

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES - 18 MARCH 2026**

Present: Councillor Asare (Chair);

Councillors McEwan (Vice-Chair), Eden, Gittings, Griffith, Keane, Lanzoni, Magon, O'Connell and DP Singh

Apologies: Councillors Ballsdon, Cresswell, Mpofu-Coles and Woodward

25. DELEGATED DECISIONS

The delegated decisions were noted.

26. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

27. CQC ASSURANCE

The Committee considered a report presenting the findings of the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) assessment of the Council's Adult Social Care service conducted between July 2024 and April 2025, together with progress made since the inspection and priorities for further improvement. An update on the development of the Adult Social Care Strategy was also provided.

The report explained that the evaluation, based on its Single Assessment Framework, had reviewed performance across four themes: Working with People, Providing Support, Ensuring Safety, and Leadership. Evidence was gathered through policy reviews, performance data, stakeholder engagement, and an on-site assessment. An overall score of 53% was received and a rating of 'Requires Improvement'. The final assessment report detailed many well-developed strengths as well as areas for improvement both of which have been detailed in this report.

It was noted that the Assessment process was a challenging experience resulting in a number of process and quality assurance concerns being raised with the CQC. This resulted in a formal complaint being submitted in January 2026. Whilst an adult social care improvement plan was in place prior to the assessment with a number of improvements achieved, a refreshed improvement plan aligned with CQC feedback and staff input was now underway, forming the basis of the new Adult Social Care Strategy due to be completed in summer 2026.

The report explained that while the CQC assessment identified areas requiring improvement, the Council had a strong foundation of compassionate care, innovative services, and committed leadership. Continued focus on the identified areas of improvement such as timeliness, safeguarding and accessibility would be critical to achieving a higher rating and delivering effective, equitable, person-centred care for all residents.

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The report also provided detailed information on the assessment activity and information on the formal complain to the CQC outlining the Council's concerns about the assessment of its adult social care services.

The Committee raised questions on partnerships with health, recruitment and retention, vacancy levels, staff morale, and neighbourhood hubs. Officers responded with detail on strengthened partnerships, reduced vacancies, improved staff wellbeing, and ongoing community work.

Resolved –

- (1) That the content of the report pertaining to the published assessment by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) of the Council's adult social care delivery of duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014 be noted.**
- (2) That the improvements made since the CQC assessment and the ongoing improvement plan be noted.**
- (3) That progress made against the Council's Adult Social Care Improvement Plan be brought back to the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee for review.**

28. MATERNITY SERVICES UPDATE

The Committee received a report and presentation from Sarah Bailey, Interim Director of Midwifery Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust (RBFT) on a summary of the national MBRRACE report findings, local data on inequalities in maternity care and progress on reducing inequalities across maternity care.

The Committee were provided with the following information:

- The findings of the 2025 MBRRACE report, highlighted significantly higher maternal mortality rates for Black women, Asian women, and women living in the most deprived areas, with leading causes of death identified as cardiac disease, mental health conditions and thrombosis.
- RBFT supported approximately 5,800 women annually, with around 4,800 births per year, serving a diverse population including areas within the 20% most deprived nationally.
- Perinatal mortality was discussed, noting a rolling RBFT rate of 4.91 per 1,000 births (Q1–Q3 2025/26), slightly above the 2023 national comparator of 4.84. A multidisciplinary deep dive review was underway, focusing on medical review, thematic analysis, ethnicity and deprivation.
- Disparities had been identified in 2023–24, including a perinatal mortality rate for Black women of 6.19 per 1,000 births, three times higher than for White women.

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- Neonatal outcomes were reported to be below the national target for term admissions, with no increased neonatal morbidity identified for ethnic minority women in 2024/25.
- Maternal outcomes were reported as stable, with further work planned to analyse outcomes by ethnicity through the National Maternal Care Bundle.

The Committee were also informed about actions taken to reduce inequalities, including:

- Continuity of care teams.
- Cultural competence training.
- An Inclusion Midwife appointment.
- Expansion of enhanced interpretation services via WordSki.
- Targeted community engagement through the Maternity and Neonatal Voice Partnership, resulting in improved early booking rates.
- Supporting targeted initiatives to improve early booking, mental health support and safe sleep.

The Committee welcomed the report and recognised the scale of work underway. Discussion focused on the Trust's response to the interim findings of the Baroness Amos review, workforce capacity and representation, the role of maternity and family hubs, community engagement, and the need for improved data to evidence impact on health outcomes.

Officers emphasised the importance of partnership working, learning from national reviews, strengthening complaints and Call for Concern processes, maintaining safe staffing levels, and improving access through maternity hubs.

Healthwatch representative Alice Kunjappy-Clifton attended the meeting and asked a question regarding what local action was being discussed or taken by maternity services regarding patients reporting they had experienced discrimination. In response it was noted that all staff were undertaking mandatory cultural competency training and any reported discrimination was thoroughly investigated.

The Chair thanked Cllr Mpofu-Coles for raising this issue during her time as Chair of ACE Committee. The Chair also thanked Sarah Bailey for the information and looked forward to an update to be provided to the Committee in 12 months.

Resolved – That an update report be provided to the Committee in 12 months.

29. SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation from Dr Emma Wainwright, Co-Clinical Lead and Consultant in Sexual Health and HIV at the Florey Clinic, Royal Berkshire Hospital.

The presentation outlined the services provided by the Florey Clinic as a multi-faceted integrated sexual health service. The clinic offered Genitourinary Medicine (GUM),

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contraception, HIV care, psychosexual counselling, home testing and health advisory, outreach and safeguarding services.

The presentation included the following points:

- The clinic was the most research active Sexual Health site in the Thames Valley including the MSD study of Islatravir and Doravirine, Positive Voices questionnaire study, Emergency department BBV testing study , Halo Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT). Also an undergraduate and postgraduate training site.
- Changing complexity and changes: new BASH PrEP (Pre-exposure Prophylaxis) guidelines in 2025, injectable PrEP, injectable antiretroviral therapy for HIB, DoxyPEP available soon in clinic.
- PrEP on Wheels, PrEP for all: project funded by Gilead to promote PrEP creating awareness and knowledge.
- Changing STI prevalence and complexity: Data from national and local sources showed varying rates of chlamydia, gonorrhoea, and syphilis. Reading data was comparatively high compared to other local areas however it was noted that this was stable.
- HIV Patient Caseload: The number of patients living with HIV was increasing, was a highly complex area of work and used a large amount of clinician time as proportion of patients were classed as complex.
- STI Chlamydia testing: The number of people screened who were aged under 25 had increased which was a positive result.
- Service users who were seen within two working days: The percentage of people was high and had improved.
- Service users offered and tested for HIV: The percentage of people who had accepted a HIV test at the service had increased. It was noted that this was part of the government's plan for ending new HIV transmissions by 2030.
- Vulnerable Outreach Services: Outreach nurses attended home, school or any convenient place to provide care. Example of users included vulnerable people under 18 who could struggle to attend clinic, people in contact with social care, substance misuse and commercial sex workers.

The Committee made comments, asked questions and received responses on supporting the outreach work with under 18s, medical meaning of complex care, pharmacy support and GP referrals.

The Committee thanked Dr Wainwright for the information and requested that a future update report be provided in a 12 months time.

Resolved – That an update report be provided in 12 months.

30. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD INAUGURAL REPORT

The Committee received the Children's Services Improvement Board Inaugural Report. Andy Couldrick, Independent Chair of the Improvement Board provided the Committee with an overview of the report.

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The report explained that on 28 January 2025 Council had agreed not to extend its contract with Brighter Futures for Children Ltd and to bring its Children's Services back in-house. The transition back into the Council took place on 1st October 2025. This required the establishment of an independently chaired Children's Services Improvement Board. It was noted that a report recommending the Terms of Reference and appointment process for an Independent Chair was presented to Council in June 2025. Andy Couldrick was appointed as the independent chair and the Board was convened in November 2025. As a requirement of the transition this was the first report to ACE Committee.

It was noted that following the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI), of the multi-agency response to children in Reading who are victims of domestic abuse, a non-statutory improvement notice was issued by the Department for Education to the Council followed by the appointment of a DfE Improvement Advisor. The Advisor also sits on the Children's Services Improvement Board.

The Committee noted that the Board met for the first time in November 2025 and has continued to meet every six weeks. The Committee noted the Terms of Reference, Forward Plan and key issues that would be monitored by the Improvement Board.

The Committee discussed the report and comments and responses were provided on fostering respite care, corporate parenting role of councillors and supporting young people.

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

Resolved –

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That an update on the progress of the Children's Services Improvement Board be provided to the Committee on a six-monthly basis.

31. BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

The Committee were provided with information on the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024/2025. The BWSCP Annual report provided 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.

The Committee noted that the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (WTSC23) provided the statutory guidance for all safeguarding children partnerships in England. From March 2019, the safeguarding partners across the west of Berkshire (Reading, West

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Berkshire and Wokingham) had joined to become the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP). BWSCP was the key statutory partnership whose role was to co-ordinate the partners safeguarding services; act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others; and implement local and national learning including from serious child safeguarding incidents.

It was noted that five new Priority areas had been established: Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Intra Familial Harm, Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Extra Familial Harm, Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Domestic Abuse, Safeguarding & Support for Children Not in School, Safeguarding & Support for Pre-School Children, Reducing Neglect.

It was also noted that an options appraisal in relation to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in response to the findings of the Joint Target Area Inspection had been undertaken. Following consideration by lead safeguarding partners a decision had been made to move to single local authority safeguarding arrangements. Therefore, a Reading Safeguarding Children's Partnership would be established to replace the Berkshire West Children's Safeguarding Partnership. It was noted that timelines and details were to be approved at an extraordinary meeting with lead safeguarding partners. It was noted that this work would also feed into the work of the Children's Services Improvement Board.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.30 pm)