

West Berkshire Council Peer Challenge

Feedback from the peer challenge team

Peer challenge 28-31 January 2025

Presentation: 31 January 2025



The peer challenge team

- DCS lead peer - Stephen Kitchman, LB Bexley
- Social care peer - Warren Petitjean, Newcastle
- Social care peer - Oluwatoyin Akinrinlade, Hertfordshire
- Education peer - Eddie Huntington, AD Education, Stockton
- LGA Peer challenge manager - Jonathan Trubshaw



The purpose of peer challenge

- Provides councils and partners with an external view on the effectiveness of the strategic response and the quality of practice.
- Conducted in an open and honest manner that jointly identifies strengths & areas for consideration.
- Provides feedback based on a brief engagement with the Council and partners.



The process of peer challenge

- Peers reviewed a range of information to ensure we were familiar with the council, the challenges it is facing and its plans for the future
- The peer team gathered information and views from more than 40 meetings, in addition to further research
- We spoke to more than 75 people including a range of council staff together with families, lead member and external stakeholders

Scope and brief for the peer challenge (Key Lines of Enquiry)

1. Is there evidence that the Family Safeguarding Model is being utilised to its full potential
2. Is there evidence of Management Oversight, Case Supervision, which is child led, and child centred and of good quality, with evidence of the child's voice throughout
3. Is there evidence of good decision making when children are considered to be at risk of harm
4. Is there evidence of Child Protection oversight from Child Protection Chairs
5. Is there evidence of children being safeguarded who are not in full time education?



Overall messages and observations - 1

- Appetite and enthusiasm for change – need for prioritisation
- The workforce is enthusiastic, committed and connected in working for West Berkshire and their families
- Leadership and management have a clear focus and are working towards improving quality of social work and education practice
- Strong political and corporate support for children's services
- Good operational relationships



Overall messages and observations - 2

- Operationally strong, needs greater strategic focus and informed challenge
- Limited evidence of partnership governance arrangements and impact
- Social workers and managers' case loads and workplace demands are high
- High levels of activity to find ingenious solutions to meet the needs of West Berkshire's children in the absence of clear partnership strategies

What people have said to us

CiN overlooked
sometimes because of
the high case loads
(Manager)

I love working here
(Social worker)

The SW is amazing in
my life, changed things
around
(Parent)

I asked CSC for
help, they listened,
they took things on
board and helped
my family
(Parent)

SW listens...I like this
SW
(9 yr child)

We are people who see
children as their focus
and make it work as
children are at our hart
(Education)

Some of the best work I
have done is with fathers
(Practitioner)

We're getting there, we
just need to keep going
(Snr manager)

No school is at risk of
slipping through a
safeguarding gap
(Head teacher)

Something we are
developing
(Social worker)

CP Chairs don't always
listen
(Non-SW professional)

Evidence that the Family Safeguarding Model utilised to full potential

Strengths

- FSM is an appropriate model for West Berkshire to adopt
- Investment in training is seen as positive by staff
- FSM working well in some of the children's files seen
- Recruitment of some multi-agency staff to implement the model
- Staff are enthusiastic for the model
- Connected with a FSM community of practice

Evidence that the Family Safeguarding Model utilised to full potential

Areas for consideration

- FSM strategic oversight is unclear – no evident evaluation schedule with clear project plan and milestones
- High case loads are impacting on the implementation of the model
- Inconsistent application by social workers – fidelity to the model
- Interventions not always analysed for impact
- No overall impact data
- Cultural genograms not evidenced

Evidence of management oversight, case supervision - child's voice throughout

Strengths

- Data reports on the frequency of supervision
- Supervision recorded in case files
- FSM seen in the structure of supervision
- Commitment and evidence of clear child's voice and family feedback
- Supportive and responsive leadership and management team
- Staff report feeling safe in their work



Evidence of management oversight, case supervision - child's voice throughout

Areas for consideration

- Most supervision, evidenced from files, was task orientated with limited reflection
- Limited specificity of actions, expectations and timescales
- No clearly articulated system for ensuring child/family feedback and quality assurance that activity leads to changes in practice
- Commitment to auditing files not being fully realised

Evidence of good decision making when children are considered to be at risk of harm

Strengths

- Positive feedback from partners on the immediate safety of children
- Evidence from majority of files that appropriate decisions are taken and recorded
- Children seen in a timely manner
- Management is available and accessible
- Co-location of all children's services helps with support and decision making

Evidence of good decision making when children are considered to be at risk of harm

Areas for consideration

- Timeliness of implementation of decisions
- Limited evidence of reflective supervision
- Limited evidence of partner involvement in group supervision
- Management oversight of CiN plans
- High percentage of s47 enquiries not requiring ICPC

Evidence of child protection oversight from Child Protection Chairs

Strengths

- Permanent, stable and experienced team
- Chairs have pre-meetings with social care team
- Conferences are well chaired
- Chairs actively looking to include parents and child's voice
- Evidence of appropriate escalation by CP chairs

Evidence of child protection oversight from Child Protection Chairs

Areas for consideration

- Engagement of fathers
- Plans are long and contain a high number of actions
- Conversion to plan is low – high use of resource in preparations
- Capacity of CP chairs and IROs
- Conference and review timeliness/repeat CP plans

Evidence of children being safeguarded who are not in full time education

Strengths

- Individual agencies are aware of statutory requirements
- Partnership working between SEN and children's social care is developing
- Schools met are confident that there is oversight of children not in FTEd
- Evidence of Youth Justice effective practice with children not in FTEd
- Alternative provision works effectively in most cases

Evidence of children being safeguarded who are not in full time education

Areas for consideration

- Role of virtual school is not fully developed
- No clear evidence of strategic oversight for children not in FTED



Recommendations - 1

1. Clarify and strengthen the governance and delivery arrangements for early help with partners
2. Use governance structures to develop resilience; not just a one council approach, a whole West Berkshire approach
3. Review governance and programme management arrangements:
 1. Mosaic
 2. Workforce development
 3. Family Safeguarding Model



Recommendations - 2

4. Review and evaluate the CiN pilot to determine how this is taken forward
5. Undertake a desktop review of children missing education
6. Review the SEF to fully reflect achievements, developments and future direction