

To: Councillor Asare (Chair)  
Councillors McEwan, Ballsdon,  
Cresswell, Eden, Gittings, Griffith,  
Keane, Lanzoni, Magon, Naz, Mpofu-  
Coles, O'Connell, DP Singh and  
Woodward

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10 March 2026

Your contact is: Jemma Durkan - Committee Services

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

A meeting of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee will be held on **Wednesday, 18 March 2026 at 6.30 pm** in the **Council Chambers, Civic Offices, Reading**. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

<b>AGENDA</b>	<b>Page No</b>
<b>1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>	
Councillors to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in relation to the items for consideration.	
<b>2. DELEGATED DECISIONS</b>	<b>5 - 6</b>
<b>3. MINUTES</b>	<b>7 - 12</b>
<b>4. PETITIONS</b>	
Public petitions may be submitted on any matter within the Committee's responsibilities. Submissions should be emailed to <a href="mailto:committee.services@reading.gov.uk">committee.services@reading.gov.uk</a> and must be received <b>no later than 12 noon, four clear working days before the meeting</b> .	
<b>5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC</b>	

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Public questions may be submitted on any matter within the Committee's responsibilities. Submissions should be emailed to [committee.services@reading.gov.uk](mailto:committee.services@reading.gov.uk) and must be received **no later than 12 noon, four clear working days before the meeting.**

## **6. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

Councillor questions may be submitted on any matter within the Committee's responsibilities. Submissions should be emailed to [committee.services@reading.gov.uk](mailto:committee.services@reading.gov.uk) and must be received **no later than 12 noon, four clear working days before the meeting.**

## **7. MATERNITY SERVICES UPDATE** 13 - 24

The Committee will receive an update from the Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust regarding Maternity Services.

## **8. SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES UPDATE** 25 - 34

The Committee will receive an update on the Sexual Health Service in Reading.

## **9. CQC ASSURANCE** 35 - 48

A report providing information on the outcome of Reading Borough Council's Adult Social Care Assessment by the Care Quality Commission.

## **10. CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT BOARD INAUGURAL REPORT** 49 - 58

A report providing an update on progress of the Children's Services Improvement Board.

## **11. BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25** 59 - 96

A report presenting the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report 2024/25.

## WEBCASTING NOTICE

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Committee	Directorate	Date of meeting	Minute number	Item title	Decision	Officer delegated to	Lead Councillor portfolio	Expected timescale for decision
ACE Committee	DCASC	02/07/25	8	Supported Living Framework Tender	<p>That the Executive Director of Communities and Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, the Director of Finance, and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be given delegated authority, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Procure and enter into a contract with successful tenderer(s) for the support/care services to be provided. The contract would be for up to 10 years (5 initial years and then up to 5 further years);</li> <li>· Negotiate with the successful tenderer(s) to mobilise the contract, vary the contract, extend the contract at the appropriate time and otherwise contract manage the contract throughout its lifecycle.</li> </ul>	Exec Director of Community and Adult Social Care Services;#Director of Finance/s151 officer;#AD of Legal & Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer/Returning Officer	Adult Social Care	Tender documents published on 26/09/2025 so the period is now open to receive applications. On track to formally award and initiate mobilisation in early January, with the contract commencing from 1st April.
ACE Committee	DCASC	02/07/25	9	Homecare Framework Tender	<p>That the Executive Director of Communities and Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, the Director of Finance, and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to be granted delegated authority to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Procure and enter into a contract with the successful tenderer(s) for the support / care services to be provided. The contract would be for up to 10 years (5 initial years and then up to 5 further years).</li> <li>· Negotiate with the successful tenderer(s) to mobilise the contract, vary the contract, extend the contract at the appropriate time, and otherwise contract manage the contract throughout its lifecycle.</li> </ul>	Exec Director of Community and Adult Social Care Services;#Director of Finance/s151 officer;#AD of Legal & Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer/Returning Officer	Adult Social Care	Tender documents published on 26/09/2025 so the period is now open to receive applications. On track to formally award and initiate mobilisation in early January, with the contract commencing from 1st April.

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# Agenda Item 3

## ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 14 JANUARY 2026

**Present:** Councillor Asare (Chair).  
Councillors Ballsdon, Cresswell, Eden, Gittings, Griffith, Keane, Lanzoni,  
Magon, McEwan, Mpofo-Coles, Naz, O'Connell and Woodward.

**Apologies:** Councillor DP Singh.

### 18. DELEGATED DECISIONS

The delegated decisions were noted.

### 19. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Further to Minute 14 of the previous meeting, Questions from members of the public and Councillors, Councillor Eden read out the following factual statement:

“I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and apologise on behalf of the Council for an inaccuracy in the response to a question asked at the last ACE Committee meeting in October. As Committee members will be aware the Council has since issued a supplementary response on the website, but I would like to address this here too and make sure everyone was aware for full transparency. Although there was no deliberate sharing of misinformation, officers have asked me to share their apologies to the Committee and I also add my own apology. An investigation into an associated complaint included a recommendation that officers take more time to prepare and check answers to questions asked at Committee. Officers accepted this recommendation and will apply it to answers presented at future Committees.”

### 20. SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2027/2028

Further to Minute 17 of the meeting held on 15 October, the Committee received a report to determine the school admission arrangements for 2027/2028 as follows:

- The admission arrangements for Community Primary Schools in Reading for the school year 2027/28
- The coordinated scheme for primary and junior schools for the school year 2027/28
- The coordinated scheme for secondary schools for the school year 2027/28
- The Relevant Area 2027
- The primary phase catchment areas for the school year 2027/28

The following appendices were attached to the report:

Annexe A	Primary 2027 Coordinated Scheme;
Annexe B	Primary Admissions Policy for Community Schools 2027;
Annexe C	Primary Designations 2027;
Annexe D	Secondary 2027 Coordinated Scheme;
Annexe E	Relevant Area 2027;
Annexe F	Annexe G - Equality Impact Assessment.

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The report set out the proposed changes to the school admission arrangements and the results of the consultation which had been carried out between 17 October and 28 November 2025.

**Resolved - That the School Admissions Arrangements 2027-2028 be agreed.**

**21. SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION PLAN**

The Committee received a report that outlined the current policy context for suicide prevention and domestic abuse in England and in Berkshire. The following appendices were attached to the report:

Appendix 1	The WHO Violence Prevention Alliance Public Health Approach;
Appendix 2	The WHO Violence Prevention Alliance Ecological Framework;
Appendix 3	Reading Suicide Prevention Action Plan on a Page 2023 to 2024.

The report presented data about the current incidence and prevalence of suicides in Reading along with a summary of what was known about domestic abuse and suicide at a local level. The report also summarised what was known about the links between suicide risk and interpersonal violence including domestic abuse and the best available evidence for preventative action. The main themes and current challenges that faced local systems were identified through the lens of a violence prevention approach. A summary of progress on the local suicide Prevention Action Plan was provided with details of how the Health in All Policies approach and the new operating model for the Public Health Team would address this important area of work.

The report explained that from 2026 onwards the Reading suicide prevention group and the local Suicide Prevention Action Plan would be resourced through the Health in All Policies approach for the Council and the establishment of a new operating model for the Public Health Team. This would include an Advanced Public Health Practitioner post that would be dedicated to Public Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and would lead the action planning group to drive the review and implementation of the Prevention Action Plan. The role would be supported by a proportionate investment from the public health grant through the Closing the Gap 2 contracts with the local voluntary, community and social enterprise sector, Reading Samaritans and the Compass Recovery College.

The Committee discussed the report and it was acknowledged that suicide needed to be made everybody's business. Councillor Eden proposed that the progress that had been made to secure an extra member of staff who would focus on mental health and drive forward the Reading Suicide Prevention Action Plan be noted and that an update report be submitted to a meeting in the next Council year about the progress on areas including gambling and priority communities.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the report, progress made on the Suicide Prevention Action Plan and the resources allocated to this area of work to ensure continued delivery be noted;**
- (2) That the progress that had been made to secure an extra member of staff focused on mental health and to drive forward the development**

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and implementation of the Reading Suicide Prevention Action Plan be noted;

- (3) That an update report be submitted to a meeting in the next Council year about the progress on areas including gambling and priority communities.

**22. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS REPORT 2024/25 FOR ADULT SOCIAL CARE**

The Committee received a report providing an overview of complaints that had been received in 2024/25 and had been dealt with using either the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure or the Statutory Complaints Procedure for Adult Social Care, summarising the main types of complaints that had been received and providing some examples where improvements had been made as a result of learning from these complaints. A summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2024/25 was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report stated that during 2024/25 the service had received 59 statutory complaints, which was an 18% increase compared to the 50 that had been received in 2023/24, and 13 corporate complaints, which was an increase of 85% compared to the seven that had been received in 2023/24. One Stage 2 request had been received for a corporate complaint in 2024/25, however, no requests for a corporate Stage 2 investigation had been received during this period. The main themes for the period 2024/25 for corporate complaints had been as follows:

- Financial Issue - 6 (46.1%);
- Quality of Service Provided - 4 (30.8%);
- Staff Conduct - 2 (15.4%);
- Communication - 1 (7.7%).

The main themes for the period 2024/25 for statutory complaints had been as follows:

- Quality of Service Provided - 23 (38.9%);
- Staff Conduct - 10 (16.94%);
- Communication - 10 (16.94%);
- Financial - 9 (15.2%).

The summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2024/25 set out in Appendix A would be published on the Council's website and highlighted some examples of learning from complaints in the previous year along with key service improvements that had been made as a result of the complaints that had been received.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the report be noted:
- (2) That the action taken in response to learning from complaints, as described in the summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2024/25, attached at Appendix A to the report, be noted.

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**23. DIRECTORATE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES ANNUAL COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS REPORT - 2024-25**

The Committee received a report that outlined the work that Children's Services had carried out to improve customer relations, focusing on complaints and compliments and covering Subject Access Requests, for the year 2024/25. The Children's Social Care Complaints 2024/25 - Summary Report was attached to the report at Appendix A.

The report stated that during the financial year 2024/25 Children's Service had received 66 statutory complaints, which was a decrease of nine (13.6%) compared to the 75 that had been received in 2023/24. To provide context, in 2024/25 3,202 children had been open to Children's Social Care, so the number of statutory complaints represented 2.09%. This compared to 3,589 open children and 2.06% for 2023/24. Of the 66 complaints that had been received:

- 11 (16.67%) had been resolved through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by the social care team at the start of the process, before progressing to a formal Stage 1. These 11 cases had been closed off following a telephone discussion with the complainant and a short written response either by letter or email;
- The remaining 55 (83.33%) had progressed to a formal Stage 1 investigation.

During the reporting period, 11 Stage 2 requests had been received in respect of the Stage 1 investigations that had been carried out in the reporting period:

- One of these had been resolved through ADR;
- The remaining ten had progressed to formal Stage 2 investigation;
- Three of the ten Stage 2 investigations had also been reviewed by a Stage 3 Review Panel.

Both the Customer Relations Team and Children's Services Communications and Compliance and HR/Training teams had continued to raise awareness of the complaints process with both staff and the public.

The report explained that the Children's Social Care Complaints 2024/25 - Summary Report, attached to the report at Appendix A, provided an analysis of the data for statutory complaints, explained how complaints were managed and how learning was used to improve services; the report would be published on the Council's website. The Council had worked closely to drive improvements in the services that were offered to children and young people and to signpost to information on advocacy, early resolution and the complaints procedures. Nevertheless, it was recognised that there was always room for improvement and the service was working continuously to better the services offered to children and families.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the report and intended actions to further improve service delivery and the management of representations, particularly complaints, in Children's Services in Reading be noted;**

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- (2) That the continuing work to raise awareness of all conflict resolution processes, including the statutory complaints process and encouraging appropriate use by children, young people and their families, be noted.

**24. READING SAFEGUARDING ADULTS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

The Committee received a report that sought approval for the publication of the Reading Safeguarding Adults Report 2024/25 on the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board website. The report provided an overview of safeguarding adults activity in Reading for the period April 2024 to March 2025 and highlighted key performance trends, demographic insights, achievements and priorities for the coming year. A copy of the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report 2024/25 was attached to the report and a copy of the Reading Safeguarding Adults Report 2024/25 was circulated after the meeting as it had been omitted in error.

The report set out the key messages within the Safeguarding Adults Report with a series of tables, charts and graphs under the following headings:

- Safeguarding Concerns and Enquiries;
- Referral Sources;
- Enquiries by Age and Gender;
- Types of Abuse in Concluded Enquiries;
- Outcomes of Concluded Enquiries.

A positive change for Reading had been the higher conversion rate, from Concern to s42 Enquiry, of 37%; this evidenced the targeted work that had been done to reduce the 'out of scope' referrals, clarifying criteria and raising awareness. As a result, inappropriate concern referrals had fallen significantly whilst more concerns that had been raised met the Care Act criteria or warranted intervention, meaning that staff and agencies were identifying genuine risks rather than unnecessary referrals.

The report stated that, with regard to achievements during 2024/25, the Council had made significant strides in strengthening its safeguarding framework. A major achievement had been the successful clearance of the backlog of safeguarding enquiries, which had previously posed challenges to timely intervention. The introduction of a new duty system and the launch of a comprehensive safeguarding manual had provided staff with clear guidance and had improved operational efficiency. The implementation of the Mosaic module and an embedded feedback form had enhanced case recording and had allowed for better quality assurance. The Council had also seen a notable increase in Persons in Position of Trust (PiPOT) referrals, rising from just four in the previous year to 26, reflecting improved awareness and compliance. Training had remained a priority, with over 620 staff completing fire safety training and 101 staff receiving specialist training on mental capacity, ensuring that frontline practitioners were equipped to manage complex safeguarding scenarios effectively.

Looking ahead for 2025/26, the Council had identified key priorities to build on the progress that had already been achieved in the previous year:

- Priority 1 Continued enhancement of the Making Safeguarding Personal approach;  
Priority 2 Raising awareness of PiPOT across all agencies;

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- Priority 3      Development of transitional safeguarding pathways to support young people moving into adulthood;
- Priority 4      Prevention work would remain at the forefront, with targeted initiatives addressing hoarding, self-neglect and exploitation.

These priorities reflected a proactive strategy that was aimed at reducing risk, promoting independence and improving the overall safeguarding experience for adults at risk and to support them the investment in workplace development would continue. Strengthening community engagement would also be critical to ensuring that safeguarding services remained inclusive and responsive to the needs of diverse populations.

**Resolved - That the publication of the Reading Safeguarding Adults Annual Report 2024/25 be endorsed.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.38 pm)

# Agenda Item 7



**Royal Berkshire**

NHS Foundation Trust

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Report for Reading Borough Council ACE (Adult Social Care Children Services and Education Committee) on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2026</b>
<b>Agenda item no:</b>	
<b>Meeting:</b>	Maternity Clinical Governance and ACE (Reading Borough Council Adult Social Care Children Services and Education Committee)
<b>Date:</b>	23 <sup>rd</sup> February 2026
<b>Presented by:</b>	Sarah Bailey, Interim Director of Midwifery
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Sarah Bailey, Interim Director of Midwifery

<b>Purpose of the Report</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of this report is to share information with Reading Borough Council ACE Committee on the following:</li> <li>• The Trust have been requested to attend the committee with a paper and presentation on the following:</li> <li>• Summary of the national MBRRACE report findings</li> <li>• Local data on inequalities in maternity care (including info on global majority women)</li> <li>• Local progress on reducing inequalities across maternity care             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Including translation services</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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<b>Report History</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maternity Clinical Governance 13/03/2026</li> </ul>
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<b>What action is required?</b>	
Assurance	
Information	
Discussion/input	
Decision/approval	The Committee is asked to approve that this paper can be shared externally

<b>Resource Impact:</b>	NA
<b>Relationship to Risk in BAF:</b>	NA
<b>Corporate Risk Register (CRR) Reference /score</b>	NA
<b>Title of CRR</b>	NA

<b>Strategic objectives</b> This report impacts on (tick all that apply)::			
Provide the highest quality care for all			√
Invest in our people and live out our values			
Deliver in partnership			√
Cultivate innovation and improvement			
Achieve long-term sustainability			
<b>Well Led Framework applicability:</b>			Not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
1. Leadership <input type="checkbox"/>	2. Vision & Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	3. Culture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4. Governance <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

5. Risks, Issues & Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Information Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	7. Engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	8. Learning & Innovation	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Publication</b>							
Published on website	<b>No</b>	Confidentiality (FoI)	Private	Public	yes		

## 1 Executive Summary

Providing this report to share information on the Trusts current position on inequalities in maternity care for women and babies. This is to be shared with the Reading Borough Council ACE Committee.

The 2025 MBRACCE report highlights inequalities in maternal outcomes, with higher mortality rates for Black and Asian women and those living in deprived areas. RBFT serves a diverse population and monitors perinatal outcomes closely.

RBFT Q1-Q3 2025/26 rolling rate is 4.91 per 1000 births, this is slightly higher than the 2023 national comparative rate of 4.84 per 1000 births. This rise has prompted a deep dive by a multidisciplinary strategy group. This will involve further medical review of all the cases, thematic analysis.

Recent data has shown a rise in perinatal mortality and in 2024/25 this was higher among Black women.

Neonatal outcomes for term babies admitted to neonatal services remains below national targets and maternal outcomes are stable with further ethnicity data analysis planned.

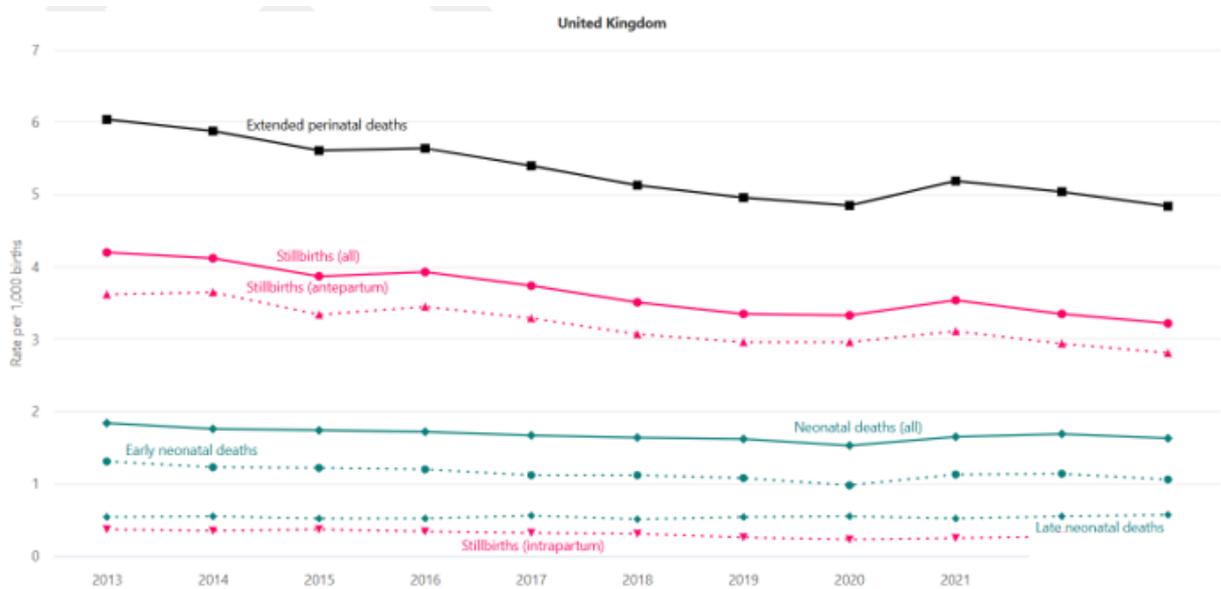
There has been extensive work to improve inequalities within the last 12 months, including continuity teams, cultural competence training, improved interpretation, targeted community engagement. Ongoing work includes Maternal Care Bundle implementation, maternal outcomes by ethnicity/deprivation and strengthens community partnerships.

## 2. Key Issues

### 2.1- MBRRACE (Mothers and Babies Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the Uk)

- Recent MBRRACE- UK (2025) report continues to highlight inequalities in maternal and neonatal outcomes across the UK. Key findings include:
- Maternal mortality rate remains higher for black ethnic backgrounds who are 3.7 times more likely to die during pregnancy or 6 weeks postpartum than white women.
- Women from Asian backgrounds are 1.8 times more likely to die.
- Women in the most deprived areas face mortality rates more than twice as high as those in least deprived areas.
- Leading cause of death is cardiac disease, mental health related causes and thrombosis with recommendations emphasising earlier recognition and escalation pathways and culturally competent care.

- National five times more survey highlights the lived experience of Black women, including lower levels of trust in maternity services, higher rates of feeling dismissed or not listened to, barriers to culturally appropriate information and challenges navigating communication and continuity of care. These insights reinforce the importance of culturally safe care and accessible communication.
- Across the United Kingdom from the MBRRACE report there has been a decrease overall in perinatal mortality.



Data sources: MBRRACE-UK, PDS, ONS, NRS, PHS, NIMATS, States of Guernsey, States of Jersey.

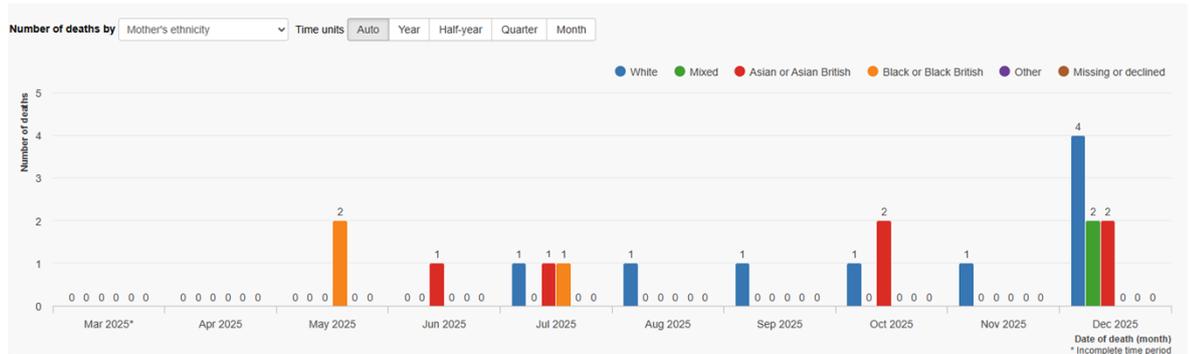
## 2.2 Local Context at RBFT

The Trust provides care for over 5800 women a year who book with the Trust for pregnancy care, with 4800 babies being born under the care of the Trust. Ethnicity breakdown of the women/birthing person who book with the Trust is 64% White, 22% Asian, 8% Black, 1% mixed Black/White, 3% other, 2% unrecorded. Care is provided in a large geographical area, which has areas of deprivation, with 12 areas among the most 20% deprived in England.

### 2.21 Perinatal Mortality (stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy and neonatal death up to 4 weeks of age)

- Perinatal mortality rates are monitored and reported to the Trust board, this is broken down into ethnicity and social deprivation indices.
- Cases of perinatal death are reviewed under the Perinatal Mortality Review Tool, a robust multidisciplinary review with external panel members and representation from Maternity Neonatal Voice Partnership. On review there is a large proportion of cases that there is no care issues identified that would have changed the outcome. Due to increased complexities of women in care and fetal complications sometimes intervention will not change the outcome. For cases where care issues have been identified there is further scrutiny through the Trust's safety process. All families receive a full copy of their report and opportunity to discuss the findings with senior midwifery, obstetricians and the neonatal team if required.
- RBFT Q1-Q3 2025/26 rate is 4.91 per 1000 births, this is slightly higher than the 2023 national comparative rate of 4.84 per 1000 births. This rise has prompted a deep dive by a multidisciplinary strategy group. This will involve further medical review of all the cases, thematic analysis. The review will also focus on ethnicity and deprivation. From the deep dive themes identified will be actioned and monitored, through the Trust board. This will be a strategic objective for this next financial year with actions identified monitored through board. Nationally, all Trusts are awaiting perinatal mortality figures for 2024, which will be the new comparative rate.

- At the end of Q4 2024/25, it was identified through quantitative review of perinatal deaths that occurred in 2023-24 that the perinatal mortality rate for Black women was 6.19 per 1000: 3-fold higher than for White women. Perinatal mortality rates for women from Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic groups were not significantly different to White women
- The cases of black women were reviewed to identify themes. A main theme was that black women were less likely to contact the hospital immediately when they notice reduced fetal movements. The MNVP and midwifery team are working with local communities to understand what challenges there are for women to report earlier.
- In the current rolling year, Q1-Q3, number of deaths in relation to maternal ethnicity



- The Trust have a maternity bereavement service which offers and provides ongoing support for bereaved families.
- The Trust is fully compliant with Maternity Incentive Scheme, and Saving Babies Lives Initiative, which focus on implementation of tools to improve perinatal and maternal outcomes.

## 2.22 Neonatal Outcomes

- The Trust monitors number of term babies admitted to the neonatal unit. The Trust since 2025 has completed a quality improvement project to reduce admission rates. The Trust's admission rate is below the national target rate. In 2024/25 women of ethnic minority background did not have an increased neonatal morbidity risk based on term admissions to the neonatal unit. 2025/6 data will be analysed at the end of the Q4.

## 2.23 Maternal Outcomes

- The Trust is currently monitoring data on for following maternal outcomes, which the Trust are not an outlier for.
  - Unsuccessful attempt at instrumental deliveries leading to caesarean.
  - Maternal death
  - Return to theatre post caesarean
  - Intensive care admissions
  - Haemorrhage post birth of over 1500mls
  - Severe vaginal tears from vaginal delivery
- These outcomes are currently not broken down into ethnicity, and this is planned for the coming year with the introduction of the Maternal Care Bundle. The Maternal Bundle is to be implemented by March 2027, so this action will align with this implementation.
- In January 2026, NHS England launched the Maternal Care Bundle, this is a national programme designed to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality through consistent

implementation of evidence-based care. The main themes are based on the MBRRACE findings, venous thromboembolism, prehospital and acute care for pregnant women, epilepsy in pregnancy, maternal mental health and obstetric haemorrhage. The Trust is currently reviewing services to benchmark against this new care bundle. It is expectation that all Trusts are compliant by March 2027.

## **2.24 Local progress on reducing inequalities across maternity care**

### **Workforce and Culture**

- All maternity team had cultural competence training.
- Full appointed of a perinatal befriender post in 2025, who works with those requiring additional support, socially isolated, complex social needs.
- New mental health midwife in post, working with perinatal mental health team and mental health lead consultant, provision of additional support for women and families with additional mental health needs.
- Midwifery working in maternity hubs provided by Reading Borough Council.
- 2025 campaign for Safe Sleeping, recognition that not all parents can afford new cots, mattresses. Connected with local charities, with easy referral routes for midwives.

### **Targeted Support**

- Development and launch of Easy Read English Leaflets aimed for non-English speakers and neuro-diverse population.
- Continuity of Care team, Blossom, in areas of deprivation in Reading, provide full continuity of care pathways for women in these areas (RG2 7. and RG2 8., Whitley.) Second team to be launched in April 2026, Orchid for central reading postcode.
- Poppy Team, continuity of antenatal and postnatal care for women and families who have complex social factors across Berkshire. Factors can be those who live in deprived areas, known to social services; this can be child protective services or adult, mental health problems, domestic abuse, teenage pregnancy, substance misuse, non-English speaking, those who may be recent migrants to the UK, unemployment; including that of the supporting partner.
- Young parenting classes.
- Word ski- new interpretation service across the Trust. Within maternity have Word ski on wheels, which allows for face-to-face interpretation at the press of a few buttons to a face-to-face interpreter.24/7 service.

### **Community Partnership**

- Easy English Classes, supported by Reading Borough Council in collaboration with Maternity.
- New inclusion midwife introduced January 2026, aim is to work with local community groups to engage and understand challenges. Met with Utulivu and Reading Community Learning Centre. Have developed engagement plan with these organisations. Will be attending the Break Free conference. Moving forward will engage with other community groups, places of worship.
- Maternity and Neonatal Voice Partnership work on engaging with black community groups in 2025 in recognition of findings that black women more likely to book pregnancy late and therefore miss important early screening. Increased booking by 10 weeks from 65% of black women to 80%.
- Working with community groups and Berkshire Healthcare to utilise health bus for important messaging in targeted community areas across 2026.
- Midwifery working in maternity hubs provided by Reading Borough Council.
- 2025 campaign for Safe Sleeping, recognition that not all parents can afford new cots, mattresses. Connected with local charities, with easy referral routes for midwives.

## **2.25 Survey of Black Women's experience**

- In 2025, completed a detailed survey of black women who had used our services within the last six months. Questions used were the same as the Five X More national survey.

All women had a face-to-face appointment with a black midwife. 35 women interviewed  
Findings were:

<b>Finding</b>	<b>Action</b>
Many women seeing GP first before contacting maternity services	Work by MNVP has supported direct contact
Required clearer information on blood tests for screening	Screening information has been improved with clear information and video.
Continuity of care in the antenatal period	As well as introduction of new continuity of care team, another project running to improve antenatal care for all women
Unsure how to get mental health support	New mental health midwife improving information – different languages
4 women felt discriminated	This was explored individually and actions taken. All maternity team had culture competence training. There are clear mechanisms for raising concerns, Call for Concern, PALs and complaints. Maternity working with Call for Concern team to increase use in Maternity.
3 women delay in getting pain relief in labour	Reviewed by anaesthetic team as involved epidural analgesia, Anaesthetists reviewing all response times for an epidural to develop any further actions
How to get support for themselves and baby	Postnatal Steering Group reviewing information given to all women at discharge.

### 3. Next Steps

- Complete Maternal Care Bundle benchmarking, develop local action plan.
- Work with informatics to provide a maternal outcome report for ethnicity.
- Analyse data at end of Quarter 4 2025/2026 for term babies admitted to neonatal services.
- The MNVP and midwifery team to continue work with local communities to understand what challenges there are for women to report reduced fetal movements earlier.
- Deep dive by a multidisciplinary strategy group into perinatal mortality rate. This will involve further medical review of all the cases and thematic analysis. The review will also focus on ethnicity and deprivation. From the deep dive themes identified will be actioned and monitored, through the Trust board.

### 3. Conclusion

Within the last 12 months there has been a huge amount of work in improving on reducing inequalities for maternity care. It is recognised that there is continuous work which has been identified in the next steps. The most important aspect being engagement with community groups, which will continue with the support of the Maternity Neonatal Voice Partnership and the newly appointed inclusion midwife.

### 4. Attachments

No attachments



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# Inequalities in Maternity Care – RBFT Report for ACE Committee

Sarah Bailey, Interim Director of Midwifery, Royal  
Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust, March 2026

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**Purpose**



**NHS**

Royal Berkshire  
NHS Foundation Trust

Provide overview of:

- National MBRRACE findings
- Local inequalities data
- Progress made at RBFT
- Ongoing work and next steps

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# National Picture

## MBRRACE 2025 (Mothers and Babies : Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK.

- Black women: 3.7× more likely to die during pregnancy/postpartum
- Asian women: 1.8× more likely
- Women in most deprived areas: >2× mortality rate
- Leading causes: cardiac disease, mental health, thrombosis
- **Five X More survey**:- Lower trust in services, Feeling dismissed/not listened to, Barriers to culturally appropriate information, Communication and continuity challenges
- Across the UK there has been a national reduction in perinatal mortality.

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# Local Data

- 5800 women book with RBFT annually
- 4800 births per year
- Ethnicity breakdown:
  - 64% White
  - 22% Asian
  - 8% Black
  - 1% Mixed
  - 3% Other
- 12 areas in top 20% most deprived nationally



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## Perinatal Mortality

- Perinatal Mortality is the death of a baby occurring before or during birth once a pregnancy has reached 24 weeks and neonatal deaths up to a baby is 4 weeks old.
- National Data is 4.84 per 1000 births (2023 National Data)- 2024 national data is due out soon,
- Q1–Q3 2025/26 at RBFT the rate was 4.91 per 1000 births (slightly above national 4.84) Deep dive underway to review this increase of Q1 - Q3: medical review, thematic analysis, focus on ethnicity & deprivation
- At the end of Q4 2024/25, it was identified through quantitative review of perinatal deaths that occurred in 2023-24 that the perinatal mortality rate for Black women perinatal mortality rate for Black women was 6.19 per 1000: 3-fold higher than for White women. Perinatal mortality rates for women from Asian, Mixed and Other ethnic groups were not significantly different to White women
- The MNVP and Midwifery team are working with local communities to understand barriers and then address these barriers. All women are provided with information on reduced fetal movements from Tommy's, which is available in many languages
- Leaflet and banner: Feeling your baby move is a sign that they are well | Tommy's

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## Neonatal Outcomes

- Term admissions to neonatal department ( special care baby unit) is monitored closely
- RBFT admission rate now below national target.
- No increased neonatal morbidity for ethnic minority women in 2024/25.
- 2025/26 data due end of Q4 to be analysed and broken down in ethnicity

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# Maternal Outcomes



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- Currently monitor the following and not an outlier
- Failed instrumental → caesarean
- Maternal death
- Return to theatre
- ICU admissions
- PPH >1500ml
- Severe perineal trauma
- Currently this data is not broken down into ethnicity. With the introduction of the National Maternity Care Bundle, this will be part of the work the department will complete for March 2027.



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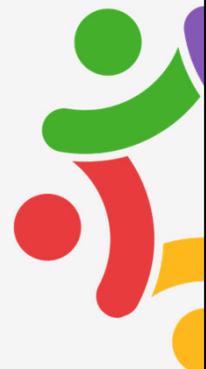
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# Progress in Reducing Inequalities



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- Easy Read English leaflets, developed by consultant midwife
- **Continuity of Care teams (Blossom; Orchid launching April 2026)**
- Easy English classes with RBC
- Poppy Team for complex social factors
- Young parenting classes
- **WordSki interpretation service (24/7)**
- Cultural competence training for all maternity staff
- **Inclusion midwife appointed Jan 2026**
- **MNVP engagement with Black communities → early booking of pregnancy for this group improved from 65% → 80% in last year**
- Perinatal befriender role
- Health Bus outreach
- Mental health midwife in post work alongside Perinatal Mental Health Team and Obstetric Consultant.
- Safe Sleep campaign with charity partnerships- easy referral for new cots and mattresses for those in need.
- Obstetric Consultant for FGM



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# Findings from Local Black Women's Survey (2025)

- All women seen face to face by a Black Midwife.
- Key themes & actions:
- GP seen first → MNVP promoting direct maternity contact
- Need clearer screening info → improved leaflets + video
- Desire for continuity → new teams + antenatal improvement project
- Unclear mental health pathways → improved multilingual info.
- 4 women felt discriminated → individual follow-up + cultural competence training for all maternity team
- Delays in epidural → anesthetic review of response times for all women
- Postnatal support unclear → discharge information reviewed and updated



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# STILL TO DO

- Complete Maternal Care Bundle benchmarking- with action plan
- Develop maternal outcomes by ethnicity dashboard
- Analyse neonatal term admissions (Q4 2025/26)
- Continue community engagement on reduced fetal movements- support from local authority to do this and opportunities
- Complete perinatal mortality deep dive and implement actions



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# Conclusion

- Considerable progress made in past 12 months
- Need to ensure continued commitment to reducing inequalities part of strategy
- Work with local community partnerships and develop new relationships.
- Listen to all feedback
- Work with MNVP and other local groups to collaboratively develop services.



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# Florey Clinic

Dr Emma Wainwright: Co-Clinical Lead and Consultant in Sexual Health and HIV

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## Overview

- Summary of the areas covered by our service
- Changes in the sexual health landscape nationally
- PrEP on Wheels project
- STI data: nationally and locally
- KPIs: some important targets

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## The Florey Clinic: Multi-Faceted

**Sexual health/GUM**

**Acute service:**  
Acute sexual health/genito-urinary medicine clinics: doctor provided, nurse-provided and other healthcare professionals  
Walk-in clinics  
Acute MPox assessment  
Results management and contact tracing

**Specialist services**  
Complex genito-urinary medicine clinic  
Vulval clinics  
Genital dermatology + Skin biopsies  
Complex GUM MDT  
Management of antimicrobial resistance  
Vulval MDT (gynaecology and dermatology)  
Antenatal/paediatrics Syphilis MDT  
GP referrals  
Hospital referrals  
Inpatient reviews

**Contraception**

**Routine:**  
Routine contraception clinics  
Implant clinics  
Coil clinics

**Complex:**  
Coil scanning clinics  
HIV cohort contraception  
GP coil and implant referrals

Home testing

Psychosexual service

Health Advisor service

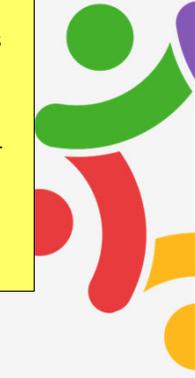
Outreach service

Safeguarding

**HIV**

Regular HIV clinics: both doctor-provided and CNS-provided  
Results review  
Prescriptions  
New patient clinic assessments  
HIV MDT  
Joint HIV-Liver clinic  
Inpatient reviews  
Antenatal/paediatrics HIV MDT  
A+E BBV testing referrals  
GP referrals  
Hospital referrals

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## Research and Training Site

**Research**

- The Florey clinic is the most research active Sexual Health site in Thames Valley.
- Research team led by Dr Chen and Dr Wainwright.
- Research contributes to large trust portfolio and brings income into the Trust
- Current and upcoming research:
  - MSD study of Islatravir and Doravirine
  - Positive Voices questionnaire study
  - Emergency department BBV testing study
  - Halo Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT)

**Undergraduate and postgraduate training site**

- Medical students from Oxford, Southampton and Brunel medical schools
- Genitourinary medicine training: Specialty registrar training
- Resident doctor training: Other resident doctor training placements
- Provide teaching on the GP VTS training programme and Physician Associate course (University of Reading)

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NHS Foundation Trust



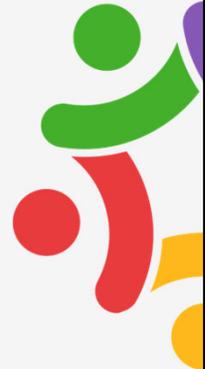
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# Changing Complexity and Changes on the Horizon



- New BASHH PrEP guidelines in 2025 with a wider offer of PrEP across the UK now
- Injectable PrEP available and soon to be introduced in our clinic
- Injectable antiretroviral therapy as a treatment for HIV soon to be introduced in our clinic
- DoxyPEP soon to be on offer in our clinic



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PrEP on Wheels

PrEP for all ✔

- PrEP (Pre-exposure Prophylaxis) is a medication to prevent HIV transmission. PrEP on Wheels is a project funded by Gilead to promote PrEP by creating awareness and knowledge in the wider community.
- This is also in support of the government's action plan to end new HIV transmissions by 2030. Historically this was predominately given to men who have sex with other men, since the latest guidance from BASHH, there has been a shift towards PrEP being distributed more widely.
- The aim of this project is to reach demographics that would not normally attend clinic or consider taking PrEP. We will be attending two events weekly. So far we have attended refugee/asylum seeker hotels and colleges. Upcoming we are arranging to attend cultural and women focused events and we have booked to attend markets across Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire.
  - First event on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March had great success with 28 people testing for HIV and given information on PrEP.

6

PrEP on Wheels
PrEP for all







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Changing STI prevalence and complexity





### Sexually transmitted infections in England, 2024

Between 2023 and 2024, infectious syphilis rose to 5,535 diagnoses.

Gonorrhoea diagnoses decreased over this time period to 71,802, but remained at very high levels.

2%  
Infectious syphilis (primary, secondary and early latent)

16%  
Gonorrhoea

Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) constitute a **high proportion** of infectious syphilis and gonorrhoea diagnoses compared to other gender identity and sexual orientation groups.

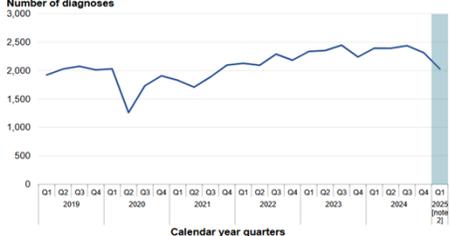
Syphilis	14%	66%	9%	10%
Gonorrhoea	18%	54%	18%	10%

\*Women who have sex with women

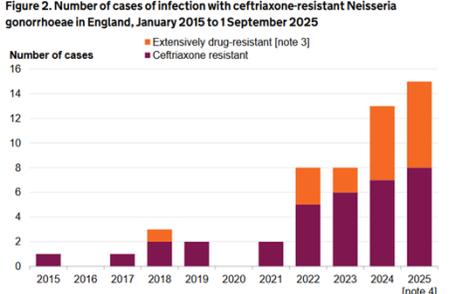
Among women aged 15 to 24, in 2024 there was a **10% decrease** in chlamydia tests and an **18% decrease** in chlamydia diagnoses compared to 2023.

Year	Internet testing	Face to face testing	Diagnoses
2019	~200,000	~400,000	~80,000
2020	~200,000	~400,000	~60,000
2021	~200,000	~400,000	~60,000
2022	~200,000	~400,000	~60,000
2023	~200,000	~400,000	~60,000
2024	~200,000	~400,000	~40,000

**Figure 1a. Diagnoses of infectious syphilis [note 1] in England by quarter, January 2019 to March 2025**



**Figure 2. Number of cases of infection with ceftriaxone-resistant Neisseria gonorrhoeae in England, January 2015 to 1 September 2025**



**In 2024 there were 364,750 diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) made in England, a 9% decrease from 2023.**

Syphilis	2%
Warts	6%
Herpes	7%
Gonorrhoea	18%
Other STIs	25%
Chlamydia	42%

**Diagnoses of infectious syphilis amongst men who have sex with women (MSW) has increased by 24%, and by 1% in women who have sex with men (WSM).**

Year	MSW	WSM
2019	~500,000	~100,000
2020	~500,000	~100,000
2021	~500,000	~100,000
2022	~500,000	~100,000
2023	~500,000	~100,000
2024	~600,000	~100,000

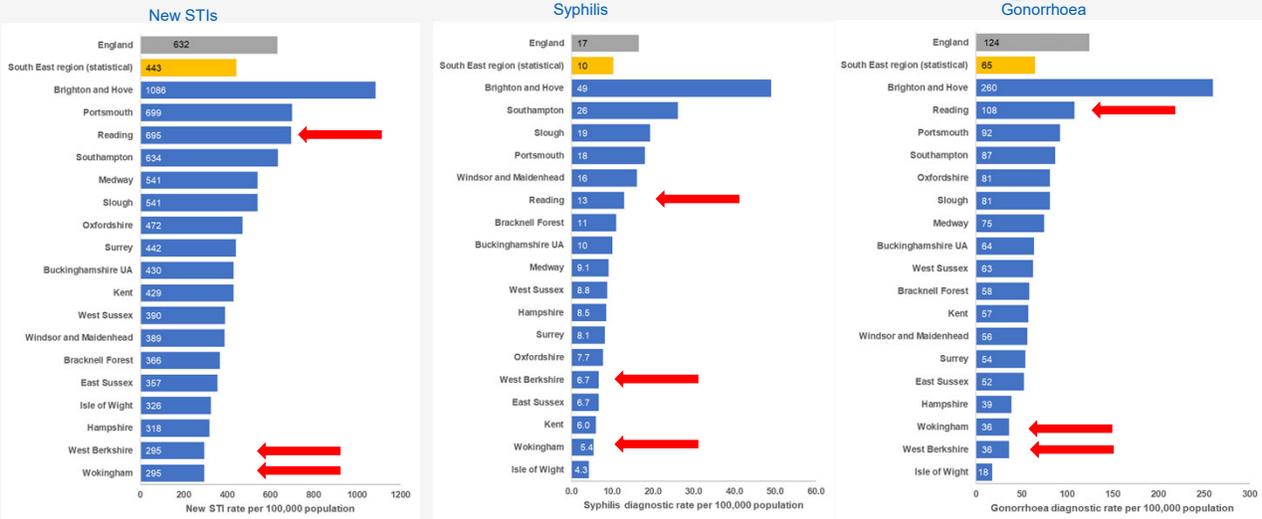
**While more new STIs are diagnosed among people of White ethnicities, some Black ethnic minority groups have disproportionately higher diagnosis rates.**

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4

# New STI, syphilis and gonorrhoea diagnosis rates by local authority of residence: SE residents, 2024



Data sources: GUMCAD, CTAD

[Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles - Data - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk)

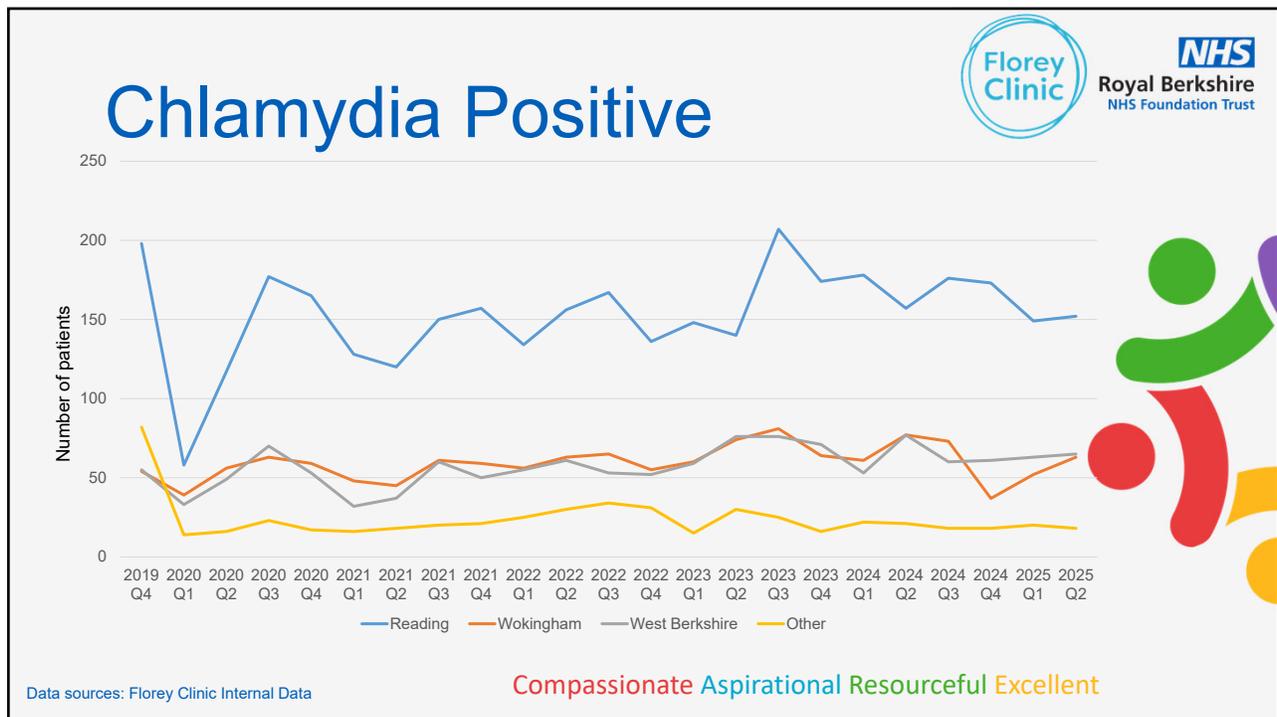
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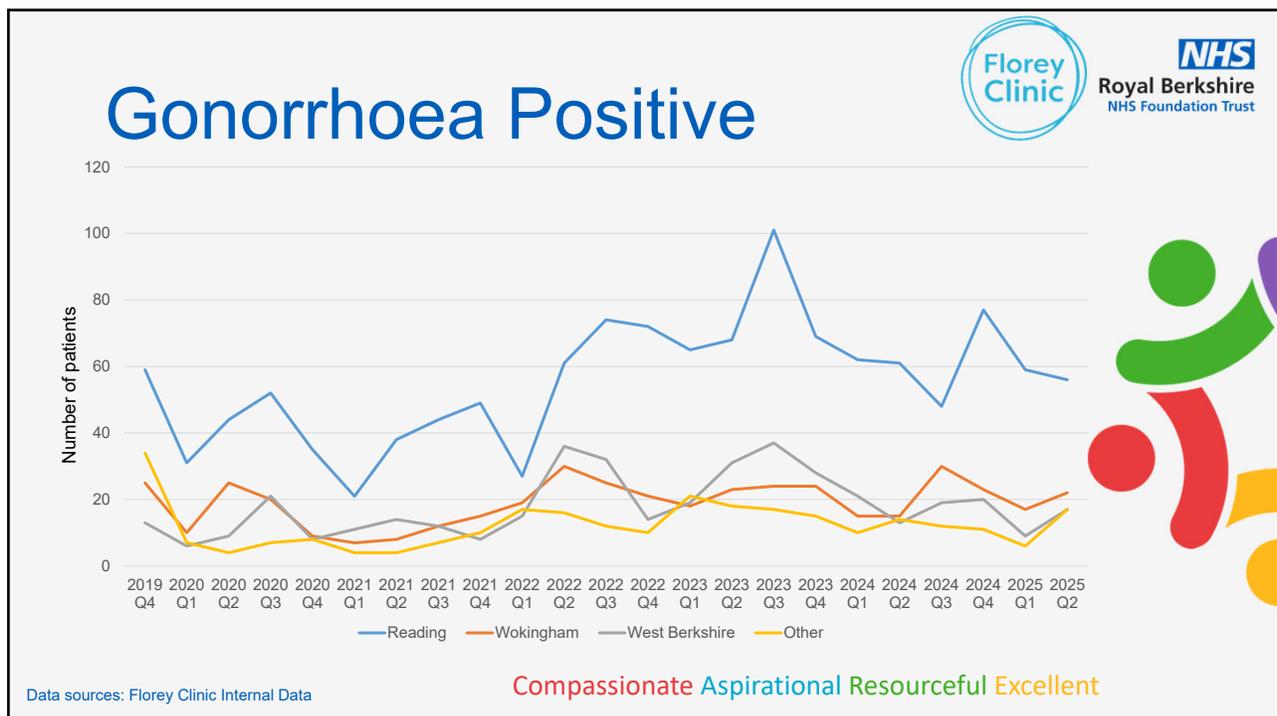
# Local STI Data

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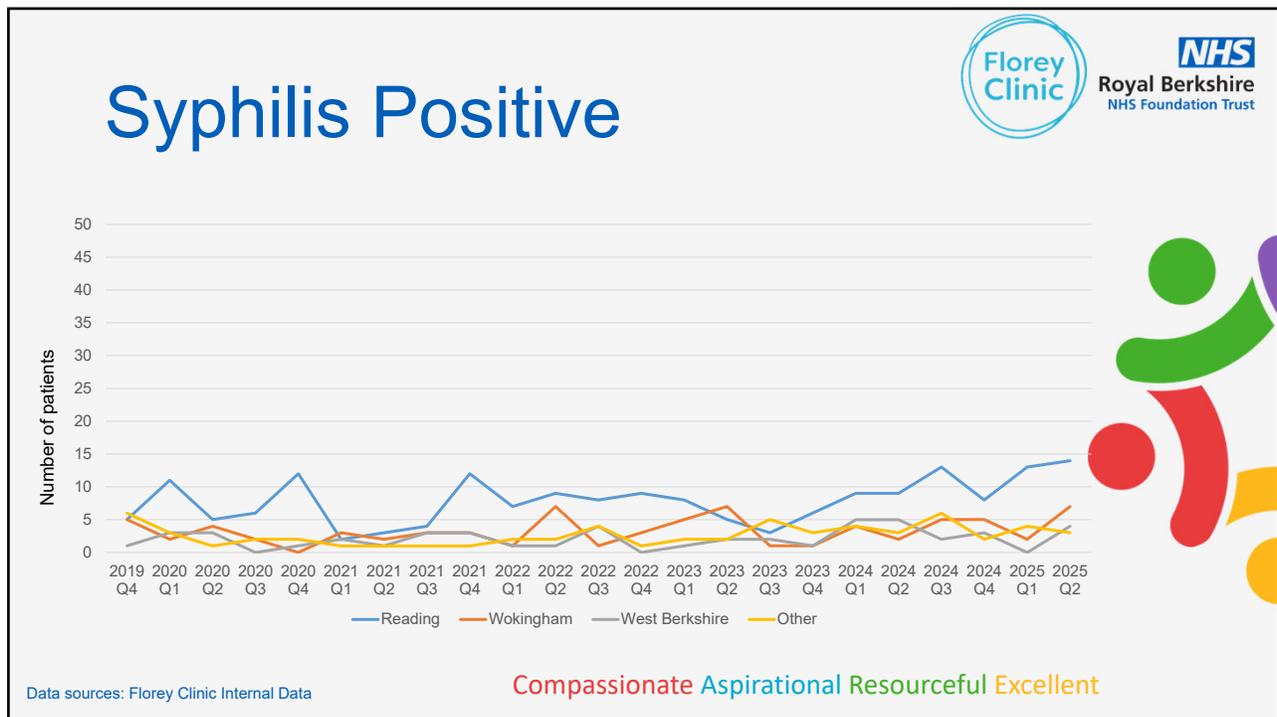
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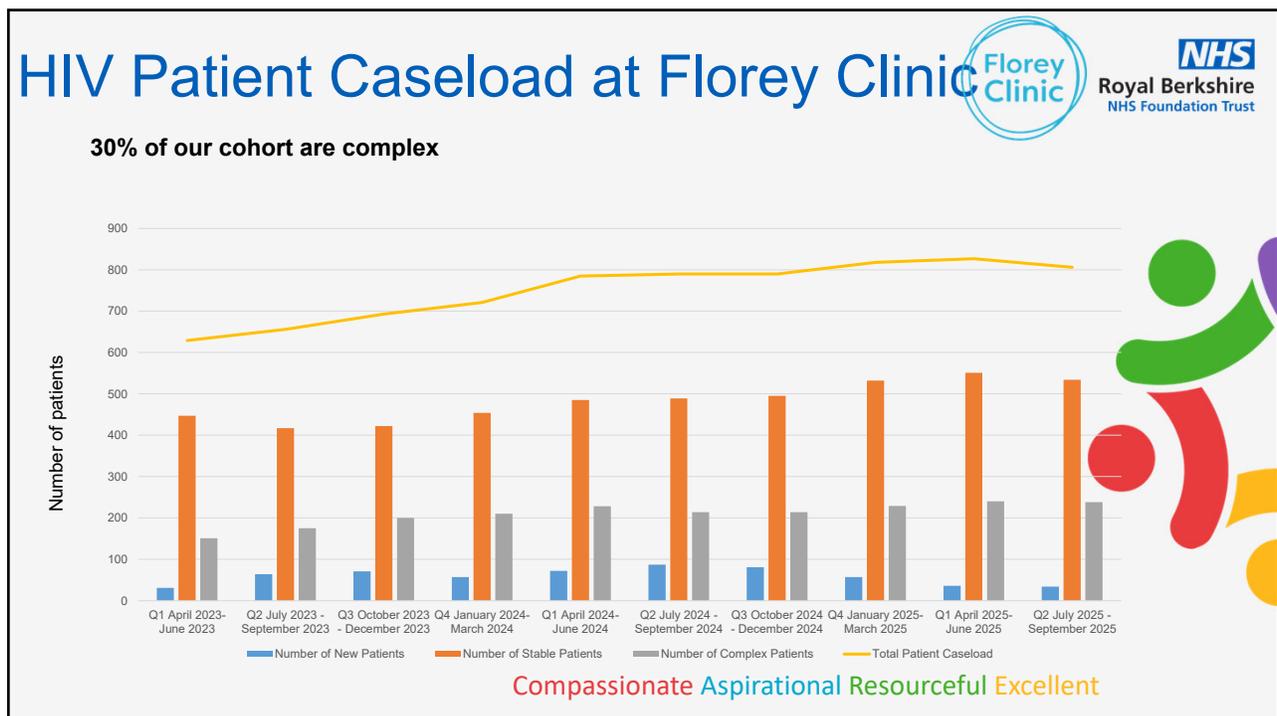
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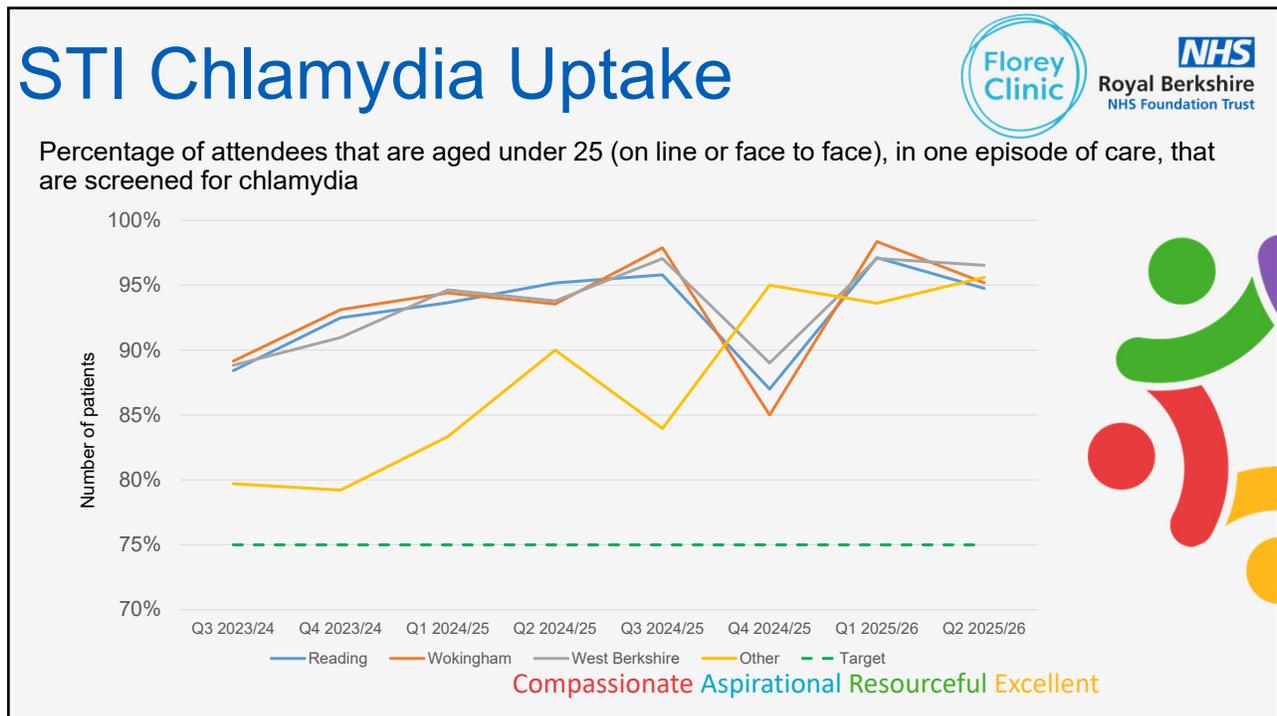





# Local KPIs

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# Service users who are seen within 2 working days



Percentage of service users contacting the service for an urgent need who are seen within 2 days of contacting the service



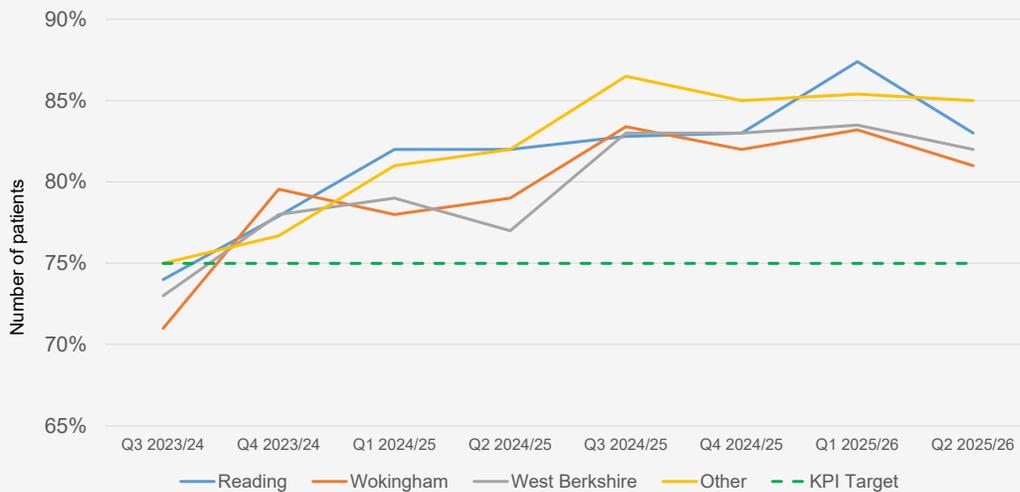
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# Service users offered and tested for HIV

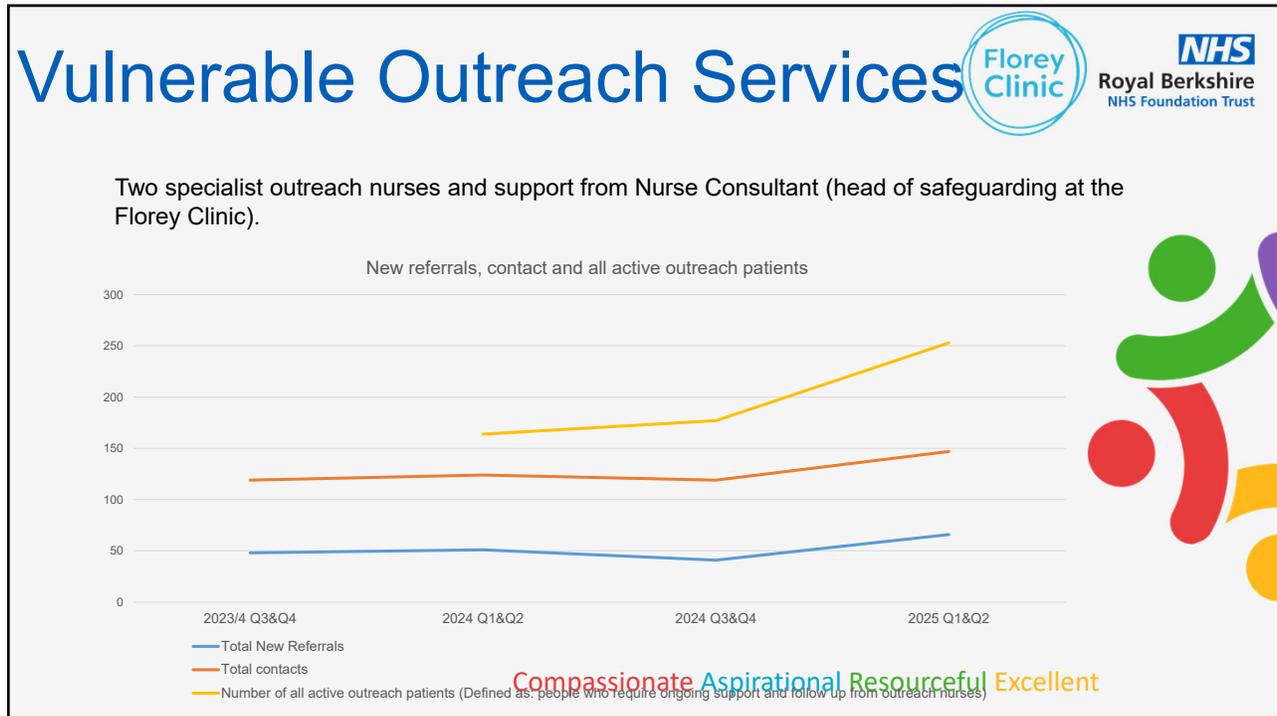


Percentage of those with an identified risk that accept a HIV test.



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18



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# The Florey Clinic: Summary



- The Florey is a multi-faceted service, covering a wide-range of areas
- The Florey has an active research and training portfolio
- The service has responded to changes in the sexual health landscape with innovation and resourcefulness

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## Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
*Working better with you*

**18 March 2026**

<b>Title</b>	Outcome of the Council's Adult Social Care Assessment by the Care Quality Commission.
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note the report for information
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report</b>	Melissa Wise, Executive Director – Communities & Adult Social Care
<b>Report author</b>	Michelle Tenreiro Perez, Head of Strategic Safeguarding, Strategy, and Improvement
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Cllr Paul Gittings – Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care
<b>Council priority</b>	Safeguard & support the health & wellbeing of Reading's adults & children
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee note the content of this 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.</li> <li>2. That the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee note the improvements made since the CQC assessment and the ongoing improvement plan.</li> <li>3. That progress made against the Council's Adult Social Care Improvement Plan is brought back to Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee for review.</li> </ol>

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Under the Health and Care Act 2022, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) introduced a new regulatory framework to assess how effectively local authorities meet their adult social care duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014. This report is being brought forward to outline the outcome of the Council's first CQC assessment, conducted between July 2024 and April 2025.
- 1.2. The CQC's evaluation, based on its Single Assessment Framework, 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.
- 1.3. Reading Borough Council received an overall score of 53% 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.
- 1.4. The Assessment process was a challenging experience resulting in a number of process and quality assurance concerns being raised with CQC. This has resulted in a formal complaint being submitted in January 2026.

- 1.5. 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 is now underway, forming the basis of the new Adult Social Care Strategy due to be completed in summer 2026.
- 1.6. In conclusion, while the CQC assessment identified areas requiring improvement, the Council has 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 will be critical to achieving a higher rating and delivering effective, equitable, person-centred care for all residents.

## **2. Policy Context**

- 2.1. Under the Health and Care Act 2022, from April 2023 the CQC was given new regulatory powers to independently evaluate how effectively local authorities are in meeting their adult social care duties under Part 1 of the Care Act 2014. Part 1 of the Care Act sets out the responsibilities of councils in promoting wellbeing, preventing needs for care, safeguarding adults, shaping care markets, and ensuring the provision of high-quality, person-centred support.
- 2.2. To support the evaluation of local authorities the CQC introduced a national Single Assessment Framework that assesses performance across four core themes; Working with People, Providing Support, Ensuring Safety, and Leadership, using a subset of 9 quality statements and 4 evidence categories tailored to statutory local authority responsibilities.
- 2.3. The CQC gathers evidence through information returns, review of policies and performance data, stakeholder engagement, and onsite inspection activity, culminating in a published report and a single word rating: Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement, or Inadequate. These ratings are intended to provide transparency and accountability to residents, support national oversight, and drive local improvement.
- 2.4. Linked to the new duties given to the CQC is a power for the Secretary of State to intervene where, following assessment under the new duty, it is considered that a local authority is failing to meet their duties.

## **3. CQC Assessment Process and Outcome**

### **Assessment Activity**

- 3.1. On the 15th of July 2024, the CQC notified the Council that their assessment of Reading had commenced and requested an Information Return and self-assessment within 3 weeks. This deadline was met and included 320 documents to meet the requirements of the Information Return and a 96-page self-assessment.
- 3.2. On the 21st of October 2024, the CQC confirmed their on-site assessment of the Council would take place during the week of the 16th of December 2024. The on-site assessment consisted of small group discussions or interviews with Council staff, including leaders, partner organisations and in some instances people who receive services and their carers. As part of the assessment process the CQC reviewed 6 anonymised cases of those in receipt of care and support selected from the 50 submitted. After the visit, several requests for additional information by the CQC were provided by the Council between January and April 2025.
- 3.3. On the 15th of May 2025, a draft report was received from the CQC with an initial score and rating of 'Requires Improvement'. In line with CQC process, the Council were invited to address any perceived factual accuracy errors within the report for CQC to review. The Council found 113 typographical errors, 170 evidence accuracy challenges, and 31 omissions. These were provided alongside a 52-page supplementary report to CQC via a factual accuracy form on the 11th of June 2025.

- 3.4. On the 26th of August 2025, the CQC issued a revised 'final' report, providing a slight adjustment to the score but retaining the 'Requires Improvement' rating.
- 3.5. The Council raised further concerns with the CQC on the 1st of September 2025, highlighting significant process and quality assurance errors. The CQC met with the Executive Director of Communities & Adult Social Care in response to the concerns on the 5th of September 2025. The CQC acknowledged that the Council had received the wrong version of the final report and that numerous errors had been made within the factual accuracy form and report and they committed to a full review.
- 3.6. A second 'final' report was received by the Council on the 25th of September 2025, with another slight adjustment to the score and a retained 'Requires Improvement' rating. The factual accuracy form and report continued to contain errors.
- 3.7. On the 26th of September 2025, the CQC issued the Council with a press release that they intended to use alongside the publication of Reading's assessment report on the CQC website. The press release was found to contain incorrect information which was inconsistent with the final report and included inaccuracies about the delivery of adult social care in Reading which the CQC had previously agreed to remove.
- 3.8. In response to the inaccurate press release, on the 29th of September 2025, the Council wrote to CQC requesting intervention and a halt to publication. On the 2nd of October 2025 CQC responded verbally with an apology, acknowledging a series of errors and committing to remedy the outstanding errors and revision of the press release.
- 3.9. On the 3rd of October 2025, CQC provided a written apology for the process errors, an updated report and factual accuracy form. Concerns regarding a fair score and rating remained unaddressed by the CQC.
- 3.10. On the 10th of October 2025, the final assessment report and press release were published by CQC. The Reading score published by CQC on their website was initially incorrect and was amended by the CQC after being alerted to this by the Council. The Council also published a press release on the 10th of October 2025.
- 3.11. On the 17th of October 2025, as per CQC's published processes the Council requested that the CQC carry out a Rating Process Review on their assessment of Reading. In order to request a review, the Council were required to provide details of how we consider the quality control process was not properly followed. CQC then use this information to decide if concerns raised meet the grounds for review which in practice involves reviewing whether:
  - CQC carried out the relevant checks of the scores and associated ratings before publishing them.
  - providers had the opportunity to check the factual accuracy.
  - any challenges from the provider were properly considered before they published the assessment.
- 3.12. CQC wrote to the Council on the 5th of December 2025 stating they were 'assured the quality assurance process for this assessment, and the reporting was followed with due consideration given to the relative weighting of the evidence collected. As such the request for a review of the rating assurance process for Reading Borough Council will not proceed.
- 3.13. The Council wrote to the CQC's Chief Inspector of Adult Social Care on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 2026 expressing their concern at this refusal and confirming their intent to issue a formal complaint.
- 3.14. A formal complaint was submitted to CQC in January 2026. The complaint outlines the Council's concerns about the CQC's assessment of its adult social care services. The

Council states that the process involved planning and coordination issues, inconsistencies in how evidence was interpreted, and a high volume of factual and typographical errors in draft and final reports. It also raises concerns about how scoring decisions were made, how information was communicated publicly, and whether the assessment aligned with the CQC's own procedures. The outcome of the complaint has yet to be determined. This is the final stage of the process.

### Assessment Scores and Findings

3.15. A summary of the scores and findings is set out below, with the full report link attached in Section 12 – Background Papers. These findings are from the assessment period that ran from July 2024 to April 2025, and data used in the assessment was from the 12 months prior to the assessment period. As a result, the assessment content and findings do not represent the current performance and structure in all areas.

### Assessments Scores

		Quality Statements								
		Assessing Needs	Supporting People to live healthier lives	Equity in experience and outcomes	Care Provision, integration and continuity	Partnerships and communities	Safe systems, pathways and Transitions	Safeguarding	Governance, management and sustainability	Learning, improvement and innovation
Evidence Categories	Peoples experience	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Feedback from staff and leaders	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
	Feedback from Partners	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
	Processes	1	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Quality Statement Rating		2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Overall % Quality Statement Score		44%	63%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	57%	57%

Quality Statement and evidence category scoring % key:

25%-38% = 1 Evidence shows significant shortfalls

39%-62% = 2 Evidence shows some shortfalls

63%-87% = 3 Evidence shows a good standard

>88% = 4 Evidence shows an exceptional standard

### Assessment Findings

STRENGTHS	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
1. <b>Compassionate, kind, and knowledgeable staff</b> , with many people feeling listened to and supported.	1. Significant <b>delays</b> in Care Act assessments, with <b>long waiting lists and inconsistent timeliness</b> across teams.
2. <b>Strong hospital discharge pathways</b> , including timely follow up calls and coordinated multidisciplinary working.	2. Large number of <b>overdue reviews</b> with long waits, especially for mental health and complex-needs cases.
3. <b>Highly responsive reablement service</b> .	3. <b>Safeguarding delays</b> in reviewing concerns and Section 42 enquiries, with inconsistent practice across teams.
4. <b>Strong Technology Enabled Care (TEC) offer</b> , including dementia monitoring,	4. <b>Mixed and sometimes poor carer experience</b> , including low awareness of

pattern of life sensors and early intervention technologies.	assessments and long delays in receiving direct payments.
<b>5. Effective prevention projects</b> , including Closing the Gap, Community Wellness Outreach and targeted mental health and homelessness work.	<b>5. Inequality and access gaps</b> , particularly for autistic people, sensory-impaired residents and those affected by digital exclusion.
<b>6. Good access to equipment and adaptations</b> , with prompt fulfilment for standard equipment and positive use of grants.	<b>6. Inconsistent accessibility of information</b> , especially for people without internet confidence or who need non-digital alternatives.
<b>7. Strong cross system partnership working</b> , including NHS, VCS, police, housing, and effective multiagency forums.	<b>7. Low uptake of Direct Payments</b> and barriers such as lack of contingency plans for employing Personal Assistants.
<b>8. Visible, committed, and transparent leadership</b> , with improved workforce stability and positive organisational culture.	<b>8. Service capacity pressures</b> , including insufficient respite options, limited mental-health-specific provision, and reliance on out-of-area placements.
<b>9. Strong learning and co-production culture</b> , shown in carers strategy development, sensory rooms, and adult social care transformation work.	<b>9. Data quality and systems issues</b> , with dashboards and digital improvements still not fully embedded.

- 3.16. In summary, the CQC found multiple strengths in Reading’s Adult Social Care, but concluded that improvements are required in timeliness, safeguarding, carer support, inclusion, service capacity, partnership working, direct payments, and data quality. None of the CQC findings were unknown to the Council and improvement work in these areas had already commenced. As a result, the CQC acknowledged that many areas showed recent progress, but sustained improvement and system-wide embedding were still needed. Well-developed strengths noted include reablement, hospital discharge, partnership working, technology-enabled care, safeguarding improvements, and leadership culture. These strengths provide a solid foundation for continued improvement despite broader system pressures.
- 3.17. All local authorities who received a rating of ‘Requires Improvement’ in one or more of their Quality Statements are required to provide an improvement plan and subsequent updates to the plan to the Department of Health and Social Care. Local authorities are supported to do so by Partners in Care and Health who are an amalgamation of the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS). The Council have commenced work with Partners in Care and Health in order to meet these requirements.

### **Improvement Activity**

- 3.18. The Council’s Adult Social Care department launched its Striving for Excellence programme in July 2023. This programme included an Improvement Plan which also commenced in July 2023 and is ongoing with regular reviews to ensure progress is being captured and that the Plan is inclusive of new department developments. The Improvement Plan was co-produced by staff and informed by partners and is overseen by the DCASC Directorate Leadership Team. Through the Striving for Excellence programme the Directorate purpose statement of ‘Supporting the life that Matters to you’ was launched. This purpose statement is now well embedded and informs practice, strategy, and our improvement activity.
- 3.19. Improvement activity under the Striving for Excellence programme has been consistent and effective, leading to many positive outcomes such as those outlined below:

- The Local Government Association Employer Standards Health Check survey is designed to understand the experience of social care staff. In 2024, Reading was the 3rd highest-scoring authority nationally and 1st in the South East for Registered Social Workers, also scoring highly for occupational therapists and non-registered social care professionals.
- An effective workforce strategy has led to improved recruitment and retention. This can be evidenced through data from the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF). ASCOF data is a set of outcome measures used to demonstrate the achievements of adult social care. It is a tool to set direction for local authorities, support local accountability for the delivery of adult social care and allow local authorities to benchmark their performance against other authorities.

ASCOF Measure	23/24 outcome	23/24 national rank	24/25 outcome	24/25 provisional national rank
6A: The proportion of staff in the formal care workforce leaving their role in the past 12 months (lower is better)	28.7	124	23.5	80

- Data collected by the Council shows that between January 2024 and January 2026 permanency of Social Workers has increased by 43% and permanency of Occupational Therapists has increased by 93%.
- Latest ASCOF data from 2023/24 also shows:

ASCOF Measure	22/23 outcome	22/23 national rank	23/24 outcome	23/24 national rank
1A: Self-reported social care-related quality of life score. (higher is better)	19.2	51 <sup>st</sup>	19.9	5 <sup>th</sup>
3C1: the proportion of people who use services who find it easy to find information about support. (higher is better)	65.1%	104 <sup>th</sup>	74.7%	12 <sup>th</sup>
5A1: the proportion of people who use services who reported that they had as much social contact as they would like. (higher is better)	45.9%	60 <sup>th</sup>	52.8%	8 <sup>th</sup>

- An innovative reablement services to prevent and delay escalation of care and support needs is in place. ASCOF covers three measures for reablement, as shown below. For these measures the higher the number the better. For measure 2D(1) whilst our percentage has reduced it has been a smaller reduction than other local authorities resulting in a higher rank nationally than the previous year.

ASCOF Measure	2023/24 outcome	Provisional 2023/24 national rank	2024/25 outcome	Provisional 2024/25 national rank

2A: The proportion of people who received reablement during the year, who previously were not receiving services, where no further request was made for ongoing support. (higher is better)	83.1%	59 <sup>th</sup>	91.3%	20 <sup>th</sup>
2D(1): The proportion of people aged 65 and over discharged from hospital into reablement and who remained in the community within 12 weeks of discharge. (higher is better)	82.9%	88 <sup>th</sup>	64.73%	54 <sup>th</sup>
2D(2): The proportion of people aged 65 and over discharged from hospital, who received reablement services. (higher is better)	3.9%	38 <sup>th</sup>	10.62%	24 <sup>th</sup>

- The median wait for financial assessments is just 1 day.
- An innovative voluntary sector front door has been commissioned by Adult Social Care to sign post people to support in the community to prevent and delay care and support needs. As a direct result, since June 2025, there has been a 30% increase in Improved Resilience and Independence for People who have been provided with a service. In addition, experience and satisfaction whilst seeking or receiving support has been rated at 100% since June 2025 by those supported by the voluntary sector front door.
- An internationally recognised Technology Enabled Care service.
- Updated adult social care section of the corporate website co-produced with service users and carers.
- A new Falls Prevention Lead post
- An All-age Carers Strategy and action plan launched in June 2024, and a resulting new Carers Lead post from March 2025
- An award-winning Provider Quality Monitoring Service and learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews
- Published Market Position Statement in December 2024 and sustained high level of sufficiency of residential care placements
- Embedded co-production with an effective Working Together Group made up of service users and carers. This group commenced in March 2024 and has made a significant contribution to improvement activity and department development. Examples of this include:
  - Recruitment support through forming service/user carer panels to support interviews of senior officers within the department.
  - Scoring of the bids delivered through the voluntary sector front door procurement.
  - Networking and connecting with other co-production leads across the area and nationwide to identify best practice to apply locally.
  - Input into the decision about the future of the use of group homes.
  - Feedback provided on the Disability Facilities Grant application form and the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard feedback form.
  - Development of easy read practice and vocabulary guidance and support of an options appraisal to embed these into all appropriate documents

- Innovative community prevention schemes such as Community Wellness Outreach and Community Health Champions:
  - The Community Wellness Outreach Project is a model of delivering NHS Health Checks in the Community, to reach people in our community that may not have had or have easy access to an NHS Health Check. There have been 4,196 checks (as at end of Dec 2025). 95% of respondents agreed that they have a better understanding of Cardiovascular risk and how to reduce the risk, after talking with the Nurses at the check. During the checks conditions identified to date are: 68% very high/high body mass index (BMI), 21% very high/high blood pressure, and 21% with high blood glucose levels (a pre-indicator of diabetes) and 5% high Q risk score indicating high cholesterol. The team are reaching ethnically diverse groups, with 62% of people attending being from ethnically diverse backgrounds, 56% from Asian/Black background, who have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes. 6% of people seen were above 75 yrs and 36% were below 40 years of age enabling early intervention to prevent development of heart disease and diabetes leading to increased reliance on health and social care services as people age.
  - Community Health Champions (CHCs) are people who live, work or volunteer in Reading and care about raising awareness within the community about health and wellbeing information. CHCs connect their community to evidence based health and wellbeing information, empowering people to access local services to improve their health. There are now 104 trained Community Health Champions in Reading (there were 65 when CQC carried out their assessment in Reading), with another 24 people waiting to be trained. CHCs have gained qualifications around gambling related harms, completed training to support people access physical activity and created a video campaign about vaccination in Urdu, Arabic and Nepalese which has been shared across the borough.
- New buildings are in progress providing new day opportunities and respite facilities to invest in our residents' future needs.
- The Council has appointed a specialist Sensory Needs Practitioner who commenced in post in January 2026 who acts as our lead and champion for people with sensory needs. This role oversees the sensory needs pathway and supports staff across Adult Social Care to upskill and share knowledge. We have also commissioned specialist Rehabilitation Officer for the Visually Impaired (ROVI).

### **Performance Data**

- 3.20. The CQC utilise a combination of qualitative and quantitative insight and data to make their assessment of performance. Insights come from people who access care and support services and carer experience, staff and leader feedback, partner feedback, and processes as well as performance data.
- 3.21. The CQC draw data from a comprehensive list of more than 50 metrics that come from sources such as Statutory Returns, Service User and Carer Surveys, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), CQC Ratings and Skills for Care. Where applicable, this data is benchmarked against other English authorities and statistical analysis is carried out to measure deviation from the average. Where relevant, data is also used to identify and inform key lines of enquiry as well as give an indication on how themes compared to the national picture. The majority of statutory data is published annually and there is lag between publication and CQC visit/report which meant in the case of the Council's assessment additional work was required to show evidence of our improvement journey, in the absence of an up-to-date national metric.
- 3.22. Performance data used by the CQC to evidence areas of improvement within Reading's report are mainly focussed on waiting times for Care Act assessments and Occupational Therapy (OT) assessments, overdue reviews, carers experience and delays in safeguarding. The Council were already aware of these areas and have continued to

focus attention on improvement activity. As a result, since we submitted our information return in July 2024 the following has been achieved:

	30/06/2024		31/12/2025	
Assessments	Value		Value	Percentage change
Median waiting time for Care Act Assessment. (days)	83		77	-7.2
People waiting for a Conversation 2 Assessment. (people)	251		166	-33.9
People waiting for an OT Assessment. (people)	543		488	-10.1
<b>Carers</b>				
Median average waiting time for carer assessments. (days)	63		20	-68.3
Carers waiting for an assessment. (people)	43		16	-62.8
<b>Reviews</b>				
Median overdue review wait. (days)	250		136	-45.6
Number of overdue reviews. (number of reviews)	739		553	-25.2
<b>Safeguarding</b>				
People waiting for a Safeguarding Concern to be completed. (people)	260		54	-79.2
Longest wait for Safeguarding Enquiries to be completed. (days)	503		267	-46.9
Median average wait for an Enquiry to be completed. (days)	42		37	-11.9

- 3.23. The CQC used carer experience in Reading information taken from the Social Services Survey of Adult Carers in England (2023/24) in their assessment report. A subsequent national survey has been conducted but results are not yet available.

### Next Steps

- 3.24. In parallel with work on the existing priorities a refreshed improvement plan is in development to encompass both the CQC's feedback and recent staff feedback. This wealth of information has supported the department to identify 5 priority areas to be addressed over the first 12 months of the refreshed improvement plan. These are:
- Carers
  - Waiting Times
  - Partnership Working
  - Prevention
  - Accessibility of Information and services

All teams within the department have been tasked with considering these priorities and the feedback we have had under each and identifying what they can contribute to improving outcomes. This will be completed by the end of February 2026 and when

amalgamated will form the refreshed and co-produced improvement plan that is specific and aligned to specialisms within teams. The improvement plan will be reviewed after 12 months to ensure it is still effective and representative of the current position.

- 3.25. There are further improvements that CQC identified in their report, but there is confidence within the department that they have either already been addressed since the CQC assessment, or they can be managed outside of the prioritisation work. These improvements will still be featured in the improvement plan that needs to be provided to the Department of Health and Social Care.
- 3.26. The five priorities are also being used as the basis of the new Adult Social Care Strategy which is due to be completed in summer 2026. An update on the development of the Adult Social Care Strategy can be found at Appendix 1.
- 3.27. The Council will be using the governance processes already in place to oversee improvement activity to ensure compliance with the requirement to report to the Department of Health and Social Care on how the Council are addressing areas requiring improvement as identified by CQC's assessment. This report recommends that progress made against the Council's Adult Social Care Improvement Plan is brought back to Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee for scrutiny and review.

#### **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. The work of Adult Social Care strongly aligns with the overarching Council priorities of 'Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children,' 'Promote more equal communities in Reading' and 'Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future'.
- 4.2. Adult Social Care can demonstrate adherence with all the principles guiding the delivery of these priorities in particular recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities and involving, collaborating, and empowering residents. Examples of how these principles have been applied include through our published carers strategy and action plan and through our common purpose of 'Supporting the Life that Matters to you' which is used as a target in department staff appraisals to ensure it is embedded in all staff and team work.
- 4.3. The CQC assessment provided an independent perspective on how the Council are Safeguarding and supporting the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and provided insight into the equity of experience of communities who access Adult Social Care. Whilst the assessment doesn't provide a direct assessment of how fit for the future the Councils Adult Social Care services are, it does indicate what is a strength to be maintained and what needs to be improved in order to meet the needs of current and future residents with care and support needs.

#### **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. There are no environmental and climate implications relevant to this report.

#### **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. This is an information only report and therefore no community engagement was undertaken in preparing the report.
- 6.2. Community engagement was a significant feature in the assessment of Reading's Adult Social Care by the CQC, with statutory and non-statutory partners consulted as well as people with lived experiences of services by way of receiving services or being a carer of someone receiving services.
- 6.3. The Council are committed to ensuring community engagement is a feature of the adult social care improvement journey and adult social care strategy to ensure that the voices of people who are directly affected by services and their development are consulted.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. This is an information only report and no changes to services are proposed, therefore an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is not relevant.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

None

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1. Part 1 of the Care Act 2014 sets out the duties and responsibilities of local authorities relating to care and support for adults. This report sets out progress made against the Council's Adult Social Care Improvement Plan following a CQC assessment, conducted between July 2024 and April 2025, which highlighted areas requiring improvement.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1. Maintaining sufficient funding in Adult Social Care is essential to remaining fit for the future when nationally demand and complexity is increasing.

## **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. Not applicable

## **12. Background Papers**

- 12.1 Published Reading assessment report: [Reading Borough Council: local authority assessment - Care Quality Commission](#)

## **Appendices**

1. **Adult Social Care Strategy update February 2026.**

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## Appendix 1

### Adult Social Care Strategy Development Update February 2026

The Council's Adult Social Care Strategy is currently in development and will form a core component of our continued improvement journey following the CQC local authority assessment. The strategy is being shaped by the findings of the CQC report, staff feedback gathered through the Striving for Excellence programme, and our refreshed improvement plan. Five priority areas have been identified for the strategy: *Carers, Waiting Times, Prevention, Partnership Working, and Accessibility of Information and Services*. These priorities reflect both local need and national expectations and are aligned with the improvement activity already underway across the Council's Adult Social Care department.

The strategy will be co-produced with people with lived experience, carers, staff, and partners, and will be evidence-based to ensure transparency, accountability, and measurable impact.

#### Delivery Approach

The development of the strategy is structured into three phases:

##### A. Phase 1: Evidence Building (In Progress)

Work is currently underway to build a robust evidence base for each of the five priority areas.

- **Carers**  
The Council already has a comprehensive Joint All-Age Carers Strategy and action plan. The new Adult Social Care Strategy will not duplicate this work but will align with it and reinforce key commitments. Existing data provides a strong foundation for this priority area.
- **Waiting Times**  
Waiting times remain one of the most visible areas of concern for residents and were a key finding in the CQC assessment. Internal performance data is being analysed to understand delays at every stage (from first contact to the start of support). This will inform clear, targeted actions in the strategy.
- **Prevention**  
CQC identified that prevention is not yet consistently embedded across the service. A full review of existing documents and projects has been completed, with activity mapped against the national prevention framework (prevent, reduce, delay). Early findings show strong pockets of preventative work but a fragmented overall offer. The next step is to produce an overarching prevention framework and set of strategic prevention commitments.
- **Partnership Working**  
Strong partnership working is central to achieving our purpose of *Supporting the Life that Matters to You*. Work is underway to define partnership principles that

reflect the strengths of our multi-agency system and to draft a workplan to enhance consistency, communication, and shared responsibility.

- **Accessibility of Information and Services**

The CQC highlighted accessibility of information as an area requiring improvement, especially for people who are digitally excluded or who need non-digital formats. A stakeholder workshop will be held to gather lived experiences of accessing information and services. This will define what good accessibility should look like and identify the changes required to achieve it.

## **B. Phase 2: Drafting the Strategy**

Once the evidence base is complete, drafting will begin. The strategy will include:

- A clear articulation of our shared purpose of *Supporting the Life that Matters to You*
- Cross-cutting themes reflecting equality, inclusion, workforce, and person-centred practice
- Strategic commitments and outcome measures for each of the five priority areas
- Alignment to the refreshed Adult Social Care Improvement Plan

## **C. Phase 3: Co-production, Consultation and Finalisation**

A full formal consultation will take place once a draft strategy is available. Co-production will remain central throughout this stage to ensure the strategy is shaped by those with lived experience as well as partners, voluntary sector organisations, and staff. Feedback gathered through consultation will inform the final version of the strategy.

### **Progress to Date**

We are currently in Phase 1 and progressing with the evidence base for all priority areas. Work has begun to draft sections relating to Prevention and Carers, using existing frameworks and data. Engagement activity and internal analysis relating to Waiting Times, Partnership Working, and Accessibility of Information and Services is also underway.

### **Timeframe**

The Adult Social Care Strategy is expected to be completed by summer 2026. Consultation will commence once the draft strategy is available, with timelines planned flexibly to ensure meaningful participation from residents, carers, staff and partners.

**Adult Social Care,  
Children's Services and  
Education Committee**



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
*Working better with you*

**18 March 2026**

<b>Title</b>	Children's Services Improvement Board Inaugural Report
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note the report for information
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report</b>	Lara Patel, Executive Director Children's Services
<b>Report author</b>	Andy Couldrick, Independent Chair, Children's Services Improvement Board
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Cllr Wendy Griffith, Lead Councillor for Children
<b>Council priority</b>	Safeguard & support the health & wellbeing of Reading's adults & children
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To note the report</li> <li>2. That Committee receives an update on progress of the Children's Services Improvement Board on a six-monthly basis</li> </ol>

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1. On the 28 January 2025 Council 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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025.
- 1.2. This decision required the establishment of an independently chaired Children's Services Improvement Board. 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.
- 1.3. It was also a requirement of the transition that the Board reported into ACE Committee. This is the first such report.

**2. Policy Context**

- 2.1. Incorporated on 5 April 2018 and operational since 3 December 2018, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC), a company limited by guarantee, delivered children's services on behalf of Reading Borough Council (RBC). The company was wholly owned by but independent of the Council and was governed by an independent Board to ensure operational autonomy.
- 2.2. On the 28 January 2025 Council 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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025.
- 2.3. Following the JTAI of the multi-agency response to children in Reading who are victims of domestic abuse, the Department for Education (DfE) issued a non-statutory Improvement Notice to the Council, followed by the appointment of a DfE Improvement

Advisor. The DfE Improvement Advisor sits on the Children's Services Improvement Board.

### **3. The Proposal**

- 3.1. The Independent Chair's inaugural report outlines the initial progress made by the Children's Services Improvement Board, the drivers required for sustained improvement and the areas of focus for the Board.

### **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. The Council Plan has established five priorities for the years 2025/28. The priorities that the children's Services Improvement Board contribute to are:

- Promote more equal communities in Reading
- Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children
- Ensure Reading Borough Council is fit for the future

- 4.2. In delivering these priorities, we will be guided by the following set of principles:

- Putting residents first
- Building on strong foundations
- Recognising, respecting, and nurturing all our diverse communities
- Involving, collaborating, and empowering residents
- Being proudly ambitious for Reading

### **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. None.

### **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. Reports to the Children's Services Board are informed by feedback from children and families gathered in a number of ways including, coproduction, compliments and complaints and participation work.

### **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is not required as the report itself does not have a differential impact on people with protected characteristics. However, it is important to recognise the intersectionality between protected characteristics and the impact on children. This includes care experienced young people, a protected characteristic in Reading.

### **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1. None noted

### **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1. None noted.

### **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1. The Independent Chair is funded through the Children's Services budget.

### **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. The Children's Services Improvement Board was established in November 2025.

### **12. Background Papers**

- 12.1. There are none.

## **Appendices**

### **1. Independent Chairs Inaugural Report**

## Appendix 1

### Reading Borough Council Children's Services Improvement Board Report to Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee

18 March 2026

#### Introduction

I was appointed as Independent Chair of Reading's Improvement Board in September 2025.

My background:

- Qualified social worker
- DCS Wokingham BC
- Chief Executive Wokingham BC
- Chief Executive, Birmingham Children's Trust
- Commissioner, DfE

The Board was established in the context of the winding up of Brighter Futures for Children, a company solely owned by RBC to deliver children's services, and the reintegration of children's services into the Council last year.

Ofsted inspected Reading's children's services in April 2024 and rated services 'Requires Improvement' overall, with ratings of Good for services to looked after children and care leavers. This was an improved position on the previous inspection outcome.

A Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) was carried out in March 2025, focused on the multi-agency response to domestic abuse. This inspection led to an identified 'Area for Priority Action' concerning shortfalls in the multi-agency strategic safeguarding partnership leading to systemic weaknesses in multi-agency safeguarding practice. This led to an Improvement Notice from the Department for Education and the appointment of a Children's Services Advisor. It is worth noting that while the focus of the inspection is on the multi-agency partnership, the response focuses on the Council as the Department does not have a mechanism for holding partner agencies to account in the same way. The Advisor, however, focuses his work on supporting the Safeguarding Partners to improve practice to address the shortfalls found in the JTAI.

The Improvement Board met for the first time in November 2025 and has met three times altogether. Its Terms of Reference and current forward plan are appended to this report, for Members' information. The Board has been well-attended with excellent engagement to date.

I am aware that the DCS and her team are supporting two external advisors and boards currently, as well as a programme of Ofsted Monitoring Visits, and the DfE Advisor and I work together to ensure we are not duplicating work or making unmanageable demands of the team, as their focus needs to continue to be on driving improvement in the quality of practice and practice leadership across the service.

The forward plan highlights the key areas of interest for the Board: performance and quality of practice, workforce, readiness for and feedback from Ofsted monitoring visits are routine items for oversight and discussion. Routine updates will be received from the Partnership Board chaired by the DfE Advisor. In addition, a series of 'deep dives' will be undertaken to examine in greater detail areas of particular interest and/or concern to the Board. These will include, in the first year of the Board's operation:

- Children's Services Transformation programme
- Children living with family and friends

- Fostering
- Placement costs and the costs of care for children in Reading

It might be helpful to share some of my initial observations and thoughts about the service and some key issues that will need to be focused on:

- Stable leadership of children's services is critical to sustained improvement and has been absent in Reading for a long time. The current leaders in the service have led some improvement already and it is to be hoped they will continue to lead the service and drive further improvement.
- The reintegration of children's services from Brighter Futures into the Council was completed successfully but there is work to do in terms of culture and relationships to ensure that it becomes a fully integrated part of the Council once more.
- Strong corporate and political leadership of the Council is evident and will support this reintegration
- Children's Services in Reading has been supported with financial investment, but the cost of delivering children's services is a challenge, and some unit costs for care are higher than for comparable authorities. This is a familiar picture across councils, but will need to be a matter of determined focus to drive costs down effectively and safely.
- While numbers in care in Reading are broadly in line with statistical neighbour authorities, this is not the case across the social care pathway: referrals, open children, assessments, Children in Need, Child Protection numbers are all higher than for comparable authorities
- Reading's improvement activity needs to dovetail with the transformation programme that is addressing the social care reforms being implemented nationally. Getting these changes right should support reducing costs as well as delivering services to families in a very different, and better, way going forward, but maintaining the focus simultaneously on continuous improvement of the quality of practice will be critical
- The social care workforce is largely inexperienced and the additional support needs this brings is now recognised and being addressed
- This inexperience increases the importance of effective first line management of practice and there is a need to maintain a focus on growing capacity and strength in this tier of the organisation
- A new approach to Quality Assurance has been introduced and will need to be embedded. Service leaders will need to ensure that there is effective 'closing of the loop' in relation to quality assurance and practice evaluation (that is to say we must ensure that the learning we get from audit and evaluation leads to changes and improvement at a casework level and shapes the training and development needs of the service)

The Improvement Board will monitor progress in all of these areas.

I have been impressed with the political, corporate and service leadership I have seen to date, and am confident that the ingredients for ongoing and sustained improvement of children's services are in place, albeit everyone recognises there is more to do.

Appendix i: Terms of Reference for CIB

Appendix ii: Forward Plan, CIB

**Andy Couldrick**

**Independent Chair,  
Reading Children’s Services Improvement Board**

**February 2026**

## **Reading's Children's Services Improvement Board Delivering Good and Outstanding Services for Reading's Children**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### **Purpose**

Oversee and drive at pace the delivery of improved practice across Children's Services in Reading leading to better outcomes for children who need our support, including children with special educational needs and disabilities.

To seek assurance and triangulate data that demonstrates that improvements are embedded and sustained.

To ensure that all partners providing services for children in Reading are working together effectively.

To support the Service in focussing on 'getting the basics right' and improving the consistency and quality of social work practice within Children's social care.

To ensure that the Service's Improvement Plan combined with its Transformation Programme increase quality and reduce cost, delivering a sustainable Service that represents value for money.

To ensure the voice of children and young people is fully heard, considered and reflected both in social work practice and the work of the Board

To provide assurance to the Council that appropriate scrutiny and challenge is driving sustained improvements across Children's Services.

To provide bi-annual progress reports to Reading Borough Council's ACE Committee.

#### **Approach**

Priorities of the Board will be aligned to inspection findings, progress against inspection findings and emerging risks, and will therefore change over time. Initially they will be focussed on the findings of the Ofsted ILACS (2024) and the JTAI (2025).

The Board will provide scrutiny and independent challenge of the continuous practice improvement plan to support the development and delivery of consistently good and outstanding services.

The Board will identify barriers to improvement and take a solution-focused approach to aid problem solving.

The Board will monitor key performance data (which tells us about how services are doing, and what outcomes are being achieved) to ensure it is

delivering on its objectives.

The Board will focus on the big picture.

The Board will be curious in its approach, adopting a positive learning culture.

### **Who will be on the Board and how will it work?**

The Board will be a partnership of equals, and all members will be expected to be actively involved. Members of the Board will respect that we are all different and that we and our children must not be discriminated against because of age, sex, disability, race, religion, belief or sexual orientation.

Members of the Board must comply with the Council's code of conduct and the general principles of public life. [The Seven Principles of Public Life - GOV.UK](#)

Meetings will be held in person every six weeks (approx. 8 times a year). A schedule of meetings for the year will be agreed and circulated in advance. Board members will be expected to have read papers in advance and to prepare for meetings

Members of the Board are asked to do everything they can to attend meetings.

### **Board members**

It is proposed that the Board will initially comprise the members set out below. However, additional members may be coopted in future subject to the agreement of the Leader, Chief Executive and Chair.

### **Members**

Independent Chair (subject matter Expert)  
DfE Improvement Advisor  
Reading Borough Council Chief Executive  
Lead Member for Children's Services  
Executive Director of Children's Services (DCS)  
Section 151 Officer  
ICB senior representative  
A.N Other member representative

The Chair in consultation with the CEO and DCS will agree agendas. It is anticipated that there will be standard agenda items and reporting templates in order to track progress. However, deep dives into particular issues may also be requested.

The Board may request relevant officers & subject matter experts to attend to brief them on specific topics.

Papers will be circulated electronically 5 working days in advance of meetings. Action notes will be taken and circulated within 5 working days of the meeting.

## Reading Children's Services Improvement Board

### Forward Plan

2025/26

#### Meeting Frequency

It is proposed that the CSIB will meet on a 6-weekly basis.

We need to ensure as a Board that we spend our time productively, balancing our focus on performance and quality measures and reports and taking a 'deep dive' approach to focus on particular areas of children's services activity and performance, informed by our collective understanding of risk, challenge and opportunities.

We need also to continue to check in with the Partnership Board chaired by the DfE Advisor, Steve Crocker, to ensure we continue to avoid duplication of activity and avoid gaps in our collective scrutiny, support and challenge.

Performance and Quality data will be available at each meeting, but at deep dive meetings we may look only at highlights and risk areas as flagged by the DCS

So a proposed forward plan looks as follows:

#### Meeting 2 (17 December):

- Performance and Quality
- Ofsted Monitoring Visit 1
- Service Self-Evaluation (updated)
- Service Transformation programme, including the 'roadmap' and potential Newton Europe commission
- Forward plan agreement

#### Meeting 3 (10 February)

- Performance and Quality
- Service update: highlights and risks
- Deep dive: findings from review commissioned into Kinship care: support; breakdown; capacity; learning
- Deep Dive: Fostering Recruitment

#### Meeting 4 (14 April)

- Performance and Quality
- Service update
- Partnership board: update
- Transformation update
- Workforce update: Foundations programme; recruitment and retention

#### Meeting 5 (1 June)

- Performance and Quality

- Service update
- Ofsted Monitoring Visit 2
- Placement Sufficiency and Placement Costs

#### **Meeting 6 (21 July)**

- Performance and Quality
- Service update
- Service Transformation update
- Fostering: recruitment, retention, innovation

#### **Meeting 7 (1 September)**

- Performance and Quality
- Service Update
- Partnership Board update
- Workforce update

There is, of course, scope to add to this as issues arise

**Andy Couldrick**  
**Independent Chair**  
**November 2025**

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## Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
*Working better with you*

**18 March 2026**

<b>Title</b>	Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report FY 24/25
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note the report for information
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report</b>	Lara Patel, Executive Director Children's Services
<b>Report author</b>	Alastair Harsant, Berkshire West Safeguarding Partnership
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Cllr Wendy Griffith
<b>Council priority</b>	Safeguard & support the health & wellbeing of Reading's adults & children
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. That committee note the report

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (WTSC23) provides the statutory guidance for all safeguarding children partnerships in England. From March 2019, the safeguarding partners across the west of Berkshire (Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham) joined to become the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP). BWSCP is the key statutory partnership whose role is 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.
- 1.2. This Annual Report, required by WTSC23, is being presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure members are informed about the work and achievements of the BWSCP for the 2024/2025 financial year.
- 1.3. Public Health Directors are not identified as either Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSP) or Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSP) as defined in WTSC23. Through financial year 2024/25, Public Health Directors across Berkshire West, including Reading's Public Health Director, became substantive members of the LSP meeting group.

### 2. Policy Context

- 2.1. As required by WTSC23, the BWSCP is required to publish an annual report on the effectiveness of child safeguarding arrangements and promotion of the welfare of children in Berkshire West, detailing the work and progress undertaken within the year, giving an account of how it has discharged its duties against statutory guidance. This is a Berkshire West report, but information in relation to Reading is included within it.
- 2.2. For information on the published safeguarding arrangements and links to previous annual reports, follow this link:

<https://www.berkshirewestsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/scp/the-partnership/draft-berkshire-west-safeguarding-children-partnership-assurance-documents>

### 3. The Proposal

- 3.1. The BWSCP entered 2024/25 with 5 main priority areas:
  - A) Creation of a Berkshire West Wide Neglect Strategy
  - B) Extra-familial Harm: Contextual Safeguarding, Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence
  - C) Establishing a Berkshire West wide Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) & Front Door Arrangements Leadership Group
  - D) Development of the Partnership Learning and Development Group Training offer
  - E) Continuing Development of the BWSCP Partnership
- 3.2. During March 2025, the BWSCP established 5 new priority areas for the period 2025 to 2028 that were officially launched in April 2025. They are:
  - **Priority 1: Lead Wokingham Borough Council** – Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Intra Familial Harm
  - **Priority 2: Lead Thames Valley Police** - Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Extra Familial Harm
  - **Priority 3: Lead Reading Borough Council** - Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Domestic Abuse
  - **Priority 4: Lead West Berkshire Council** - Safeguarding & Support for Children Not in School
  - **Priority 5: Lead Integrated Care Board** - Safeguarding & Support for Pre-School Children, Reducing Neglect
- 3.3. A [Joint targeted area inspection of Reading](#) took place in Reading from February-March 2025. This was an inspection of the Partnership focussing on the multi-agency response to children aged 7 and under who are victims of domestic abuse. Inspectors' evaluation of strategic arrangements in Reading considered the multi-agency response to children of all ages. This inspection identified significant weaknesses in the multi-agency approach to prevention, help and support for children and their families who are victims of domestic abuse in Reading.
- 3.4. The Joint Targeted Area Inspection found *Shortfalls in the multi-agency strategic safeguarding partnership leading to systemic weaknesses in multi-agency safeguarding practice.*
- 3.5. The inspection also found that: *The safeguarding partnership priorities had not been sufficiently focused on outcomes for children.* This has been addressed by the development of the five new child focused priorities outlined above in item 3.2.
- 3.6. The Joint targeted area inspection of Reading also outlined the following area of improvement: *The effectiveness of strategic governance arrangements to ensure priorities are set and aligned with the other strategic partnerships, with a focus on those children subject to domestic abuse.*
- 3.7. The local Reading response to the findings of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection is being delivered through a Rapid Improvement Plan. A Partnership Action Plan was

submitted to Ofsted 13 August 2025. A Department for Education Improvement Advisor was appointed to support Reading Borough Council from 1 July 2025.

- 3.8. **Item 3.1 A) The Berkshire West Wide Neglect Strategy.** Strategy and tools were published December 2025 - [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership - Neglect: Information and Guidance](#) . Current oversight of this strategy and activity sits with the **Priority 5** operational delivery group, Safeguarding & Support for Pre-School Children, Reducing Neglect, led by the Integrated Care Board.
- 3.9. **Item 3.1 B) Extra-familial Harm: Contextual Safeguarding, Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence.** This priority sits with Thames Valley Police as the lead for **Priority 2**, Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Extra Familial Harm.
- 3.10. **Item 3.1 C) Establishing a Berkshire West wide Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) & Front Door Arrangements.** An oversight group exists and continues to meet quarterly in person. A data dashboard is in place and continues to be refined. The agencies involved in this group recognise the benefit of an ongoing dialogue to better understand how each local areas arrangements operate. Processes differ behind each 'front door', including language. The Partnership recognises that as children and families move between local areas, an understanding of local area process is advantageous, for example where a statutory 'threshold' is not met.
- 3.11. **Item 3.1 D) Development of the Partnership Learning and Development Group Training offer.** A learning improvement framework was established in 2024. Following a survey to members of the Partnership in November 2024, a key theme emerged - 'Professional Curiosity' training. In response, a multi-agency subgroup formed and devised a training module that was successfully delivered in June and November 2025 to members of the BWSCP and is scheduled to be delivered throughout 2026. Additionally, resource support from Wokingham Borough Council has been secured at the end of the FY24/25 to help establish a training needs framework in consideration of the **5 Priorities** listed in 3.2 above.
- 3.12. **Item 3.1 E) Continuing Development of the BWSCP Partnership.** Public Health colleagues have been engaged in the BWSCP across several subgroups including the DSP and LSP groups to help with the alignment of Priorities. Education representatives and local area Directors of Education have been more closely involved with the DSP through the reporting year 24/25, as is asked in WTSC23.
- 3.13. The BWSCP held its first in person conference since COVID, in October 2024. This event was the platform for a Berkshire West wide multi-agency discussion to help inform the future direction of the BWSCP and its priorities, as listed in item 3.2 above. A follow up BWSCP conference took place 20 January 2026.
- 3.14. A BWSCP options appraisal of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements is underway to be concluded by early 2026, following the outcome of the Reading Joint Targeted Area Inspection.

#### **4. Contribution to Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. The work of the BWSCP aligns with the Reading Borough Council plan priority 2025/28 by contributing to the priority of 'Safeguard and support the health and wellbeing of Reading's adults and children'.

#### **5. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 5.1. Not applicable.

#### **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. The Annual report has been written with contributions from all BWSCP partners and circulated to and agreed by the Statutory Safeguarding Partners. It was disseminated to all partners and published on the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership website in December 2025.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not applicable; however, equality and diversity continue to be a key theme for the safeguarding partnership arrangements.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1. Not applicable.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (WTSC23) provides the statutory framework for safeguarding children partnerships in England. BWSCP is the key statutory partnership whose role is 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 reviews.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1. BWSCP is jointly funded by Reading Borough Council, Wokingham Borough Council, West Berkshire Council, Thames Valley Police and the ICB.

## **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. Not applicable.

## **12. Background Papers**

- 12.1. There are none.

## **Appendices**

### **1. BWSCP Annual Report 2024-25**

[bwscp annual report 2024-2025 final.pdf](#)



Reading | West Berkshire | Wokingham

# Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024/2025



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 2024/2025, 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.

The work of the partnership has undergone significant structural change to support improved multi-agency working arrangements and a vision whereby children and young people are supported to stay safe and well across the Berkshire West area.

The BWSCP is made up of the 3 core statutory partners, Health, Police and Local Authority. In Berkshire West we also include Education as a core statutory element of our partnership and have taken measures over this past year to further strengthen the valuable input our education partners bring to helping children to stay safe and well.

The work of the Partnership is informed by the following principles:

- Children, young people and families, wherever they live, should be confident that multi-agency working respects their rights; the services that we deliver and commission are safe and delivered with consistency
- Children's welfare is paramount: decisions about help, protection and care for children must always be made in their best interests (section 22(3), Children Act 1989)
- Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to. Agencies work in partnership with whole families
- The multi-agency partnership works to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families
- The multi-agency partnership considers the demographic, economic, cultural and social circumstances impacting children, young people, and families

At time of writing the BWSCP operates with over 20 sub-groups in its structure (see Appendix 3). Through the last financial year there were roughly 80 multi agency related meetings that took place across the partnership.

As of October 2024, the Business unit was fully staffed having a had a vacancy from June 2024. The financial details of the partnership are captured in Appendix 2.

The Partnership entered 2024/2025 with five main priority areas carried over from the previous financial year 2023/2024:

- 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. Additionally, although outside of this reporting period, the Partnership entered 2025/2026 with 5 new Priorities, to be progressed over 3 years into 2028 as of April 2025:

- **Priority 1: Lead Wokingham Borough Council** – Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Intra Familial Harm

- **Priority 2: Lead Thames Valley Police** - Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Extra Familial Harm
- **Priority 3: Lead Reading Borough Council** - Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Domestic Abuse
- **Priority 4: Lead West Berkshire Council** - Safeguarding & Support for Children Not in School
- **Priority 5: Lead Integrated Care Board** - Safeguarding & Support for Pre-School Children, Reducing Neglect

#### **BWSCP priorities are informed by**

- Learning from Local and National Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- Legislation and Policy
- Inspection Reports from the 5 Lead Safeguarding Partner agencies
- National learning, briefings, research, including National Review Panel reports and guidance
- Local audit findings through monitoring and evaluation
- Data sources and analytical products, development of a BWSCP Dashboard
- Learning through subgroup activity and professional challenge and support
- The work of the wider safeguarding partnership: Community Safety Partnership & Safeguarding Adults Board. Health and Wellbeing Boards
- Children and Families lived experiences

#### **BWSCP Ways of Working**

Effective support for children, young people and families will be recognised as per guidance laid out in Working Together 2023 and informed by updated guidance in respect of what good Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) look like, alongside the Social Care National Framework ([Children's social care national framework](#)), following the 3 enablers:

- Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective
- Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
- The workforce is equipped and effective

We recognise that the children who require statutory support from a Social Worker require, by virtue of their status, the pro-active involvement of all key statutory partners in helping them to stay safe and well and act together to prevent escalating need and harms.

#### **BWSCP: Learning Together**

The BWSCP hosted its first in person wide day Conference for several years, in October 2024, involving nearly 100 colleagues. The event was well received by agencies across the Partnership, including attendance from Education settings across Berkshire West. [Paul Lindley](#) opened the day on behalf of the Partnership. An output from the conference was the discussion of a new direction for members of the Partnership regarding clear strategic priorities and objectives, linked to knowledge of local need and multi-agency practice improvement activity to create the conditions for effective practice. This culminated in a re-design of local area-based partnership arrangements to drive forward the work required relating to the 5 BWSCP Priorities listed above.

A [Joint targeted area inspection of Reading](#) took place in Reading from Feb-March 2025. This was an inspection of the Partnership focussing on the multi-agency response to children aged 7 and under who are victims of domestic abuse. Inspectors' evaluation of strategic arrangements in Reading considered the multi-agency response to children of all ages. This inspection identified significant weaknesses in the multi-agency approach to prevention, help and support for children and their families who are victims of domestic abuse in Reading.

Inspectors found that:

*The safeguarding partnership priorities have not been sufficiently focused on outcomes for children*

This has been addressed by the development of the five new child focused priorities outlined above. The report also outlined the following area of improvement:

*The effectiveness of strategic governance arrangements to ensure priorities are set and aligned with the other strategic partnerships, with a focus on those children subject to domestic abuse*

The local Reading response to this is outlined below, whilst the broader tri-borough response is being progressed through a BWSCP options appraisal of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to be concluded by early 2026.

The BWSCP Partnership chair – Wokingham’s Corporate Director of Children’s Services - was appointed during July 2024. The chair has agreed to continue through financial year 2025/2026 for continuity following the subgroup structure changes, new priorities and Reading JTAL.

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, **with the aim of improving our oversight and the impact of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for all children across the Berkshire West area.**

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024/2025

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.
<b>Update on actions and impact:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The strategy and tools were released in 2024 - <a href="#">Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership - Neglect: Information and Guidance</a></li> <li>A Berkshire West wide multi – agency neglect themed audit took place in November 2024.</li> <li>This priority and the ongoing BWSCP understanding and response to Neglect, sits with operational delivery group supporting ‘Priority 5 - Safeguarding &amp; Support for Pre-School Children, Reducing Neglect.’</li> </ul>	

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.
<b>Update on actions and impact:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following the May 2024 workshop, colleagues agreed that alignment across the three local 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 and are working with partners to achieve this.</li> <li>This topic was reviewed and revisited at the BWSCP October 2024 conference, an output of which was the 5 BWSCP Priorities, including ‘Priority 2 - Safeguarding &amp; Support for Children and Young People from Extra</li> </ul>	

Familial Harm’ as of April 2025. The BWSCP response to Extra Familial Harm is being progressed by the operational delivery group as of Autumn 2025.

Strategic 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.

**Update on actions and impact:**

- In person meetings have continued through the financial year rotating between local authorities to aid conversations and relationship building.
- A Berkshire wide data dashboard remains in development to focus on identifying themes and requires the input of all statutory partners.
- Local area Threshold of Need guidance reviews were initiated in April 2024; this work has progressed to incorporate the Families First Partnership Programme, which was officially launched (March 2025).
- Thames Valley Police shared a new automated process, which allows real time review of daily demand and MASH checks. Regular updates of the proposed local area Berkshire West Local Command Unit structures were shared to improve joint working across the local area.
- The new Reading Emotional Mental Health Triage service was shared with the group in February 2025. Reading’s Emotional Health Triage is a preventative system that is embedded in the Children’s Single Point of Access to enable consistent one point of entry to Reading’s Family Help system. Its aims include but are not limited to enable children and young people to receive the right help, at the right time and support from one partner agency or multiple complementary agencies where appropriate.

Strategic Priority	Strategic Intent
Partnership Learning and Development Group	Develop a comprehensive BWSCP Learning and Development offer

**Update on actions and impact:**

- A significant task of the partnership in this reporting year and last, has been the relaunch of the learning and development programme, in part due to staff changes.
- The Learning Improvement framework remains from last year - [bwscp\\_lif\\_v3.pdf \(berkshirerwestsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk\)](https://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 remained with the Brighter Futures for Children Local Authority Designated Officer and the Wokingham Borough Council Learning and Development Manager.
- The first partnership wide training offer for ‘Professional Curiosity’ was delivered in June 2025.
- More work is required to establish the Partnership wide live training offer. Learning and Development colleagues from Wokingham have stepped forward to support the process in summer 2025 to lead on the development of a framework with the support of key statutory partners.
- The Universal Safeguarding Training offered to the Partnership continues to be well received and accessed, around 4,200 times through the financial year.

Strategic Priority	Strategic Intent
Continuing Development of the BWSCP Partnership	Improve oversight and the impact of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for all children across the Berkshire West area.
<p><b>Update on actions and impact:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 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"> <li>○ Meeting subgroups have been reviewed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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 meetings. This Partnership wide meetings was stepped down in March 2025 and a BWSCP subgroup chairs meeting has been implemented to ensure a clear link between the subgroup chairs, local area based partnership groups and Delegated Safeguarding Partners.</li> <li>II. The local area place based ISIG's were stood down and replaced with Quality Impact Partnership Groups, (QIP) operational from September 2025.</li> <li>III. The three local area Education Engagement subgroups were consulted on moving to a single Partnership meeting during the early stages of 2024. A single Education Engagement Group was piloted through the reporting year with positive feedback, a benefit being that Health and Police agencies can be present in one meeting with local authority social care representatives.</li> <li>IV. The three Education Engagement group chairs attended the Delegated Safeguarding Partners meeting (DSP) from September 2024, as part of a pilot. During the reporting year the three local area Directors of Education became named members of the DSP, alongside an agreed School Leader representative, in order to facilitate that Education have strategic input and oversight of the children's multiagency safeguarding arrangements.</li> </ol> </li> </ul> </li> <li>● Form closer links between the DSP and Subgroup Chairs – this is now in place with the introduction of the BWSCP 'Subgroup Chairs' meeting group.</li> <li>● Embed the Quality Assurance Framework, providing assurance and evidence of progress and impact.</li> <li>● Single-agency audits took place within the last reporting year and one BWSCP Neglect multi-agency audit. The safeguarding partnership recognises that we need to increase our opportunities for joint shared learning and development, rooted in an improved understanding of children and families experience of our arrangements and how we work together to improve children's circumstances for the better. A multi-agency Quality Assurance Framework is being taken forward in this forthcoming year, supported by a jointly agreed plan and supported by the work and oversight of the QIP's.</li> </ul>	

**LOCAL CHILD SAFEGUARDING REVIEWS AND RAPID REVIEWS**

A Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) 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 LCSPR being commissioned, a Rapid Review, involving the three safeguarding partners and any other involved agencies takes place first.

During the 2024-2025 reporting year, 3 Rapid Reviews were undertaken, one of which has led to a LCSPR being commissioned in 2025 for an anonymous case within the Berkshire West footprint. Below is an overview of the reviews and some of the key learning actions from them.

In addition to formalised Rapid Review processes initiating LSCPR's, the partnership has supported a further 3 'Reflective Learning Reviews' taking place. These are multi agency reviews following incidents, but for incidents that did not meet the Serious Incident Notification criteria as defined in Working Together To Safeguarding Children 2023, pages 131 to 134 - [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#) but where it is felt that an appreciative enquiry approach would further support multi-agency learning and development.

### **Rapid Reviews**

**West Berkshire** - An infant passed away unexpectedly. Prior to the review there were significant safeguarding concerns, including suspected neglect and unclear caregiving arrangements. Identified learning and actions progressed include:

- The Southampton Hospital (out of the Berkshire West area) updated procedures to ensure critical safeguarding concerns are promptly communicated to the relevant local area Children's Social Care team.
- The Hospital to ensure clear protocols for reporting injuries in inpatient children. To additionally assure themselves that discharge planning meetings are taking place as required.
- Exploring alternative support options and simplifying Child Protection Plans to improve engagement with young and vulnerable parents.

A care leaver who had recently been discharged from supported living services, tragically died. Identified learning included:

- Review and development of the process to ensure effective transition planning from children's services to adult Services. The updated procedure clearly defines clear roles and responsibilities and ensures clear strong information sharing processes, along with procedures for planning and review for children who transition to adulthood.
- The Royal Berkshire Hospital are planning to integrate additional training into their work, with a specific focus on the transition period for young people with a history of care. The training will ensure that staff appropriately assess and escalate cases to adult social care or safeguarding, enabling the development of more comprehensive discharge plans for individuals.

There were no Rapid Reviews for Wokingham or Reading in this reporting period.

### **Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPR)**

One new LCSPR was commissioned at the end of the last financial year and one legacy review is concluding.

**Reading 'Edward'** – This review was commissioned following an incident in 2017. Long running criminal proceedings, which concluded in 2024 prevented publication. An updated report of the original Serious Case Review has been edited and will be published in early 2026.

**Anonymous** – Following a Rapid Review for a young person, who had not been seen by services for an extended period, was electively home educated and subject to a child protection plan, Safeguarding Partners agreed to proceed to a LCSPR.

### **Reflective Learning Reviews**

In the reporting period there were three separate incidents involving children that did not meet the criteria for a Serious Incident Notification, however, were significant in terms of system learning for partner agencies. In consequence, each was the subject of a reflective learning review, with a summary of impact below.

#### Supporting children with mental health difficulties:

- The formation of a multiagency working group to ensure a robust response to children who present with mental distress and suicidal ideation within 48 hours, in line with national recommendations.
- The review of agency training, policies and procedures to ensure a consistent and supportive response where a child presents with mental health difficulties.
- The enhancement and development of early help processes to ensure that children receive consistent, inclusive and coordinated help and support as soon as possible.

#### Safeguarding Infants:

- The maternity assessment template was updated to capture additional information in relation to fathers.
- The health visiting service implemented a new approach to triage, enabling identification of the most vulnerable mothers at 28–36-week gestation of pregnancy. This approach has subsequently been rolled out across the Berkshire West footprint to ensure consistency in practice
- The refinement of the cross-boundary protocol to ensure effective information sharing when children move between local authorities within Berkshire West, with related amendments to Berkshire West child protection procedures.

#### Safeguarding adolescents:

- Training within Thames Valley Police to ensure all child victims and suspects are consistently referred through the MASH process for safeguarding consideration. This training was delivered to all front-line officers and outlined the practical application of Every Child Seen, Every Child Heard, Every Child Safe.
- Youth Cautions must be consistently recorded on the Police National Database and shared with relevant agencies (e.g., Youth Offending Team) ensuring early intervention.
- The BWSCP planned and delivered its first Multi-Agency Professional Curiosity training in June 2025.

### **BERKSHIRE WEST SUBGROUP SUMMARY**

Refer to appendix 3 for the breakdown of the subgroups within the BWSCP.

#### **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.

Case Closure Reports – Reading 'Aiden', Wokingham 'Aisha & Ciara', 'Harry', and 'David' were published during the reporting year. These closure reports reflect the impact and completion of the associated actions plans, alongside the original recommendations captured in the Local Child Safeguarding Practice published reviews. [Local-child-safeguarding-practice-reviews-and-other-published-reports](#)

#### **Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups**

The purpose of these meetings was to understand the impact of services delivered to children and any safeguarding concerns and or themes. Meetings were chaired by the Independent Scrutineer, on a quarterly basis. A key mechanism and request from the scrutineer was for agencies to share their agency annual services reports. These continued to come forward during the reporting year from the 3 local authorities (including Education based reports e.g. Children Missing Education), Health agencies and Police.

#### **Quality and Impact Partnership Groups**

At the end of the reporting year, it was agreed by the Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSP) that the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups (ISIG) would transition to 'Quality and Impact Groups' per local area authority in

Berkshire West. Their purpose is similar to the ISIGs however the focus is to 1) Understand local area place based safeguarding themes and ensure arrangements are working for children 2) Progress the 5 BWSCP Priorities for 2025-2028 and 3) Progress the BWSCP Multi-Agency Audit plan. Additionally, chairing arrangements have moved to a co-chairing role whereby the local authority co-chair meetings with either a Health or Police agency colleague. The scrutineer is present in each meeting with the sole role of scrutiny.

To aid the Delegated Safeguarding Partners understanding of the subgroups in the BWSCP, the Berkshire West ISIG group has been stepped down and replaced with a Berkshire West Chairs Meeting group, as of the end of the reporting period. This brings together all subgroup chairs of the BWSCP to update on their status of progress. The meeting is chaired by the Chair of the DSP for the BWSCP.

### **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 Group**

During this reporting year, the partnership has strengthened its operational response to all forms of Extra-Familial Harm (EFH), with a deliberate shift away from individualised approaches toward types of risks outside the home. Further plans to develop and strengthen the strategic oversight and governance of extra-familial harm responses across Reading are underway.

Partnership engagement has continued to expand, with the Extra-Familial Harm Team Manager contributing to a broad range of strategic and operational forums, including Borough Problem Solving, the Complex Adults Meeting, and key police-led groups such as Tactical Tasking and Problem Solving Group, and Knife Crime meetings. Stronger links have also been built with the Community Safety Team, particularly through joint work on the Young Voices Summit and the CODE event.

Alongside this, improved collaboration between Children's Single Point of Access and the Extra-Familial Harm team has enhanced earlier identification of risk and need, improved information sharing, risk analysis and supporting improved consistency of threshold application and decision-making at the front door. Working closely with Berkshire EMRAC (Exploitation and Missing Risk Assessment Conference) Chairs to co-produce a new EFH screening tool and the focus is embedding this into case-management systems in the forthcoming year.

The Children's Society has supported Reading with the development of several new workstreams this year. This has included a multi-agency disruptive reflective assessment, which is shaping learning and development across the partnership; an immersive session for Service Managers focused on embedding disruption within safeguarding forums; and targeted work with local hotels where organised abuse has previously taken place. A dedicated EFH meeting has now been established to ensure multi-agency oversight of children experiencing harm in extra-familial settings. The safeguarding partnership has also agreed to progress toward a Contextual Safeguarding approach, including recruitment of a Contextual Safeguarding Social Worker and the longer-term development of ROTH (Risk Outside The Home)-informed child protection conferences for children and young people in Reading. Strategic alignment has been further strengthened through direct engagement with Professor Carlene Firmin and the partnership's involvement in the Local Area Interest Network, supporting shared learning, reflection, and innovation across the system.

## West Berkshire Child Exploitation

- ‘Risking It All’ (2engage theatre) performed in 10 schools during February 2025, aimed at Year 9 and 8 students. Over the course of the week, 2engage delivered 14 performances to over 2000 students in year 9 or year 8. The reach compared to 2024 was up by 600 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. The impact was measured by qualitative survey feedback from the students which included an overall performance rating of 88% (very good or Excellent). In answer to the questions, do you know more about the following topics and how to deal with them Being involved in inappropriate relationships; Social media misuse (sexting); Alcohol and drug misuse; Either you or a friend being at risk of being exploited; Spotting the signs of grooming – nearly 80% of students agreed that yes, they were better equipped of the signs.
- A West Berkshire Child Exploitation Profile Action Plan was created from September 2024, which was generated from the sub groups discussion of children at risk of exploitation. The action plan considers Strategic Links and developments; Prevention; Identification; Support; Disruption and Prosecution.
- The West Berkshire Child Exploitation guidance was updated for terminology and links to Working Together 2023.

## Wokingham Serious Violence And Exploitation Strategic Board

- In the previous reporting year, to help drive the current Serious Youth Violence plan, 6 workstreams had formed, chaired by different members of the Strategic Board.
- Workstreams included:
  - 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

During this reporting period the group has been working on future direction of travel and revising its remit, in line with the need to engage with the revised strategic priority for the partnership.

## Education Engagement Subgroups

In 2025, the previous three locality-based Education Engagement groups have been consolidated into a single, Berkshire West-wide Education Engagement Group. The three Local Area Education Chairs rotate the responsibility of chairing the meetings, ensuring shared leadership and representation across the Berkshire West footprint. This unified group includes representatives from all three local areas (typically education setting representatives that also sit in local area primary or secondary head forums) as well as and Police and Health. It is designed to strengthen engagement with all education settings to:

- Enhance the understanding of local safeguarding arrangements across the three local authorities.
- Promote awareness of key issues and services available throughout the Partnership.
- Alleviate key speakers from external agencies, police and health colleagues attending in triplicate.

The Education Engagement Group convenes five times annually. Combined with the Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) meetings, which occur nine times per year, this results in a total of 14 education-focused meetings annually. Throughout the year, education colleagues have used both these forums to raise safeguarding concerns, such as:

- **Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) & Elective Home Education (EHE)** - A noticeable increase in both has been seen across all three local areas A key challenge is that local authorities are often unaware of these cases, as there is currently no legal requirement for parents to notify them when choosing to home educate,

however it is noted that the proposed Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will make changes in terms of oversight. Work here will continue via the BWSCP Priority 4 - Safeguarding & Support for Children Not in School.

- **Asylum Seeking Children** - Key issues include frequent relocations without notice, challenges in accurate age assessment, and the placement of children in semi-independent accommodation. A dedicated workgroup has been established to address these issues.
- **Information sharing (when children are moving between schools)** - inconsistent sharing of safeguarding information when children transfer between schools, particularly across local authority boundaries. In response, a standardised transfer package is being developed, alongside staff training initiatives.
- **Knife possession** - an increase in intelligence around knife possession in schools causing concerns and prompting 'Knife Arch Operations' being conducted in schools.
- **Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI)** - Concerns were raised regarding the prevalence and inconsistent application of Restrictive Physical Intervention across schools. A need for clearer guidance on best practices, escalation procedures, and the implementation of RPI-related policies was identified. Following consultation with the Education Engagement Subgroup, it was agreed to undertake an information-gathering exercise across all education settings. This initiative aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of current practices and inform the Partnership's development of an appropriate and coordinated response. Review of findings continues into the next financial year.

Following updates to *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023* and the increased emphasis on engaging all schools across Berkshire West at an operational level, work continued to further ensure Education's voice across the BWSCP is being consistently captured and informing the partnerships strategic priorities:

- Local Area Directors of Education now attend the quarterly Delegated Safeguarding Partners meetings. During these sessions, they present local education updates to support collaborative discussion and strategic safeguarding planning.
- The three Chairs of the Education Engagement group will be attending the new Berkshire West Chairs group meeting as well as the newly formed Quality and Impact Partnership group meetings.

### **Key area events: Reading Festival**

Festival Republic, in collaboration with safeguarding partners across the Berkshire West footprint, undertakes annual safeguarding planning ahead of Reading Festival. Practices are continually informed by learning from previous years, leading to enhanced safeguarding measures and targeted messaging.

A key development has been the introduction of Air Hubs—safe spaces for festivalgoers needing support. A Safeguarding Coordinator is always present on-site, working alongside welfare teams and key partners including social care emergency duty teams, local hospitals, Thames Valley Police, and South-Central Ambulance Service. In 2025, the festival introduced 'Consent Conversations', a Thames Valley Police campaign aimed at improving understanding of consent among the 18–24 age group.

### **Designated Safeguarding Leads Groups**

The partnership actively supports and hosts three local area Designated Safeguarding Lead/Designated Teacher (DSL/DT) Forums for Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham, inviting representatives from all education settings to ensure broad dissemination of safeguarding updates. These forums are considered a key mechanism for sharing essential information. Attendance is tracked via sign-in registers to monitor engagement and identify patterns of non-attendance. Recordings of each session are made available through secure links for those unable to attend live or wishing to share content with colleagues.

## Presentations during this reporting year to Designated Safeguarding Leads in Berkshire West have included:

- **Berkshire Women’s Aid (BWA):** Provided an overview of domestic abuse support across Reading, West Berkshire, and Bracknell, including refuge services, survivor and perpetrator programmes (Choices, Aim for Change), and child-focused initiatives (Expect Respect, DART). The session also covered training opportunities such as Virtual School drop-ins, Year 6–7 transition planning, safeguarding updates (KCSIE 2024), and kinship care awareness.
- **Safeguarding Against Vaping:** Public Health and Community Alcohol Partnership officers encouraged schools to adopt a whole-health approach to vaping prevention. Key strategies included implementing smoke/vape-free policies, recording incidents, engaging in local surveys, and working with Trading Standards and Public Health for targeted interventions.
- **Social Media Safety for Young People:** Berkshire Youth highlighted both the benefits and risks of social media, including cyberbullying, grooming, and oversharing. The presentation emphasised the importance of open conversations, online safety education, monitoring usage, and promoting digital literacy and support networks.
- **Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls:** The Senior Violence Reduction Coordinator at West Berkshire Council, shared local strategies under the Serious Violence Duty. Resources for schools included awareness campaigns (*Stay True to You, It Does Matter, Consent Conversations*), virtual reality tools, Safe Places, and Bystander Training.

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

- **ACT for Education E-Learning (Counter Terrorism)** – a free online training programme hosted on the ProtectUK platform, designed for staff across all education settings. It consists of seven modules that focus on building a security-minded culture, identifying vulnerabilities and suspicious activity, and responding effectively to incidents using principles like Run, Hide, Tell and the HOT Protocol (H- Has the item been Hidden? Has it deliberately been concealed? O – Is it Obviously suspicious? Does it seem odd or out of place, is there wires, liquids or batteries sticking out of it? T – Is it Typical for the location?).
- **Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Training**– designed for professionals in both statutory and voluntary sectors and is available in online and in-person formats. It covers key areas such as distinguishing RPC from domestic abuse, understanding referral pathways, using parenting apps and plans, and participating in “One Plus One” sessions.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead groups continue to be recognised as an effective way of sharing information to our education setting colleagues involved with safeguarding children across Berkshire West.

## Section 175/157

Under Section 175 of the Education Act 2002, schools and educational settings—including early years providers—are legally required to have robust arrangements in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Berkshire West Local Authorities (Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham) collect provider feedback using the NSPCC online audit tool.

## What is going well:

- Strong engagement: Nearly 100% return rate across all three Local Authorities.
- Removed the ‘Partially met’ option from the Early Years audit which reduces confusion.
- Moving the timing of the audit to Spring (to give new staff in settings at the beginning of the school year in September time to adjust and understand their setting).
- Improved clarity and communication on how to complete the audit.
- Enhanced protection for vulnerable groups: Including disabled children and those at risk of exploitation.

### Areas of concern:

- Training gaps
- DSL training for childminders (Childminders have now been instructed to complete).
- Governor safeguarding training (refresher sessions are now available).
- Paediatric first aid (Staff members have agreed to take immediate action).
- Induction gaps for new staff without safeguarding training.
- Online safety, GDPR, and image consent protocols.
- Cultural competency in safeguarding curriculum (ethnic diversity and LGBTQ+ inclusion).
  
- Policy gaps
  - Intimate care and asylum-seeking children.
  - Online safety and cyberbullying risk assessments.
  - Child sleeping/eating policies.
  - Missing employment documentation for long-term staff.

### Proposals for improvement:

- Analyse audit comments from previous years to identify trends and recurring issues.
- Strengthen communication channels via DSL forums and governor networks.
- Develop accessible safeguarding materials for parents (easy-read formats).
- Enhance digital tools to streamline audit completion and reduce errors.
- Introduce group safeguarding email addresses to improve response times.
- Shift the audit cycle from Autumn to Spring term (effective 2024/2025).

### 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. 44 chapters were reviewed through the reporting year and 28 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 (S11) 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 Section 11 panel was held in September 2024. Returns for the 5 statutory partners and all partners are due on 3 yearly cycles, West Berkshire, Wokingham and Brighter Futures for Children/Reading Local Authorities are scheduled to present in April 2026. Thames Valley Police and the Berkshire West Integrated Care Board presented in May 2025.

**Annual Child Exploitation Forum** – The Slough Safeguarding Children Partnership business unit organised a webinar by Dez Holmes, for practitioners and colleagues across Berkshire in March 2024. The next webinar will be in

November 2025 and will be hosted by [The REIGN collective](#), a survivor-led organisation dedicated to raising awareness and improving responses to child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSA/CSE) through lived experience.

**Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)** – The Partnership remain committed to being part of the Bracknell hosted group. The CDOP Coordinator continues to attend annually at each local area's Designated Safeguarding Leads Group to remind and update on the importance of notifying deaths at schools and the process to follow. Additionally annual refreshers are taking place care of the CDOP Coordinator with each local areas Children's Single Point Of Access teams, regarding process and timeliness of sharing information following a notification. The Bereavement Pack can be found on the BWSCP site [Microsoft Word - CDOP Bereavement Pack July 2025.docx](#)

## **BWSCP Multiagency Auditing**

The BWSCP conducted a Multiagency Neglect Audit with an in-person audit panel had September 2024. Three lines of enquiry were considered as part of the audit design:

- 1. Did we as a partnership identify concerns about neglect and provide a timely, appropriate and impact response at the earliest opportunity?**
  - Yes (across Berkshire West) and referrers often referenced neglect as a concern directly in their contact forms, or described concerns that were readily recognised as concerns about neglect when received at the front door by local authorities.
  - Decisions about contacts were made in a timely fashion.
  - There was limited evidence of support and impact of this support being offered, by referring agencies prior to contact with the respective front door.
  - Where referring agencies held concerns about neglect, these were raised with the local authority in a timely fashion.
  - Impact for the child was not always immediately identifiable as a proportion of the children selected remained open and active within Children Services.
- 2. Is the child's age a factor when we consider local area responses to neglect?**
  - Within the cohort range of 0 to 11 years there was no indication that age was a factor within the responses.
- 3. Can we identify what types of support and provision have the most sustainable impact for a child and family?**
  - Within West Berkshire the quality of the parent and professional relationship was clearly a factor within family willingness to seek and accept support.
  - Only a small number of audits noted involvement/intervention with a family prior to the contact, which related to the number of police and health agencies that would not necessarily have been expected to have a prior, ongoing role with the child or family. Changing the audit methodology to include more schools, early years settings and community-based services may have provided results that enables a clearer response to this line of enquiry.

Next steps from the audit included:

- A review of the neglect tools available across the local area and good practice examples more broadly.
- Agreement that the neglect tools should be used as part of understanding and assessing risk, by all partners as well as local authority front door teams.

- Ensuring that a robust awareness raising and training programme to embed the use of these tools to identify and assess concerns about neglect and provide timely and effective intervention. Ensure the escalation process is understood.

Work will continue via the operational delivery group for Priority 5 - Safeguarding & Support for Pre-School Children, Reducing Neglect.

## **SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

### **Thames Valley Police contribution to the functioning and structure of the Safeguarding Partnership**

Thames Valley Police has a [Thames Valley Police Strategic Plan 2025-26](#) which focuses on Serving Victims, Building Trust, Fighting Crime and Valuing our People. The Chief Constable is designated the Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP) under Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and has a statutory duty to promote the welfare of children. The 5 Chief Superintendents who oversee each of the Local Command Units/County Heads are nominated as the Delegated Safeguarding Partners and are responsible for the effective delivery of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

The force has recently reviewed and refreshed the governance and oversight of Safeguarding and Public Protection in TVP. The Vulnerability Strategic Group meeting, chaired by the Assistant Chief Constable, oversees three boards to be led by a Chief Superintendent. These three boards develop and co-ordinate activity around Child Protection, Rape and Domestic Abuse and Adult Protection. This revised governance structure is now in place and has been reviewed by the national Vulnerability and Knowledge Practice Programme (VKPP).

The Public Protection & Safeguarding Command is now well embedded and led by an experienced Detective Chief Superintendent, who chairs the Child Protection Governance Board, and leads all of the public protection teams, with appropriate structure beneath him, which has included the recruitment of a number of additional senior leaders and a large uplift in investigators.

### **Evidence of the impact of the safeguarding functions of the TVP service on outcomes.**

Thames Valley Police share outcome data provided to quarterly Community Safety, Serious Violence and Domestic Abuse panels. Police crime and outcome data can also be accessed via a public website [Home | Police.uk](#)

### **Evidence of impact of safeguarding training provided by TVP to staff**

College of Policing set the training for TVP staff on child and adult safeguarding. Police officers have induction training, which includes an element of child and adult protection, along with Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub referral (MASH) processes. Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and specialist detectives receive Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) training according to their role, including Specialist Child Abuse Investigators Development Programme and portfolio. All detectives on the Child Abuse Investigation Unit complete the Serious Sexual Assault Investigators Development Programme and this course is also completed by all detectives. There is also a Domestic Abuse Specialist Investigator Course.

Voice of the Child is incorporated within our training across Investigative Skills and Foundation Training for all frontline police officers.

All relevant frontline practitioners remain current within safeguarding training by mandate and completed through regular training in area days or through a central register held by the Investigative Skills Department.

### **What service users say about TVP service they received**

Data from the 24/25 Thames Valley Public Perception Survey shows the following;

76% surveyed said they trusted their local police force

33% said their local police communicated well with people in their area

87% said they feel safe being out and about where they live during daylight hours

### **Evidence of impact of internal arrangements around managing allegations against staff, if there were any in the reporting period.**

Thames Valley Police have a robust internal professional standards department with trained detectives and investigators who complete investigations on reports of misconduct and gross misconduct in addition to working with the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) in response to external complaints against staff and officers. Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) referral process for police officers under investigation is well embedded now. Our support managers (Chief Inspector equivalent) consider LADO referrals at the point any case comes into the Professional Standards Department (PSD). It is then considered again in each supervisor investigation review. All of PSD have now had an input from the Oxfordshire LADO so are aware of obligations. The policy is now on the PSD website.

Policy is around officers and staff with a specific role involving children, e.g. Child Abuse Investigation Unit (CAIU) / Schools or lone workers with access to children.

LADO referral process for other police investigations into relevant professions is already well embedded and utilised by CAIU and other departments.

### **What practitioners say about safeguarding policies and protocols developed in the reporting period**

Work to develop safeguarding protocols is in collaboration with the BWSCP in a consultative and productive way. An example of this is the current development work on the recently mandated (by central UK government), introduction of Multi Agency Child Protection Teams.

### **Any examples to show evidence of how information sharing has improved practice and outcomes**

Thames Valley Police maintain effective triage processes to fulfil multiagency information sharing protocols through the current multiagency safeguarding hubs.

In line with national guidance TVP form part of the statutory partners panel within the rapid review process and subsequent child safeguarding practice review process. This occurs following serious incidents and deaths, information is shared with the aim of identifying any points of practice that would benefit partnership learning to inform improvements to child and adult safeguarding practices.

There are numerous examples of police and partnership learning from recommendations made in Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews available through the BWSCP Case Review Subgroup.

### **Evidence of improved practice**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspections and Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAI) inspections across the force have led to an increase in child abuse investigator numbers and a redesign of force structures, allowing for Harm Reduction Units to be introduced and therefore improving child and adult protection.

The Harm Reduction Units have officers dedicated to exploitation of the young and vulnerable and continue to apply the interrupter tactics including the use of Child Abuse Warning Notices alongside the boosted officer numbers

within the neighbourhood partnership teams. They would work with families and communities to drive down exploitation and educate young people and the public alongside the schools officers.

All frontline police staff are receiving Voice of the Child training to ensure children are empowered in decisions within child witness and child protection incidents and in line with the local authority duty emphasised within the Children Act 2004

Within this annual reporting timescale, the local police area has successfully merged with its bordering police areas to increase flexibility and agility of its workforce and so BWSCP area is now covered by the Berkshire West Local Command Unit.

The force has implemented 'Right Care Right Person' for adults and is in the process of agreeing the process, with partners, for applying this to children.

The Force has Policy and Operational Guidance for officers and staff to follow when they identify concerns about an individual's safety or welfare. This is reviewed periodically in light of changing legislation and national guidance such as Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 and Approved Professional Practice updates from the College of Policing.

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

NHS Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) has a statutory responsibility to arrange health services for the local population by setting direction, allocating the NHS budget, overseeing delivery and driving transformation, integration and improvement of health services.

Over the last year, the ICB has been through significant change, during 2024 we reviewed and refreshed our operating model, to clearly define our purpose, the roles and responsibilities within our organisation, and how we will work collaboratively with our partners across the health and care system. Our operating model was developed through consultation, collaboration and engagement with both our staff and partner organisations.

Our partner NHS Trusts include:

- Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (BHT)
- Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT)
- Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUH)
- Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OHFT)
- Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust (RBH)
- South Central Ambulance Services NHS Foundation Trust (SCAS)

In addition to these organisations, we work closely with our primary care providers (GPs, pharmacists, optometrists and dentists) which directly provide health and care services, we have links with schools, universities, businesses and research partners working in health or care in our area.

As statutory safeguarding partner, the ICB is committed to discharging safeguarding obligations set out in Working Together 2023 and ensuring that we continue to play an active role within Berkshire West multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Internal ICB arrangements are in place to support the new roles and functions, with safeguarding assurance and escalation from all partnerships across the ICB reported through the local place based assurance meeting, the ICB Safeguarding Committee, Quality Operational Group, and onward to the ICB Board. The ICB Chief Executive delivers the Lead Safeguarding Partner role (LSP), and Director of Safeguarding, the Delegated Safeguarding Partner role (DSP). In addition, the ICB Director of Nursing as Board-level Executive Director

for the ICB, holds the accountability for ensuring that effective safeguarding processes are in place and that the statutory responsibilities and duties of the ICB are met.

The Director of Safeguarding leads the ICB Safeguarding Team/ Designate professionals, who work in partnership with statutory and non-statutory agencies at 'Place' and at a system-wide level to ensure and support safeguarding practice and strategy. The Designate professionals, as clinical experts and strategic leaders for safeguarding, are a vital source of advice and support to health commissioners in the ICB, Local Authorities and NHS England, other health professionals, regulators, the Local Safeguarding Adults Boards (LSABs) and the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnerships (LSCPs).

NHS England holds a system leadership role in safeguarding and provides national oversight of the ICB in relation to compliance with the Safeguarding Accountability and Assurance Framework (SAAF). This national oversight helps ensure that safeguarding remains a priority across the healthcare system, with robust governance and accountability in place to protect children, adults-at-risk, and vulnerable populations. ICB activity to evidence SAAF compliance includes within Berkshire West:

- Health provider "walk and talk" audits focused upon safeguarding, have shown evidence of workforce understanding of safeguarding and MCA/DoLS
- Leadership of the Mental Capacity Act programme of events that has engagement form across the integrated system
- Local Domestic Abuse service supporting in Emergency Department setting

BOB ICB as a statutory partner of the BWSCP is well established with effective working relationships with interface and work through the various workstreams and subgroups of the partnership. Throughout the year, the ICB Safeguarding and LAC Team collaborate with providers and commissioners to monitor activity and ensure that provider service procurement, contracts and policies embed safeguarding requirements.

The ICB-appointed and deputy safeguarding delegates serve the ICB at place-based Domestic Abuse (DA) Partnership Boards. The ICB has committed portfolio leads for DA, and they have supervision of system-based initiatives across BOB and are persistent in backing providers in continuously enhancing services and support. The ICB assisted the system during a DA-focused Joint Targeted Area Review (JTAI) in March 2025.

Both nationally and within BOB ICB, safeguarding demand and capacity continue to rise. The current financial landscape and constraints on investment in new services add further challenges, necessitating innovative approaches to collaboration and more efficient safeguarding support.

Health partners across Berkshire West are actively involved in discussions with the multi-agency in respect of the Reforms. The ICB is committed to supporting a whole-system approach to population health and social care provision and is working alongside leaders within our health system to provide engagement and contribute to shared planning at all stages of these reforms and across each of the local authority areas that our health services are being provided to.

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

Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) has delivered children's social care, early help and prevention and educational services including special educational needs and disability (SEND) on behalf of Reading Borough Council (RBC) since December 2018, as an independent, not-for-profit company.

The original contract to deliver children's services ends in March 2026 and following a comprehensive contract review process. In January 2025, full Council endorsed a recommendation that children services move back into

the Council, with a transition planned for 1 October 2025. Brighter Futures for Children fully supported the Council's decision to bring children's services back in house and remain committed to continuing to improve services throughout 2025/26 and beyond. We know, as evidenced by our Ofsted and HMIP inspections over the last year, that our pace of practice improvement has been too slow. Ensuring that we drive sustained improvement with rigour and pace, to deliver high quality child-centred services to Reading's children and families, is our absolute priority moving forward.

Our service delivery is based on the fundamental belief that children are best cared for in their families, and when that is not possible, we want them to be able to live in a loving stable home, locally.

In 2024 we established our transformation programme to:

- reduce escalation of children's need by developing family hubs and focus on delivering good practice interventions across preventative and statutory services to improve outcomes for children.
- ensure that children are supported to remain living with their families, wherever possible and that when they do need to come into care it is for the shortest time possible, with the aim to keep them connected with their birth family, by developing an edge of care offer.
- address the lack of local children's residential care homes and foster carers by growing the number of internal foster carers and planning to develop in-house residential care homes.

Our Family Help offers a wide range of targeted services to support approximately 450-550 families at any given time throughout the year. Across 2024/25, 187 children were stepped up into children's social care, that is 13% of the total work across the year. This is down from nearly 16.8% the year before and is evidence of how the Family Help service is reducing the need for statutory intervention and managing increasingly complex and multiple needs of families effectively.

Initial contacts continue to predominantly be from police (34% contacts), followed by education settings (19%) and health (17% contacts) and relate to concerns about domestic abuse (19% referrals), physical abuse (16% referrals) and families in acute stress (14% referrals).

Key achievements over the past year include:

- With the support of the Council, we invested in and embedded our ambitious Transformation Programme. Through the programme we have:
  - Developed a new partnership Early Help Strategy and a plan to open Family Hubs in 2025
  - Strengthened our partnership approach at the front door
  - Improved our fostering offer to our in house foster carers, including enhanced fees and the creation of a therapeutic tier and started to develop a Mockingbird Carer Hub as part of the DfE funded Local Authority Fostering South East (LAFSE) project
  - Progressed plans to develop two children's homes and an assessment home in Reading, with properties identified and funding in place, with a view to opening in 2026
  - Set up and recruited to an Edge of Care service
  - Initiated a project to develop additional special school places in Reading to meet need locally, including the development of a new special school.
- Our Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) was published in July 2024, showing improvement from 2019. While remaining Requires Improvement overall, the inspectors graded both the experiences and progress of children in care and the experience and progress of care leavers as Good.
- 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 in Reading.

after and care leavers. Council tax relief for care leavers was extended up to age of 25 years from April 2024 and free prescriptions, gym membership and an improved apprenticeship offer have all been added to the Care Leavers' Offer.

- In September 2024 our IFA was rated Good for the second time by Ofsted.
- We have improved the permanency of our workforce, with 100% permanent senior leaders and managers and 85% permanent social workers (as at March 2025). 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. Six new ASYEs joined BfC in September 2024 and BfC formed its own dedicated ASYE Academy Team in November 2024, which will be supported by a newly created Principal Social Worker post in 2025.
- In November 2024 we held our first annual staff conference focused on wellbeing recognising that our workforce is our most valuable asset.
- Following a retender of our advocacy service, we created an opt-out service, inclusive of advocacy for parents resulting in a 50% increase in the number of children accessing advocacy.
- We have increased the use of Family Group Conferences for all children, putting children and families at the heart of decision-making about their lives.
- We have continued to increase the number of statements received from children through Mind of My Own which now stands at 1,066 statements, with 79 children's accounts and 161 practitioner accounts. From April 2024 to March 2025, we received 508 new children's statements.
- We developed a new 2024-2026 Sufficiency Strategy to ensure we remain fit for purpose in a changing context and landscape, ensuring as many children as possible can live locally in stable, loving homes. This work is supported by our membership of the DfE funded SE Regional Care Cooperative which focuses on meeting the most complex needs of our children in care.
- Pinecroft and Cressingham children's homes were both inspected and retained their 'Good' ratings.
- Strong governance oversight allows us to reflect and challenge ourselves to ensure our work remains focused and outcome driven. We continue to be committed to delivering better outcomes for children, young people and their families in an increasingly changing and challenging context and have adapted our practice to reflect this, throughout the year.

A [Joint targeted area inspection of Reading](#) took place in Reading from Feb-March 2025. This was an inspection of the Partnership focussing on the multi-agency response to children aged 7 and under who are victims of domestic abuse. Inspectors' evaluation of strategic arrangements in Reading considered the multi-agency response to children of all ages. Inspectors found that:

*The safeguarding partnership priorities have not been sufficiently focused on outcomes for children*

This has been addressed by the development of the five new child focused priorities outlined above. The report also outlined the following area of improvement:

*The effectiveness of strategic governance arrangements to ensure priorities are set and aligned with the other strategic partnerships, with a focus on those children subject to domestic abuse*

The local Reading response to this is outlined below, whilst the broader tri-borough response is being progressed through a BWSCP options appraisal of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to be concluded in early 2026.

Decisive action was taken by the partnership during the JTAI, whereby both multi and single agency action plans were implemented at pace to address child level, operational and strategic areas of weakness. Comprehensive and robust single and multi-agency action plans, governance and scrutiny were implemented and remain in place. As a consequence escalation processes are now well understood and there is clear evidence of escalations taking place and having a positive impact on practice across the partnership.

The Children's Services Rapid Improvement Plan details the actions needed to improve performance indicators and outcomes for children across eight priority areas:

- Timeliness of strategy meetings
- Children being seen regularly
- Safety plans
- Timeliness of s47 child protection investigations and single assessments
- Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences
- Timeliness of Core Groups
- Regular high-quality supervision and management oversight
- Timeliness of Care Proceedings

By taking an approach that covers all children open to Children's Social Care the impact will, by necessity, be wider than on children who are victims of domestic abuse. In taking this approach, the Plan will also address areas of improvement identified in the 2024 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) where insufficient progress has been made.

The success of the Rapid Improvement Plan will be supported by a functional change in practice. Currently children move from the Children's Single Point of Access (front door) to the Together for Families Service. Together for Families undertake an initial assessment and a wide range of short to long-term work with children, including those on a child in need plan, child protection plan, going through court proceedings or becoming cared for. We know from our data that our Together for Families' social workers' caseloads are too high. This is attributed to a high number of assessments impacting on social workers' ability to develop relational practice with children and on their ability to conclude their work with families in a timely way. We also know that the demands and complexity of court work impacts on social workers' ability to progress new assessments in a timely way. It is therefore our intention to establish a separate assessment team, removing this element from Together for Families. This shift is in line with practice in other local authorities and staff have told us that this is what will make a real difference to their ability to deliver timely and high-quality services to children and families.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 (statutory guidance on multi-agency working to help, support and protect children) removed the requirement for the lead practitioner for Children In Need to be a social worker. It introduced the option for alternatively qualified practitioners to undertake this role, with the oversight of a social work qualified manager. This is also in line with changes in practice under the government's Families First programme. We are therefore also progressing our plans to adopt this practice, plans that predated the JTAI. Following consultation with a cohort of Family Support Workers, these skilled staff will become lead practitioners for Children In Need. This shift will also contribute to the required reduction in social workers' caseloads

A Partnership Action Plan in response to the findings was required to be submitted to Ofsted by 13<sup>th</sup> August 2025, signed off by the Strategic Partnership Group prior to submission, in consultation with the Chair of the Berkshire West Children's Safeguarding Committee and the Independent Scrutineer.

The partnership plan details the multi-agency actions required across the partnership broken down by the ten areas of improvement identified in the JTAI:

- Voice and experience of individual children
- Strategy meetings
- Information sharing
- Threshold of need
- Cumulative impact of domestic abuse

- Use of data
- Commissioned services
- MARAC arrangements (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences)
- Challenge and escalation
- Strategic governance arrangements

Each of the ten areas has an accountable lead from across the partnership. Key performance indicators measure progress and impact and a multi-agency audit on children who are victims of domestic abuse will be undertaken in September 2025 to assess impact.

## **SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL**

In West Berkshire, our approach to children and family social work is rooted in Relationship-Based Practice, underpinned by a person-in-environment model. This framework recognises the vital interplay between individuals and their surroundings, helping us better understand and respond to the challenges children and families face. We are proud to have a stable and experienced senior leadership team, supported by a committed management group and dedicated workforce. Together, we strive to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people, and families across the district. Our integrated “one service” approach, uniting Education and Social Care, fosters a culture of high support and high challenge, with staff reporting increased confidence, safety, and support in their roles.

Following the approval of our transformation bid in December 2024, we embarked on a journey to reshape and enhance our services. This transformation is already yielding positive change, with several key milestones achieved and exciting developments on the horizon.

In November 2024, we hosted our first-ever Practice Week, a landmark initiative for West Berkshire designed to strengthen professional skills and promote reflective learning. Building on its success, we are preparing for a Practice Fortnight in May 2025, offering extended opportunities for staff development and collaboration.

The early months of 2025 saw a series of external evaluations that affirmed our progress:

- DCS Peer Challenge (January 2025) provided valuable insights and affirmed our strategic direction.
- LGA Peer Review (28–31 January 2025) focused on Family Safeguarding, delivering excellent feedback with no children escalated as a cause for concern.
- Ofsted and CQC Thematic Review (January–February 2025) on SEND children not in education highlighted strengths in several areas, particularly within Social Care.
- Our Youth Justice Service maintained its ‘Outstanding’ rating.
- Our Short Breaks Residential Home also received an ‘Outstanding’ inspection outcome.

These reviews, alongside a more consistent and robust audit process, confirm that thresholds are being applied appropriately, and our practitioners demonstrate a deep understanding of the children and families they support. Our CHAT tool continues to highlight strengths in timeliness and quality of practice, ensuring children and young people receive the right support at the right time.

We’ve seen a reduction in re-referrals, with greater stability across teams and numerous examples of excellent practice leading to positive outcomes for children.

As part of our ongoing commitment to early intervention, we are developing a new Early Help partnership. A successful recruitment drive has enabled the relaunch of the Family Safeguarding Model, supported by Motivational Interviewing training to embed this approach across our teams.

We are also pleased to report a rise in foster carers, including Kinship carers, helping ensure children and young people have access to stable, nurturing homes. The majority of children in care are placed with West Berkshire foster families, who benefit from strong peer support through our fostering hubs.

Our Care Leavers continue to receive consistent support, and we are developing a housing strategy that has already enabled many to secure council tenancies—a significant and positive step toward independence.

### Safeguarding Priorities for 2025/26

Looking ahead, we are focused on several key areas to further strengthen our safeguarding arrangements:

- **Recruitment and Retention:** While progress has been made, sustaining a stable workforce remains a priority, particularly in light of changes to agency pay structures.
- **Family Help / Family First Reforms:** We are committed to developing a robust Family Help Model, establishing Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams, and enhancing family decision-making meetings. Our Early Help service began a period of Co-Design and Co-Production in March 2025, laying the groundwork for Family Hubs. Additionally, our Child in Need Pilot, though not without challenges, is demonstrating positive impact and will inform future developments.
- **ICS Recording System:** Recognising the limitations of our current system (Care Director), we are preparing for a transition to Mosaic in March 2026, which promises improved functionality and user experience.
- **Budgetary Pressures:** We continue to navigate significant financial challenges, particularly around high-cost placements, agency staffing, and home-to-school transport.
- **Learning and Skills Development:** Our Learning Sets, launched in January 2025, are helping to embed our practice model and build staff confidence. We remain committed to fostering a learning culture where practitioners feel safe, supported, and empowered to deliver high-quality services.

## SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

In Wokingham, we are actively shaping our response to the national social care reform agenda, including **Stable Homes, Built on Love** and the **National Framework for Children’s Social Care**. Our approach is rooted in a commitment to improving outcomes for children and families through early intervention, relational and systemic practice, and through the transformation of our services.

Over the past year, we have launched several targeted programmes to address identified service development needs. These initiatives reflect our ambition to build a more integrated, resilient, and responsive system of support. The following report summarises the key developments and progress made in 2024-25 as part of our transformation journey.

### 1. Helping Early / Family Help Strategy Update

#### Overview

In May 2025, we published our co-produced Helping Early Strategy, marking a significant milestone in our response to the national Families First Partnership reform agenda. Developed in collaboration with our Sector-Led Improvement Partner (SLIP), Camden, the strategy lays the foundation for transformational change in how we support children and families.

#### Leadership & Capacity Building

To strengthen delivery, a new Head of Service role was created and filled in December 2024. Additionally:

- Three new practitioners have joined the Helping Early system.
- A full-service structure review is underway, with anticipated new roles including:
  - Early Help Coordinators
  - Family Connectors
  - Additional management capacity to lead Family Hub development

### **Practice Development**

We are embedding systemic and strength-based approaches across Wokingham to empower families and improve long-term outcomes. Key developments have included:

- Recruitment of a Practice Consultant specialising in systemic practice
- Launch of a pilot project to develop systemic work in Early Help, to be evaluated by Coram

### **Youth Justice & Prevention**

Our Prevention and Youth Justice Service continues to strengthen:

- Children are being seen and visited regularly
- Assessments and plans are consistently on file
- The service was graded “Good” (from a previous grading of Requires Improvement) by HMIP, in Summer 2024

### **Delivering the Strategy**

Our vision is to ensure families access non-stigmatising support at the earliest opportunity. We are working with partners to build a more connected and responsive Early Help/Family Help system. Strategic priorities include:

- Development of Family Hubs and enhanced parental support
- Creation of an integrated front door
- Establishment of a shared approach to practice

### **Multi-Agency Early Help Assessment (MEHA)**

A review of the MEHA is planned to:

- Increase community-based interventions
- Reduce reliance on statutory services
- Develop a seamless model of assessment and intervention, minimising the need for families to repeat their stories

### **Practice Improvement**

- A Helping Early thematic audit was completed in January 2025, with key findings informing service improvements
- Practice standards are being refreshed to support continuous development
- These initiatives will enhance insight and drive better outcomes

### **Performance & Oversight**

We have launched a bespoke Early Help Dashboard via Power BI, providing:

- Real-time visibility into Early Help activity
- A robust framework for Performance and Outcome Meetings
- Overseen by a Children’s Services Improvement Board, chaired by the CEX

## **2. Stable and Loving Homes**

### **Overview**

Wokingham’s Children’s Services cared for 148 children at the end of March 2025, equating to 35.9 per 10,000 of the child population—significantly below the regional (47) and national (70) averages. If aligned with these averages, Wokingham would have 204 or 303 children in care respectively.

We also support 285 care leavers aged 18 to 25 (and beyond for those in full-time education).

## Placement Types

Children we care for live in a range of settings:

- Local authority foster carers
- Connected carers
- Independent fostering agency carers
- Residential care
- Prospective adopters
- Supported lodgings
- Semi-independent living

Care leavers live in

- Staying Put arrangements
- Supported lodgings
- Semi-independent living
- Community group living
- Independent accommodation

## Sufficiency Planning & In-Borough Resources

Securing sufficient accommodation is vital for placement stability and improved outcomes for children we care for. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes for looked after children.

Wokingham has increased its in-house provision and now includes:

- Harbour House (4-bed children's home) opened and graded 'Good' by OFSTED in May 2025.
- Bay Cottage (2-bed home) completed initial registration.
- Step by Step commissioned to recruit 10 Supported Lodgings carers.
- Semi-independent living provision opened in 2022, with plans to double capacity in 2025.
- Two additional properties opened in July 2024 for care leavers, with a further 10 rooms added in April 2025.

## Regional Collaboration & Innovation

Wokingham is part of the South-East Regional Fostering Hub, supporting regional recruitment efforts. We launched our second Mockingbird constellation, supporting 18 families, The impact has been overwhelmingly positive, with families coming together to socialise, build friendships, and arrange sleepovers naturally and with ease. Wokingham has also supported other local authorities in establishing their own constellations, sharing valuable insights to help foster effective partnerships and ensure successful implementation.

## Fostering Team and Recruitment

Wokingham's fostering team works with 56 fostering homes, including 12 connected carers. On average, 10 new fostering homes are recruited annually. In 2024, Wokingham collaborated with Reading, West Berkshire, and Bracknell at Reading Pride to promote fostering inclusivity.

## 3. Workforce

In November 2024, we formally launched our new Children's Services Workforce Academy, providing a strategic hub for all our practice improvement and workforce development activity. Led by our Principal Social Worker, the Academy delivers a range of learning and development opportunities for the service (including bi-annual Practice Weeks, six-weekly Practice Development Forums and a programme of Skills Sessions and Practice Model Training) which are all linked to our strategic improvement areas, and responsive to latest learning from our audits and wider QA processes. The team also coordinates our pipeline recruitment activity – recruiting and supporting our ASYE, Apprenticeship and Frontline cohorts – and runs our bi-annual Career Progression Panel, which governs the progression of social workers to senior practitioner roles. The Academy is now an integral component of our

overarching Recruitment and Retention Strategy, which continues to deliver improving indicators on various fronts – including an increasing rate of permanent staff.

- **Practice Development Forums**
  - 3 forums delivered: Outcome Focused Plans, The Helping Early Strategy, Pre-Birth Assessment
  - Attended by 213 staff
  - 2 Practice Weeks: Working with Older Children (May 24), Child Participation (Nov 24)
- **ASYE Recruitment**
  - 9 ASYEs recruited for 2024–25
  - Monthly group sessions and supervisions ongoing
  - 8–10 expected for 2025-26
- **Career Progression Panel**
  - Panels held in Nov 2024 and Mar 2025
  - 6 social workers progressed to senior practitioner
  - 10 applicants confirmed for next panel
- **Skills Workshops**
  - 7 workshops: Direct Work, Working with Dads, Chronologies
  - Attended by 121 staff
- **Practice Model Training**
  - 32 courses: Neglect, Attachment, Trauma-Informed Practice, Systemic Practice
  - Attended by 359 staff
- **Social Work Apprenticeships**
  - 4 apprentices recruited for 2024–25
  - 3 to qualify in 2026, 1 in 2027
- **Helping Early Support**
  - Systemic Practitioner Consultant appointed Jan 2025
  - 10 monthly sessions on systemic ideas and family outcome questionnaire
  - Linked to Coram, Institute of Family Therapy project
- **Approach Social Work**
  - 4 Frontline/Approach students recruited for 2024–25
  - 5 selected for 2025–26
- **Impact**
  - Locum rate reduced from 27% (Mar 2024) to 13% (Mar 2025)
  - Our Children we Care For and Care Leavers are reporting that they feel services are improving to support them, supported by more consistent relationships.
  - An increasing number of practice learning audits are identifying good and better practice and decision making.
  - Improved systems and developments are helping us to identify those families that require support, however this has resulted in an increased number of children presenting with needs that have required statutory intervention and support.
  - Children and young people’s voices are firmly at the heart of decision making and visibly influencing policy.
- **Plans and Strategic Focus for the Year Ahead**
  - Develop a Learning Hub for resources and guidance
  - Create career pathways for alternatively qualified roles.
  - Advance shared Practice Framework
  - Support and develop Anti-Racist practice
  - Leadership and management training and development

- Further strengthening our participation, engagement and co-production offer.
- Lead on strategic area of priority on behalf of the BWSCP, in relation to practice developments for children who experience intra familia harm.

#### 4. Closing Summary

This year, Wokingham has demonstrated a steadfast and relentless commitment to transforming our children’s social care system in alignment with national reforms and local priorities. Our focus on early intervention, systemic practice, and service integration has driven significant progress across key areas, including the development of the Helping Early Strategy, enhancement of placement sufficiency, and the strengthening of our workforce.

Through targeted initiatives such as the establishment of Family Hubs, expansion of in-house accommodation, and innovative regional collaborations, we are making meaningful strides toward providing families with the support they need at the earliest opportunity and stable, loving homes for our children and supporting our care leavers to thrive. Our investment in workforce development—highlighted by the launch of the Children’s Services Workforce Academy—continues to improve practice quality, reduce reliance on locums and create a sense of permanency and consistency, and foster a culture of continuous learning.

Looking ahead, our strategic priorities will focus on embedding shared practice models, advancing anti-racist practice, and creating sustainable career pathways. We remain committed to working collaboratively with partners, families, and communities to ensure every child and young person in Wokingham is supported to reach their full potential in a safe, nurturing environment.

Together, these efforts reaffirm our dedication to safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of children and families in Wokingham, as we continue our journey of system improvement and positive change.

### INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER CLOSING THOUGHTS

#### Partnership Functioning

The Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership is now functioning with clearer structures, consistent senior engagement has been established and there is an improving culture of shared learning. These are significant achievements given how the Partnership was in 2023. All three local authorities have embedded reform programmes linked to *Families First for Children*. Thames Valley Police and the ICB continue to fulfil statutory partner roles with credible leadership and presence. However, the relative visibility of education at Delegated Safeguarding Partner level remains weaker in 2024 compared to the other agencies.

#### Themes from Scrutiny and Reviews

Scrutiny across the year highlights strengths in threshold management, workforce development and relational practice. Weaknesses remain in the evaluation of impact, particularly in neglect and cumulative harm. Reviews and audits show that professional curiosity and timely information sharing have improved but still vary across agencies. Learning from national and local reviews is being acted on but not yet evaluated for outcomes.

#### Evidence of Impact

There is clear evidence of improvement in workforce stability (Wokingham and Reading), practice quality (West Berkshire) and police response to exploitation. Yet there is less evidence that these gains are systematically translating into improved outcomes for children, such as reduced re-referrals, sustained family change or improved emotional wellbeing.

## Gaps and Areas for Development

Four areas show limited progress across all partners:

1. **Impact measurement:** narrative reporting dominates, there is little outcome data.
2. **Neglect:** toolkits used inconsistently; chronic neglect cases remain high.
3. **Systematic data sharing:** some problems persist in data sharing which impedes joint analysis.
4. **Voice of the child:** strong examples locally, but no consistent partnership feedback loop.

## Learning from Serious Incidents

Police data and review engagement show greater rigour in rapid reviews and exploitation processes. Lessons about professional curiosity, father engagement and school attendance feature prominently. There is some evidence of responsive training (chronologies, male carers), but sustained monitoring is needed.

## Key Decisions and Implementation

The year's key decisions, reform of Family Help, reorganisation of police safeguarding structures and realignment of BFFC governance, demonstrate shared intent to strengthen leadership and coherence. At the end of 2024, the Delegated Safeguarding Partners are working as a team. The challenge is ensuring that strategic change is matched by consistent frontline integration.

## Voice of Children and Families

Examples of co-production (Wokingham), participatory digital tools (Reading) and care-leaver housing support (West Berkshire) are encouraging. However, mechanisms for aggregating and acting on feedback across Berkshire West are underdeveloped. Establishing a unified "voice and influence" framework would meet a clear gap.

## Costs and Value for Money

Future annual reports must include cost pressures and assessment of value for money.

## Education Representation

Education is well-integrated in operational safeguarding but underrepresented strategically. Each local authority's education lead contributes to audits and case reviews, yet headteacher and school governor participation in governance structures remains shallow.

## Data and Information Sharing

Progress is visible through new dashboards and improved police MASH timeliness. However, each partner still uses a separate data system and integrated analytics are absent. A shared performance dataset should be a priority.

## Independent Scrutiny and Leadership

Leadership is now strong and relational. The scrutiny function is respected but could have greater influence if learning was more explicitly logged and tracked.

## Implementation of National Reforms

Berkshire West is well aligned with *Working Together 2023* and the *Stable Homes, Built on Love* agenda. Family Help is a consistent reform theme across all authorities. Police participation in developing multi-agency child protection teams shows readiness for the next phase.

## Summary Judgement

Domain	Judgement	Commentary
Partnership governance and leadership	<b>Good</b>	Stable, relational, improving strategic alignment.
Learning and improvement	<b>Good, with some inconsistencies</b>	Active learning culture but variable evaluation of impact.
Voice of children and families	<b>Requires strengthening</b>	Local examples strong but no partnership-wide mechanism.
Data, performance, and assurance	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Dashboards exist; integration and evaluation lag behind.
Implementation of reforms	<b>Strong</b>	Clear alignment with <i>Families First for Children</i> reforms.
Overall effectiveness of arrangements	<b>Good and improving</b>	System strengthening evident; focus now needed on measuring real-world impact and consistency across agencies.

## Conclusion

The Berkshire West safeguarding arrangements are sound and purposeful. Partners are committed, governance is stable and reform programmes are moving in the right direction. However, the partnership remains data-light and outcome-thin. Progress is real but uneven. To reach the next level of maturity, BWSCP should focus on:

- **Impact over activity:** measuring how learning changes outcomes.
- **Systemic voice:** embedding children’s and families’ feedback in governance.
- **Data integration:** developing a shared multi-agency performance framework, and
- **Financial transparency:** fulfilling the statutory duty to report contributions and value.

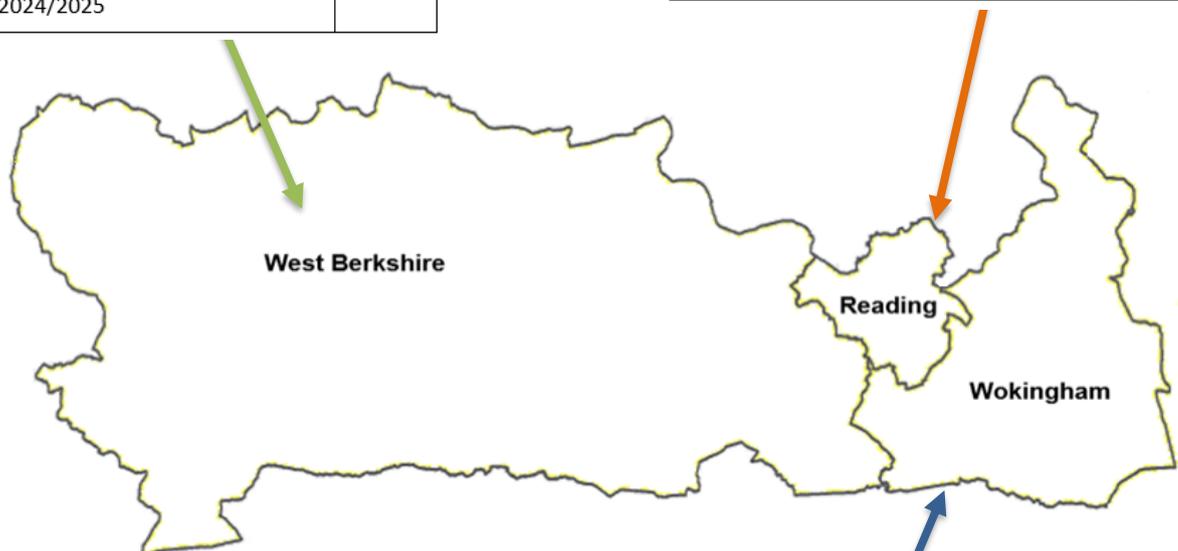
With these developments, the partnership will improve and make more of a difference in the lives of Berkshire West’s children.

**David Goosey**  
Independent Scrutineer

**APPENDIX 1: KNOWING OUR CHILDREN - STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CHILDREN ACROSS BERKSHIRE WEST**

West Berkshire	
West Berks Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	<b>37,122</b>
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>58</b>
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>271</b>
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>53</b>
Domestic Crimes involving Children Q4 2024/2025	<b>185</b>
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2024/2025	<b>13</b>

Reading	
Reading Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	<b>41,808</b>
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>64</b>
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>428</b>
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>71</b>
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2024/2025	<b>226</b>
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) – Q4 2024/2025	<b>45</b>



Wokingham	
Wokingham Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	<b>44,375</b>
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>46.7</b>
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>293</b>
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2025	<b>35</b>
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2024/2025	<b>163</b>
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2024/2025	<b>25</b>

## APPENDIX 2: BWSCP FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

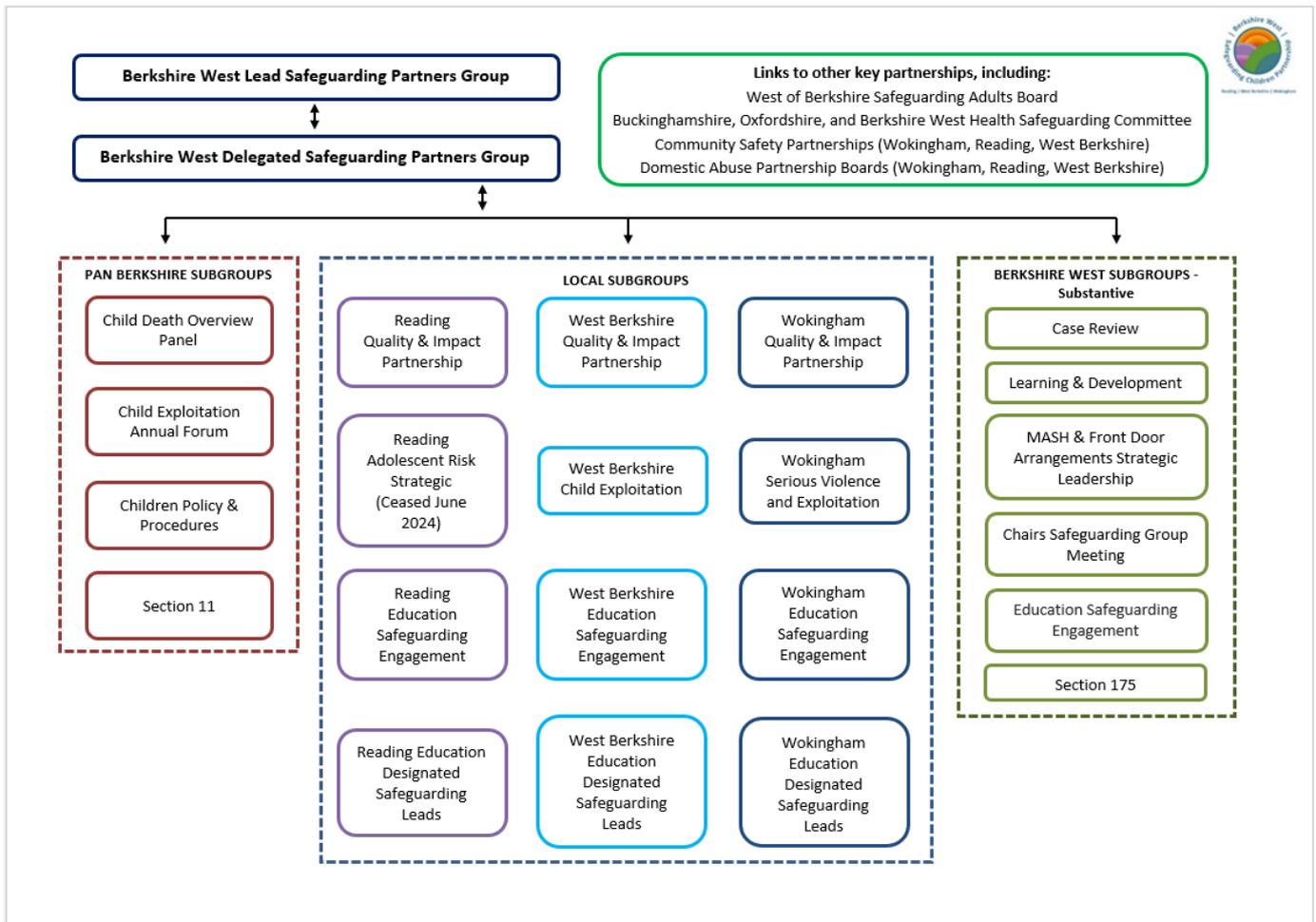
### BWSCP FINANCE REPORT 2024/2025

<b>BWSCP 2024/2025 Finance – Contributions</b>	<b>Amount</b>
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
Underspend from 2023/2024*	£46,000
<b>Total Contributions for 2024/2025</b>	<b>£266,000</b>

\*Underspend includes remaining S31 grant monies received from 2023.

<b>BWSCP 2024/2025 Finance – Outgoings</b>	<b>Amount</b>
BWSCP outgoings (all costs including Business Unit and Scrutineer)	£193,000

## APPENDIX 3: BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE CHART



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