Single Point of Access (CSPoA) and the out of hours Emergency Duty Teams.
 - whether or not fathers' names and dates of birth are being recorded by practitioners, including when mothers present for antenatal care and all referrals to the Children's Single Point of Access.
- Seeking assurance from social housing providers that they will contact the Children's Single Point of Access if they become aware that any utilities for a household including children is at risk of or has been disconnected.
- BFFC Children's Single Point of Access, via an audit, to addresses any challenges that frontline practitioners experience in identifying whether a child protection medical is required and then offering and/or securing one.

Reading 'Edward' – This review was commissioned following an incident in 2017. Long running criminal proceedings, which concluded in 2024 prevented publication. An updated report has now been completed and will be published following consultation with the family.

Case Closure Reports

During the reporting year, the Partnership agreed that the production of Case Closure reports would be beneficial for revisiting historical actions and their impact, against the original report recommendations. See Case Review Group details below.

Thematic Analysis of Published Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review

The Independent Scrutineer produced an analysis (May 2024) of 6 recent Local Child Safeguarding Practice reviews, spanning the last 4 years. The review identifies the areas for further development shortfalls in the frameworks, practices, and coordination efforts intended to protect vulnerable children. The report is included in full as **Appendix 3**.

The paper has been discussed via the Partnership subgroups including the Delegated Safeguarding Partners and will feed into a strategy planning meeting happening within the October 2024 Conference.

BERKSHIRE WEST SUBGROUP SUMMARY

Case Review Group

The group's purpose is to monitor and discuss Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Reviews outside of the Partnership are encouraged to be presented to the group, as learning opportunities. Near misses or areas of learning are also discussed.

- A new chair was secured from Berkshire Health Foundation Trust (BHFT) - Head of Children's Safeguarding in November 2023.
- The Case Review Process Guidance and Terms of Reference have been revised and are available [here](#). This also includes the recommendations in WTTSC 23 around the guidance of cases involving the Notification of the Death of a Care Leaver.
- Learning from the 'Gloucestershire Child C' have been shared, as well as Safeguarding themes raised by the NSPCC through the reporting year.
- Aiden, Bobby, Aisha & Ciara, Harry, and David Local Child Safeguarding Practice published reviews were agreed to be progressed to Case Closure Reports during 2024. These will be published when ready. These closure reports will reflect the impact of the associated actions plans, alongside the original recommendations captured in the Local Child Safeguarding Practice published reviews.
- Meeting frequency has reduced from 6 meetings per year to 4.

Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups - ISIGs

The groups' purpose is to understand the impact of services delivered to children and any safeguarding concerns and or themes. Agency annual services reports are shared through the year. Meetings are currently chaired by the Independent Scrutineer, on a quarterly basis.

- A Partnership wide meeting has been introduced to enable senior agency colleagues to discuss concerns and themes. Police and Health are able to avoid repeated updates to 3 groups. The meetings' structure (local area and partnership wide meetings) remains under review through 2024, to understand that they are proportionate and effective as a forum to understand child safeguarding themes.
- Data continues to inform the Independent Scrutineers understanding of services and themes concerning the safeguarding of children. The data dashboard consolidates Childrens Social Care, Education, Health and Police key indicators. A supporting narrative supports the data, per agency and continues to be refined. Public Health data is being reviewed with the intention of being added during 2024.
- The Safeguarding of Children with Complex Needs in Residential Care by The National Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2022) was reviewed, learning opportunities are being established.
- The entire Partnership was updated regarding the Neurodiversity service available to children across Berkshire.

Local Area Child Exploitation, Adolescent Risk and Serious Violence Groups

Each local area has its own response and structure to Child Exploitation and Serious Violence. These groups include members of each local areas Community Safety Partnership.

Reading Adolescent Risk Strategic

- Main priority in the reporting year has been a focus on the Reading Thematic action plan in response to the Thematic Review [1. bwscp thematic cspr reading into serious youth violence - final.pdf](https://www.berkshirerestatesafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk) ([berkshirerestatesafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk](https://www.berkshirerestatesafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk))
- The group was governed by the One Reading Children and Young People's Partnership and the Community Safety Partnership and as of June 2024 ceased as an Early Help workstream. A new tactical group is being developed to tackle adolescent risk and extra familial harm in Reading. This will be supported by the development of an Adolescent Risk Strategy.
- A revised Reading partnership Early Help Strategy is due for publication before the end of 2024.

West Berkshire Child Exploitation

- A Youth Survey was carried out in the reporting year involving 10 schools in the area, with the aim of understanding how safe children feel. Young people responded with a higher concern around mental health (30%) worries than concerns around Exploitation (4%). Wishes for additional support around bullying in schools was raised as an issue. 26% of respondents felt that young people carrying a weapon was a concern however only 4% felt that they knew or was aware of a young person carrying a weapon. These findings have been added to the Child Exploitation action plan.
- Serious youth violence is not a concern in West Berkshire however the rise in low level violence (Group B) crime is a concern.
- 'Risking It All' (2engage theatre) performed in 10 schools during February 2024, aimed at Year 9 students. The performances reached 1400 students. The aim of the performances was to help educate on risk taking behaviour to raise awareness around child exploitation, e-safety, substance, and alcohol misuse, grooming and inappropriate relationships.

Wokingham Serious Violence And Exploitation Strategic Board

- To help drive the current Serious Youth Violence plan, 6 workstreams have been created in the reporting year, chaired by different members of the Strategic Board.
- Workstreams are:
 - Data and Targeting
 - Communities and Partnership
 - Early Intervention and Prevention
 - County Lines and the misuse of drugs
 - Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice
 - Children and Young People survey, consultation, and engagement events

Education Subgroups

The partnership structure currently has three locality-based education engagement subgroups which provide a mechanism for two-way dialogue with a section of education partners, which have been in place for several years. These currently take place every half term for each area, which, in addition to the Designated Safeguarding Leads meetings, total 30 meetings per year. This year, education colleagues have used the meetings to raise safeguarding concerns such as:

- **Behaviour** – an escalation in the number of behaviour incidents, but also an increase in the severity of incidents. For example, violence on site has been more extreme, and a sense that students are feeling they are 'invincible'.
- **SEND** – impact on safeguarding as a result of insufficient local SEND provision. Children with complex needs being placed in mainstream education can cause risk to staff and other students, as well as the children themselves.
- **Mental Health** - struggling to meet the needs of an increasing number of students with issues relating to mental health, self-harm, and suicidal ideation.

It is recognised that agendas and information sharing can be inconsistent across the three localities. An acknowledgement that children, their families, and safeguarding risks do not stop at borders also means that the sharing of information, good practice and resources could benefit all.

A proposal was made and agreed by the three subgroups, that meetings from 2025 onwards will include a merged tri-locality session for partnership wide discussions. This would also alleviate key speakers from external agencies,

police and health colleagues attending in triplicate. Separate sessions will be run to focus on location-specific discussions, data and services.

Furthermore, with changes in WTTSC 23 and the requirement to engage all schools across Berkshire West at an operational level all three subgroups (during July 2024) have been approached to discuss:

- Alternative ways to engage schools to discuss Safeguarding related matters, as it is acknowledged that the current subgroups, although representative of different types of schools in each area, are only a small percentage of the **actual schools** in the area (circa 10%).
- A proposal has been made to each subgroup to consider moving safeguarding conversations to existing and well attended by schools Primary and Secondary network forums that exist in each local area.
- Each subgroup local area meeting chair has been approached to attend the Delegated Safeguarding Partners meeting going forward from September 2024, to help build the Education sectors overview of the strategic topics under discussion in the Partnership.

Reading Festival

Festival Republic alongside colleagues across the Partnership footprint undertake safeguarding work in preparation for Reading Festival on an annual basis. Learning from previous years informs safeguarding practice and Reading Festival 2023 saw enhanced safeguarding measures and messaging put in place. Air Hubs, a safe space for festival goers if they need support, were a positive introduction. A Safeguarding Coordinator is always on site alongside welfare teams which include our key safeguarding partners. The Festival maintains strong links with the social care out of hours emergency duty team, local hospitals, Thames Valley Police, and South-Central Ambulance Service.

Designated Safeguarding Leads Groups

The partnership runs separate Designated Safeguarding Lead / Designated Teacher (DSL/DT) Forums for Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham. Representatives from all education settings in each area are invited to attend, so these meetings are seen as the most effective tool in disseminating key safeguarding information and presentations more widely. For assurance of this, sign-in registers have been introduced during the financial year 2023/2024 to record attendance and flag up any regular non-attendance. Recordings of the sessions have also been made available via secured links for those not able to attend the live sessions or for those wishing to share presentations with colleagues.

Presentations this year at education engagement and DSL / DT meetings have included:

- **TellMi** – an NHS-funded digital peer support service for children aged from 11 to 18 years, which provides year-round access to an age-banded, anonymous space to discuss feelings and seek support.
- **Cyber Choices** – a national strategy run by the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit which aims to identify those at risk of committing cyber offences and provide alternative outcomes to prosecutions. Concerning national statistics show that teenagers are more likely to hack (5%) than smoke (3%), have sex (2%), or be in a gang (2%). Schools were provided with statistics, resources, and advice about how to make referrals.
- **NSPCC** - updates on free programmes available for schools including 'Speak Up / Stay Safe' teaching primary-aged children to recognise abuse in all its forms and that they have the right to be safe. 'PANTS' ([Let's talk PANTS with Pantosaurus! | NSPCC](#)) aimed at children aged from 3 to 11 years which helps introduce the concept of bodily autonomy, consent, and help seeking, and 'Talk Relationships' which supports secondary school teachers to confidently deliver sex and relationship education.

Education colleagues were also given opportunity to attend online sessions including:

- **Online Safety Live** – a free virtual briefing in response to the 'Filtering and Monitoring' online safety responsibilities published in Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023. The session, run by the UK Safer Internet Centre, provided advice and assurance to school staff on how to keep pupils safe when using school IT systems.
- **Affluent Neglect** – presented by Professor Claudia Bernard from the Department of Social, Therapeutic and Community Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London on the findings of her national study exploring how social workers engage with parents from affluent backgrounds in suspected child neglect cases. Schools, particularly from the independent sector, have reported finding Affluent Neglect a growing cause for concern.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead groups are recognised as being an effective way of sharing information to our school colleagues involved with safeguarding children across Berkshire West. There is no current plan to change these forums.

Section 175/157

Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 in the United Kingdom places a legal duty on schools and educational institutions to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of students. This includes those in early years settings. Berkshire West Local Authorities capture provider feedback using the online NSPCC tool. In the reporting year the following was noted:

- Positive - high level of returns (nearly 100%) across the 3 Local Authorities.
- The current audit format is not specific enough and therefore does not provide the assurance we are seeking.
- The process for each Local Authority to consolidate returns is timely. The format makes it difficult to identify training needs with accuracy.
- Some schools are not bought into the process and don't view it as a good use of time.
- There are concerns for the authorities around the validity of the returns including:
 - No external validation of the responses.
 - A level of subjectivity to responses.
 - The risk that schools see the audit as a 'tick box exercise' and don't review the audit year on year.
 - Concerns that staff who are new in post and won't know the school well enough to be responding, were submitting and audit very similar to the audit from the previous year.
- The timing of the annual audit needs to be moved to further into the new school year, to allow any new members (Headteachers and DSLs) time to adapt and understand their setting.

Training needs identified in the reporting year included:

- DSL guidance and handbooks
- Updates of changes to statutory guidance
- Managing health needs in schools
- Schools would value area wide model policies – such as intimate care
- Support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Going forward:

- The audit cycle is proposed to move from the Autumn term to the Spring term in the reporting period 2024/2025.
- Validation of data – due to inconsistency in structure and capacity, each LA will arrange its own additional scrutiny of the audit findings. Findings will still be reported through the ISIGs.
- Phew platform – has been investigated as an option going forward to improve the efficiency of the auditing and data gathering process, there are no current plans to adopt it for the S175 process.

PAN BERKSHIRE ARRANGEMENTS (working with the Three Children Safeguarding Partnerships in East Berkshire)

The BWSCP continues to support Pan Berkshire safeguarding arrangements through:

Pan Berkshire Policy and Procedures – the multi-agency group responsible for scrutinising amendments suggested by the procedure's provider, tri.x, and a timetable of chapters for local review (on a 2-year cycle). Members from the group share the reviewing process of the chapters. This approach ensures the practitioners across the Berkshire locality have access to up-to-date localised online procedures. The group is well attended by colleagues across Berkshire. 33 chapters were reviewed through the reporting year and 18 chapters were amended and subsequently published. The BWSCP Business Unit continues to administrate and chair this meeting for Berkshire.

Section 11 – the auditing process to enable agencies to demonstrate and provide evidence that they are fulfilling their safeguarding duties under Section 11 of the Children Act 2004. A member of the BWSCP Business Unit sits as one of the S11 panel members responsible for scrutinising returns and providing feedback on areas for improvement. The S11 panel and organisation happens care of the business unit at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The last Section 11 panel was held in September 2024.

Child Exploitation Forum – The Slough Safeguarding Partnership business unit organised a webinar by Dez Holmes, for practitioners and colleagues across Berkshire. Full recording here: [Slough Safeguarding Children Partnership - Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing \(sloughsafeguardingpartnership.org.uk\)](https://www.sloughsafeguardingpartnership.org.uk)

Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) – The Partnership remain committed to being part of the Bracknell hosted group. The CDOP Coordinator will be attending each area Education Engagement Group to remind and update on the importance of notifying deaths at schools and the process to follow, from September 2024. The Bereavement Pack can be found on the BWSCP site [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership -](#)

NATIONAL REFORMS

This annual report has outlined its response to the updated Working Together To Safeguard Children 2023 guidance including the formation of the DSP and LSP groups in the Partnership, as well as the ongoing work to further engage education groups across the Berkshire West footprint at an operational and strategic level.

Safeguarding Children Partnerships in the country received a grant of £47,300 to further strengthen their local area Partnerships in late 2023. The BWSCP has not committed to how they will invest this money yet, but part of the funding will go toward the October 2024 Conference. This conference will also allow members of the DSP and LSP to discuss the future business operation and goals of the BWSCP over the next 3 – 5 year period.

SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – THAMES VALLEY POLICE

Contribution to the Partnership

Thames Valley Police continues to actively support the BWSCP and during the last year we have strengthened our oversight and delivery of our own safeguarding functions.

Impact of our work

We have introduced a new Public Protection and Safeguarding Command under the direction of an experienced Detective Chief Superintendent with force wide responsibility for safeguarding functions such as Domestic Abuse and Child Protection. We have also recruited a number of additional senior leaders to improve our oversight of this important work and invested in more specialist child protection investigators too. They all work alongside local police teams and has led to more offenders being brought to justice, especially for sexual crimes against children.

We have increased our staffing within our police MASH teams and improved our management and functions in this vital work. This has reduced the time taken to process requests for police information and helped us to ensure that any backlogs are identified and addressed quickly.

We have speeded up our assessment and response to missing children in the county and are working closely with our partners to adopt nationally recognised missing people protocols. We now work closely with our partners to ensure we can protect children quickly where we identify risks from online harm.

Contextual Safeguarding Meeting, EMRAC and ETAC

TVP are actively engaged in the Exploitation and Missing Risk Assessment Conference (EMRAC) which is co-chaired by the Local Safeguarding Inspector. The EMRAC is well established with strong interagency relationships. TVP is working on improving multi-agency child exploitation processes, including standardisation across the three Berkshire West areas and creating joint datasets to better understand the exploitation landscape. A force wide Child Exploitation problem profile is being developed using the National Child Sexual Exploitation Task Force template to identify cross cutting themes and areas of risk.

TVP's MASH Exploitation Team is leading a multi-agency Task & Finish group with representatives from all nine Local Authority areas. TVP is also revitalising their approach to Operation Makesafe and is engaged with a regional Task & Finish research group lead by the Children's Protection Society to enhance safeguarding opportunities with national hotelier companies, thus making children safer in Berkshire West.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

We continue to prioritise effective action to protect those at risk of harm & abuse and to bring offenders to justice. We identified over 4500 domestic incidents and crimes involving children last year and worked closely with our partners to keep children safe. In addition to police enforcement and investigation we seek to address domestic abuse through effective joint working. The Multi Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC) meeting meets regularly and is jointly chaired by the police and the Domestic Abuse leads from the local authority areas. The meeting has representatives from across the partnership and aims to reduce the ongoing risk of domestic abuse, such as

delivering the DA perpetrator intervention programme (DRIVE) which has been integrated into the MATAC process locally.

Intelligence and information sharing

We completed multi-agency training with partner agencies locally to promote understanding of the police intelligence process. Our partners report an increase in confidence and are now submitting more key information to the police, especially around youth exploitation. TVP are represented in multi-agency meetings to improve information flow with the education sector locally.

Training

Our staff have undergone training in tactical options to tackle exploitation, vulnerability and risk, especially among young people and have also participated in the multi-agency training offered by the partnership.

Feedback and engagement

We have issued revised guidance for our front-line staff on capturing the voice of the child and vulnerable adults to assist them in identifying intervention and safeguarding opportunities for the most vulnerable. This helps us to respond to both to their issue or concern, but also enables us to seek feedback about how they have experienced policing. We already seek feedback from some victims of crime and are exploring how we might do this consistently from children and families whom we deal with.

Diversity and legitimacy

We have recently achieved national recognition (Silver status) as a Race Equality Matters Trailblazer organisation. This was awarded following a detailed assessment by an independent panel of experts with lived experience of workplace racial inequality in recognition of our decisive steps to tackle race inequality and to promote race equality.

It shows that our initiatives have made a significant impact across our entire organisation, moving us closer to our goal of becoming a more diverse, inclusive, and equal workplace.

SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – BUCKINGHAMSHIRE OXFORDSHIRE INTEGRATED CARE BOARD (BOB ICB)

BOB ICB as a statutory partner of the BWSCP is well established and supported by Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children and Looked After Children (LAC), Director of Safeguarding and Chief Nurse (Safeguarding Executive Lead/Delegated Safeguarding Partner) for the ICB. There are effective working relationships which continue to be fostered and recent changes in personnel was acknowledged as a challenge to this. However, with a period of more stability and substantive staff in post, this should further enhance the interface and work (both strategic and operational) through the various workstreams.

Effective working includes the collaborative work throughout the year has between health and the local authorities to improve the timeliness of health assessments for LAC both in and out of area and activity to support learning from local and statutory reviews is being facilitated across primary care.

Multi-agency forward planning within the partnership is a clear shared priority. The opportunities for more effective and impactful joint working, auditing and learning are being realised and embedded and the roles of LSP and DSP with the clear responsibilities, offering increased opportunities to strengthen partnership with challenge from the scrutineer.

SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN (READING BOROUGH COUNCIL)

Incorporated on 5 April 2018, Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) is a company limited by guarantee. It is an alternative delivery model for children's services which are delivered on behalf of Reading Borough Council (RBC). The Company is wholly owned by, but independent of, the Council and is governed by a Board of Directors.

During 2023/24, we have built on our positive progress in delivering our continuous improvement programme, which is aligned with our newly implemented transformation programme. This reflects our genuine ambition to achieve the very best outcomes for Reading's children and families.

In January 2024 our targeted early help teams (family help) were integrated with children's social care to form one service, known as Family Help & Safeguarding. Many families require some early help to flourish and some families need more help from targeted and specialist teams. This new, combined service means that the support can be delivered with seamless transitions for families and the least possible changes of workers and teams for them.

The umbrella service covers children's social care (including include statutory assessment and care planning for children in need and at risk of significant harm; provision for children looked after, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and provision for young people leaving care), family work, targeted youth/outreach work, children's centres, contact centre, Children's Single Point of Access, partnership hub, the Youth Justice Service, young people's drug and alcohol support, Independent Fostering Agency, adoption and permanence services (a Voluntary Adoption Agency), children's disability service, occupational therapy, children with disabilities shared care and short breaks homes and, alongside our other service areas, support for young parents.

The number of contacts received at our front door increased from 11,199 in 2022/23 to 12,847 in 2023/24 representing a 15% increase in the demand for our services. Referrals to children's social care increased from 2,843 to 3,003 (6% increase) and early help referrals went from 1,381 to 1,547 (12% increase). As of March 2024, there were 235 children on a child protection plan compared to 179 in the previous year (31% increase). During the year, 120 children became looked after compared with 97 in the previous year (13% increase). We supported 192 care experienced young people throughout the year compared to 164 the previous year (17% increase).

In 2023/24 we reframed our priorities to respond to the changing landscape, recognising that the reality of children's lives is continually shifting as are the difficulties they face. Our work over the last year consolidated what has been achieved to date and built on delivering more services and support with greater impact by increasing our momentum and pace. We have responded on a timely basis to those most in need and strive to ensure quality is firmly rooted into our practice and culture, with a focus on greater collaboration, coproduction and partnership working.

We are proud of the key achievements made by BFFC over the past year. Some – but not all – are listed below:

- We have strengthened our corporate parenting ambition and offer, continuing to work jointly with Reading Borough Council to develop our corporate parenting offer so that it reflects our ambitions for children looked after and care leavers.
- Care experience was recognised formally as a protected characteristic by the Council in October 2023, with a further commitment to extend council tax relief on a sliding scale to care leavers up to age of 25 years from 2024/25.
- With the support of the Council, we invested in and started to implement our ambitious Transformation Programme.
- We secured DfE funding for an 18-month project and, in February 2024, we launched our Reading Inclusion Support in Education (RISE) service to support all Reading schools to improve their offer of Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP), Graduated Response (GR) and to better support all children and young people (CYP), including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- We successfully secured single and regional funding bids including the DfE funded South East Regional Fostering Hub, Local Authority Fostering South East, and ICB funding to extend Mental Health Support Teams across all Reading schools.
- We rolled out our Practice Framework handbook in November 2023 to embed a consistent trauma-informed, systemic and attachment aware approach and tools across our children's workforce.
- We have improved the permanency of our workforce, with 100% permanent senior leaders and managers and 83% permanent social workers. The recruitment of social workers in local children's services remains a national issue and the introduction of a variety of local initiatives and incentives has supported this ongoing improvement.

- We developed a new 2024-2026 Sufficiency strategy to ensure we remain fit for purpose in a changing context and landscape. As a result of this, we are now working on developing our own children's home provision in Reading, as well as continuing with the block purchase of eight local beds, ensuring as many children as possible in residential care can live locally in stable, loving homes.
- Our participation work with our children in care won a national award from Coram BAAF.
- Following a retender of our advocacy service we have created an Opt Out service, inclusive of advocacy for parents resulting in a 50% increase in the number of children accessing advocacy.
- Family support workers work alongside social workers to support parents where neglect and domestic abuse is identified as concern. Audit findings evidence the positive impact they have in reducing the escalation of risk for these children and supporting families to safely step down to early help and universal services.
- More than 200 quality audits completed, and 580 children reviewed in panels, dip sampling & thematic audits. Through these audits we have seen evidence of changes in quality of practice across assessments, visits, plans and supervision, enabling us to target our continuous improvement activity in the right areas.
- We have increased the use of Family Group Conferences for all children.
- Pinecroft, our short breaks provision for disabled children, was remodelled to provide shared care and keep families together.
- We opened 145 Additionally Resourced Provision places in Reading schools so that more children can have their needs met in their local mainstream school.
- Reading remains in the 1st quintile of local authorities with the best performance for young people being in education employment and training, with one of the lowest combined not in education, employment and training (NEET) and not known positions.
- In February 2024 we launched our Reading Inclusion Support in Education (RISE) service to support all Reading schools.
- BFFC's Mental Health Support Team was shortlisted for 'Medium Team of the Year' at the annual LGC Awards 2024.
- At the National Association of Family Information Services (NAFIS) Coram Family & Childcare conference in November 2023, Reading Family Information Service were nominated for two categories, 'Best SEND Local Offer' and 'Best Promotion of the two-year funding'. We are very proud to have won both awards at the national conference.
- As evidenced in our Ofsted Focused Visit in September 2023, care leavers (18-25 years) are supported by dedicated social workers and personal advisors who remain in touch with them (98%), are placed in suitable accommodation (90%) and supported to engage in education, employment, and training (29% NEET).

SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

Opportunities- Challenges- Impact- Outcome

In West Berkshire Council (WBC) we actively engage in developing our services and practices to bring valuable, effective and beneficial outcomes for children and their families who need help and support. In response to the National Social Care reforms-Stable Homes Built on Love and the National Framework, a bespoke practice model has been developed; implemented and embedded within our innovative Early Response Hub. Aligned practices have been introduced within our Contact Advice and Assessment Service that streamline and compliment this innovative practice model ensuring the 'Right Service at the Right Time from the Right Person in the Right Place' for our cohort of children in need of support who sit across the spectrum of need. WBC's Children's Services enhanced screening tools have had further enhancement and development bringing an additional layer of professional curiosity and inquiry to earlier identification and 'hidden harm'.

Children and families receive individualised support according to their level of need, should children and young people require protection, this streamlining of service and resource ensures prompt identification and swift response.

WBC's strategy and activity in the early help space has led to the creation of the Family Help and Achievement model of practice that has enhanced our ability to work both collaboratively and in partnership with children and their families, innovatively utilising the numerous agencies and community services linked to the Early Response Hub. This way of working has enhanced our ability to work with families earlier; and within their own community to prevent escalation of the challenges faced. We are working to expand our reach in the community and evolve and extend our partnership working to ensure a robust and evidence-based approach informed by both quantitative and qualitative data and feedback. The Family Help and Achievement model compliments West Berkshires Relationship Based Practice Framework that has incorporated a refresh of our Family Safeguarding model of practice. This strategic and operational focus across West Berkshire's Children and Family Services is prevention and support through the development of relationships, partnerships and collaboration to ensure the needs of children requiring support in West Berkshire are met.

Enhanced screening tools developed during the covid pandemic have continued to be developed and utilised increasing our ability to identify earlier and support 'hidden harm' and our most vulnerable children and their families.

Recently appointed Missing and Exploitation worker has seen the improved quality of information and identification of exploitation with increased use of mapping and multi-agency reflective learning with oversight of the Child Exploitation (CE) strategic group and our Exploitation & Missing Risk Assessment Conference (EMRAC). Screening tools are used consistently and are presented to EMRAC which has excellent multi-agency attendance and is a forum for learning, challenge, with children at risk of exploitation being identified early and a multi-agency response crafted to safeguard and support.

We remain invested in and are currently refreshing our Family Safeguarding practice model and have successfully employed permanent staff to all specialist roles of; (*domestic abuse practitioners, mental health workers and psychologists and substance misuse specialists*), who are co located in social work teams working collaboratively with practitioners and families to build resilience and invoke longer term positive change through motivational interviewing and strengths based practice.

Bringing further opportunity and a response to current challenges, is the Kennet Valley Provision for children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs which will be opened in autumn 2024. The provision is the culmination of multi-disciplinary work across the council and is testament to the small steps taken throughout the design and build process, listening to the needs of our children.

West Berkshire's Children in Care benefit from a highly experienced stable workforce who have strong relationships with children and young people in our care. Children in Care have access to a dedicated Children Adolescent and Mental Health service (CAMHS), and children are supported to live with their family and friends whenever possible. The Corporate Parenting Panel is co-chaired and attended by our Children in Care and care leavers. WBC's children and care experienced young people increasingly have a voice to shape decision making against a backdrop of a corporate and strategic commitment to plans that support them to grow, develop and thrive.

West Berkshire Children's services have a stable leadership and management team, and have significantly reduced the use of agency social workers with majority services benefitting from a full compliment of permanently employed staff who plan and deliver high quality services that are innovative and transformative with a focus on prevention.

An essential function of the council in responding to challenge is scrutiny, the council uses scrutiny for essential systematic examination and evaluation of the services we deliver and has included a high-cost placement review, and progress so far of our 'Delivering Better Value Programme'. Governance essential to ensure leaders are sighted on the effectiveness of services provided, and the trajectory of continuous service developments and improvements for our children and families.

SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

In Wokingham we are actively engaged in developing our response to the National Social Care reforms (Stable Home Built on Love & National Framework) and have a number of programmes addressing transformation already in train, in response to identified service development needs. Below is a summary of work that has taken place in the last year to develop our response and improve children's outcomes.

Helping Early/Family Help

To strengthen our helping early offer, we created a new Head of Service role 'Helping Early, Community and Prevention'. This role will lead on strategy and activity within the Council and across Wokingham's partners to ensure there is a robust and evidence-based approach to delivering on early intervention and support for families, children and young people who have additional needs but do not require a statutory intervention. It will focus on developing relationships with both statutory and voluntary partners to enhance the services and offer to Wokingham children and their families, meeting need and offering support in the right place, at the right time.

The additional head of service role leads to us having a Head of Service for Children with Disabilities. This will provide greater capacity to focus on this area of service delivery along with the development of the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) for SEND. The aim and focus of the DSCO is to achieve; better outcomes for children and families, improved social care input to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and bringing the Social Care and SEND systems together with greater levels of alignment and integration, leading to an improved knowledge and understanding of services that make a difference for children at earlier points.

Our Helping Early strategy is currently subject to review and will be finalised in early 2025. This will bring together the local area offer for children and families who require additional help and support.

A new Exploitation Lead Post was also created and recruited to in Wokingham. This role will work across Children Adults and Community Safety, supporting our partnership work with children and vulnerable adults up to the age of 25.

We are currently undertaking a review of Short Breaks for children with disabilities, with a view to expanding the range of Short Break opportunities within Wokingham. In early autumn we intend to have developed an options paper, (a high-level document that sets out the strategic options for ways to increase the breadth and capacity of short breaks), sought agreement from the Council's Leadership Team for the recommend approach/es and commenced a process of implementation. We are working with SEND Voices Wokingham, partners and key stakeholders to co-produce this work. The process of implementation will include opportunities for children and parents to co-produce service specifications to design additional or increased short break provision.

The Neglect screening tool was launched in Wokingham, in September 2023 and the QA Service Manager has been involved in the co creation of the BWSCP Neglect Strategy with a multi- agency audit planned, focussing on the 'front door' across the partnership planned for late 2024.

Stable and Loving Homes

Transformation work has been undertaken of our fostering team focusing on changes to how we recruit, assess and support our foster carers to care for our children. This included the recruitment of two family support workers to support carers and the introduction of our first Mockingbird constellation. The model nurtures the relationships between children, young people and foster families supporting them to build a resilient and caring community.

Wokingham has been involved in a joint bid across the south-east as part of the Regional Fostering Hubs (RFH). After being introduced in the Independent review of Children's Social Care (2022), the concept of RFH's has been taken forward in 'Stable Homes Built on Love'. This provided grant funding to support councils to address sufficiency of foster placements across the region. As a result of a successful bid, we are currently in the process of launching our second Mockingbird constellation and most recently launched the largest local authority fostering recruitment partnership, with the aim to increase the number of foster carers across the region. Launched on the 8th July 2024 'Local Authority Fostering South-east' is a new virtual fostering hub bringing together the expertise of 20 councils from across the region.

Wokingham Children Services have invested additional funding to commission Step by Step to recruit Supported Lodgings carers for Wokingham's children or care leavers, with the aim of adding 10 new households. Supported Lodgings is similar to foster care and can support young people who are 16+ or leaving our care, experience the transition to adulthood in a safe and secure environment, whilst learning emotional and practical skills that will help them thrive.

Later this autumn, Wokingham will be opening its own residential children's homes. Providing care locally for children where a residential setting is the most appropriate to meet their needs. This will complement our developing portfolio of care settings and also support local sufficiency and in achieving best value in respect of our placement budget.

In 2022 we opened a Semi-Independent living provision offering supported accommodation to children in care aged 16+ and care leavers who are transitioning to adulthood. We plan to double this offer in 2025.

In 2023 Wokingham successfully bid for 'staying close' grant funding, which provided £350,000 to provide enhanced support for care-leavers moving on from semi-independent provision (SILs) supporting their move into step-down accommodation and independence.

In 2024 we also added a further 2 transitional accommodation buildings for 10 of our care leavers with floating support, with further developments planned in 2025.

In 2023 Wokingham successfully bid for 'Staying Close' grant funding, which provided £350,000 to provide intensive support for young people transition from in supported accommodation to transitional living.

Workforce

Wokingham children's services have in place a range of approaches for recruitment of social workers to reduce the reliance on locums. Current forecast is showing a significant reduction in the use of agency social workers over the next quarter. These include:-

The introduction of a market supplement. This has supported stability and led to a number of agency workers converting to permanent posts and seen an increase in experienced workers applying for roles.

Rachel Bedford was appointed as Head of the Academy/ Principle Social Worker in September 2024, leading a strong and supportive program, for social workers in their first-year post qualification (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, ASYE). This year we have already recruited 8 ASYE's who will join us in the autumn. To support their development and first year in practice they receive good quality support and development opportunities, there is also a period of overlap between them commencing and the agency workers departure. This program was commented on during our recent focused inspection: Newly qualified social workers who are in their assessed and supported year of employment are provided with regular support, learning and reflective supervision. This enables them to develop and progress their knowledge and skills and equips them for their developing social work roles (OFSTED 2024).

Four of our existing workforce in Childrens services who were alternatively qualified or experienced have been appointed into social work apprenticeship roles. A blend of supported working in the directorate, placements and university tuition will lead to them being able to gain a social work qualification over the next 2 to 3 years.

Four student social workers will be joining children services over the next few weeks as part of the Frontline scheme. Frontline is England's largest social work charity. They fund the arrangement and the in-borough support and management to support the students learn, develop and qualify as social workers. They will qualify over the next two years and then progress as ASYE's at Wokingham.

New Practice and Outcome Groups are being established across the social care services.

New governance has been put in place to ensure that practice is purposeful, planned and focussed, that links learning about what works to help and support children, families and their carers, across a range of interventions. The meetings are reviewing both quantitative and qualitative data and information, alongside

learning from audit. This is ensuring that teams, managers and practice leaders are sighted on our achievements to celebrate, our areas for improvement and continued learning. Ultimately this system of governance will ensure that we know ourselves and that we have the right plans in place to support continuous improvement for children open to social care and for those children who have additional needs.

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER CLOSING THOUGHTS

The Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report for 2023/2024 outlines various successes and ongoing challenges in safeguarding children across Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham. The development of two Neglect Screening Tools, with input from local authorities and education partners, demonstrates progress towards a coherent response to neglect. While tools were adapted for local needs, the input from education professionals highlighted their usefulness in evidence collection and potential referrals. This demonstrates useful multi-agency activity.

Establishing a Berkshire West MASH Oversight Group has fostered increased scrutiny, advice, and challenge on local arrangements. Meetings held across the three authorities have enhanced direct engagement with key MASH staff. Additionally, the development of a data dashboard, which includes regional benchmarking, reflects efforts to improve data-driven decision-making and oversight.

Some priorities, particularly the Extra-familial Harm strategy, experienced delays and may not come to fruition as a whole Partnership approach since alignment across Berkshire West has proven complex due to differences in local authority needs and operations.

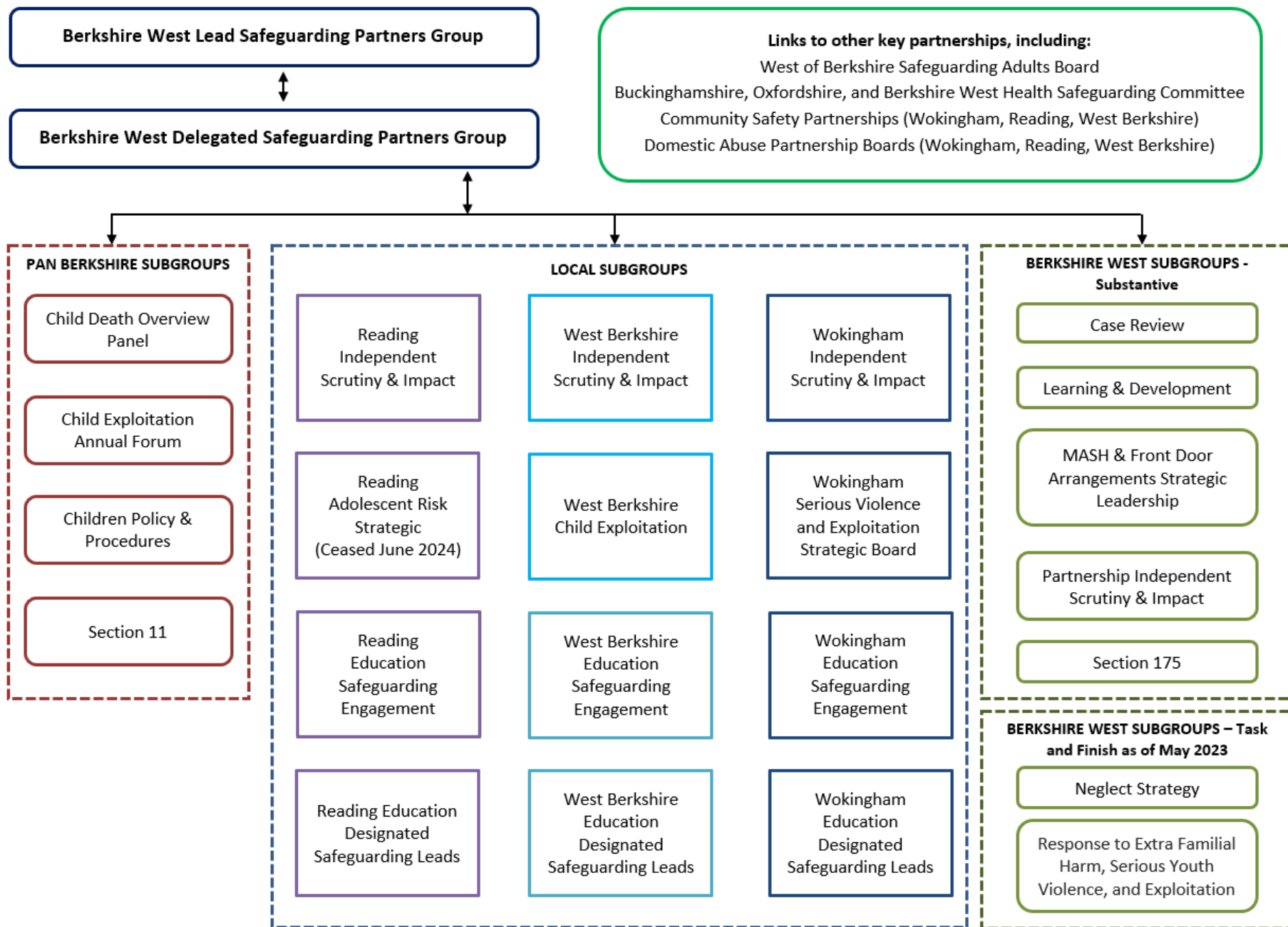
Education safeguarding concerns especially exclusions and suspensions, mental health issues amongst young people and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), remain significant. Not all schools in the region are engaged in the safeguarding partnership work. Proposal to move these discussions to broader educational forums recognises this gap.

While universal safeguarding training is well received, there is still more to do to develop a partnership-wide, live training offer. There is no dedicated role within the business unit to support this activity, which limits the scope of training and its potential impact. Expanding training capacity is crucial for future improvements.

The safeguarding system, while showing elements of strength, such as the formation of the MASH Oversight Group and ongoing multi-agency collaboration, has areas where further refinement is needed. The BWSCP has demonstrated an ability to adapt and improve through multi-agency initiatives, such as the development of strategic tools and some training programmes. The creation of data dashboards and benchmarking reflects an increasing reliance on data-driven insights, which strengthens oversight and accountability.

There remains a need for better alignment of safeguarding approaches across the tri-borough area, particularly regarding strategies for addressing extra-familial harm. Furthermore, safeguarding professionals have called for greater engagement in education settings, where schools' involvement in multi-agency work currently is inconsistent.

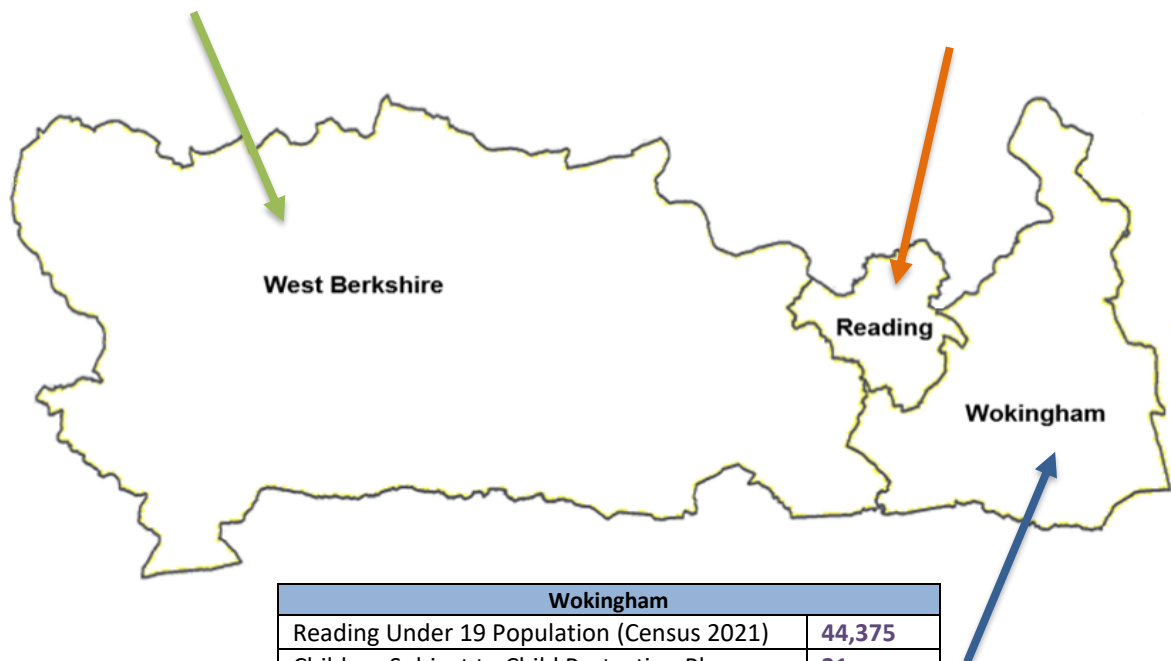
APPENDIX 1: BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE CHART



APPENDIX 2: KNOWING OUR CHILDREN - STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CHILDREN ACROSS BERKSHIRE WEST

West Berkshire	
West Berks Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	37,122
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	53
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	317
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	52
Domestic Crimes involving Children Q4 2023/2024	190
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2023/2024	46

Reading	
Reading Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	41,808
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	62
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	466
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	74
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2023/2024	279
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2023/2024	48



Wokingham	
Reading Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	44,375
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	31
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	151
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2024	32.3
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2023/2024	179
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2023/2024	23

APPENDIX 3: INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis of Published BWSCP Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

The reports titled Reading Thematic CSPA Serious Youth Violence, West Berkshire Bobby CSPA, Reading Aiden CSPA, Wokingham David CSPA, Wokingham Harry CSPA, and Wokingham Aisha and Ciara CSPA collectively highlight enduring shortcomings in the frameworks, practices, and coordination efforts intended to protect vulnerable children. This synthesis, drawn from an analysis of these reports, aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the recurring issues that signal systemic weaknesses in child safeguarding practices.

1. Recognition of Neglect and Inadequate Care

Systemic failures in recognizing and addressing various forms of neglect, including emotional, educational, and health neglect, are prominently noted across all reviews. Each report documents instances where neglect was either poorly identified or inadequately addressed, leading to adverse outcomes for the children involved. For example, emotional neglect was a significant concern highlighted in cases like those detailed in the "Reading Thematic CSPA Serious Youth Violence" and "West Berkshire Bobby CSPA," where professionals missed critical emotional cues that indicated broader welfare issues.

2. Insufficient Multi-Agency Collaboration

A recurring theme across the reports is the inefficacy of multi-agency collaboration and communication. The reviews consistently cite examples of fragmented communication channels and poor information sharing between agencies, such as education, health, and social services, which compromised the safety and well-being of children. For instance, in "Reading Aiden CSPA" and "Wokingham David CSPA," there were noted failures in sharing critical information about children's injuries and family circumstances that could have influenced intervention strategies.

3. Inconsistencies in Case Management

Inconsistencies in handling cases, from initial assessments to escalation processes, were noted across all reviews. Disparities in the application of protocols and subjective interpretations of policies led to variations in how similarly situated cases were managed, as evidenced in reports like "West Berkshire Bobby CSPA" and "Wokingham Harry CSPA." These reports detailed instances of delayed or premature escalations that negatively impacted the interventions provided.

4. Lack of Professional Curiosity

The reports uniformly criticized a lack of professional curiosity, where professionals failed to probe deeper into the circumstances surrounding the children's lives. This lack was particularly evident in cases detailed in "Wokingham Aisha and Ciara CSPA," where signs of distress or abnormal family dynamics were not adequately investigated, leading to missed opportunities for early intervention.

5. Inadequate Training and Support for Safeguarding Roles

All reports pointed to significant gaps in training and support for those in safeguarding roles, affecting their ability to handle complex cases effectively. For example, "Wokingham Harry CSPA" highlighted the challenges faced by professionals dealing with cases involving mental health complexities, where they felt underprepared and unsupported.

6. Early Intervention and Prevention Failures

Failures in early intervention and prevention strategies were widely noted, with early warning signs often overlooked or inadequately acted upon. This issue was consistently documented across the reviews, including in "Reading Aiden CSPA," where initial signs of a child's distress, such as withdrawal and aggression, were not acted upon promptly.

7. Service Accessibility and Equity Issues

Issues related to the accessibility and equity of services were highlighted, particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities, non-English speakers, or those from socioeconomically disadvantaged

backgrounds. Reports like the "Reading Thematic CSPA Serious Youth Violence" discussed delays and barriers these children faced in accessing timely and appropriate support.

8. Resource Constraints and Funding Issues

Resource and funding constraints were a pervasive concern across all reports, with limited resources leading to overburdened services and delayed responses. The "West Berkshire Bobby CSPA" specifically connected these constraints with the inability to provide timely and adequate interventions in complex safeguarding scenarios.

Recommendations

1. Enhance Multi-Agency Collaboration and Communication

Given the recurring issues related to the inefficiency of inter-agency communication and coordination, greater efforts are necessary to improve information sharing. In the long term, integrated software systems that allow real-time data sharing (such as Thames Valley Together) and the creation multi-disciplinary teams dedicated to complex cases could significantly improve coordination. The Stable Homes innovation projects are currently exploring how to create the multi-disciplinary teams which would extend beyond that already seen in West Berkshire with the Family Safeguarding model.

2. Training

This training should focus on developing a high level of professional curiosity, comprehensive risk assessment skills, and familiarity with legal frameworks. The Partnership has a negligible training offer and next to no resource available to improve that offer although individual agencies provide their own training. Training which brings different professions together could help to improve professional curiosity and risk assessment skills and generate trust across agencies. In line with other Partnerships, it is recommended that BWSCP invests in a Training Manager with a budget to provide a multi-disciplinary offer.

3. Early Intervention

Given the highlighted failures in early intervention, it is imperative to establish approaches that can identify and address risks at an early stage.

APPENDIX 4: BWSCP FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

BWSCP FINANCE REPORT 2023/2024

BWSCP 2023/2024 Finance – contributions	Amount
Reading (Brighter Futures for Children) – hosting agency	£50,000
West Berkshire Local Authority	£50,000
Wokingham Local Authority	£50,000
Thames Valley Police	£20,000
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Board	£50,000
Total	£220,000

BWSCP 2023/2024 Finance – outgoings	Amount
Business Unit (Including TASP membership, website, marketing, travel, room hire)	£196,502
Independent Scrutineer	£25,457
Total	£221,959*

BWSCP 2024/2025 Finance – contributions	Amount
Reading (Brighter Futures for Children) – hosting agency	£50,000
West Berkshire Local Authority	£50,000
Wokingham Local Authority	£50,000
Thames Valley Police	£20,000
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Board	£50,000
FY 23/24 Underspend**	£45,341
Total	£265,341

*Overspend in the financial year was due to interim staffing changes in the business unit.

**The Section 31 grant received by all Children Safeguarding Partnerships in late 2023 (£47,300) has been accounted for as an underspend and carried over to FY24/25. The £1,959 spend overspend in FY23/24 has been offset against the grant, as agreed by the Delegated Safeguarding Partners.