

To: All Members of the Health and  
Wellbeing Board

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10 March 2026

Your contact is: Nicky Simpson - Committee Services

### **NOTICE OF MEETING - HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD 18 MARCH 2026**

A meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board will be held on **Wednesday, 18 March 2026 at 2.00 pm** in the **Meeting Room, The Weller Centre\*\*, 110 Amersham Rd, Reading RG4 5NA**. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

<b>AGENDA</b>	<b>Page No</b>
<b>1. APOLOGIES &amp; DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>	
<b>2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 OCTOBER 2025</b>	5 - 10
<b>3. QUESTIONS</b>	
Consideration of formally submitted questions from members of the public or Councillors under Standing Order 36. Submissions should be emailed to <a href="mailto:committee.services@reading.gov.uk">committee.services@reading.gov.uk</a> and must be received no later than 12noon, four clear working days before the meeting.	
<b>4. PETITIONS</b>	
Consideration of any petitions submitted under Standing Order 36 in relation to matters falling within the Board's Powers & Duties which have been emailed to <a href="mailto:committee.services@reading.gov.uk">committee.services@reading.gov.uk</a> and received no later than four clear working days before the meeting.	

- 5. HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD PRIORITIES 2026-2028** 11 - 14
- A report setting out the three priorities for the Health and Wellbeing Board, which it is proposed should be the focus for the Board over the next two years in order to deliver meaningful change in population health, a proposed governance model and proposed sponsors for the priorities.
- 6. HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD COMPACT** 15 - 18
- A report presenting the draft Reading Health and Wellbeing Board Compact for approval and adoption.
- 7. BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (BWSCP) ANNUAL REPORT FINANCIAL YEAR 2024/2025** 19 - 56
- A report presenting the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report for the Financial Year 2024/2025.
- 8. BETTER CARE FUND INTEGRATION UPDATE** 57 - 64
- A report providing a highlight update on the Integration Programme and performance of Reading against the national Better Care Fund (BCF) targets 2025/26, an update on the Community Wellness Outreach programme of health checks and wellbeing support, and an update on the South East Neighbourhood Accelerator programme in Whitley and Church Wards.
- 9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**
- Proposed dates for the 2026/27 meetings of the Reading Health & Wellbeing Board, for agreement:

<b>Formal public meetings</b>	<b>Informal private meetings</b>
15 July 2026	23 September 2026
21 October 2026	9 December 2026
10 February 2027	24 March 2026

**INFORMATION REPORTS**

- 10. BOB ICB UPDATE BRIEFING** 65 - 66
- A report giving an update on matters from the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board.

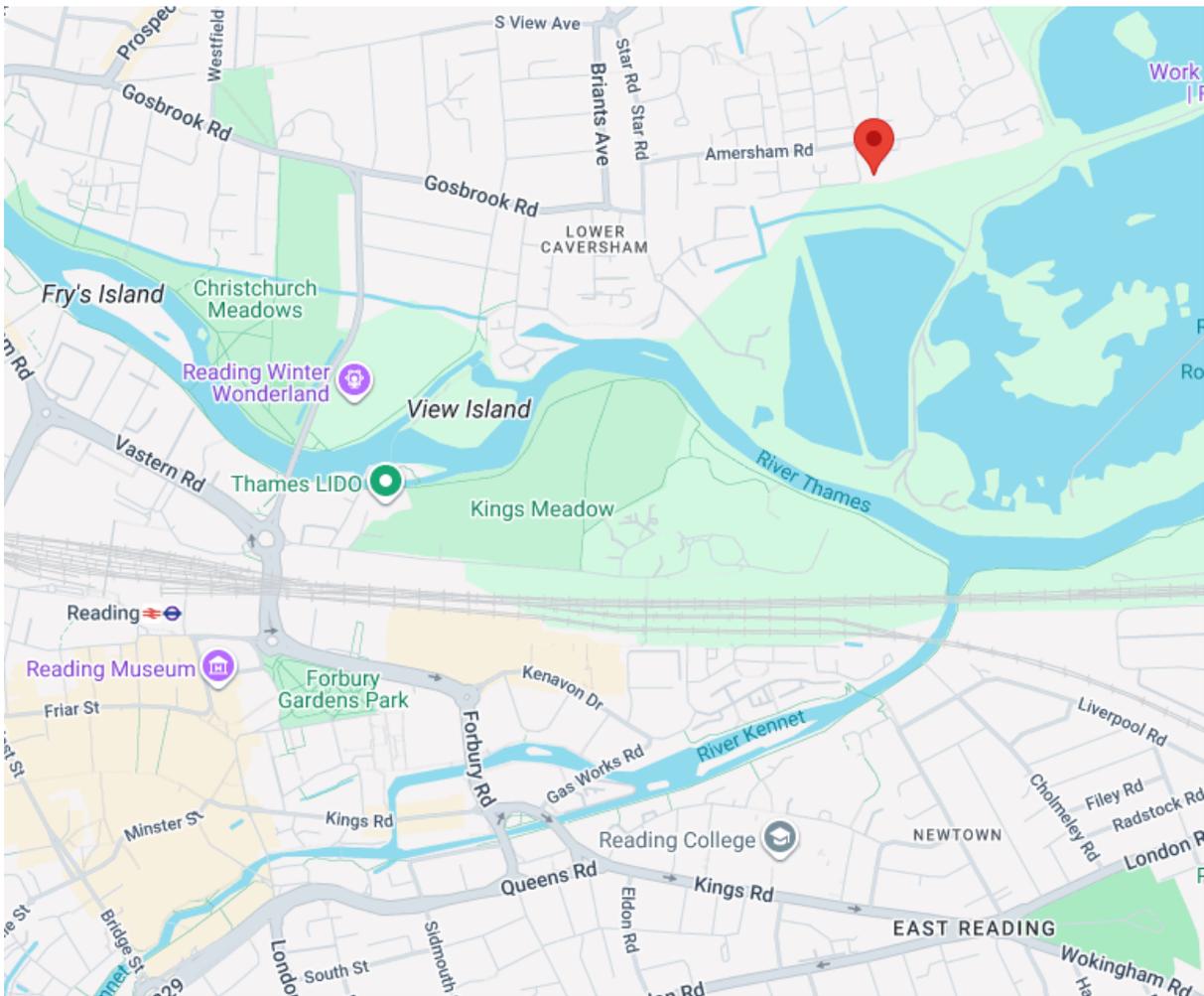
## **\*\*Getting to the Meeting Venue – The Weller Centre**

The meeting will be held in the **Meeting Room in the Weller Centre, 110 Amersham Road, Caversham Reading RG4 5NA.** (see location map below) –

The Meeting Room is accessed through the Café at the Centre.

- Bus routes 27/29 run frequently to and from Friar Street in Reading Town Centre and stop outside the centre. Parking is available outside the centre.
- The Weller Centre's number is 0118 947 5828

If you have any questions about access, please contact Nicky Simpson – contact details above.



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**Present:**

Councillor Rachel Eden (Chair)	Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health, Reading Borough Council (RBC)
Andy Ciecierski	Clinical Director for Caversham Primary Care Network
Karen Cridland	Director for Children, Family & All Age Services, Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT)
Councillor Paul Gittings	Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, RBC
Brian Grady	Director of Education, RBC
Councillor Wendy Griffith	Lead Councillor for Children, RBC
Alice Kunjappy-Clifton	Lead Officer, Healthwatch Reading
Councillor Micky Leng	Deputy Leader, RBC
Matt Pearce	Director of Public Health for Reading and West Berkshire
Katie Prichard-Thomas	Chief Nursing Officer, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust (RBFT)
Ben Riley	Chief Medical Officer, BOB ICB
Rachel Spencer	Chief Executive, Reading Voluntary Action

**Also in attendance:**

Keith Brown	Chair, West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board
Zoe Campbell	Business Manager, Public Health, RBC
Jamie Evans	Area Director, Healthwatch in Berkshire West
Lara Fromings	Assistant Director for Transformation, Commissioning and Performance, RBC

**Apologies:**

Colin Hudson	Reading LPA Commander, Thames Valley Police (TVP)
Steve Leonard	West Hub Group Manager, RBFRS
Lara Patel	Executive Director of Children’s Services, RBC
Councillor Liz Terry	Leader of the Council, RBC
Melissa Wise	Executive Director – Community & Adult Social Care Services, RBC

**9. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2025 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**10. WEST OF BERKSHIRE SAFEGUARDING ADULTS PARTNERSHIP BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24**

Professor Keith Brown submitted a report presenting the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Partnership Board (SAB) Annual Report for 2023-24. A copy of the SAB’s Annual Report was attached at Appendix 1.

The report outlined the role of the SAB and listed the priorities that the SAB had set for the 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 years. The SAB’s Annual Report 2023-24 outlined the achievements of the SAB during 2023/24 across the Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham areas and included:

- statistics on the number of safeguarding concerns and enquiries recorded;
- trends identified across the West of Berkshire area;
- details of the risks identified and the actions taken to mitigate them;

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- details of the progress made towards the 2023/24 priorities and achievements through working together;
- highlights from the Voluntary Sector and Healthwatch Sub Group;
- Annual Budget and financial contribution
- summaries of the Safeguarding Adult Reviews conducted by the SAB;
- reflection on areas of success in 2023/24 and areas for improvement;
- further details of the key priorities set by the SAB for 2024/25.

The report stated that one of the areas identified in the annual report for improvement was for the West of Berkshire Safeguarding Adults Partnership to improve its links with Health and Wellbeing Boards, Community Safety Partnerships and Children's Safeguarding Boards. The SAB, in collaboration with the Children's Safeguarding Board, was developing a proposal for all strategic partnerships across the West of Berkshire to adopt a shared protocol which would require each partnership board to provide biannual update reports to the collective strategic partnerships in the area. The protocol aimed to enhance strategic collaboration by promoting:

- Shared situational awareness of safeguarding activities
- Alignment on shared priorities
- Identification of opportunities for collaboration
- Avoidance of duplication
- Stronger collective impact

At the time of writing the report an invitation letter to request Reading Health and Wellbeing Board to sign up to the protocol was being drafted.

Keith Brown addressed the Board on the SAB's priority around embedding a good understanding of the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) within the practices of statutory partners, noting that more work was needed to ensure that the Act was understood at all levels, and that it was used in a decision-specific way. He stated that the SAB website had lots of information about and guides on how to use the MCA, which could be shared by partners with their colleagues: <https://sabberkshirewest.co.uk/professionals/practice-guidance/mental-capacity-act-and-dols> He noted that there was no legal definition of "next of kin" and it was suggested that partners needed to consider what contact information they actually needed from individuals and for what purpose, eg "emergency contact in case of illness/death". He also noted that not enough people were arranging for Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) for themselves, suggesting that everyone over 18 should be encouraged to have an LPA for Health & Welfare in case of emergencies or accidents (as well as the more commonly arranged LPA for Property & Finance), rather than people often not considering LPAs until later in life, and that the Health & Wellbeing Board could have a role in this.

He also addressed the Board on the SAB's priority for 2025/26 on preventing financial exploitation of adults with care and support needs, noting that there was a need to raise public awareness of fraud within families and by paid carers. He said that he was keen to get all partner organisations to cooperate on this and work together but that he was having difficulties as Chair of the SAB in engaging with the Community Safety Partnership.

The Board discussed the report and the points made included:

- The learning pages from the Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) were valuable in providing useful information and guidance for partners.

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- There was currently a Dying Well project in Reading, and the issues raised about LPAs for Health & Wellbeing and Property & Finance could also be linked into that project.
- There was a lack of training on and understanding of the MCA within organisations and it would be good to widen that out.

### Resolved –

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That partners look in their individual organisations at the best way to ask for “next of kin” information, depending on what was actually needed;
- (3) That partners flag up in their organisations the availability of training and information on the MCA on the SAB website and cascade the information as appropriate;
- (4) That Councillor Eden speak to Councillor Gittings and Alice Kunjappy-Clifton about how best to engage locally on encouraging residents to arrange LPAs for both Health & Wellbeing and Property & Finance, well in advance of any crisis;
- (5) That Councillor Eden speak to Councillor colleagues about Community Safety Partnership engagement with the SAB around raising awareness of financial exploitation of adults with care and support needs.

### 11. DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT 2025

Matt Pearce submitted a report presenting the Director of Public Health’s Annual Report for 2025, on “Setting the Foundations for Lifelong Health”, which was attached at Appendix 1.

The Annual Report set out the health of infants and parents in Reading and the challenges they faced, alongside the work and achievements made in giving children the best opportunities for good health, both now and in the future. The report provided an overview of the health and wellbeing status of parents and children during infancy (0-5 years), highlighting areas where Reading benchmarked well, and areas that needed attention. The report set out several recommendations for the Health and Wellbeing Board and partner agencies to consider, outlining how public health and the wider system could improve the health and wellbeing of Reading infants and reduce health inequalities. The high-level recommendations were based on evidence of what worked to reduce health inequalities:

- 1 Invest in parent support programmes
- 2 Increase uptake of healthy start vouchers
- 3 Ensure the successful implementation of family hubs
- 4 Improve oral health
- 5 Empower families to plan for pregnancy
- 6 Improve vaccination uptake
- 7 Adopt a whole system approach to trauma-informed practice
- 8 Become a ‘child-friendly’ Borough
- 9 Develop a health promotion programme for early years settings
- 10 Better data and information sharing across agencies
- 11 Have a high-performing Healthy Child Programme

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The report stated that the recommendations would need to be delivered through a whole-system approach, with a focus on joint working across organisations.

The report stated that, since work on the Annual Report had commenced, the Government had announced a series of policy measures through their Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life Strategy that would, in part, support the implementation of the recommendations set out in the report.

Matt Pearce said that the One Reading Children and Young People's Partnership would be considering the Annual Report and its recommendations to see what they would mean in practice.

It was noted that members of the Health and Wellbeing Board were holding a private workshop following the public meeting to discuss the Board's future priorities, and this report would provide useful information to feed into that discussion.

It was suggested that information from the Annual Report should be communicated to the wider community, as well as to professionals, including perhaps an easy-read accessible version, availability in other languages, and a video.

### **Resolved –**

- (1) That the report be noted;
- (2) That the members of the Board share the DPH Annual Report 2025 within their respective organisations and networks to consider the recommendations contained within it;
- (3) That Matt Pearce look at ways to communicate the information in the DPH Annual Report in a helpful and meaningful way to the wider community.

## **12. READING'S PHARMACEUTICAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT 2025-28**

Further to Minute 40 of the meeting held on 17 January 2025, Zoe Campbell submitted a report seeking approval from the Health & Wellbeing Board for the Reading Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) 2025-2028, to cover the period from 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2028. The Reading Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2025-2028 was appended to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Health and Wellbeing Board had a statutory responsibility to refresh the PNA and to publish it on the Council's website by 1 October 2025. The purpose of the PNA was to assess the need for pharmaceutical services in the Reading area, to publish a statement of that assessment and to establish whether there were any gaps in provision. The PNA would be used to inform the decision-making process regarding applications for new pharmacies and could also be used to inform commissioning of services that may be provided within pharmacies such as those funded by the NHS and local authorities.

A Consultant, Healthy Dialogues, had been appointed to prepare the PNA, reporting to a local Task and Finish Group of key stakeholders. The process had been overseen by a Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Steering Group. The process had included:

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- A review of the current and future demographics and health needs of the Reading population.
- A survey of Reading patients and the public on their use and expectations of pharmaceutical services and an equality impact assessment.
- An assessment of the commissioned Essential, Advanced, Enhanced and Locally Commissioned services and services delivered by dispensing GPs in Reading.

A consultation draft of the PNA had been published for formal consultation between 14 May and 13 July 2025. Responses to the consultation had been considered by the task group and steering group before final production of the PNA.

The report highlighted the PNA's findings that Reading was well served in relation to the number and location of pharmacies, with good access to necessary and other relevant services, with no gaps in the current and future provision of these services identified. It noted that there were 27 pharmacies, supported by one dispensing appliance contractor and one distance selling pharmacy located within Reading, along with six community pharmacies located in neighbouring authorities within a mile of Reading's border.

### **Resolved -**

That the final Reading Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment 2025-2028 be formally approved by the Health & Wellbeing Board.

### **13. BOB ICB UPDATE BRIEFING**

The Board received a briefing note from the BOB Integrated Care Board, as at September 2025.

The report covered the following areas:

- BOB ICB Board meetings
- BOB ICB Transition Programme
- Resident Doctors Industrial Action
- Community Equipment Provider Change
- Winter Vaccines Support
- Reducing Medicines Waste Campaign

**Resolved -** That the report be noted.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and closed at 2.58 pm)

**CHAIR:**.....**DATE:** 18/3/26

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## READING HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	18 March 2026
<b>Title</b>	Health and Wellbeing Board Priorities 2026-2028
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report author</b>	Dr Matt Pearce
<b>Job title</b>	Director of Public Health
<b>Organisation</b>	Reading Borough Council
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To agree that the priorities for the Health and Wellbeing Board for the medium term should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best Start in Life</li> <li>• All age Mental Health</li> <li>• Healthy Neighbourhoods</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. That the proposed governance model be implemented through existing partnership arrangements with subgroups tasked with developing delivery plans and outcomes frameworks.</li> <li>3. Appointment of board sponsors for each priority area who will have responsibility for overseeing development and delivery of the plans.</li> </ol>

### 1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1. This report sets out the three priorities for the Health and Wellbeing Board, which it is proposed should be the focus for the Health and Wellbeing Board over the next two years in order to deliver meaningful change in population health.

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Local Government Association (LGA) was invited to undertake a review of the Health and Wellbeing Board's governance and working practices to evaluate its effectiveness in improving the health and wellbeing of the local population and reducing health inequalities and make recommendations for improvement.
- 2.2. The review recommended that the Health and Wellbeing Board should focus on two or three priorities at a time, which were informed by local need and evidence. This would help the Board to focus its collective resources to delivery meaningful change rather than diluting its efforts across a larger number of activities.
- 2.3. This report outlines the work that has been completed following the LGA review and makes recommendations for areas where the Board could focus its attention in the medium term. It also outlines the governance for effective oversight of each priority and identification of board sponsors.

### 3. Background / Context

- 2.1 Last year, the Local Government Association (LGA) was invited to undertake a review of the Health and Wellbeing Board's governance and working practices. The aim was to evaluate its effectiveness in improving the health and wellbeing of the local population and reducing health inequalities, and to make recommendations for improvement. A key

recommendation arising from the review was for the Board to have a focus on just two or three priorities at a time in order to drive meaningful change.

- 2.2 There was widespread agreement amongst partners that the Board should be driven by data, with activity informed by the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), intelligence from Healthwatch and patient groups.
- 2.3 A high level 'state of the borough' JSNA was presented to Board Members and other stakeholders at a workshop on 7 October 2025. This was used to generate a long list of potential priorities, which included:
- Healthy neighbourhoods
  - Best start in life
  - Adult mental health
  - People with long term conditions
  - CYP mental health
  - Social isolation and loneliness
  - Smoking
  - Cancer
  - Sexual health
- 2.4 Through a prioritisation process, the following areas were collectively identified as important by health and wellbeing board members:
- Healthy neighbourhoods
  - Best start in life
  - Children and young people and adult mental health
- 2.5 These priorities were identified as there is both national momentum and/or a local requirement to accelerate these areas of work as evidence suggested improvements were needed in health outcomes across these priorities
- 2.6 A second workshop was held on 4 December 2025 to review current activity, possible future options and next steps for the development of delivery plans associated with each of the priorities. Key outcomes are summarised below.
- 2.7 **Healthy Neighbourhoods**
- 2.8 The NHS 10-Year Plan outlines its ambition to establish neighbourhood health services that provide co-ordinated community-based care, focusing on prevention and support for long term conditions. It is anticipated that Health and Wellbeing Boards will have overall oversight of Neighbourhood Health plans and therefore this presents an opportunity for the Board to focus on this area and mobilise their collective efforts.
- 2.9 Neighbourhood health was about more than just health services and it was important to look wider than the NHS services and for communities to be active partners in the design and delivery of neighbourhood services and integrated working
- 2.10 **Best Start in Life**
- 2.11 The 'State of the Borough Report' identified several health outcomes that needed attention across the borough including; maternal obesity, infant mortality, child development, tooth decay, childhood obesity, immunisations, teenage pregnancy and child poverty
- 2.12 The Government had published a [Giving every child the best start in life](#) strategy which required all local authorities to develop and publish best start plans by the end of March 26. This included raising the proportion of 5-year-olds achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) to 75.9%; by 2028 and disadvantaged children benefitting *at least equally* from this improvement. It also required strengthening support for families from pregnancy to age 5, focusing on early intervention.

- 2.13 Good progress has already been made across a number of areas, and it was recognised that there would be opportunities around co-location of services in future.
- 2.14 **Mental Health**
- 2.15 The 'State of the Borough Report' identified a number of outcomes that the Board wished to improve including, child mental health, self-harm, suicide, rates of depression and severe mental illness
- 2.16 It was suggested that there was a need to free up resources from high demand, complex cases and crisis treatment in order to focus on primary prevention. There was also a recognition that more work was needed around suicide prevention and that refreshed action plan was needed.
- 2.17 **Governance**
- 2.18 In order to effective oversight of the three priorities, three partnership groups have been identified to oversee each priority:
- Best Start in Life - One Reading Partnership
  - Children and Adult - All age Mental Wellbeing Board
  - Healthy Neighbourhoods - Reading Integration Board (RIB)
- 2.19 There was widespread support at the workshop for each priority to be allocated a Health and Wellbeing Board Member as a sponsor. They will have responsibility for overseeing development and delivery of the plans and will be accountable to the Health and Wellbeing Board. The Health and Wellbeing Board Sponsors will be:
- Best Start in Life – Director of Children Services (RBC)
  - Neighbourhood Health – Associate Director of Place (ICB)
  - Mental Health – Director of Strategic Planning (BHFT)
- 2.20 **Delivery and Resources**
- 2.21 Although Delivery Plans will be developed for all three priorities, development of the Local Neighbourhood Health Plan and Best Start in Life Delivery Plan will be prioritised to meet timescales specified by central government.
- 2.22 Each delivery plan will be fully costed and resources allocated to deliver them. Actions will be focused on local needs, informed by data, and will reflect available funding, aligning budgets wherever possible.
- 2.23 The plans will have SMART measures to clearly indicate where actions and associated targets have been achieved. To support each delivery plan, outcomes frameworks will be developed that include intermediary input and output metrics that will look to shift outcomes. Also, dashboards will be developed to facilitate tracking and reporting of progress.
- 4. Contribution to Reading's Health and Wellbeing Strategic Aims**
- 4.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board has responsibility for delivery of the objectives set-out in the [Berkshire West Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2021-30](#). The three priorities will not supersede the priorities outlined within the health and wellbeing strategy, but will complement and support delivery of existing priorities.
- 5. Environmental and Climate Implications**
- 5.1. There are no general implications for the environment arising from this report; however the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy will have shared and mutual benefits given the cross-cutting ambitions to reduce levels of obesity, eat more healthily and increase levels of physical activity through active travel.

## **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. Several officers and members have been engaged in the Health and Wellbeing Board as noted in this report. The proposals include greater community engagement and giving a voice to the seldom heard.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. Not applicable.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1. Not applicable.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1. Not applicable.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1. The proposals in this paper may incur costs as delivery plans are developed across each of the three priorities. Some of the priority will, or have received additional resources through national funding e.g. family first, supervised toothbrushing.
- 10.2. Any funding will be committed in line with existing grant conditions (where applicable) and will be set within the existing financial envelope of the services.

## **11. Timetable for Implementation**

- 11.1. As detailed in this paper

## **12. Background Papers**

- 12.1. None

## **Appendices**

None



## READING HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	18 March 2026
<b>Title</b>	Health and Wellbeing Board Compact
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report author</b>	Dr Matt Pearce
<b>Job title</b>	Director of Public Health
<b>Organisation</b>	Reading Borough Council
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. To approve and adopt the Reading Health and Wellbeing Board Compact and agree to adhere to the principles and ways of working set out within it.

### 1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1. This report presents the draft Reading Health and Wellbeing Board Compact for approval and adoption.

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. Following the Local Government Association review of the Health and Wellbeing Board last year, several changes to governance and working practices were proposed and agreed at the Board meeting on 11 July 2025.
- 2.2. These included the development of a Reading Health and Wellbeing Board Compact setting out how members will work collectively as a strategic partnership to drive meaningful action and achieve the vision articulated in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This report presents the draft Compact for approval and adoption.

### 1. Background / Context

- 2.1 One of the recommendations arising from the recent Local Government Association review of the Health and Wellbeing Board was to develop a Compact – this was agreed at the Health and Wellbeing Board meeting on 11 July 2025.
- 2.2 The intention was for the Compact to set out how Board members will work collectively as a strategic partnership to drive meaningful action and achieve the vision articulated in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 2.3 The Compact has been drafted by the Director of Public Health in consultation with Board members and is provided in Appendix 1. It has been developed with reference to other best practice examples across the country.
- 2.4 The Compact seeks to establish a mutual understanding of how the Board will operate and to define members' roles and responsibilities in delivering its function to deliver meaningful change and improve outcomes for people in reading. It sets out a number of core principles and how these should be practically supported.
- 2.5 Development of the Compact is timely given the current focus on neighbourhood health, which will require more integrated working amongst Health and Wellbeing Board partners.

## **2. Contribution to Reading's Health and Wellbeing Strategic Aims**

- 2.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board has responsibility for delivery of the objectives set-out in the [Berkshire West Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2021-30](#). The Compact sets out a way of working that will likely lead to successful delivery against strategy priorities.

## **3. Environmental and Climate Implications**

- 3.1. There are no general implications for the environment arising from this report.

## **4. Community Engagement**

- 4.1. No community engagement was undertaken as part of this report

## **5. Equality Implications**

- 5.1. Not applicable.

## **6. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 6.1. Not applicable.

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1. Not applicable.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1. Not applicable.

## **9. Timetable for Implementation**

- 9.1. As detailed in this paper

## **10. Background Papers**

- 10.1. None

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1 – Reading Health and Wellbeing Board Compact**

## Reading Health and Wellbeing Board Compact

This document defines the shared principles and jointly set expectations for how Reading Health and Wellbeing Board members will work collectively as a strategic partnership to drive meaningful action and achieve the vision of its Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS).

The compact seeks to establish a mutual understanding of how the Board will operate and members' roles and responsibilities in delivering its function to generate impact on improving outcomes for the people in Reading.

Regarding operating principles, members agreed the Reading Health and Wellbeing Board will:

1. Behave as a genuine strategic partnership, recognising its distinct role and function from scrutiny, establishing a culture of shared responsibility, accountability and collaboration.
2. Clearly establish its role in promoting prevention, equity and driving improvement on the building blocks of health and endeavour to utilise a common language.
3. Seek to maximise opportunities that are within the board's control and commit to exploring opportunities that are negotiable across its membership in a supportively challenging way.
4. Ensure that system leadership is collaborative across its membership, with commitment from its nominated organisations to take a proactive role in enabling, influencing, actioning and championing the work of the Board.
5. Seek to prioritise its focus based on evidence of need and where it can add most value as a strategic partnership, whilst retaining oversight of the wider Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
6. Ensure parity between its members by providing sufficient opportunity to influence its work programme/activities within and between Board meetings, supported through an annual development session.
7. Use 'additionality' as an essential criterion when prioritising its work programme, ensuring that the Board is adding value by giving focus to a topic, above and beyond that of a single member organisation and is not duplicating activity elsewhere in the system.
8. Ensure the format of discussion is appropriate for the focus and purpose of any topic, in order to enable action. This may include formal meetings, task and finish groups or workshops, recognising a high frequency of formal meetings and volume of reporting does not equate to success.
9. Ensure that wider stakeholders are engaged in the Board's work where appropriate, to better identify opportunities to drive action and make connections across relevant agendas.
10. Seek to better engage and reflect the voice of residents in the work of the Board, including through working groups/workshops where people may have an interest or expertise.

Reading Health and Wellbeing Board members agreed they would support these principles by:

1. Recognising that although it will sometimes be appropriate to seek assurance or further understanding, their role on the Board is distinct from scrutiny.

2. Representing the group, organisation, and / or partnership that they speak for and ensuring they enable a feedback loop between the Board and that group, organisation and / or partnership.
3. Bringing the system leadership, insight, knowledge, perspective and strategic capacity they have through their role and taking responsibility for recognising where their group, organisation and / or partnership can add value in relation to a particular topic.
4. Ensuring that contributions within meetings are evidence based and when bringing in local insight, recognising the need to have a population (rather than individual) focus.
5. Being proactive and willing to propose and take away actions on behalf of the group, organisation and / or partnership they represent and report back progress within agreed timescales.
6. Proactively informing the Board's work programme, ensuring appropriate items are brought to the Board's attention for consideration.
7. Acting in an inclusive and open manner, recognising the strengths, constraints and contributions other partners may be able to make, to collectively identify constructive action.
8. Viewing the Board as a network and understanding its role is broader than formal meetings, recognising the importance of making connections and implementing actions in between.
9. Supportively challenging each other to adhere to the principles set out within the Health and Wellbeing Board compact.



## READING HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	18 March 2026
<b>Title</b>	Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report Financial Year 2024/2025
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note the report for information
<b>Report author</b>	Alastair Harsant
<b>Job title</b>	Strategic Partnership Manager
<b>Organisation</b>	Business Unit for the BWSCP, hosted by Reading Borough Council
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. Not Applicable, report for information

### 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 inspectors 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.

3.5. 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.*

3.6. The local Reading response to 3.5 included 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.

3.7. **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.

3.8. **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.

3.9. **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 examples in cases which do not meet a statutory 'threshold'.

- 3.10. **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.
- 3.11. **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.
- 3.12. 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.
- 3.13. 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 Reading's Health and Wellbeing Strategic Aims**

- 4.1. The work of the BWSCP aligns with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy by contributing to the Strategy's priorities of 'Help children and families in early years' and 'Promote positive mental health and wellbeing in children and young people'.

#### **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. Not applicable.

**10. Financial Implications**

10.1. Not applicable.

**11. Timetable for Implementation**

11.1. Not applicable.

**12. Background Papers**

12.1. There are none.

**Appendices**

- Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report Financial Year 2024/2025



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.
<p><b>Update on actions and impact:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In person meetings have continued through the financial year rotating between local authorities to aid conversations and relationship building.</li> <li>• A Berkshire wide data dashboard remains in development to focus on identifying themes and requires the input of all statutory partners.</li> <li>• 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).</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	

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://www.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 framework 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.
- Pincroft 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.

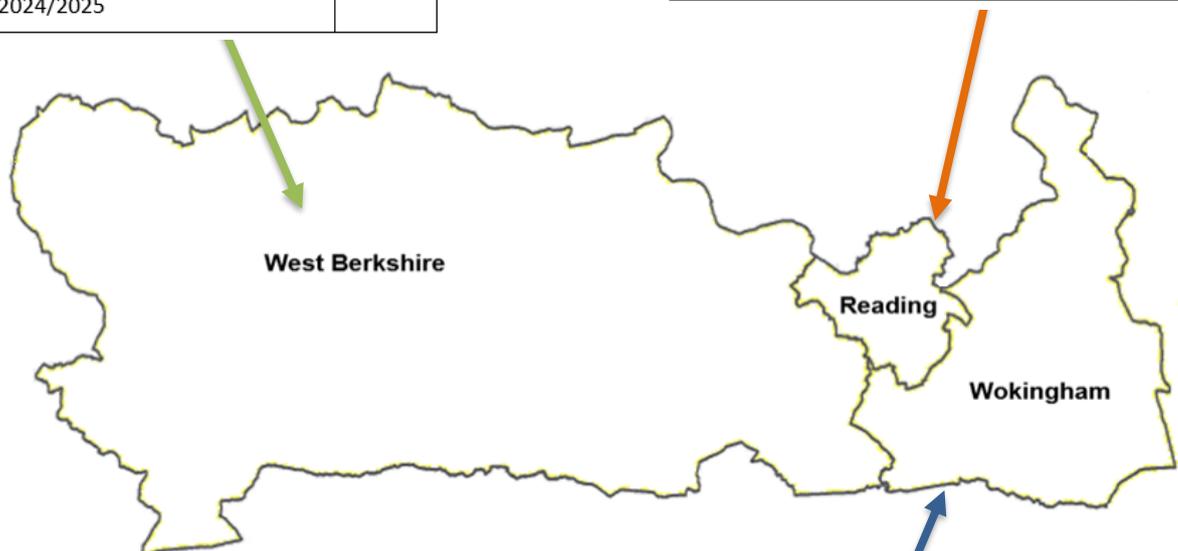
With these developments, the partnership will improve and make more of a difference in the lives of Berkshire West’s children.

**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

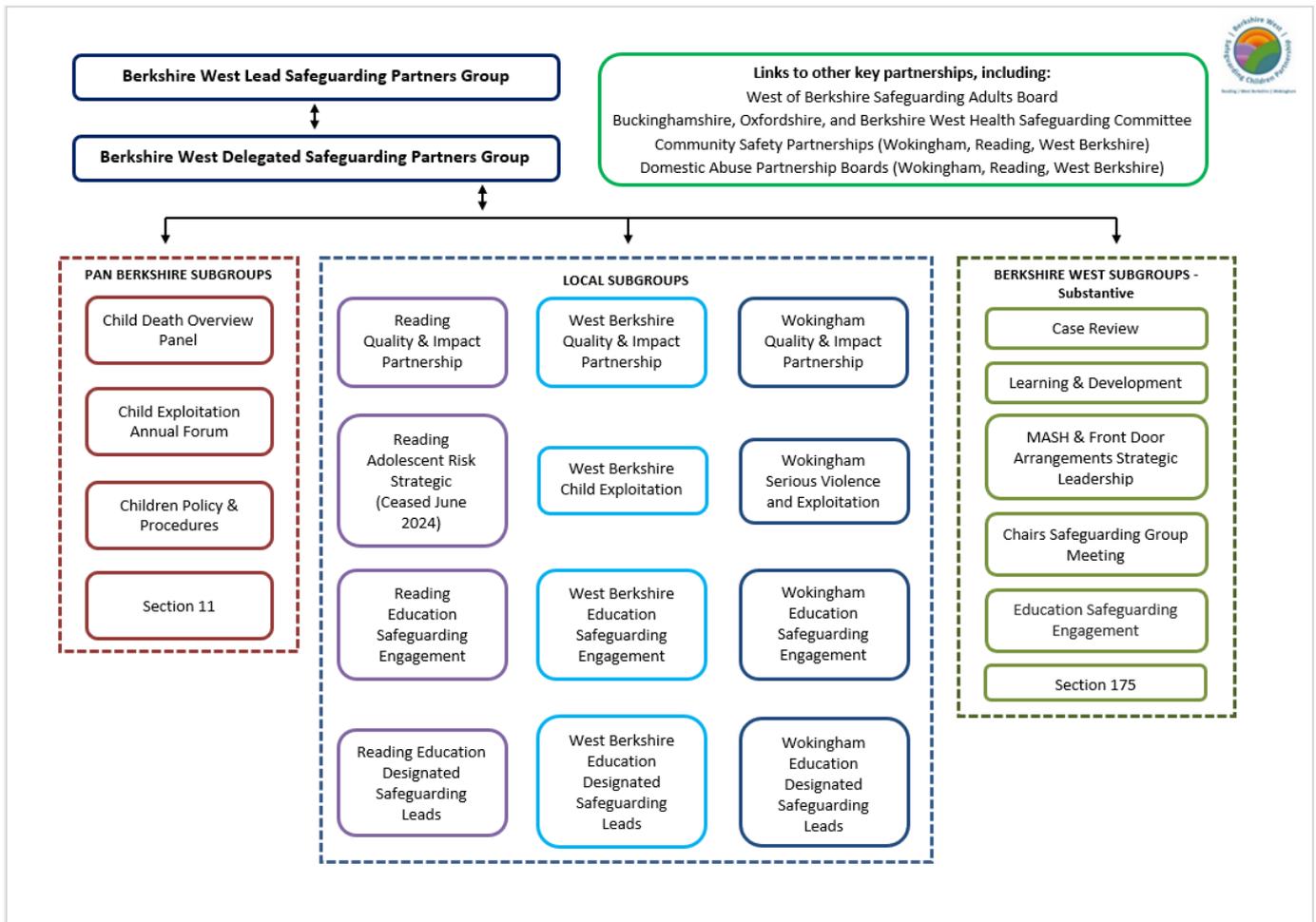
### BWSCP FINANCE REPORT 2024/2025

<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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## READING HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	18 March 2026
<b>Title</b>	BCF Integration Update
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To note the report for information
<b>Report author</b>	Beverley Nicholson
<b>Job title</b>	Integration Programme Manager
<b>Organisation</b>	RBC – Adult Social Care / BOB Integrated Care Board
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the performance against BCF Metrics for 2025/26 is noted as at Quarter 3.</li> <li>2. That the Board note the BCF 2025/26 Quarterly Returns for Quarters 1, 2 and 3 were submitted by due dates following the Delegated Authority procedure.</li> <li>3. That the Board note that the Reading BCF 2025/26 arrangements remain compliant with the Four National Conditions, and that the Section 75 Deed of Variation for 2025/26 was signed and sealed on 8 October 2025.</li> <li>4. That the Board note progress updates related to the Community Wellness Outreach project and the South East Neighbourhood Accelerator Programme.</li> </ol>

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a highlight update on the Integration Programme and performance of Reading against the national Better Care Fund (BCF) targets 2025/26, and an update on the Community Wellness Outreach programme of health checks and wellbeing support, and the South East Neighbourhood Accelerator programme in Whitley and Church Wards.
- 1.2 We are compliant with the BCF National Conditions, and the metrics were agreed with system partners during the BCF Planning process for 2025/26. We received confirmation of acceptance of our BCF plan from the National Better Care Fund team on 30th May 2025. We are on track to meet two of the three metrics, in relation to emergency hospital admissions and the number of people admitted into care homes to meet their long term care needs. We are not on track to meet the new hospital discharge targets but have improved performance compared to 2024/25 as a result of process changes to triage, introduction of a hospital to home service, and continued support through our dedicated hospital discharge team.
- 1.3 The Community Wellness Outreach programme has delivered over 4,400 health checks and wellbeing reviews, identifying risks early to prevent progression to cardiovascular disease. Of those seen, 78% were from priority cohorts. We had a 43% response rate to

our questions about awareness of risks, and 95% of those responding, reported improved understanding of health risks and how to make healthier choices.

- 1.5 The South East Accelerator programme for Neighbourhood Working is progressing well, focused on a cohort of people who live alone in Whitley and Church Wards, who have an enhanced care plan. The team is multi-disciplinary and have mapped out the initial approach to segmentation of our cohort to identify a core group who would benefit from a concentrated holistic review of their needs. Learning from the accelerator programme is being shared with the Neighbourhood Steering Group to inform the development of Neighbourhood Teams across Reading.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The Better Care Fund Policy Framework 2025/261 sets out the principles for the pooling of funds to support integrated working across health and social care, to ensure the right care is available to people at the right time. The Reading Integration Board (RIB) is responsible for leading and overseeing system working with Local Authority Adult Social Care and Housing, Acute and Community health providers, Primary Care, Integrated Care Board (ICB) Commissioners, Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector partners and Healthwatch, across Reading. The aim of the board is to enable partners and other interested stakeholders to agree and deliver a programme of work that promotes integrated working to achieve the national Better Care Fund (BCF) performance targets and objectives and align with the Council Plan, and Place based objectives.

## 3. Performance Update for Better Care Fund and the Integration Programme

### 3.1. BCF Performance as at the end of Quarter 3, 2025/26

An overview of the BCF targets and performance compared to the previous period are shown in this table:

BCF Performance Highlight			
BCF Metric	Target	Actual <small>(Adj. due to pop changes 65+)</small>	Last Mnth - Trend
<b>4.1 Emergency admissions to hospital for people aged 65+ per 100,000 population</b>	No more than 18,226 per annum	12,539 (Cumulative data, Dec), Current projection to end of year 16,718	G Stable
4.1.1 The number of avoidable admissions (unplanned hospitalisation for chronic ambulatory care) per 100,000 population	No more than 753 per annum	375 (Cumulative data, Dec), Current projection to end of year 500.	G Stable
4.1.2 The number of emergency hospital admissions due to falls in people aged 65 and over, per 100,000 population.	No more than 1,601 per annum	892 (Cumulative data, Dec), Current projection to end of year 1,189	G Stable
<b>4.2 Proportion of adult patients discharged from acute hospitals on their discharge ready date. (DRD)</b>	No less than 79.9% (ave. per annum)	70.4% (Dec data), Current projection to end of year 72.8%	A Worse
4.2.1 Average length of delay for adult patients not discharged on their DRD (Per 100,000 pop)	Average delay no more than 3.2 days (ave. quarter 3)	4.14 days (Dec data), Current projection to end of year 4.14 days	R Improved by 1 day
<b>4.3 The number of older adults whose long-term care needs are met by admission to residential or nursing care per 100,000 population</b>	No more than 880 per annum	487 (Cumulative data, Dec), current projection to end of year 650	G Stable
4.3.1 The proportion of people discharged home using data on discharge to their usual place of residence	Not less than 92.2% (ave. per annum)	93.1% (Dec data), Current projection to end of year 91.6%.	A Improved
4.3.2 The proportion of people who received reablement during the year, where no further request was made for ongoing support (ASCOF 2a)	No target set - monitored	86.1% (December data), current projection to end of year 92.2%	Worse

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/better-care-fund-planning-requirements-2025-26/>

Operational services have reported that often delays are caused as a result of awaiting equipment, court of protection processes and family expectations about ongoing care. Whilst we are not on track to meet the hospital discharge metrics this table shows the improvements in performance compared to the previous year:

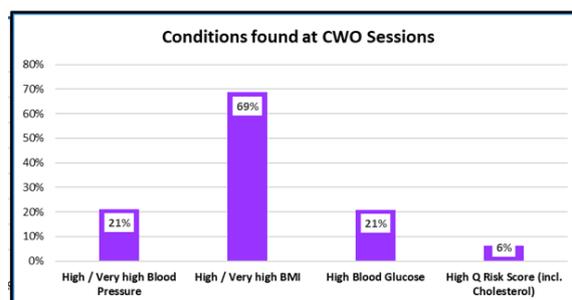
Comparison 2024/25 to 2025/26			
Pathway 0 (1 day)	2024/25 Average	2025/26 Average	Change
Reading	2.4	1.8	▼
Pathway 1 (2 Days)			
Reading CRT	2.1	2.1	↔
Reading POC	6.7	4.8	▼
<b>Reading P1 Average</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.1</b>	▼
Pathway 2 (2 days)			
Reading	2.7	2.7	↔
Pathway 3 (6.5 days)			
Reading	18.8	13.3	▼

### 3.2 Community Wellness Outreach

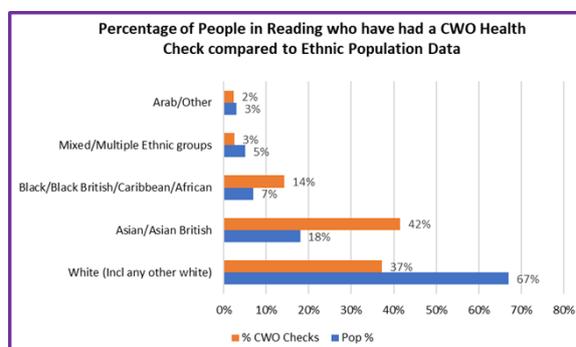
There have been 4,416 checks (as at end of Jan 2026), which represents 51% of the adjusted target (8667 to 30/06/26). 95% of respondents agreed that they have a better understanding of CVD risk and how to reduce the risk, after talking with the Nurses at the check.

Since April 2025, 76% of appointments have been booked through the website <https://rva.org.uk/community-wellness-outreach/> and 26% were drop-ins, which clearly demonstrates the need for a drop-in option for this service.

Conditions identified during the checks to date: 69% very high/high body mass index (BMI), 21% very high/high blood pressure, 21% with high blood glucose levels (a pre-indicator of diabetes) and 6% high Q-risk score, indicating potential high cholesterol and higher cardiovascular risk factors.



The team have maintained the reach to ethnically diverse groups, with 61% of people attending being from ethnically diverse backgrounds, 56% from Asian/Black background, who have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes.



The age range was widened for these community-based checks and 5% of people seen were above 75 yrs and 36% were below 40 years of age. These checks have enabled early intervention to prevent development of heart disease and diabetes and improve overall wellbeing.

Filming was arranged with BBC South Today and That's TV, organised by the RBC Media and Communications Manager. TV clip broadcast 27 January ([watch here](#)) and article published 1 February ([read here](#)). Both highlighted the impact on an individual who had previously provided an individual case study, and highlighted the impact of this scheme, and the recently opened space in the Broad Street Mall, currently available until third week of April. A case study from the programme is included in section 4 of this report.

### 3.3 South East Neighbourhood Accelerator Programme

Using data collated via the Thames Valley Shared Care Record (*also referred to as Connected Care*) using a risk stratification approach, we have identified a “rising risk” group of people who are living alone, in Whitley and Church Wards, two of the most deprived areas in Reading, have higher instances of hospital admissions, A&E attendances and 111/GP interaction, as well as admissions into long term care. We know that this cohort are at greater risk of isolation, poorer health and wellbeing outcomes and unmet care needs because they live alone. This makes the approach of providing proactive, joined-up support essential to maintain wellbeing, independence and social connection.



By April 2027, we aim to ensure that people living alone with anticipatory care plans, in Church and Whitley Wards in Reading, feel supported and connected through a co-produced neighbourhood model. Through resident engagement it is clear that having a “trusted point of contact” is an important factor to aid us in improving timely access to health and wellbeing services. This improvement will primarily be monitored through an increase in the Patient Activation Measure (PAM) Scores, using two questions to identify current level of need.

Q1: How confident are you managing your health? (Scale of 1 to 4)

Q2: How good or bad is your health today? (Scale of 0 to 100)

## 4. Contribution to Reading’s Health and Wellbeing Strategic Aims

4.1. The Health and Wellbeing Board has reviewed the priorities that had originally been set out in the [Berkshire West Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2021-30](#).

The priorities that our local neighbourhoods will focus on are:

- a) Reducing risk of cardiovascular disease
- b) Reducing poor health outcomes due to respiratory conditions
- c) Improving Mental Health
- d) Reducing frailty

4.2. The programme of work being delivered through the Reading Integration Board (RIB) covers a wide range of schemes and grant funding to community services that are aligned with these adjusted priorities, alongside schemes such as ‘Dying Well’ to create compassionate communities supporting people and their families at end of life, the development of our Falls Team and the Community Wellness Outreach project to enable early intervention to reduce risks of cardiovascular disease. Here are three case studies (*names changed to protect anonymity*) that demonstrate the impact of these community based schemes:

### **Case study 1 (ACRE Men to Men project)**

Ahmed, a 32-year-old migrant from Guinea, had been experiencing depression linked to unemployment and cultural adjustment challenges. He often felt isolated due to language barriers and the stigma around mental health in his community. When introduced to *Men2Men Talk*, Ahmed was relieved to find a culturally sensitive space where discussions could happen openly without judgement. The session helped him in recognising signs of depression, accessing local NHS Talking Therapies, and peer-to-peer encouragement. Over time, Ahmed grew confident enough to speak with a mental health practitioner, something he had resisted for years. He has since started part-time work, encouraging others from his community to attend.

### **Case study 2 (Reading Gateway Church - Parish Nursing)**

A young man came to our attention through a referral from Readifood. He had been experiencing prolonged emotional and physical abuse and was living in unsafe conditions. Initially, building trust was essential, and our team worked patiently to establish a supportive relationship. Recognizing the safeguarding concerns, we made an immediate referral and initiated close collaboration with multiple agencies both statutory services and charitable organizations. This multi-agency approach ensured that he received comprehensive support tailored to his needs.

Outcomes and Impact: Within a matter of months, the young man's life was transformed:

- **Housing Stability:** Successfully rehoused in an HMO with the support of a dedicated key worker
- **Financial Security:** Began claiming benefits, reducing financial stress and vulnerability.
- **Access to Resources:** Started attending our Church Pantry, ensuring access to nutritious food
- **Skill Development:** Enrolled in the Food Coach course, learning practical life skills and healthy eating habits
- **Emotional Well-being:** Through consistent listening, trust-building, and encouragement, he regained self-esteem and a sense of self-worth.

Holistic Impact: This case demonstrates the power of Parish Nursing to act as a bridge connecting individuals to essential services while providing compassionate, faith-rooted care. By listening, advocating, and working collaboratively, we helped this person move from crisis to stability, fostering independence and hope for the future.

### **Case study 3 Community Wellness Outreach**

A carer who had to return home to Reading to look after her mother, who had become ill with a serious condition, was able to approach a carers group at the Atrium. They were also able to meet the RBC carers lead and have a health check with the CWO team. They found their newfound circumstances and the various avenues of information overwhelming and were given information about the carers partnership, carers rights, pathway into Adult Social Care and Social Prescribing. They will be supported with time and consideration of their needs in order to receive the support that is right for them to navigate this monumental change in personal circumstances to be a Carer.

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

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. No new services are being proposed or implemented that would negatively impact the climate or environment, however, climate implications are being considered in relation to the wider context of the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategic Priority Action Plans, and the potential impact on avoidable admissions, particularly those related to respiratory conditions and we work with our Public Health colleagues to provide information to the public and our system partners to raise awareness of climate impact.

## **6. Community Engagement**

- 6.1. Engagement in relation to specific services takes place, such as feedback on customer satisfaction for services such as Reablement. Stakeholder engagement continues to be a key factor in effective integrated models of care, and engagement with all system partners is important to the Reading Integration Board. The Service User feedback forms submitted by people using the Community Reablement Team, indicate 98% satisfaction rates with the service. We have also held co-production sessions with Carers to support us in shaping a Carer's breaks and respite service, funded through the Accelerating Reform Fund, and feedback from people engaged has been very positive. A Carers' lead joined the Council in March 2025 and is leading on the delivery of our Carers' Strategy and action plan.
- 1.1. Reading Adult Social Care have a co-production lead who has set up a Working Together Group of service users, carers and self-funders. This is helping to ensure that services are co-designed with service users, carers and families as much as possible, and feedback on user experiences will be gathered.

## **7. Equality Implications**

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
  - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. There are no new proposals or services recommended in this report that would impact negatively on anyone with protected characteristics. We continue to monitor equality data to ensure people are not adversely affected.

## **8. Other Relevant Considerations**

- 8.1. The BCF Planning Requirements for 2025/26<sup>2</sup> have introduced some changes to the National Conditions and the Objectives for 2025/26:

National Condition 1: Plans to be jointly agreed

National Condition 2: Implementing the objectives of the Better Care Fund

National Condition 3: Complying with grant and funding conditions, including maintaining the NHS minimum contribution to adult social care

National Condition 4: Complying with oversight and support processes

BCF Objective 1: Support the shift from sickness to prevention

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/better-care-fund-planning-requirements-2025-26/>

BCF Objective 2: Support people living independently and the shift from hospital to home

8.2. Confirmation of acceptance of the Reading BCF 2025/26 Plan was received on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2025.

## 9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. Compliance with the Better Care Fund (BCF) 2025/26 National Conditions has been confirmed in the BCF quarterly returns.
- 9.2. The Section 75 Framework Agreement for 2025/26 was signed by both Reading Borough Council and the BOB Integrated Care Board, and sealed on 8th October in accordance with the governance arrangements agreed by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

## 10. Financial Implications

10.1 BCF Quarterly Returns were submitted by the due dates following a briefing to the Lead Councillor for Health and Wellbeing and the Director of Adult Social Care through the delegated authority procedure. The returns demonstrated our compliance with the four national conditions and progress against the metrics and expenditure,

As the BCF provides a contribution towards Adult Social Care costs and locally commissioned community based services, the reported position at Quarter 3 was that 75% of the £21,177,782 budget had been spent. Following month end adjustments, the final position at the end of quarter 3, reported to the Reading Integration Board was £17,389.008, 82%, with a small underspend which has yet to be allocated through discussion and agreement in line with the Section 75 Framework Agreement.

RIB Summary Report 2025/26 @P10	Original Budget £	YTD Budget as at 31/12/25 £k	YTD as at 31/12/25 (Actuals) £k	Forecast to 31/03/26 £k	Variance £
Reading Borough Council Hosted Schemes	13,384,921	10,894,958	10,722,115	13,384,921	-56,266
BOB Integrated Care Board	1,551,064	1,292,553	1,292,553	1,551,064	0
Cross BOB ICB Hosted Schemes	3,558,062	2,965,051	2,965,051	3,558,062	0
Hospital Discharge Funding	1,505,300	1,254,417	1,254,417	1,505,300	0
24/25 Under spend	1,178,435	982,029	982,029	1,178,435	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,177,781</b>	<b>17,389,008</b>	<b>17,216,164</b>	<b>21,177,781</b>	<b>-56,266</b>

10.2 Funding allocated by BOB Integrated Care Board, from the Inequalities Fund to deliver the Community Wellness Outreach pilot project has been spent in line with the plan, and included within the Section 75 Framework Agreement.

## 11. Timetable for BCF Submissions

11.1. The schedule for the quarterly BCF reporting:

Quarter	Template available to HWB areas	Signed off HWB submission date
Quarter 1	16 June 2025	15 August 2025
Quarter 2	29 September 2025	10 November 2025
Quarter 3	15 December 2025	30 January 2026
End of Year	12 March 2026	29 May 2026

All templates will be available on the Better Care Exchange

HWB submissions once signed off must be emailed to the national Better Care Fund team [andand.bettercarefundteam@nhs.net](mailto:andand.bettercarefundteam@nhs.net) and to the regional Better Care Manager by noon on the submission date.

11.2 The BCF Planning Guidance for 2026/27<sup>3</sup> was released in February 2026, and plans will be developed in consultation through the Integration Board and through workshops with key stakeholders. The submission date for the 2026/27 plans is 19<sup>th</sup> May 2026.

### **Background Papers**

The BCF performance data included in this report is drawn from the Reading Integration Board Dashboard – January 2026 (*Reporting up to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025*).

### **Appendices**

None

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-care-fund-framework-2026-to-2027>



## Health and Wellbeing Board Briefing Note

March 2026

### Thames Valley ICB operating model and staff consultation

#### Planning 2026/2027

#### Thames Valley Innovation Fund

#### Dr Nick Broughton

### Thames Valley ICB operating model and staff consultation

BOB and Frimley ICB chief officers are working to develop an operating model for the new Thames Valley ICB from 1 April 2026. This will include new areas of focus, ways of working and potential alternative hosting arrangements for some services or teams. This will be shared with staff as part of the formal consultation - due to launch on 24 February - in line with the ICBs' statutory duties and the restructuring process.

The ICB is keen to hear the thoughts of valued stakeholders on how Thames Valley ICB might best support their work and keep them engaged to deliver better, more joined-up services to the communities they serve.

The ICB will invite stakeholder feedback on the operating model in the coming weeks. This will include a survey and the opportunity to join a workshop.

In the meantime, colleagues from BOB and Frimley ICBs are working together to ensure the safe closedown of the individual organisations and the set-up of Thames Valley ICB, ready for launch on 1 April.

### Planning 2026/2027

The ICB Cluster (BOB and Frimley) has submitted its final plan for 2026/27 to NHS England, which includes a 3-year finance plan (4 years for capital), a 3-year workforce plan (primary care and non-NHS mental health workforce) and a 3-year activity plan.

Also submitted was a 5-year narrative plan, based on the recently published [Thames Valley Commissioning Intentions](#). The document sets out strategic objectives to

deliver improved value, build neighbourhood health and prioritise prevention, and the approaches to measure and manage this work.

Following the plan submission, we will work with providers across Thames Valley to finalise contracts in the period up to April 2026, alongside preparing for the formal establishment of Thames Valley ICB.

We expect to hear from NHS England regarding acceptance of by the end of March at the latest.

## **Thames Valley Innovation Fund**

The fund was launched in December with a total value of £53 million to support delivery of ICB commissioning intentions. The response has been strong, with 195 expressions of interest from across the Thames Valley. Notably, more than eight out of 10 were joint submissions involving more than one organisation. Collectively, the bids request more than £139 million for 2026/27, which significantly exceeds the available funding.

The ICB expects to communicate next steps to all submissions shortly.

## **Dr Nick Broughton**

BOB and Frimley ICB Chief Executive, Dr Nick Broughton has been successful in securing an additional leadership role with NHS England. Alongside his ICB Chief Executive post, Nick will be National Priority Programme Director for Mental Health, Learning Disabilities and Neurodevelopmental Conditions.

As the national lead, Nick will be responsible for shaping and driving the mental health, learning disabilities and neurodevelopmental conditions agenda across the country. His work will include leading national programmes, supporting policy development, and strengthening partnerships with regions and systems to improve outcomes and access to these services nationally.

While Nick is carrying out his national responsibilities, he will be supported by his Chief Officer team in leading the ICB cluster and the new Thames Valley ICB from April.