



Reading | West Berkshire | Wokingham

Annual Report 2020/2021



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Brighter
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Children



Berkshire West
Clinical Commissioning Group



THAMES VALLEY
POLICE

Foreword/Executive Summary from the Berkshire West Statutory Safeguarding Executive

Welcome to the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report for 2020/2021, which provides an account of the work and progress undertaken by the multi-agency partnership to promote the safeguarding and wellbeing of children in Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham.

Less than one year into our new tri-borough multi-agency partnership arrangements we were all tested in a situation never faced before, with the ramifications of the pandemic likely with us for a number of years. We are proud to say that our cross-border approach enabled us to acknowledge, accept and work quickly together against a rapidly changing situation. We would like to recognise the exceptional hard work and dedication of all our staff, but also our thoughts are with all those who have been affected by Covid-19.

As an ambitious tri-borough partnership, we recognise that working across local authority borders can be difficult and effective partnership arrangements take time to embed. Throughout this document you will see examples of our positive progress and where working in partnership has made a difference. These include, but are not limited to, the jointly funded provision of Kooth (an online counselling service for young people to support their emotional health and wellbeing), the alignment of Threshold Guidance to support continuity for practitioners working across Berkshire West, provision of support and training for schools, joint identification of vulnerable families during Covid-19 lockdowns to ensure face-to-face visits, and improved information and guidance via the BWSCP website which receives hundreds of visits every day.

We would also like to recognise the significant impact that Covid-19 has had on our case review work since March 2020. As you will read on page 15, the number of notifications of serious child safeguarding incidents since March 2020, far exceeded anything we could have realistically predicted. The Rapid Review process requires significant resource from all our partner agencies, and it is a huge strength of our local safeguarding leads that they have, and continue, to commit to each review with openness, fully prepared to identify and respond to immediate learning. We have been recognised as an area with a strong process that delivers robust review reports, and this is a credit to all involved.

We are clear that there is some way to go in embedding our arrangements and maximise the benefits from working over the wider footprint. Throughout the report you will see 'Scrutiny and Challenge' boxes that highlight to us where we need to focus our attention. This information comes from our own analysis, what we have learnt in audit and case reviews, but also from scrutiny via Independent Reviewers and our Independent Scrutineer.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and say thank you to each and every member of the Partnership, our Subgroup Members, practitioners from all our partner agencies, education colleagues, volunteers and those people out in the community for their commitment and the work they continue to do to help keep children in Berkshire West safe and to improve their life chances.

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Carol Cammiss
Director Children's Services
Wokingham Borough Council



Deborah Glassbrook
Executive Director Children's Services
Brighter Futures for Children



Andy Sharp
Executive Director - People
West Berkshire Council



Debbie Simmonds
Nurse Director, Berkshire West
Clinical Commissioning Group



Rebecca Mears
Head of Protecting Vulnerable
People, Thames Valley Police

Governance and Accountability – review and future arrangements

Our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements were created as a result of revised statutory guidance (*Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*) and have been in existence as the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) since June 2019. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners hold the oversight, governance and responsibility of the partnership arrangements, with delegated responsibility to the BWSCP Safeguarding Executive. The composition of the Safeguarding Executive is:

- Directors of Children’s Services - Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham
- Nurse Director - Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- Head Protecting Vulnerable People Thames Valley Police
- Independent Scrutiny representative

From the outset our multi-agency arrangements have been designed to be flexible, with the Safeguarding Executive acknowledging the need to review the structure if required. As such, it was recognised in 2020 that an Operational Partners Group (Assistant Director level, with a wider membership) was needed to enable work to be progressed at pace. This operational group is still developing but senior level engagement across Berkshire West is strong, and this was typified by the effective response to Covid-19 (see below).

A key element in the requirements for multi-agency safeguarding arrangements is to ensure that independent scrutiny is applied and acted upon. The BWSCP took the decision not to recreate the role of the previous LSCB Chair and have instead taken a flexible approach which is still being tested and can be adapted. Our current arrangement has utilised the skills and knowledge of a colleague within the CCG to become our Independent Scrutineer. This has provided positive progress at a practice level, particularly through the continued development of the localised Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups, where data and auditing are reviewed and initiated, and the consistency in Chairing and provision of a helicopter view across Berkshire West has been a clear benefit. The oversight and management provided by this post to the numerous case reviews undertaken over the past 18 months has ensured a timely, fully multi-agency engaged process, with positive feedback from the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel. The use of independent review authors in full case reviews has provided additional scrutiny.

The current BWSCP structure promotes partnership collaboration, which has enabled positive and constructive independent scrutiny from partner agency colleagues. This has been evident locally in our sub groups, notably the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups and the Operational Partners Group but is also replicated in our pan-Berkshire work in relation to the Berkshire Child Safeguarding Procedures, and Section 11 arrangements, which are well regarded across the county.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

We recognise there are some challenges and improvements required in our high-level accountability and governance and our scrutiny model. The statutory responsibility for the partnership arrangements sits with the Chief Executives of the safeguarding partners, who delegate this duty to the BWSCP Safeguarding Executive, but it is vital that the Chief Executives remain informed of progress and are themselves curious about risks or improvements made, plus the potential or realised benefits of a tri-borough shared arrangement. This link could be stronger, therefore in the autumn, the Safeguarding Executive will be presenting a report to the Chief Executives to initiate and promote these key discussions. The BWSCP Safeguarding Executive also recognise that the extent of independent scrutiny over the past year has been limited due to capacity and have agreed that a review is required to develop a revised scrutiny model that will provide the full range of assurance required and evidence that local leaders have been held to account. This will take place in November 2021, with any agreed changes to the arrangement to be in place by the end of the financial year.

Response to Covid-19

In March 2020 the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership convened initially twice weekly meetings of senior leaders to discuss emerging risks and business continuity plans. This was a period of heightened challenge and vulnerability, but these strategic partnership meetings enabled information to be shared, challenges to be made to the approaches being taken by different organisations and timely, responsive joint work to be commissioned to support the most vulnerable families.

With lockdown came the identification of some areas of concern including an increase in younger children and babies experiencing both accidental and non-accidental injuries. In some of these cases, the injuries were serious and catastrophic, and in several cases, the children were in families that were previously unknown to specialist services or those that would not normally be considered as vulnerable. This indicated that families who would usually manage stress and pressure of parenting with the support of family and friends no longer had these to offset their pressures.

This Covid-19 response group stood down in May 2021 to allow other established groups to take over their business as usual, but on the understanding that meetings would be reconvened if further lockdown restrictions applied or if there was a particular service need. Below is more detail of the partnership response:

Issue	Key Achievements/Response
Service Continuity and changes in working practices.	Each agency developed and shared Business Continuity Plans to promote synergy and consistency.
	Covid-19 meetings facilitated the opportunity for services to report their experiences, and to challenge colleagues on their individual responses. Plus, a Covid-19 WhatsApp Group for colleagues to be able share 'live' information when required (e.g. out of hours).
	Multi-agency mapping of resources that may be affected by the pandemic and included discussion on staffing resource, sickness, redeployment to assess and problem solve where there was risk and need.
	Partners have embraced the emerging use of technology to allow front line practitioners to attend and facilitate strategy discussions and child protection conferences remotely. There has been a notable increase in engagement with meetings.
	Service preparation and risk identification post 'Lockdown'.
Responding to risk	Partnership meetings enabled the comparison of multi-agency data, discuss emerging risks and determining what the impact of lockdown, and its relaxation, will be on our families. These discussions resulted in many of the following actions.
	Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT) who provide Health Visiting and Mental Health Services, worked with Children's Services across Berkshire West to identify particularly vulnerable families to ensure that both services work together to ensure these families were seen face-to-face by a practitioner.
	Working with fathers: Royal Berkshire Hospital Maternity Unit staff actively engaged fathers/partners in conversation when they arrived to collect mother and new baby, including safe baby handling, safe sleeping and crying baby information. The Maternity Service also introduced an additional phone call specifically to fathers/partners at day 9 to talk about any needs and caring issues.
	Support for new parents: BHFT introduced an additional Health Visiting triage at time of booking, for risk factors to identify vulnerable families. An additional visit at 4 weeks was introduced alongside the new birth visit and 6-8-week visits.
	BHFT video raised awareness of Domestic Abuse for their services who were using video consultation methods. This approach was to display a 'notice' behind the clinician on the call, with Domestic Abuse helpline details, in a discreet format.
	Thames Valley Police video campaign specifically aimed at children to explain what Domestic Abuse is, and to encourage children to reach out if they were worried about themselves or another person.

	Partnership oversight and agreement of key communications to families and staff in response to the wider impact of 'lock-down' e.g. emotional health.
	BWSCP issued an agreed Berkshire West Wide statement, in support of families being able to access their regular support mechanisms such as family and friends, if it is safe to do so, with the reassurance that they will not be prosecuted or fined to help keep children safe.
Communication and agreement of swift production of communication materials for practitioners and communities	Production of #Be Brave Speak up social media campaign, which encouraged communities to report any suspicion of abuse or neglect they may have concerns about in their neighbourhoods. This covered children and adults safeguarding and was rolled out across all agencies in both domains. It was also shared as part of a targeted Facebook campaign with over 80,000 views and was shared hundreds of times.
	Clinical Commissioning Group: #Coping; Family life during the Lockdown was widely promoted via social media and to children and families via schools.
	Thames Valley Police initiated a campaign in Berkshire (that was then shared cross the force area) to provide training to staff in Pharmacists and Supermarkets to support them to identify potential victims of domestic abuse and know how to react if they were asked for help and offer help. A large communications campaign continued as other shops opened, which included how to access help and support, plus it reinvigorated briefings and internal communications for officers and police staff on identifying hidden harm. The scheme is now recommended nationally as good practise.
	BWSCP issued an agreed Berkshire West Wide statement, in support of families being able to access their regular support mechanisms such as family and friends, if it is safe to do so, with the reassurance that they will not be prosecuted or fined to help keep children safe
	Covid-19 specific BWSCP web page created to share a multitude of resources for families, young people and communities. There were nearly 10,000 views from 01.04.2020 to 21.03.2021.
	ICON (crying baby) resources have been widely shared among partner agencies, to share with new parents

Impact of Partnership Working:

- The partnership Covid-19 response, as described above, directly influenced changes to services provision and the way front line practitioners worked with families, for example, the joint project between Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust and the three Children's Services ensured vulnerable families continued to be seen face-to-face via a coordinated response. The sharing of useful and supportive information also led to nearly 10,000 views of the specific Covid-19 page on the BWSCP website.
- Concerns were raised at the Education Safeguarding Engagement Group meeting in Reading in regard to vulnerable children transitioning to secondary schools after the first lockdown period. This was raised with wider partners and a Primary Year 6 project was established. A transition plan was put in place and contact made with Year 7 transition leads at all secondary schools. Identified children received light touch support over the summer and support was on offer to all secondary schools from September through to December 2020.
- Recent inspections by Ofsted in all three areas agreed that strong partnership arrangements supported a joined-up service delivery approach to meet community needs during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

Since the onset of the pandemic, it is significant to note the increased levels of complexity and severity of cases coming to services and to the attention of the partnership. This includes increased levels of eating disorders (and 'disordered eating'), child and adult mental health, complex domestic abuse and adolescent risk issues. This includes 2 very serious incidents of fatal stabbings, and a total of 19 notifications made to the National Case Review Panel during the period 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021.

The unprecedented circumstances created by the pandemic mean that our usual interpretation of risk needs continued review and discussion. The close working relationships in the partnership encourage this flexibility, however resources are stretched beyond anything we have experienced. It is critical that the collaborative efforts to manage services continues. The partnership has responded robustly to this challenge while under pressure and we need to use this learning when the next challenge occurs, with support and clear governance from all partners.

Our Key Priorities

The BWSCP priorities are based on the areas of concern faced by our children, young people, their families and our practitioners, which were backed up by evidence from data, auditing and inspection findings, and themes identified in our local case reviews and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, we re-evaluated our overarching priorities, which remained relevant, but our outcomes and activities were adapted to reflect the change in need and risk.

Work to meet the priorities set out in the Business Plan has been carried out across the local, Berkshire West and Pan Berkshire Sub Groups. The BWSCP sub group structure chart can be found in Appendix 1. Whilst individual organisations respond to emerging and existing safeguarding concerns, the information below represents the joint partnership approach, work and outcomes in relation to these priorities. We are working towards a consistent Berkshire West approach to enable the sharing of skills and identify best practice across a wider footprint, to help improve the life chances for all our children. Under each priority are sub-headings which relate to specific areas of action identified in the business plan.

Priority 1 – Emerging Safeguarding risks to young people in today's society

Practitioners understand the approach to Extra-familial risk – contextual safeguarding and exploitation

We recognise the importance of practitioners understanding the local approach to 'contextual and complex' safeguarding and how this work needs a response often outside of our usual safeguarding frameworks. There are regular multi-agency meetings in each of the three areas that discuss individual cases and separate strategic meetings to agree a joint agency response.

In the past year each area has reviewed its processes and meetings in relation to this risk and have made changes if required. For example, in Reading, where numbers are higher, the existing Exploitation and Missing Risk Assessment Conference (EMRAC) meeting was split into two meetings with separate remits to allow a focus on specific cases and reviewing newly identified vulnerable young people, with a separate meeting focussed on multi-agency problem solving and the sharing of wider information such as persons of concern or local hotspots. This new approach was reviewed in May 2020 with positive feedback from practitioners who found it more productive and focussed. West Berkshire already had a similar approach in place and the annual audit has shown continued positive multi-agency engagement with clear, early identification of young people. In Wokingham, the EMRAC was evaluated in early 2021 with the aim of becoming more child focused and gaining an understanding of what disruption activities were required. The meeting discussed children rated as High, Medium and Low risk with a second part looking at themes, areas and people of concern, allowing for more meaningful dialogue between partners. In all three areas, numbers of identified cases have reduced over the Covid-19 period, most likely relating to the national lockdowns. This was and is recognised as an area of concern, and that exploitation may have become 'hidden'. Colleagues are continuing to work together across the partnership to raise awareness and support practitioners to identify potentially at risk and vulnerable young people (see below).

Each area continues to review the effectiveness of their strategic approach, with changes made in Wokingham and Reading over the past year to strengthen the partnership ownership and engagement at the highest levels. In Wokingham there will be a new coordinated approach towards serious violence and exploitation, creating a new collaborative board that looks at both issues with strategic direction and oversight from the Community Safety Parentship. In Reading, the existing Safeguarding Exploitation Group has merged with the Adolescent Risk Group of the One Reading Partnership (Children and Young People Partnership) to now cover a broader range of risk concerns and drawing on a wider breadth of partner organisations. In West Berkshire, the existing group remains well represented, with strong links with Building

Communities Together (Community Safety Partnership). These approaches in all three areas has strengthened the governance arrangements, bringing the front line and strategic processes closer, and learning and responding together.

Impact of Partnership working:

Adolescent Risk – Concerns were raised by local services about the safeguarding and welfare of young people who attend large scale events such as Festival's. Schools across Berkshire West were invited to participate in a project aimed at reducing risk and staying safe ahead of Reading Festival; funding was secured by Festival Republic. A survey was sent young people in years 10, 11 & 12 in local Schools in order to gain the views of young people on the safety and safeguarding arrangements in place at events they attend. Following on from the completion of the survey a series of webinars were arranged to cover the areas of concern covering: sex, bodies, consent and assault, substances, alcohol, risk and choices. These webinars were delivered to pupils in the participating Schools and following the summer break will be evaluated further.

Identification and support offered to children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation

To support our vulnerable young people, it is crucial that practitioners have the right tools and knowledge. In the past year across Berkshire West hundreds of staff have received contextual safeguarding or similar training.

Colleagues are also supported to use the Pan Berkshire Exploitation Screening Tool, which is regularly revised to ensure it is fit for purpose. As a result of ongoing case reviews and a rise in serious youth violence locally, the tool is currently being adjusted to include identifiers of serious violence. It is also being updated to reflect changing terminology and phraseology to support a trauma informed approach, which is becoming a more standard practice model across the county. This work is undertaken by the Pan Berkshire Exploitation Sub Group, and therefore brings together a county wide approach and knowledge base. Locally, our audits have shown the tool is well used and subsequent referrals are appropriate.

Following specific incidents locally over the past year, case review activity has focussed on incidents of adolescent risk and serious youth violence. In Wokingham, a child safeguarding practice review (CSPR) has been underway (due to be published in October 2021), and the learning from it has already prompted many of the positive changes to local approach described above. In Reading a Thematic CSPR is underway focussed on a cohort of young people involved in serious youth violence. Learning from this review will be shared across the partnership to support a Berkshire West response.

Impact of Partnership working:

A Navigator Programme funded by the Violence Reduction Unit and delivered by trained volunteers from the local community recruited by Starting Point, has been working in the Emergency Department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital; the volunteers are a listening ear for young people who present to the Emergency Department; so, they have someone they can talk to and signpost them to other support at critical moments.

The rise in serious youth violence prompted school colleagues in the Reading Education safeguarding Engagement Group to discuss their significant concerns about weapon crime and in response Brighter Futures for Children identified some specific funding to enable Paul Hannaford to facilitate 60 sessions for pupils in years 7/8/9.

Scrutiny and Impact:

It is positive that in each area there is a continued drive to ensure processes and strategic direction are strong or improving, through evaluation and review. Changes have been implemented where appropriate, and these need time to embed. Due to the severity and breadth of this area of risk, the responsibility sits under multiple partnerships, and this can cause duplication or dilution of ownership in the system. The Statutory Partners, via the Safeguarding Executive and Operational Partners Groups, must ensure that lines of responsibility are clear and links with the Community Safety Partnerships and newly formed Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards are robust.

BWSCP is assured that pupils in Berkshire West receive appropriate information and advice in relation to Online Safety:

Just as the pandemic started the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups in each locality discussed Online Safety as part of their themed agenda's, from this discussion assurance was provided that:

- Schools have an education PHSE programme of online safety along with assemblies to discuss online safety.
- Schools have robust filtering, so it isn't possible to access inappropriate material when using school devices.
- Parents are informed of issues and sent communications/support as well as being invited to sessions in schools.

As the lockdown progressed, online access was regularly discussed at meetings and resources sent out to schools regarding E-safety due to the increased risk to pupils. To further support schools, parents and young people, we developed an Online Safety Page on the BWSCP website. It contains information relating to various types of online abuse that our young people can experience with links to guidance and agencies that can provide further information or support. There are also links to some useful articles for parents and carers about how to keep young people safe online. Online Safety features regularly in the BWSCP Facebook and Twitter posts.

More recently, a local Online Safety Forum has been organised as part of our Learning Forum Programme, this will take place in October 2021; it will be a Multi-agency forum exploring children & young people's use of the internet, and safety measures that need to be considered by professionals. This forum will be recorded and made available as a resource on the BWSCP YouTube channel.

Priority 2 - Intervening Earlier to safeguard effectively

This priority is crucial to preventing escalating risk by supporting all partners to be able to respond to concerns and confidently hold responsibility for risk at an appropriate level. This should prevent our children and their families from having to access high level support or not be subjected to Children's Social Care involvement if not required.

Effective understanding of child protection thresholds to ensure appropriate safeguarding referrals - Aligned Threshold Guidance

Following evidence from Rapid Reviews, data and audit, it was agreed that there would be value in reviewing and aligning the local Threshold Guidance in all three areas in order to support practitioners who work across Berkshire West. This work was undertaken with colleagues across the partnership and was supported by an Independent Consultant who tested our local guidance against best practice examples. The resulting updated Threshold Guidance now looks similar for each area but ensures that local differences in service provision and referral routes information remain. There is a separate document for each area but the wording, levels of need diagrams and the risk factors and protective factors are almost identical. It is positive that recent focused visit inspections by Ofsted in two of the areas did not raise any issues with regards to the application and use of thresholds. Details and links to the documents can be found here: [BWSCP website - threshold guidance](#)

Early Emotional Health and Wellbeing Intervention

This is clearly an area of high concern for all partners. The pandemic has been particularly impactful on the emotional health and wellbeing of our children and their families. This has been evident through the serious child safeguarding incident notifications made locally and reported by health staff and particularly education settings. After lockdown periods, schools have reported a general level of raised aggression in young people which has made managing behaviour in schools particularly difficult. The overall disruption to schooling, routine, learning and willingness to learn, is likely to have a significant impact on outcomes that are not only educational, but also impacting on emotional and mental health. However, positively, education colleagues in all three areas have maintained or reduced levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions. For example, Reading schools reported 29 primary fixed term exclusions and 112 secondary fixed term exclusions in March 2020, and in March 2021 this was 21 for primary and 96 for secondary.

During 2019 and 2020 our Education Safeguarding and Engagement Groups lobbied for support for children's mental health and have influenced the commissioning of Kooth in Berkshire West from July 2020. Kooth is an online counselling service for young people and adults offering information, blogs and interactive session with trained therapists. It has been jointly funded by Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group, Wokingham Council, West Berkshire Council and Brighter Futures for Children. After a successful first year, it has been recommissioned for a second year with a longer-term arrangement being explored.

Impact of Partnership Working: In the first 9 months of availability (to April 2020) over 2200 children and young people have registered to use Kooth and 82% have returned to use the offer. Anxiety and stress were the main reason why children and young people came for help, and we are pleased to see that our Schools have really promoted and encouraged access, being the significant place where children and young people were introduced or heard of Kooth (60% of the 2200). Many of these children and young people (64%) are using the service out of hours, which has shown the value for weekend and evening access. Nearly all (98%) would recommend the service to a friend and other outcome data is encouraging, e.g. 93% of children and young people got what wanted on using the service.

BWSCP are assured that Child in Need processes are seen as equally robust, secure and important as the Child Protection process

Previous and more recent local case reviews had identified that there was a misunderstanding around Child in Need (CIN) processes, including the multiagency involvement, how it is communicated and how we effectively engage with families. To fully understand the changes required, alongside specific recommendations by Independent Reviewers, we have initiated a multi-agency Child in Need audit across Berkshire West. Our tri-borough partnership allows us to undertake one audit, but each area can focus attention on a particular area of concern for them, as agreed in the separate Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups. For example, in Reading the audit will focus the CIN project in Early Help, including the families and practitioner response to a Family Worker providing support to the Child in Need rather than a social worker. In West Berkshire the focus is on parental and staff engagement, the eligibility of being a CIN and the multiagency participation; with Wokingham focussing on engagement from parents, consent issues and information sharing. All will look at key aspects of time on a CIN plan, the step up and down process and appropriate case closure.

Scrutiny and Impact:

Locally we have recognised that there is differing understanding both by practitioners across the network and families of the Child in Need status and processes. Specifically, in one recent case review the Independent Reviewer states in the report that 'there was professional agreement that the child in need process was not well understood by parents and that they often felt out of their depth and isolated in these meetings. This was in comparison to child protection processes where the clear role of the chair to explain to adults and children what the meeting was about, what was going to happen and to explain the information that would be shared. A similar approach is needed within child in need meetings with a leaflet for families (and children) about child in need meetings, including an outline of the purpose and process, their right to bring a report, in what circumstances advocacy or a buddy would be provided and how to feel comfortable as often the only non-professional in the meeting'. These comments, and learning from the multi-agency audit, needs to be acted upon and implemented swiftly, coherently and consistently across Berkshire West.

Practitioners understand the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people, with appropriate support in place to mitigate the risk

Domestic Abuse has been a significant feature in recent reviews, therefore a multi-agency audit was undertaken in West Berkshire to test processes and practitioner understanding and identification of risk. We also wanted to know that the child's voice or lived experience was 'heard'.

Overall, the results were positive, with swift responses to concerns, positive engagement with family members including children, and recognition if cases were repeat incidents. However, there was learning identified which included:

- An automatic process (known as Op Encompass) is triggered if a child experiences a Domestic Abuse incident which notifies key partners such as schools. It was found that the full recording process was not widely understood by Police Officers and, in some cases, it caused delays in reporting the issue to the schools. Officers thought that they had triggered the Encompass process when in fact they had not. **Response:** Thames Valley Police immediately put processes in place to rectify this issue, including Officer training and team briefings locally, but have also raised the issues with the Protecting Vulnerable People unit as a finding for the whole Force. Subsequently, robotic automated processes have been introduced to the Op Encompass process which has drastically improved the notification rate - in October 2021, 47% of potential Encompass notifications were successfully shared with schools, compared to 14% in October 2020.
- Voice of the Child – Clarity and training for Police Officers was required to avoid confusion in relation to safeguarding duties and ensuring children in the household are seen and spoken to. **Response:** A force-wide briefing was presented to operational officers in relation to these concerns.
- It was noted that victims and families can refuse the support offered by consent-based services, which can leave universal services such as schools frustrated and concerned for the welfare of the children. **Response:** The audit group agreed that a supplementary plan should be considered for these situations.

The full audit is to be shared with the newly formed Domestic Abuse Partnership Board in West Berkshire, for discussion and decision making on further actions.

Impact of Partnership Working: As detailed above, learning from the domestic abuse audit was immediately responded to, with additional training to Police Officers. It is extremely positive that this learning was not only shared locally but has been taken across the whole Thames Valley Police force area.

Scrutiny and Impact:

Domestic Abuse is another example of a high-risk concern where the responsibility for a coordinated response lies with multiple partnership arrangements. It is vital that BWSCP members engage fully with the three new Domestic Abuse Partnership Boards to ensure the risk to children is appropriately included in their agendas and remains a robust challenge within the safeguarding partnership.

Priority 3 - Engagement of Children, Families and Practitioners

Our initial multi-safeguarding arrangements were clear that we wanted to improve our partnership engagement with children and families, ensuring that their voice and experiences were part of our discussions and decision making. As the pandemic progressed, and the first lockdown eased, our local Independent Scrutiny and Impact Group were keen to understand to the impact of Covid-19 on our children and young people. Survey results, particularly the survey in West Berkshire, included the statements and information from children and young people, some of whom had found the time at home beneficial, whereas others had struggled. This closely mirrored national surveys that were also undertaken around that time.

Additional surveys have been undertaken in the localities, for example the Youth Offending Service in Reading wanted to capture thoughts from young people around Covid-19, Black Lives Matter and following on from the fatal stabbing attack at the Forbury Gardens earlier in the year. The evidence suggested that many of the recent events had not massively impacted on this group, which may partly be due to this being a cohort who have less regard to authority or the restrictions in place. Covid-19 had made a difference to crime patterns however. They did not report anxiety or stress and continued to see their friends if they wanted to. It seemed that these issues were just 'noise' around them.

Auditing is another area where we expect to see evidence of gathering and reflecting on the views of service users.

Impact of partnership working: Following a rise in care leavers becoming NEET and/or pregnant a specific audit was undertaken in Reading in relation to this cohort. This included directly asking the young people their views on the support they received. Comments included:

- 'I know what a bad parent looks like but not how a good a parent is like and that worries me, we want the best for our baby girl.'
- 'I receive whatever support I need from [Leaving Care Advisor] and she'll help me in any way she can she's been amazing over the past four years of working with her.'
- 'I could have benefitted with further support when baby was born in the very early stages of his life. I was struggling with flash backs of my previous bad experiences and could have done with extra support with someone that knows my history.'

The findings re-enforced the work already being initiated to support looked after children at a younger age to ensure they are prepared to move to independence both emotionally and physically. As part of this, a workshop took place with the workers involved and they came up with an action plan that they will personally own in relation to the young people they support. Better working arrangements are now place, with the Leaving Care Team taking ownership, and NEET figures have already reduced.

Our engagement with practitioners has predominantly continued through auditing and case review work. We have ensured that all our Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) have included a practitioner event, where the independent reviewer has had a chance to ask questions and hear directly from those involved about their experiences and what they feel is the key learning. This has been particularly challenging in an environment of online meetings, and these sessions would always be preferable as face-to-face, however we have endeavoured to make sure practitioners are supported through the process and feel comfortable to speak. Given the number of cases that have progressed to CSPR in the past 18 months, we have heard more from practitioners this way than we would in a normal year, and this has strengthened the review process.

Auditing is also a key area where practitioners are able to reflect and feedback on areas of work or practice. Multi-agency and single agency audit (where there is a safeguarding element) findings are reported back to the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups with audit topics including (but not limited to) domestic abuse referrals into the three Children's Services, GP involvement in safeguarding processes, referrals from the Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust to the three Children's Services, exploitation risk thresholds, effectiveness of safety planning, neglect, prevalence of NEET and pregnancy in Care Leavers, plus other audits which have been referenced throughout the report. A Berkshire West wide audit of Child in Need plans is currently underway and is involving practitioners from a range of agencies. This is a significant piece of work and we expect results towards the end of 2021.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

This continues to be an area of challenge for the BWSCP. It is positive to receive comments, feedback and the results of surveys from our children and young people, but there is not enough direct evidence of subsequent decision making by the partnership as a result. We recognise this is not an easy problem to solve, and do not want to inadvertently take a tokenistic approach to involving children in our arrangements. This will continue to be discussed at key meetings such as the Executive Group and Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups to ensure a meaningful proposal and action both at a governance level and at a practice level.

The involvement with practitioners is evidently stronger, through their involvement in multi-agency auditing processes and practitioner events linked to Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. It has been very positive, over the past 18 months, to see how open and honest local practitioners can be in both the Rapid Review and CSPR processes. Although practitioners are included in auditing work, evidence of their voice, feedback and resulting improvements in practice need to be better evidenced.

Priority 4 - Effectiveness of the new Partnership Arrangements

We are acutely aware that we have challenged ourselves locally by forming a tri-borough safeguarding partnership arrangement – we actively decided not to rebrand the previous Local Safeguarding Children Boards but aim to build on the positive aspects of those local boards, share good practice and take the opportunity to work more coherently and collaboratively across the three borough boundaries.

Improving Education Sector Engagement

A key element of our arrangements was further developing our links and engagement with the Education Sector; we had pockets of excellent work that we have now replicated across the three areas. This includes three locality-based Education Safeguarding Engagement Groups, with Headteacher and Local Authority Safeguarding Leads/representatives, which provides a mechanism for education leaders to identify and inform the development of safeguarding and improvement across schools and ensure that issues specific to the school/education community have a voice and can be escalated for discussion to the Statutory Safeguarding Partners. Particularly over the past 18 months, these conversations have been beneficial in supporting our education community with the difficulties they have faced with lockdowns and home learning and direct examples have been provided earlier in this report. Alongside these meetings are locality-based learning sessions for Designated Safeguarding Leads where we are able to share consistent but tailored safeguarding messages.

A particular success has been the alignment of the Section 175/157 (school safeguarding audit) process across the three authority areas. Previously each area operated a different process, but this has now been aligned, with schools only being asked once a year to submit a return (using the NSPCC tool). The return rate in each area is either 100% or very close to it, which demonstrates that schools also find this process useful and supportive. It is positive that all schools felt that they met most of the criteria

(85% or above). We require that schools confirm that they have completed the audit with their Safeguarding Governor and that it is seen by the Local Governing Body, to promote awareness and responsibility for safeguarding within the school governance structure. The returns are analysed by safeguarding leads locally to identify any areas for concern. The results are shared between the local authority leads to enable the learning to be shared across the three areas, but also with the Education Safeguarding Engagement Group in each locality. This process enables school safeguarding leads to raise concerns and receive support directly from Local Authority leads, with the local authority colleagues also proactively approaching schools if an issue has arisen. Examples include:

- Across Berkshire West, the criteria on work experience remained a concern, although this had improved from the previous year. In one area an email was sent to all DSLs explaining how to meet this criteria, even if work experience wasn't applicable for their establishment. A model policy has also been developed and disseminated.
- A model Physical Intervention Policy and an Intimate Care Policy have been shared with all establishments in one area and with safeguarding leads across Berkshire West, as this was an area where not all schools could meet the criteria.

Communications across Berkshire West - Improving the visibility of the BWSCP

The BWSCP has the opportunity to promote the wider safeguarding agenda, to increase safeguarding awareness, understanding and knowledge to children, young people, and general public, practitioners across multi agencies, communities, and voluntary sector and faith groups. Our main mechanism to achieve this is via our newly merged website. This website contains a wide range of information for different cohorts and provides safeguarding information, signposting links to help and support, training and learning opportunities. There have been nearly 155,000 views on 81 pages over the past 12 months. In March 2020, we developed Covid-19 specific help and support pages for children, parents/carers and multi-agency practitioners. We were able to link and coordinate local resources, and this was well received by practitioners. There have been nearly 10,000 views since setting this page up. We have also recently launched our own YouTube channel where we have linked recordings of our virtual online training forums.

In addition, we use social media to promote safeguarding campaigns in response to local and national learning from serious case reviews, Child Death Overview Panels, emerging risks and sharing the wider partnership campaigns. Via Facebook and Twitter, we post regularly, with Local Authorities and other safeguarding partnerships sharing our communications. Key campaigns in 2020/21 included:

- 'Be Brave – Speak up' campaign reached over 80,000 (with a total number of impressions being 522,445 being watched an average 6.3 times) and shared nearly 500 times on Facebook
- Covid-19 sharing multi-agency information
- Lift the Baby Campaign to support safe sleeping – almost 14,000 views of the video since June 2019
- Summer campaigns on water safety and the danger of open windows as a result of themes identified by the Pan Berkshire Child Death Overview Panel.

Online Universal Safeguarding Training

Across Berkshire West we have, for many years, provided a free online level 1 universal safeguarding training module, available to anyone working with children and young people. After the original provider closed, with the module moved to systems hosted by the local authorities, however this soon became administratively prohibitive. In 2019, we were able to fund and utilise a section of the new BWSCP website and move the training module to be a completely open and free resource, easily accessed through the website. It has always been our aim to retain this element of training for our workforce as free to access, and it is hugely positive that during the 2020/21 year, 2871 practitioners completed the module. The main users are education/school colleagues (41%), local authority colleagues (36%) and Early Years providers (10%).

Pan Berkshire Arrangements

BWSCP has continued to support the Pan Berkshire safeguarding arrangements through the Section 11 Panel, Pan Berkshire Policy and Procedures Sub Group and Pan Berkshire Exploitation Sub Group. These groups are well respected by colleagues from across the county and are crucial to effective partnership arrangements.

The Section 11 Panel requests that representatives from key agencies who work across two or more Berkshire local authority areas attend the panel to present their Section 11 self-assessment return. A tool is provided to enable agencies to demonstrate and provide evidence that they are fulfilling their safeguarding duties under the Children Act 2004. Panel members scrutinise the return, ask questions of the presenter and provide feedback on areas for improvement. After a period of time (approximately a year) agencies are then asked to provide an update on progress against the improvements/ actions identified by the panel. This is seen as a highly effective process, which agencies value.

Impact of Partnership Working: At their full S11 return the Emergency Duty Service were recommended that they complete a training needs analysis to determine and evidence what training staff have or need and provide confirmation of the take-up and evaluation of the training programme. At the mid-term review the service was able to evidence that a training needs analysis for both substantive and sessional senior social workers, as well as the screening officers had taken place with a training matrix developed to identify training undertaken and training needs for staff. In addition, the service worked with their host local authority (Bracknell Forest) Principal Social Worker to work on the training programme which resulted in additional training on topics such as Family Safeguarding Model, plus training from other local colleagues on topics such as the child death response process, and legal update training from the Joint Legal Team, to support their staff knowledge base.

The Pan Berkshire Policy and Procedures subgroup is also a multi-agency group with representatives from agencies across the county. The meetings scrutinise chapter amendments suggested by the procedure's provider, but also has a timetable of chapters for local review. This cross border and multi-disciplinary approach enable all Berkshire Safeguarding Partnerships to maintain up-to-date localised procedures that are easily accessed by all practitioners.

Impact of Partnership Working: This group reacts to findings from local reviews, an example being the complete review of the chapter on dangerous dogs following a Child Safeguarding Practice Review in one area. The chapter now reflects that all dogs (and other pets) can be dangerous if not supervised appropriately and has moved away from focusing on the danger of certain dog breeds.

BWSCP local datasets support focussed discussion on key topics

Our three areas have very different demographics, and as such are never in the same group of statistical neighbours. However, our children and families regularly cross the borders and as a Berkshire West area we obviously share many safeguarding risks. The Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups (ISIGs) therefore took the decision to reduce the huge bureaucracy of the large, all-encompassing datasets that we previously had in each locality to produce a document that focusses the discussion on key safeguarding data. The dataset includes the same information from all three Children's Services to provide a comparison, as well as data from other key partners. There is also an expectation that other subgroups, for example the Exploitation based subgroups, review their specific data in more detail and escalate any concerns.

The comparison of local data has led to several discussions regarding specific topics over the year, such as referral numbers. In West Berkshire, referral numbers had not returned to usual levels by the end of 2020, however assurance was provided that a local recovery meeting takes place where there is scrutiny on referrals. Referral numbers have since returned to pre-pandemic levels. In light of the increased number of non-accidental injuries in under 1-year olds seen in Berkshire West, the West

Berkshire Children and Family Contact Advice and Assessment Service, confirmed they had an enhanced screening protocol for unborns and children up to 1 year old which is completed with the parent/carer and health services and covers a range of issues. Additionally, in early 2021 a review of all pre-birth assessments for children born in 2020 was underway to ensure families had the support they needed. ISIG members agreed to strengthen this very positive approach by taking forward a joint response between Children and Family Services and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust. by meeting and colleagues at the ISIG agreed to meet after the meeting to strengthen this joint response.

To support this streamlined approach, we also encourage thematic discussions at the ISIGs which can lead to better multi-agency involvement. For example, there is a recognised national increase in Elective Home Education (EHE). All localities in Berkshire West reported an increase in EHE over the year with the concern that these children become less visible when not seen regularly at school. All three areas were concerned that children removed from school during the Covid-19 period might not have a place in school if they decide to return from EHE after the pandemic eases. Colleagues from each area reported the clear and supportive processes they have in place for families who decide to electively home educate but agreed that considering multi-agency approaches to supporting pupils, assisting practitioners to be alerted to safeguarding risks and contribute to wider consultation on EHE practice and improvement would be beneficial. The South East Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP) is currently undertaking work on this area and colleagues agreed to wait for these results, and to establish if numbers remain raised at the beginning of the school year.

A selection of the data included in the dataset can be found in Appendix 2.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

We recognise that working over a Berkshire West footprint is complicated and it requires continued engagement, ownership, discussion and willingness for it to work at all levels and to be successful and provide added value. Our three local authority wide partnership enables us to think more creatively, for example, the opportunity of cross boundary working allows us to identify common safeguarding issues and consider the strengths of joint discussion and co-working with partners. The examples above provide good evidence of the positive impact for our workforce of working in this coordinated way. There is still far to go, and the all the sub groups recognise that improvements can be made. The Independent Impact and Scrutiny Groups are continuing to develop and the large-scale multi-agency audit currently in progress in for Child in Need cases will further embed the cross-border approach. Over the next year, these groups need to demonstrate strong scrutiny and challenge to ensure local leaders are aware of emerging concerns and risks, and that we can demonstrate positive impact for children and families.

Case Review Activity

From the first lockdown period in March 2020 up until the end March 2021 the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership completed 19 Rapid Reviews across Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham; these reviews related to:

- Injuries in non-mobile babies
- Non accidental injuries to young children
- Adolescents who were well known to services
- Sexual Abuse
- Alleged perpetrators of serious youth violence

This unprecedented number of notifications of serious child safeguarding incidents partly reflected the strain that families countrywide were facing as a result of the pandemic. The significant rise in non-accidental injuries was not only seen locally and a national review by the Child safeguarding Practice Review Panel is underway to explore this further, particularly with regards to male perpetrators. Locally, we have also seen a rise in serious youth violence, which tragically resulted in two fatal stabbing incidents in Reading, which directly lead to seven of the notifications as we sought to understand the role of multi-agency support to the alleged perpetrators in their lives before the incident, as well as that of the victim. In addition, the Safeguarding Partnership undertook a Rapid Review in relation to a young person who had turned 18, but there had been considerable involvement with a number of children's services over several years and was in receipt of services as a care leaver at the time he passed away. Although this did not fall within the statutory responsibility to submit a notification and carry out the Rapid Review, we agreed that it was still important to identify and respond to the learning in his case.

Of the 19 Rapid Reviews, five have progressed to individual Child safeguarding Practice Reviews, plus a thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review focussing on serious youth violence which will directly include three of the young people where there was a Rapid Review, plus the learning from three others.

All the Rapid Reviews identified specific points of learning for agencies, which are taken forward. Some examples of operational or practice changes as a direct result of Rapid Reviews include:

- Young people discussed at operational exploitation meetings and not known to the sexual health clinic at RBH will have a ## along-side their name, so that sexual health practitioners know this young person is at risk of exploitation.
- All Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust Child Protection and Adult safeguarding training to include better understanding in practice concerning young people the difference in child/adult safeguarding thresholds, the law and young people who are care leavers.
- Reading Borough Council Housing Service has provided funding for detached youth workers. This team meet young people in the community to engage with those distrustful of statutory services. Funding is confirmed until March 2022.
- A new pathway between Reading Adults Services and Children Services, linked to SEND work, with the transition process starting at age 14.
- Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust introduced an additional Health Visiting triage at time of booking, for risk factors to identify vulnerable families. An additional visit at 4 weeks has been introduced alongside the new birth visit and 6-8-week visits.

- Guidance for practitioners will be disseminated to enable practitioners to understand that the immigration status of parents affects whether children born in England are entitled to free healthcare. This will form part of standardised questioning for health practitioners and will also be shared with the wider workforce.
- A draft Education Health and Care Plan was not routinely shared with all those who had contributed, the SEND Team are reviewing and updating processes.

Additional outputs from case reviews that will have an impact across Berkshire West include the large-scale multi-agency Child in Need audit which is currently being undertaken. The understanding of Child in Need processes and differences in application between the three local authorities has been raised in a number of reviews, therefore the audit seeks to identify effective partner involvement and understanding, effectiveness of family engagement and effective multi-agency decision making. The alignment of the threshold guidance detailed in priority 2 is also partly as a result of case review findings.

As part of the rapid review process we also identify and highlight the positive work undertaken by practitioners. Numerous examples of this was found from completing the Rapid Reviews and related to:

- Practitioners going above and beyond to support families, especially during the lockdown period.
- Clear identification of vulnerabilities in families and multi-disciplinary discussions being undertaken.
- Colleagues regularly inviting pregnant women and new mums to tell them if they are suffering from domestic abuse.
- Early referrals when concerns identified, and examples of quality assessments.
- Swift responses after an incident to safeguard children and their siblings.
- Practitioners effectively sharing information and communicating, and examples of cultural sensitivity.

In addition, the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel have commended our rapid review process and the quality of reports submitted to them, noting that the Rapid Reviews contain a good level of analysis that clearly set out key issues and identify learning and actions.

The Case Review Group continues to promote active discussion about any cases that colleagues may feel meet criteria for a level of multi-agency review. Colleagues from any agency can submit a case for consideration document, and the group will then coordinate receipt and review of multi-agency information in relation to the case. If, on consideration, it is then felt that the case meets the criteria for a notification of significant child safeguarding incident, then the relevant local authority is instructed to do so as a retrospective notification. This is an open, honest but challenging group, where individuals actively scrutinise safeguarding practice.

Local Learning from previous Case Reviews

The purpose of a Child Safeguarding Practice Review is to look at the multi-agency response of organisations working alongside children and families, to identify any improvements that can be made to the services they provide; and as a partnership for us to understand and share good practice and learning to improve and promote the wellbeing of our children and young people.

The common themes and learning from previous case reviews was an opportunity for practitioners to come together just before lockdown, to reflect on the case learning and think about what we can do differently. The Learning event slides, published reports and 7-minute briefings can be found here:

<https://www.berkshirewestsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/scp/professionals/child-safeguarding-practice-reviews-formerly-scrcs>

In addition, we have shared learning from Rapid Reviews with colleagues via our Children's Leaders forum, both virtually and at an open online meeting, providing an opportunity for questions discussion and reflection.

Impact of Partnership Working: The immediate learning and resulting actions from the Rapid Reviews have been beneficial for all our partners, with specific examples given above. In addition, we have recognised that issues with regards to the effective escalation of cases where there is a difference of opinion in case management is a regular finding in our case reviews. To support practitioners, we have written some additional guidance to sit alongside the main Pan Berkshire Procedure. Our aim is that this guidance:

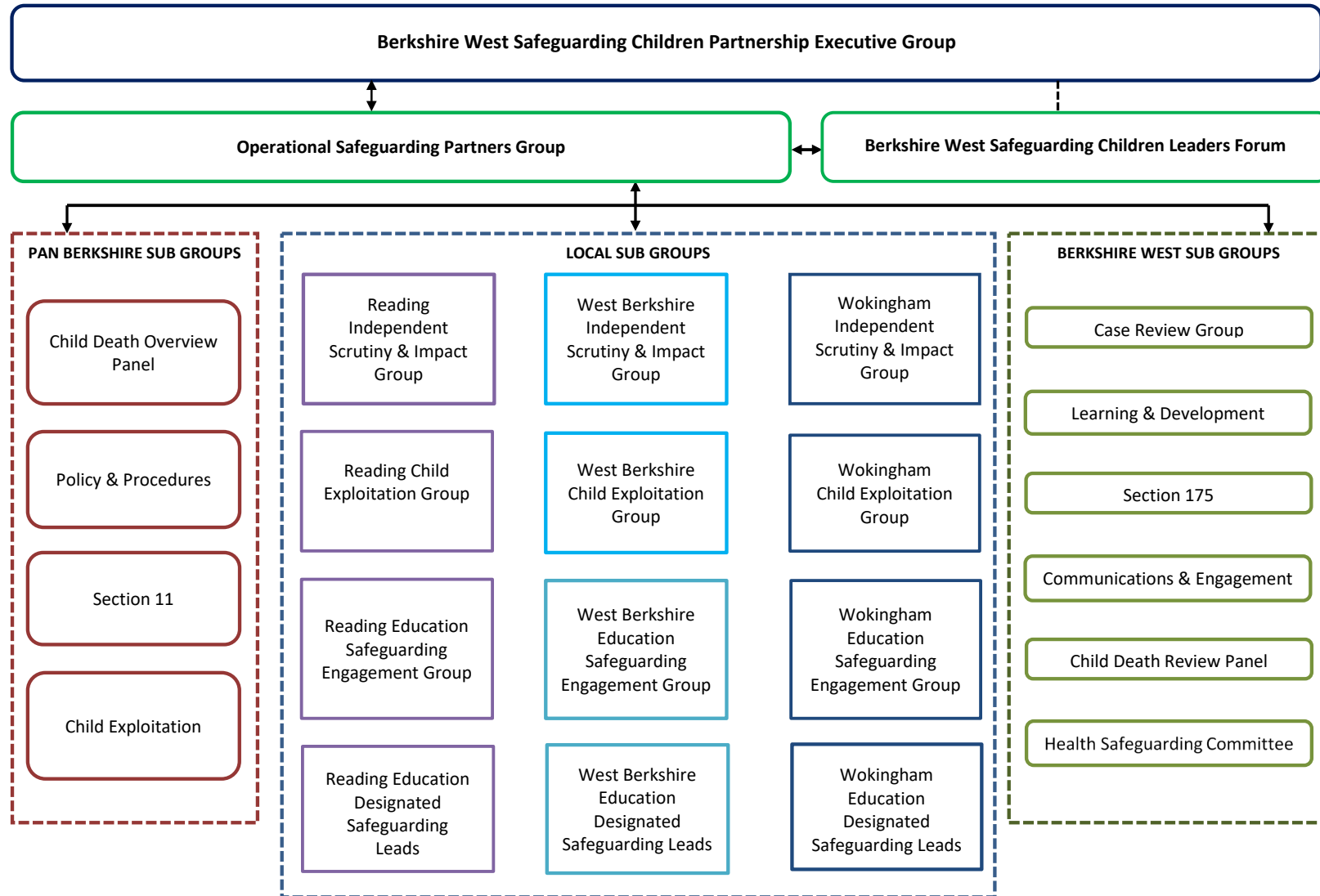
- explains that a difference of opinion between practitioners/agencies on how to work towards the best outcome for a child is part of our day-to-day practice, particularly in complex cases. Escalation should not be seen as trying to resolve a dispute, but a way to collectively find the most appropriate solution for the child. To support this approach, we have endeavoured to move the language used away from terms like 'dispute' and 'disagreement' to be more solution focussed. This change in language is also being suggested to the pan Berkshires Policy and Procedures sub group to consider making similar changes to the overarching procedure.
- provides specific detail about who to contact when an escalation reached stage 3. This is often the stage when an escalation fails to find a solution, so we were keen for all agencies to name the appropriate senior manager who would be able to take the discussion forward constructively.
- provides a briefing note template to enable practitioners to articulate the concern, the discussions already taken and describe the solution they are looking for. This allows the senior manager to understand the issue and be able to work towards an agreed resolution.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

There is considerable independent scrutiny built into the case review process, with multi-agency partners scrutinising information at the Rapid Review stage (often Chaired by the Independent Scrutineer) and Independent Reviewers brought in for Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Over the past year there has been an unprecedented increase in the identification of cases that were notified to the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, and with the benefit of hindsight, not all of these were necessary, however the open and honest conversation had as a result strengthened our local approach and relationships between colleagues. The Independent Scrutineer and Partnership Manager met with a colleague at the Department of Education to discuss the significant rise and to identify if we were an area of concern. Once some cases were excluded (for various reasons including those focussed on alleged perpetrators of crime) then the local rise was not dissimilar to that seen nationally during the pandemic. We are hopeful that the number of notifiable incidents will reduce this year to allow us to focus on the Child safeguarding Practice Reviews that are ongoing, and embedding the learning identified.

The partnership has a proven successful process for Rapid Reviews and supporting Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. There is a need now, to establish how best to action learning across a tri-borough arrangement, ensure there is clear responsibility for plans and a method of effectively monitoring and tracking impact.

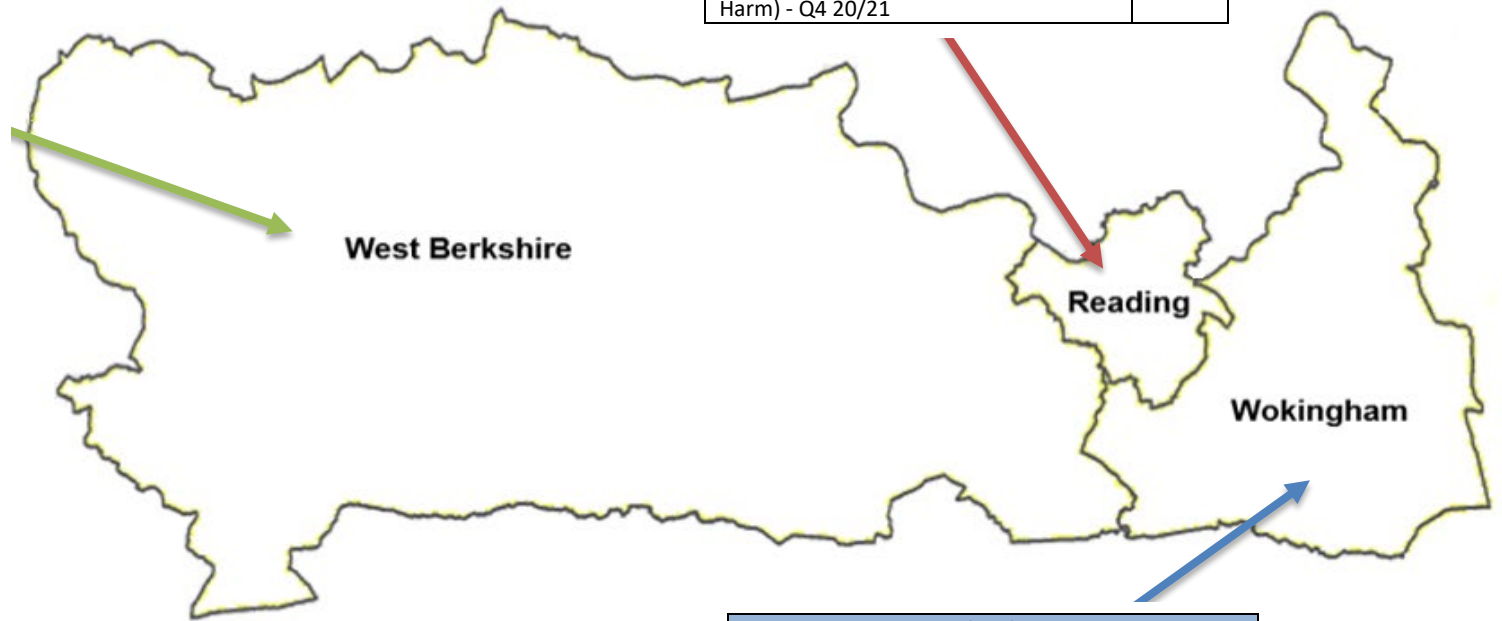
Appendix 1 – Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Sub group structure chart



Appendix 2 – Knowing our children

West Berks	
West Berks Under 18 Population	35,500
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 21	40
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 21	245
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 21	41
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 20/21	335
Total number of children 0-18-year olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 20/21	41

Reading	
Reading Under 18 Population	37,000
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 21	61
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 21	422
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 21	73
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 20/21	540
Total number of children 0-18-year olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 20/21	79



Wokingham	
Wokingham Under 18 Population	40,400
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 21	38
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 21	128
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 21	25
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 20/21	250
Total number of children 0-18-year olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 20/21	36