



Reading | West Berkshire | Wokingham

Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022/2023



Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire
and Berkshire West
Integrated Care Board



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Foreword/Executive Summary from the Berkshire West Safeguarding Executive

Welcome to the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report for 2022/2023, 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.

Our unique tri-borough partnership provides us with opportunities for collaborative working over a wider footprint. This can be challenging, and takes time, but throughout this document you will see examples of our progress. These include but are not limited to the alignment of Threshold Guidance to support continuity for practitioners working across Berkshire West, provision of support and training for schools (Alter Ego Productions) and clear and specific updated procedures and practice changes as a result of case reviews.

During this reporting year we have published an unprecedented six Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. The Child Safeguarding Practice 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. Please see section 3 for further information on these reviews and the learning identified.

We continue to reflect and scrutinise our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to gain the benefits from working over a three local authority area footprint. Our new Independent Scrutineer, David Goosey, has been a huge help in enabling us to think more collaboratively and identify where our endeavours to work together are best focused. Please see the Governance and Accountability page below for more information. In addition, throughout the report you will see 'Scrutiny and Challenge' boxes that highlight where we need to focus our attention.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and say thank you to 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. We would also like to thank our Partnership Business Unit, who manage all the partnership meetings, support the Chairs, and keep in communication with colleagues across the whole of Berkshire West. This is no mean feat, and we all appreciate the positive nature of the team, the high calibre of work produced, and their ability to keep the partnership on track.

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 from June 2022 is:

- Directors of Children's Services - Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham
- Chief Nursing Officer – Integrated Care Board (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West)
- Head Protecting Vulnerable People - Thames Valley Police
- Chief Superintendent, Local Policing Berkshire – Thames Valley Police
- Independent Scrutineer (Chair)

From the outset our multi-agency arrangements have been designed to be flexible, with the Safeguarding Executive acknowledging the need to review the structure and responsibilities if required. As such, we recognised there were some challenges and improvements required in our high-level accountability and governance, communication between subgroups, and our scrutiny model.

The statutory responsibility for the partnership arrangements sits at the Chief Executive level of the safeguarding partners, who delegate this duty to the BWSCP Safeguarding Executive. 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. We recognised that this link needed to be stronger, therefore we initiated regular joint meetings between the three Local Authority Chief Executive Officers and the three Directors for Children's Services. These meetings are being broadened to include the equivalent roles within Thames Valley Police and the ICB, and a new scheme of delegation is in the process of being agreed to ensure clear governance and line of sight for the statutory partners.

This year we have benefitted from the challenge, support, and advice of our new Independent Scrutineer. This role has been a critical part of our Safeguarding Executive discussions, enabling us to consider different viewpoints and think critically. David has also provided a consistent approach to the Chairing arrangements of the Executive Group and the three locality Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups. We are clear that this role does not hold responsibility for the partnership, which firmly remains with the Safeguarding Executive, but Chairing these particular groups allows a vital communication link between them and provides a helicopter view across Berkshire West. Further links between the Safeguarding Executive and the wider subgroup structure will continue as we plan to invite Subgroup Chairs to periodically join the Executive meeting to discuss how the work of the groups can be better understood and shared.

For this reporting year the Safeguarding Executive met monthly to enable conversations and decisions to move quickly while our Independent Scrutineer settled into post. We have now agreed to return to a quarterly meeting timetable to enable work to progress in between meetings. Likewise, we have moved the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups to be quarterly and in line with the data availability, to support partnership colleagues to be able to complete work and auditing in between meetings and enable actions to be progressed and completed.

An area of focus for us going forward is the need to improve our multi-agency audit planning and delivery. This year, multi-agency auditing has continued to be driven on a locality basis through case review recommendations or inspection preparation. While the audits have been useful and learning is shared across the partnership, this still lacks clear coordination with no formally agreed multi-agency auditing process and is an area of development for the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups. We have, however, implemented a new Quality Assurance Framework, with the considerable help of our Independent Scrutineer. This provides clear purpose and focus for the partnership, detailing the safeguarding assurance processes we expect to follow (See section 4).

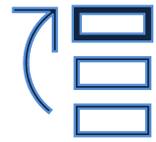
Our partnership structure allows us to promote partnership collaboration, which has enabled constructive independent scrutiny from partner agency colleagues. This has been evident locally in our subgroups but is also replicated in our pan-Berkshire work. Further details can be found in the following sections.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

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 tri-borough partnership provides us with the opportunity 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 some evidence of the positive impact for our workforce of working in this coordinated way. However, much more could be done and should be done at pace to benefit from cross boundary working. This has to be a major part of the progress achieved in the coming year.

SECTION 2: PRIORITY AREAS OF WORK

During the 2021/22 year the BWSCP focused on some key themes identified by Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and feedback from colleagues within our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. This was undertaken in subgroups across our localities, Berkshire West, and Pan Berkshire. The BWSCP subgroup structure chart can be found in Appendix 1.



Whilst individual organisations respond to emerging and existing safeguarding concerns, the information below represents the partnership approach, work, and outcomes in relation to these themes.

OUR APPROACH TO EXTRA-FAMILIAL RISK – CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING, EXPLOITATION, AND SERIOUS YOUTH VIOLENCE

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. These are routinely reviewed and changes to approach taken where necessary.

In Reading, an Independent Reviewer was appointed to review the Child Exploitation Missing Triage and Review (CETAR) and Child Exploitation and Missing Operational Group (CEMOG) Meetings following a recommendation in the Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review. There were a number of positive reflections including clear information sharing within the meetings, trauma informed compassion around the young person’s experience, great relationship among colleagues attending the meetings and exploitation mapping was deemed important, and practitioners were pleased with the mapping work done.



There were recommendations for improvement also and these include better involvement with the young people and their parents, increasing the timeliness of referrals into these meetings, more effective meeting actions and timeframes (with an escalation route identified), introduction of a risk and issues log and more regular multiagency audits, where all agencies look at the arrangements for the young person. Including Adult Services to enable better transition planning is important, all ‘red’ raged cases should have a social worker and a problem profile is required. The review was completed in March 2023, and a multi-agency group is putting in place an action plan to support these recommendations.

In West Berkshire our Independent Scrutineer attended an Exploitation & Missing Risk Assessment Conference (EMRAC) and provided some useful feedback for development in the 2023/24 reporting year for the incoming chairs of the group. The feedback was mostly positive, noting that the meeting was well managed, the purpose was clear and understood by those present and the Child Exploitation/Child Sexual Exploitation criteria being used to good effect. There were close working relations between several different professionals and agencies which facilitated information sharing. A recommendation was to explore contexts further, including that of the impact of significant harm and ensuring that the young person’s ethnicity is discussed and understood, as these will have an impact on the young person’s identity.

Indicator Tool: To support our vulnerable young people, it is crucial that practitioners have the right tools and knowledge. Colleagues across Berkshire West continue to receive contextual safeguarding or similar training from their respective organisations. Colleagues are also supported to use the Pan Berkshire Exploitation Indicator Tool, which is regularly reviewed by the Pan Berkshire Exploitation Subgroup to ensure it is fit for purpose, ensuring a county wide approach. Locally, audits have shown the tool is well used and subsequent referrals are appropriate.

Audit: West Berkshire colleagues conducted an audit of indicator tools to establish if the relevant EMRAC thresholds were applied on a consistent basis, this concluded that in the vast majority of cases thresholds were

correctly applied. The type of factors that are most prevalent would commonly be present in young people working with children’s social care. There has been a considerable increase in the number of young people identified at risk of exploitation where there is family relationship breakdown or conflict in comparison to the previous year.

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) Response:

In Reading, following the Thematic LCSPR into Serious Youth Violence, weapon crime continues to be a priority; Thames Valley Police Officers have a process in place to stop and search “habitual” knife carriers in the community. Thames Valley Police continue to provide safety arches in Secondary Schools when needed and the Neighbourhood Police Team have offered to support and undertake work with primary schools. Funding was secured by Thames Valley Police to provide assemblies from St Giles Trust in Reading schools. St Giles Trust helps vulnerable young people who are criminally exploited through gangs, serious violence, and offending. More than 20 assemblies were delivered to year groups seven, eight and nine across a number of Reading Schools and focused on debunking the myths and stereotypes around crime, weapons, gang involvement, county lines, exploitation, and violence.

Impact of LCSPR learning:

In Wokingham, following a LCSPR featuring serious youth violence, a pilot Exclusion Prevention Programme was initiated in September 2022 involving 5 schools in the area which had the highest exclusions rates. This programme is focused on exclusions related to offending type behaviour and works with the individual children and their schools to support the pupil to remain in school. In May 2023 the programme was working with 9 children and had evidence of success for a child who had been planned to move education settings but will now be staying at their current school given the noted improvements after they started working with the Prevention and Youth Justice Service.

Impact of Partnership working:

Adolescent Risk – Reading Festival – Concerns were raised by local services about the safeguarding and welfare of young people who attend large scale events such as festivals. Festival Republic alongside colleagues across the Partnership footprint undertake work in preparation for Reading Festival on an annual basis. The safeguarding practice at Reading Festival 2022 was effective and a Safeguarding Coordinator is always on site alongside welfare teams; there are key safeguarding partners in the welfare teams. There are also links with local hospitals, Thames Valley Police, and South-Central Ambulance Service.



Planning for 2023 will include a review of the visibility of services for young people and signage at the festival so any concerns can be responded to effectively. Festival Republic and local partners will be facilitating a project looking at the development of Help Hubs that will operate 24 hours a day throughout the festival period. These Hubs will be staffed by local safeguarding professionals and will be a one-stop hub where young people can come to talk, seek advice, and offer support.

Attending any large event, such as Reading Festival can be anxiety inducing; the Mental Health Support Team are considering hosting webinars and assemblies for the parents of Festival Goers to outline the range of safeguarding officers available at the festival.

Impact of Partnership working:

Starting Point – Navigator Programme - The Starting Point Navigator programme launched in June 2021. Based within the Royal Berkshire Hospital over the weekend it supports young people who come to the Emergency Department due to violence or risk-taking behaviours with the aim of reaching young people at a moment of crisis and to try to connect/divert them to other opportunities.

This programme format has been introduced in schools to engage with young people that are struggling in and need additional support. They offer support both in the education setting, but also ensure the young person is connected with a mentor in the community. So far, the programme has connected with 47 young people. Once they have made a connection, they work to understand their interests, what they want to achieve and explain to them the opportunities available via the Navigator Programme. Young People have an allocated mentor to accompany them throughout their journey and provide support as and when required.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO EXTRA-FAMILIAL RISK

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. Locally, high profile incidents of serious youth violence have reminded us that a coordinated and consistent approach and response is crucial to support our families and practitioners.

In recent years, each locality area has produced a multi-agency strategy that relates to extra-familial Harm (using the terminology of either Adolescent Risk, Exploitation or Harm Outside the Home). While the detail and governance of these strategies is different for each locality, the BWSCP expectation is that there is general consistency in strategic approach and response, while recognising that the scale and breadth across local service delivery may differ. For example, we know that the Thames Valley Police response will be consistent across Berkshire West, but the preventative services provided by other agencies will vary, dependent on need.

While the three locality-based strategic groups have been continuing to provide direction within their locality, the BWSCP Safeguarding Executive have agreed that greater alignment of strategies is a key priority for 2023/2024.



Our Strategic Intent: *To work towards locality-based strategies for Extra-Familial Harm that are more aligned, supporting a more combined and collaborative approach across Berkshire West.*

A task and finish group will be set up in in July 2023 to progress this work. For more information see the BWSCP Delivery Plan: [BWSCP Website - Assurance Documents](#)

Exploitation (Yellow YoYo) Project: To support the strategic intent for 2023/24, Thames Valley Police were able to offer additional funding to commission an organisation to review at the customer journey for all organisations that should either signpost or offer direct support in relation to exploitation. We want to ensure that, as far as possible, the public receive a consistent and user-friendly experience when they are looking for help – from the language used through to appropriate signposting and support. This work was commissioned at the end of the reporting year, and results will therefore be discussed and incorporated into the strategic work during 2023/24.

Scrutiny and Impact:

In each area there is a continued drive to ensure processes and strategic direction are improving through evaluation and review. Whilst changes have been implemented, the Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews have highlighted that more is required. These recommendations need to be acted upon quickly, and the learning shared widely. The Safeguarding Executive must work together to improve aligned responses and understanding across our Berkshire West footprint.

OUR APPROACH TO EXTRA-FAMILIAL RISK – ONLINE SAFETY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

To 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.



We recognise that social media has been highlighted as a significant concern within the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews focussing on serious youth violence. Whilst the scope of the reviews could not evidence social media as harmful contributory factor, the criminal processes and a subsequent documentary did highlight the influential effects of pushed content and how social media can be used to organise and incite violence. As a result, our reviews have included recommendations for our local Partnership to both support practitioners and schools with current knowledge and information, whilst recognising that this is a national, if not global, issue.

Crest Advisory Report: The Dawes Trust commissioned Crest Advisory in 2019 to run a multi-year programme of work examining the underlying causes and drivers of serious youth violence including the use of technology, specifically social media. As part of the process, Crest Advisory interviewed a number of Reading Headteachers', Thames Valley Police and Metropolitan Police colleagues; Thames Valley Police Project Alpha has been created to assist with the disruption of harmful media content that could be seen to incite violence, specifically gang related content.



The report published in 2022 identified that online conflict is happening much younger than the current preventative work is aimed at and whilst primary schools are aware of the issues, other services do not engage until secondary school age. One of the key findings of the report outlines that violence is seen as an accepted response when it is not challenged; if a large group of individuals accept conflict escalating online it increases the expectation that it will be resolved physically. Crest Advisory are recommending that there is a roll out of “online active bystander” training for children and young people, delivered through PSHE lessons from key stage 3 to enable children and young people to understand that their actions online have real world consequences.

Effective reduction of the risk of violence from online activity cannot be achieved through any single group or organisation through a single solution, instead a wide range of mitigation strategies need to be deployed at varying scales: parents, public services, schools, technology companies and Ofcom.

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) Response:

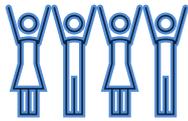
Learning from our Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews has challenged us to understand how confident practitioners are in speaking to young people about their social media usage and online safety and understand how they use this information in their work with young people and any assessment of risk. We therefore undertook a practitioner survey in early 2023 to explore this further.

78% of respondents knew where to find their organisations online safety policy, and 79% did feel confident to speak to children about social media and how they use it. Respondents raised a number of barriers they felt they encountered to them regularly being able to have these discussions, and half reported that no clear training was available to them on this subject. While respondents were able to list a range of negative influences the social media can have, it did raise some questions about practitioners using a trauma informed approach. The results of this survey are due to be shared with the Learning and Development Subgroup in the first instance.



Theatre Productions in Schools:

To support our school community, in the Autumn of 2022, the Safeguarding Partnership funded Alter Ego's productions 'In the Net' and 'Unacceptable' for Primary and Secondary Schools across the Berkshire West footprint; these performances were well received and a positive experience for the schools involved.



30 performances of the In the Net production were delivered to 43 Primary Schools (schools shared sessions), reaching approximately 3,500 pupils in Years 4-6.

Performances of the Unacceptable production were delivered to 29 Secondary Schools, reaching approximately 5,800 pupils in Years 9-11.

Following these performances, a survey with all participating Schools was undertaken in order to gain feedback on how engaging the sessions were and whether there was an increase and staff and student knowledge in relation to the subject matter.

Primary Schools reported that:

- children were able to list and give examples of how to stay safe online and use the internet responsibly
- children were able to talk confidently about what they learnt and understood that they should speak out if they see something scary, or someone says something unkind
- children were able to understand the importance of being kind and the repercussions of their actions



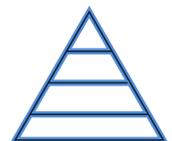
Secondary Schools reported that:

- the performances increased pupil's awareness of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual violence and gave them the space to reflect on their views
- the performance promoted good 1:1 discussions
- the performance is being used as a tool as part of their restorative measures
- the real-life stories were very useful, and it sparked a discussion about sexism; and how to challenge the behaviours of the minority of students

EFFECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF CHILD PROTECTION THRESHOLDS

Aligned threshold guidance

It is crucial to prevent 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.



In Berkshire West we have three locality-based Threshold Guidance documents, due to differences in relation to referral routes and service provision for each Local Authority Children's Services. However, a project was initiated towards the end of 2021/22 to fully align and standardise these three documents, which successfully concluded in the autumn of 2022.

The content and layout of the documents was updated to include:



- The issues highlighted by a local Domestic Homicide Review to ensure the content adequately reflected information in relation to the risks associated with domestic abuse, and the new Domestic Abuse Act.
- Improve the risk and protective factors in relation to exploitation, special educational needs and disabilities and sexual harassment in schools
- Alignment of the document detail across the three areas, with the only differences being referral information and some specific service detail
- An improved layout to enable practitioners to more easily access the important information
- Improved information and detail about consent requirements at each level of need.

These revised documents mean that whichever document a practitioner refers to they know that the detail within the levels of need is the same in each local authority area. In addition, we have uploaded the document detail

into a webpage. Practitioners can now easily review threshold guidance online, as well as download a pdf version is preferred. Details and links to the webpages and documents can be found here: [BWSCP website - threshold guidance](#)

Holding and managing risk for cases that don't meet the criteria for statutory intervention

Following an independent review of the 18 rapid reviews undertaken across Berkshire West from the beginning of 2020 until June 2021, a theme arose relating to professionals' confidence in holding risk for cases that fall below the statutory level. Education colleagues were asked to complete a short survey to coordinate a response to the findings.

The survey was sent out in early 2022/23 to Designated Safeguarding Leads across West Berkshire and Wokingham and 132 responses were received. The results of the survey have not yet been discussed at the Education Safeguarding Engagement Groups, but initial results indicate that 24% of respondents in Wokingham and 34% of respondents in West Berkshire were 'somewhat not confident in holding risk'. In addition, 43% of respondents in Wokingham were not aware of either the Threshold or Escalation Guidance documentation, compared to 22% in West Berkshire. However, most responders do feel confident to escalate safeguarding concerns within the multi-agency environment with only 6% and 11% not feeling confident in Wokingham and West Berkshire respectively.



Scrutiny and Impact:

There is clearly some awareness raising work to be considered with regards to the Threshold Guidance and support to be considered for education settings to enable them to feel more confident in working with some of their more challenging pupils.

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) Response:



In response to learning from our local Safeguarding Practice Reviews the Partnership produced guidance to support Professionals, Parents and Carers to understand the Child in Need process and the expectations when attending meeting. This guidance is easily accessible on our website and the links have been widely shared across the workforce.

- Guidance for Practitioners: [BWSCP Website - Professionals: Child in Need meeting and plan](#)
- Information for Parents and Carers: [BWSCP Website: Parents and carers: Child in need meeting information](#)

PRIORITY REVIEW FOR 2023/2024

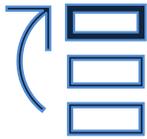
Through the support of our Independent Scrutineer, the BWSCP Safeguarding Executive have reviewed and agreed some clear priorities for the year ahead. In addition to the 'Strategic Response to Extra-Familial Harm' (noted above) we have also specifically agreed the need for clarity and guidance in relation to our combined response to Neglect. This is also in response to one of our Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Neglect is a persistent safeguarding risk for children, and it can be difficult for professionals with safeguarding responsibilities to identify indicators of neglect, to assess whether what they have observed is sufficiently serious for them to take action, and to decide on the most appropriate course of action.



While each locality is working with a significant number of cases of neglect, with a variety of tools and approaches, there is currently no strategic strategy to tackle neglect either at a locality or Berkshire West level. This is where our tri-borough partnership can provide consistent strategic guidance, which will particularly benefit practitioners who work across Berkshire West.

Our Strategic Intent: *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.*

A task and finish group will be set up in July 2023 to progress this work, building on the BWSCP Practitioner Guidance for Neglect that was agreed in 2023 ([BWSCP Website - Neglect](#)) to produce a Berkshire West Strategy.



Other areas of focused work identified include the development of a Berkshire West MASH Oversight Group (more information in Section 3), actively respond to the Social Care Review and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 consultation when published, develop a comprehensive BWSCP Learning and Development offer (more information in Section 5) and embed the Quality Assurance Framework, providing assurance and evidence of progress and impact (more information in Section 4).

For more information see the BWSCP Delivery Plan: [BWSCP Website - Assurance Documents](#)

SECTION 3: CASE REVIEW ACTIVITY

RAPID REVIEW ACTIVITY AND LEARNING

During the 2022-2023 year, only one Rapid Review was undertaken at the beginning of the reporting year. This was a case in Reading of an unborn child who died unexpectedly in utero at 36 weeks gestation. This was initially notified to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel as both parents were well known to Children's Services. However, one outcome of the Rapid Review meeting was to agree that the death was not as a result of parental abuse or neglect, although there were co-morbidity factors recognised. This was reported to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, who agreed that a formal Rapid Review Report was no longer required, however we decided to complete the Rapid Review and submit a report as there was learning identified. This included:

- The documentation of case history needs to be evident in records and considered in meetings and in planning. As a result Children's Social care reported that quality of practice was externally audited, to consider the use of history in assessments as part of accelerated improvement work. This practice would remain in place.
- Thames Valley Police information could have been shared and documented better, plus, the recording of requests for strategy meetings and conferences for all the children in the family concerned could be streamlined to make it more easily followed. This learning was shared with the MASH Manager and included in training across the area.



Scrutiny and Challenge:

It is notable that between March 2020 to June 2021, an unprecedented total of 22 Rapid Reviews were undertaken across Berkshire West. The case described above was the only case notified from July 2021 until March 2023. While there is no indication that cases have been missed, colleagues across the partnership must remain alert and ready to discuss cases which may meet notification threshold.

It is positive that there have been cases of potential concern brought to the Case Review Group for discussion throughout this period, and examples of cases that may meet notification threshold being discussed between statutory partners. However, this discussion process did not have a clear escalation or sign off route, which has been rectified through revisions to the BWSCP Case Review Process document described below.

CASE REVIEW GROUP ACTIVITY

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. This was particularly important considering the significant drop in cases being identified that met the criteria for making a notification of a serious child safeguarding incident. Due to the reduction, consideration was given to the process in place and challenging discussions took place to review whether any cases may have been missed. During this period the Case Review Group continued to review cases of concern, that didn't meet the criteria for notification, to ensure that there was a multi-agency view and to consider if any further local-based work was required.

An outcome of the case review process discussion and the Independent Review report referenced in the previous Annual Report, was that the Safeguarding Executive had not been fully sighted on all the Rapid Reviews from across Berkshire West, at the different stages of review. This inadvertently meant a lack of clear ownership and direction at the Executive level which subsequently impacted on the ability of the Safeguarding Executive to be fully assured about the process, learning identified and the impact. A thorough review of the process has been undertaken, to ensure that appropriate Safeguarding Executive members are informed or involved at key stages of decision making. The latest version of the BWSCP Case Review Process document can be found here: [BWSCP Website - Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews](#)

LOCAL CHILD SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE REVIEWS

The purpose of a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) 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.

Published LCSPRs:

The BWSCP have published six LCSPRs in the 2022/2023 year. These relate to two cases of known or suspected non-accidental injury of a young child (Reading 'Aiden' and West Berkshire 'Bobby'), one case of sexual abuse (Wokingham 'Aisha and Ciara'), two individual CSPRs for two perpetrators of serious youth violence (Wokingham 'Harry' and 'David' and a Thematic Review into the same topic for Reading). All our LCSPR reports are published on this page: [BWSCP Website - Safeguarding Practice Reviews](#).



Some of the key areas of learning from the cases include:

- Assessments should recognise and take account of the multiple risk factors, analyse statements of fact about a parent/adult with what impact the issue may have on a child's safety and welfare, ensure records reflect this thinking process, management oversight promotes clear rationale for decisions.
- Recognising and understanding patterns of behaviour through the use of chronologies (single or multi-agency) to support assessment and risk management work.
 - Ensuring safe step down of intervention - to include a clear, multi-agency process to support these cases once higher level of intervention is removed and re-assessment of risk if the family circumstances change, or parental disengagement is a cause for concern.
 - All cases reiterate areas for improved information sharing at different stages in safeguarding processes, plus the need for empowering practitioners to escalate if they have a concern or difference of opinion.
 - It is important to find out and understand if family members have any learning needs or borderline learning difficulties - professionals must make sure that family members understand what meetings they are asked to attend, why the meeting is happening, and what is expected of them.
- The importance of Child Focused Practice - professionals should always try to understand and record children's views where possible, even if they are young with limited verbal skills, with due consideration of different communication styles, including issues of disability, age, and language.



Learning specifically in relation to serious youth violence:

- Recognition that this cohort are likely to have a range of complex needs and are at risk of school exclusion.
- Improve information sharing with schools about pupils at risk of exploitation.
- The need for appropriate alternative education provision to support a multi-agency response.
- Earlier referral and engagement with CAMHS for children at risk of exclusion and understanding the role of speech and language services.
- Development of diversionary support to avoid entry into the criminal justice system.
- The need to reduce the number of professionals involved, whilst enabling consistency and continuity of workers to build relationships with the young people and their family.
- Improving data to understand the problem profile more accurately.
- Ensure that the needs of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are really understood by all professional working with them.



As part of the Child safeguarding Practice Review process, we also identify and highlight the positive work undertaken by practitioners. Many examples of this were identified, including:

- Clear identification of vulnerabilities in families and multi-disciplinary discussions being undertaken.
- 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.
- Positive examples of practitioners being child focussed and challenging decisions when they felt it was appropriate.
- Significant support was initially put in place for a family, which was appropriately reduced when good progress was made.
- Examples where the multi-agency response when some new information was received was timely and coordinated.

Recommendations and action plans are in place for these reviews; they are being actively monitored and acted upon through the Berkshire West Case Review Group and the locality based Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups. A number of partnership actions have been completed which include:

- A BWSCP webpage has been created using the best practice resources developed by the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse. These resources, and other guidance, have been shared widely across the safeguarding network
- Review and update of the Threshold Guidance (noted above)
- Review and update of the Escalation Guidance and procedures
- Produce and share Child in Need Meeting Guidance for practitioners, and parents/carers (noted above)
- A range of locality and agency specific, plus Berkshire Wide procedures and processes have been reviewed and updated as a direct result of CSPR learning.



Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) Response:

There are examples of our response to LCSPR recommendations throughout this report, but in addition:

- In Wokingham Children’s Services, following CSPR recommendations, there has been significant improvement in process, practice and information sharing when a child with an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) moves into the area. Multi-disciplinary meetings are arranged to share any relevant information between new professionals and those formerly involved, providing continuity for the children/young people moving between Local Authorities and mitigates the risk of important information being missed, or the family ‘repeating their story’. Social Workers are now routinely invited to annual reviews of children/young people with an EHCP, and if there is no Social Worker involvement, consideration is given to whether a referral to Children’s Social Care or Early Help would be beneficial to the family.
- Thames Valley Police has a vulnerability and risk annual programme and, as a result of LCSPRs, child criminality, and the appropriate trauma informed and partnership approach to children suspected of crime, was covered in the 2022 training delivered to Incident Crime Response and Neighbourhood teams. A Vodcast has also been developed with family members involved in a serious youth violence incident that triggered two of our LCSPRs. The Vodcast will be mandatory training for all front-line officers, student officers, PCSO’s, Child abuse and MASH staff.



- In West Berkshire Children and Family Services, Conferences Chairs received refresher training to ensure that ‘respectful curiosity’ is maintained, and self-reporting is regarded with due weight. The Service Manager has carried out observations and confirmed that the issues which arose within the case review are considered as part of this process and that reflective discussions occur where these factors are considered. The Service Manager reads all feedback provided by attendees of conferences and where necessary these are acted upon and used to inform service development.

- Brighter Futures for Children initiated a review of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) and alternative provision, focusing on their potential contribution to work to combat extra-familial harm and exploitation. The review has concluded, and actions are being implemented. The report commented that there had been a recent change in leadership at the PRU, and interviewers were encouraged with their level of planning and training around areas of safeguarding concern. Relationships need to be strengthened with the borough's alternative provision and they need to be considered by all professionals as a key partner in the safeguarding network around a child. Priorities include ensuring consistent information for schools and internal Local Authority staff to ensure monitoring, quality and review is in place, Alternative Provision safeguarding policies need to be developed more in respect of Extra-Familial Risk and Harm through training, engagement, and local offers of Continual Professional Development.

Audit:



In response to LCSPR learning Wokingham Children's Services have undertaken an audit of cases where the Early Help service has been tasked to support young people with special educational needs and disabilities. This included feedback from parents and identified that a better understanding of what constitutes 'Early Help' in Wokingham - including thresholds and the full range of early help activity on offer is required; reiterated the need for shared knowledge, co-ordination, and oversight for the group of children who have SEN support needs and EHCPs, but also that when a family receives an appropriate Early Help service that feedback is positive and the family find the support beneficial.

Sharing learning:

Along with ensuring processes and procedures are effective, once of the key outputs from any case review is to share learning to improve practice. Whilst there is much learning for practitioners involved in a case review, while the process is ongoing, we also produce a two-page learning brief for each case published. This focusses on the learning identified, the recommendations, and information and guidance for practitioners. Along with the full report, we share these widely with the expectation that these are used and discussed within agencies and teams.

In addition, details of the learning and recommendations from the Rapid Reviews and recently published CSPRs have been collated and shared widely, particularly at sessions with School Designated Safeguarding Leads and nearly 100 GPs across Berkshire West. Along with common themes and learning from previous case reviews the presentation slides, published reports, learning briefs and 7-minute briefings can be found here:



[BWSCP Website - Safeguarding Practice Reviews](#)

Local Case Review Process:



While previous feedback from the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and the independent review conducted in February 2022 concluded that the local process for Rapid Reviews has been effective, one LCSPR (not yet published) identified some weaknesses in our LCSPR panel process and another. As a result, a review of our Case Review Process Guidance and Documentation has been undertaken, with key areas regarding the expectation of the LCSPR Chair and Panel, and escalation processes strengthened. The revised document can be found on our website: [BWSCP Website - Safeguarding Practice Reviews](#)

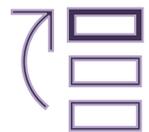
Review of National Cases of Local Interest

The Berkshire West Case Review group regularly reviews recently published national cases. Information is collated and shared with regards to learning and recommendations that would benefit from further consideration locally.

As an example, following the tragic death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and subsequent National Child safeguarding Practice Review and Joint Targeted Area Inspection, colleagues across Berkshire West initiated a project to review local services against the report findings. The project focused on the different approaches and multi-agency support into the MASH arrangements in the three local authority areas. Some of the key findings were:

- Multi-agency input into the MASH varies between the three areas.
- MASH processes are not consistent across the three areas.
- While there are good examples of strong multi-agency response and decision making, this is not consistent and in one area there were significant concerns regarding decision making resting solely with Children’s Social Care.

The results of this work identified how different the MASH approaches are in each area, which was surprising considering the three areas share the same police and health partners. This has directly led to the Safeguarding Executive agreeing that this is a priority area of work and the need to establish a Berkshire West MASH Oversight Group with the remit to provide scrutiny, advice, and challenge on how the MASH arrangements are working in each locality and identify improvements.



Impact of Partnership Working:

Learning from local and national safeguarding case reviews highlighted the need for a clear escalation policy that all practitioners felt confident to use. To support our local practitioner’s additional escalation guidance was produced to explain how to work towards the best outcome for a child, particularly in complex cases, local contact information for each agency was included so that contact can be made should an escalation reach a stage where formal resolution is required. A briefing note template was also included for practitioners to complete, to allow them to outline their concerns and describe the solution they are looking to achieve. Our solution focused approach to the escalation process has been replicated in the Pan Berkshire Policy.

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 and Independent Reviewers brought in for Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. The Case Review Group continues to scrutinise any cases of concern to ensure the appropriate decision has been made. In addition, as Independent Scrutineer, I now have a significant involvement with the subgroup bringing an independent perspective.

The partnership has recognised that improvements needed to be made to the LCSPR process, to increase oversight and management. The revised documentation should support this. It is important that colleagues involved in LCSPRs understand the remit and their responsibility to achieve a proportionate and effective review.

There also remains a need to establish the sharing of learning across a tri-borough arrangement, utilising the new Quality Assurance Framework, and to ensure there is clear responsibility for plans and a method of identifying impact.

SECTION 4: WIDER EFFECTIVENESS/WORK OF OUR PARTNERSHIP

SAFEGUARDING EXECUTIVE: ESCALATIONS, CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

We are aware that we have challenged ourselves locally by forming a tri-borough safeguarding partnership arrangement but recognise that we can work more coherently and collaboratively across the three borough boundaries. Throughout the document are examples of decisions taken and topics discussed by the Safeguarding Executive, but some other examples include:

Looked After Children Initial Health Assessments (IHA): The Safeguarding Executive were alerted to the local challenges around completion of LAC Health Assessments within the statutory timeframe. Timeliness of health checks is critical because any delay results in the child's care plan not being able to include the child's health needs at the first looked after child review.



Health colleagues were invited to the Safeguarding Executive Meeting to discuss and consider the steps to resolve the issue. A subsequent report from the Integrated Care Board with the provider agency provided assurance that there had been no specific safeguarding concerns resulting from an IHA not being completed within the 20-day period. There were either legitimate reasons for the delay, which enabled a more effective assessment, or process issues were identified which colleagues agreed to resolve. The local Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups continued to receive data and no further issues have been escalated.

Health Visiting Provision: In early 2023, it was identified locally that the unprecedented number of vacancies within the Health Visiting Service led to the need to implement a business continuity plan and develop a remedial action plan with adjustments to the service provision. It was highlighted that even with a full complement of staff there would still be insufficient numbers of HV's to provide a comprehensive service.

Mitigating actions included (but were not limited to) prioritising targeted contacts for vulnerable families, all antenatal notifications being triaged to ensure that targeted face to face antenatal appointments are offered when needed, in the family home, and continued attendance at safeguarding meetings.



There is an LGA review underway into Public Health in Berkshire so hopefully this will provide a clearer picture moving forward in relation to the commissioning position. The Safeguarding Executive agreed that they will wait until the Public Health review has concluded and, in the meantime, regular updates of assurance will be provided to the ISIGs. In recent months the position has improved considerably.

Arrival of families from Ukraine: During 2022 the Safeguarding Executive regularly discussed this situation to ensure organisations were working together and in alignment across Berkshire West. A particular issue relating to accompanied minors was identified as the messaging from Government to Local Authorities seemed not to be compliant with the suggested framework. The Safeguarding Executive agreed that there was merit in aligning the processes across the 3 areas so that practice across Berkshire West was consistent.

QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

In 2022 our Independent Scrutineer highlighted that the partnership was lacking a Quality Assurance Framework to support the understanding of the quality of practice to safeguard children and young people. The Independent Scrutineer has provided us with a framework that combines various data sources (qualitative and quantitative) and is designed to help generate a culture where the best standards of practice are expected, by providing high challenge and high support. The challenge comes via rigorous scrutiny of practice and delivered using skilled feedback across the professional system, which is informed by strong values of openness, transparency, honesty and of never setting out to harm others, whether fellow professionals or children and families. The new Quality Assurance Framework is published on our website: [BWSCP Website - Quality Assurance](#)



BWSCP Dataset Improvements: Reviewing our local data is a key element of the Quality Assurance Framework. 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. When we came together as a partnership, we produced a combined Berkshire West dataset that included the same information from all three Children's Services to provide a comparison, as well as data from other key partners. This dataset has been discussed at each Independent Scrutiny and Impact Group (ISIG) meeting during the reporting year. A selection of the data included in the dataset can be found in Appendix 2.

The combined dataset provided some interesting points of comparison between the three local authority areas, but more frequently the natural differences between the data (due largely to demographics, economics, different reporting mechanisms and local procedures) meant that time was spent unnecessarily reviewing these differences rather than understanding what the data was telling us for each locality. The Independent Scrutineer has been supporting the development of an enhanced dataset, which will be locality specific, and more comprehensive. Each locality ISIG will receive data pertinent to them, enabling focussed and relevant discussion. More effective analysis of the data is a priority for the ISIGs and feedback on the new dataset and how it has been used can be provided in the next annual report.



Scrutiny and Challenge:

The existing dataset was not fit for purpose and proved more of a distraction than a mechanism to understand the local picture. The three Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups need to use and analyse the information within the new enhanced and locality specific datasets more effectively to drive discussion, risk identification and improvement.

SUPPORTING THE EDUCATION SECTOR

We have 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.

Alongside these meetings are locality-based learning sessions for Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL) where we can share consistent but tailored safeguarding messages. The DSL sessions have continued to develop with a range of key speakers from local services but also regional or national organisations. This year this has included:



- Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service attended the 3 DSL meetings to provide an overview of the sessions they have on offer for young people. Fire Safe is a programme that schools can refer young people who are showing an interest in or have displayed fire setting behaviours; the programme looks at the consequences of fire setting, provides fire safety information and diverts to alternative activities. They also provide Fire Safety Training along with Road and Water Safety Sessions for children in Years 5 to 7.
- The NSPCC Schools Coordinator attended the 3 DSL meetings to present the range of training and resources that are on offer to Schools. For Early Years Foundation Stage children, they use the 'PANTS' resources as a simple way to talk to young children about staying safe from sexual abuse. For KS1 and KS2 pupils they offer 'Speak Out, Stay Safe' assemblies that teaches young people about all forms of abuse and where to get help. For secondary and further education pupils they offer the 'It's Not Ok' resources and lesson plans that help young people recognise concerning behaviour and identify characteristics of positive relationships as well as the 'Love Life' resources which provides strategies for staying safe as young people grow up and gain independence.

To support our Education colleagues the BWSCP also developed a briefing for their return after the summer break. It provided safeguarding updates in relation to revised Threshold Guidance, Escalation Guidance, CSPR Learning, Training Links and Private Fostering.

School Safeguarding Audit: The Section 175/157 (school safeguarding audit) process continues to be aligned across the three authority areas using the NSPCC audit tool. The audit request was sent to Schools in the Autumn of 2022 with a 6-week timeframe for completion. In Reading there was a 98.51% return rate, up 7.5% on last year's returns. In West Berkshire and Wokingham there was a 100% return rate.



It is a requirement 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 of concern. The results are shared between the local authority leads across Berkshire West to enable the learning to be shared across the three areas, but also with the Education Safeguarding Engagement Group in each locality.

The audits highlighted some local areas of focus however the common areas of attention were:

- Governor and Trustee CP Training
- Parents and carers understanding of child protection and safeguarding policy and procedures
- Visitors understanding of how they are able to raise concerns for a child's welfare.
- Supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
- Online Safety
- Safer Recruitment



Action plans in each locality are in place and will be monitored through the Section 175/157 Subgroup.

Op Encompass: A challenge was raised in the local education safeguarding Engagement Groups that Schools were not receiving timely or accurate notifications of Domestic Abuse via the Op Encompass System. Following this concern, a meeting was held with local Op Encompass leads from Thames Valley Police who advised that they are continuing to develop and improve their automated reporting processes for domestic abuse notifications. However, it was recognised that the police school lead/email details had not been updated since the original request for schools to sign the information sharing agreement in 2017 and some were therefore likely to be out of date. The BWSCP Business Unit has been liaising with colleagues to obtain up-to-date school contact lists which have been shared with Thames Valley Police. This topic needs to be re-addressed in the autumn of 2023 to establish if issues remain.

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.

Child Death Overview Panel Bereavement pack: Whenever a child or young person dies it is a tragedy. First and foremost, for the child and the family, but also for those around them including school professionals who may have worked with them. Following discussions at the Pan Berkshire Child Death Overview Panel a Bereavement Guide was produced for school professionals on how to respond to a sudden or unexpected death of a child or young person; this document was finalised in the Autumn of 2022. The guidance outlines the Child Death process and other statutory functions that need to be considered as well as providing useful contacts, resources, and links to local support services. This has been shared with schools across Berkshire West and is available on our website: [BWSCP Website - Child deaths](#)



PAN BERKSHIRE ARRANGEMENTS

BWSCP has continued to support the Pan Berkshire safeguarding arrangements through the Section 11 Panel, Pan Berkshire Policy and Procedures Subgroup and Pan Berkshire Exploitation Subgroup. 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. Agencies value this process, but our new Quality Assurance Framework is clear that we should expect more challenge and practitioner feedback into the process to provide greater assurance.

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 on-line procedures that are easily accessed by all practitioners.



Subgroup members remain willing to take responsibility for, and be proactive in, reviewing chapters outside of the schedule provided by Tri.x and in line with our local forward planner. Out of a total of 48 chapters, 30 (62.5%) have been reviewed since early 2022, and all but two have been reviewed between March 2021 and May 2023.

It is difficult to quantify the impact of this subgroup, however, there remains confidence in the group processes and accuracy of the procedures provided. Any errors are quickly resolved, and good relations with our Tri.x representative has supported us to achieve this. The tone of the group and the strong multi-disciplinary and countywide attendance is a good foundation for multi-agency working. Plus, having a pan county arrangement is helpful for all practitioners working across boundaries.

Impact of Partnership Working: This group also reacts to findings from local case reviews, an example being revisions in the Child Protection Conference chapter following a West Berkshire Child Safeguarding Practice Review. The chapter is now clear that when a case is stepped down from a child protection plan that a child in need plan is in place for at least three months and be subject to management scrutiny and review before closure.

Following a Wokingham Child Safeguarding Practice Review the Children of Parents with Learning Disabilities Procedure was reviewed and refreshed to incorporate the learning from the review, with a specific focus on those parents who do not have a formal diagnosis, in line with the Equalities Act 2010, and signposting the best practice guidance from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.

It is positive that an issue raised in one local authority area can positively impact procedures that are accessed by six local authority areas.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

Development work is required within the Section 11 process to improve and test the level of assurance provided. This requires improved attendance at the Section 11 Panel from key partners within Berkshire West to enable discussion and support change.

SECTION 5: LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

WEBSITE AND MULTI-MEDIA LEARNING

Website: The main mechanism for sharing information with the wider workforce and our families continues to be via the BWSCP website, which is updated regularly and contains a wide range of safeguarding information, guidance and links for support and training.



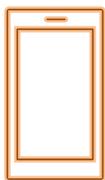
From April 2022 to March 2023 there were 130762 views on 73 pages. The most accessed page was eLearning with over 5,800 views; this is where the Universal Safeguarding Training is hosted alongside various other learning opportunities, and it is positive that the workforce knows where and how to access this.

The second most accessed page on the BWSCP website was the Child Safeguarding Practice Review page. This page contains the Overview Reports and Learning Briefings for all of the published Reviews. It was anticipated that this page would receive more coverage due to the publication of several reviews; this increase suggests that the ongoing publicising of this page is helping professionals access this information and learning.

This year we have added or improved key information pages on topics identified through audit and case review. These have included, but are not limited to:

- Threshold guidance
- Child in Need process and meeting guidance
- Neglect guidance

Social Media: We have increased our social media presence with regards to promoting safeguarding campaigns, posting on Facebook and Twitter every two to three days. Statistics show that engagement with our posts has increased significantly this year, with the most popular topics being exploitation, mental health, and safe sleep/co-sleeping. Some of the identified areas of focus for this year have been:



- Summer campaigns on water safety
- Safe sleeping
- Weapon crime and Exploitation
- Online Safety
- Mental health
- Healthy relationships and domestic abuse

E-Learning: Across Berkshire West we continue to provide a free online level 1 universal safeguarding training module that is available to anyone working with children and young people via our website.

It has always been our aim to retain this element of training for our workforce as free to access; over the past 12 months 4008 people have successfully completed the online Universal Safeguarding Training, an increase of 500 from the previous year. This year we updated the case example provided to ensure more recent and pertinent cases of national importance are highlighted.



Newsletters: The Learning & Development Subgroup published a number of newsletters that were developed to help support all professionals in their self-guided learning. Learning and Development is not just about attending training courses, it can include reading, researching, online sessions & webinars, shadowing and looking at useful tools, resources, and websites. The newsletters are available on the BWSCP website ([BWSCP Website - Newsletters](#)) and relate to: Transitional Safeguarding, Safer Internet, Effective Engagement and Trauma Informed Practice.

BWSCP VIRTUAL FORUMS



The Partnership have successfully hosted a number of online multi-agency forums; these are open to everyone whose service works with the children, young people, parents/carers, and families. Each Forum provides professionals the opportunity to gain information about local & national learning, current initiatives, network and share good practice.

Working with Dads – Working with Dads has been a theme in several safeguarding practice reviews. The aim of this session was to help professionals understand the importance of working work more inclusively with Dads to allow professionals to gain the bigger picture of the families they are working with. The Forum was attended by more than 80 professionals from several agencies.

Child on Child Abuse – An area of improvement from the completion of the Schools S175 Audit in 2021/2022 related to the measures in place to prevent and respond to Child-on-Child abuse. As a result, Child-on-Child abuse is now included in the Universal Safeguarding training and DSL training. The Partnership also hosted a multi-agency forum that outlined what child-on-child abuse is, what it looks like, when to be concerned and how to respond. The Forum was attended by more than 75 professionals from several agencies.

Words Matter - The language that professionals use can have a significant and potentially lifelong impact on victims of abuse and exploitation. This forum enabled us to come together and discuss victim blaming language and how we can accurately and sensitively record and report on victim experience. Colleagues had the opportunity to consider unconscious bias, remodeling their language and barriers.



The Forums are recorded and made available via our YouTube channel: [BWSCP YouTube Channel](#) and our website: [BWSCP Website - Multi-agency Forums](#)

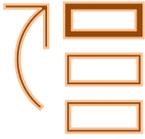
SAFEGUARDING ASSURANCE

The BWSCP Learning and Development (L&D) Subgroup need to ensure that all partner organisations are providing single and multi-agency training, and that there is the required uptake of such provision. In addition, the subgroup wants to ensure that organisations are appropriately and adequately assessing their learning needs and using the information to determine learning priorities. This in turn should enable the BWSCP to identify any gaps or additional learning needs across the workforce.

To support this discussion the L&D Subgroup run a Training Needs Assessment. This survey was undertaken in Spring 2023 and at the time of writing this report, not all required responses had been received, meaning that a discussion of the results has not yet taken place. However, of the responses received, almost all organisations confirmed that they provide regular safeguarding children training for their staff which is regularly reviewed and updated, and that the majority of staff who require training have received it. A range of safeguarding children training at all levels has been delivered by a number of different training providers.



Some gaps in training have been highlighted within the responses including domestic abuse. Whilst domestic abuse appears to be embedded within other areas of training, there are no standalone training resources specifically for the subject. The results also highlighted a mix of responses regarding the delivery of training; the majority of responses are in favour of a mixed method including both face-to-face and virtual.



Challenge from the Independent Scrutineer has highlighted to the Safeguarding Executive that there is no current multi-agency training offer other than the BWSCP Forum Sessions described above. The majority of the decision making, direction and organisation has been placed on the outgoing L&D Subgroup Chair and the BWSCP Business Unit. While the current offer complies with the requirements of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, it falls short of a comprehensive and cohesive programme of training. This is now an element of the BWSCP Delivery Plan for 2023/2024.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

As noted above, the current L&D multi-agency programme is not fit for purpose and a new L&D Subgroup Chair needs to be identified. The new Chair must be given the support of key partnership colleagues who understand the locality learning requirements. A Learning and Development Strategy is required to provide clear direction and expectation in this area of partnership working. Finally, resources must be made available to ensure the learning and development offer is credible and sustainable.

SECTION 6: ENGAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK

Our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements recognise the need to improve our partnership engagement with children and families, ensuring that their voice and experiences are part of our discussions and decision making. Whilst this remains a work in progress, colleagues have undertaken surveys that we have considered in our partnership meetings. Some of the below have been referenced directly in other sections of this report.



Attitudinal Survey: This survey was distributed across all West Berkshire Secondary School; there were a total of 6353 responses with the majority of responders being aged between 11 and 18 years. Young People were asked a series of questions relating to how happy they are to the concerns they are faced with and whether they feel safe in the area they live.



When asked what the most important concerns are 62.9% of young people selected mental health and wellbeing, 6.7% selected domestic abuse and only 4.4% selected exploitation and grooming. There are ongoing projects with young people to raise awareness of exploitation including the Risking it All theatre production, posters, and online information. However, this topic generally expected to be covered by schools as part of the PSHE curriculum, therefore local RSHE forum will review this further to ensure that the material is up to date and informative. In addition, the missing children coordinator is working more closely with youth workers to create a half a day, during school holidays, where they work with a cohort of young people of concern around online exploitation.

'Taking illegal drugs' was highlighted by quite several young people as an issue in the area; however, when asked if any of them had someone close affected by the highlighted issues, the number of responses dropped. Similarly, 26% of young people reported 'carrying a weapon' as a problem in the area they live in; however, when asked whether they or anyone close to them was personally affected by this issue, the percentage dropped to 4.5%. This highlights the difference between perception and experience of an issue and Thames Valley Police confirm that they are not finding many weapons in their stop and searches. The Serious Violence Steering Group will be focusing on addressing how to communicate these statistics to young people to provide some reassurance and highlight that there is more risk of harm if you are carrying a knife.

Due to the success of this survey in West Berkshire, the Police and Crime Commissioner have funded it to being undertaken in Reading and Wokingham for the first time.

Reading Extra-Familial Harm Workshop: In March 2023, the BWSCP delivered the Reading Extra-Familial Harm Workshop; the purpose of this being:

- To review and refresh the Extra-Familial Harm Strategy Action Plan
- To build in links with the Community Safety and Serious Violence Strategy
- Take the opportunity to learn from the Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) published in Berkshire West recently
- To support the completion of relevant Reading Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) actions



The workshop was productive, and it provided detail about what the focus should be going forward. Workshop attendees were divided into different groups, each of which was given a topic to discuss relating to the recommendations from the recently published Thematic CSPR. This exercise provided analysis around what is working well, where further development is required works well, and ideas about how progress can be made. An action plan is currently being developed and work will be progressed in the coming months.

Crest Advisory Report: The Dawes Trust commissioned Crest Advisory in 2019 to run a multi-year programme of work examining the underlying causes and drivers of serious youth violence including the use of technology, specifically social media. As part of the process, Crest Advisory interviewed a number of Reading Headteachers', Thames Valley Police and Metropolitan Police colleagues. More information can be found in Section 2.

Practitioner Engagement: 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.

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) pre-birth assessments, first time entrants into the Youth Offending Service, referrals from the Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust to the three Children's Services, vulnerable caseload audit from Health Visiting and School Nursing, and the Berkshire West Child in Need audit.

In addition, we have surveyed sections of the workforce on specific topics. These have been referenced within the report and include:

- Practitioner confidence in speaking to young people about their social media usage and online safety and using this information in their work with young people and any assessment of risk (Section 2)
- Feedback from the Alter Ego Theatre Productions in Schools (Section 2)
- Education professionals' confidence in holding risk for cases that fall below the statutory level (Section 2)
- Agency Training Needs Assessment (Section 5)
- School Safeguarding Audit using the NSPCC audit tool (Section 4)

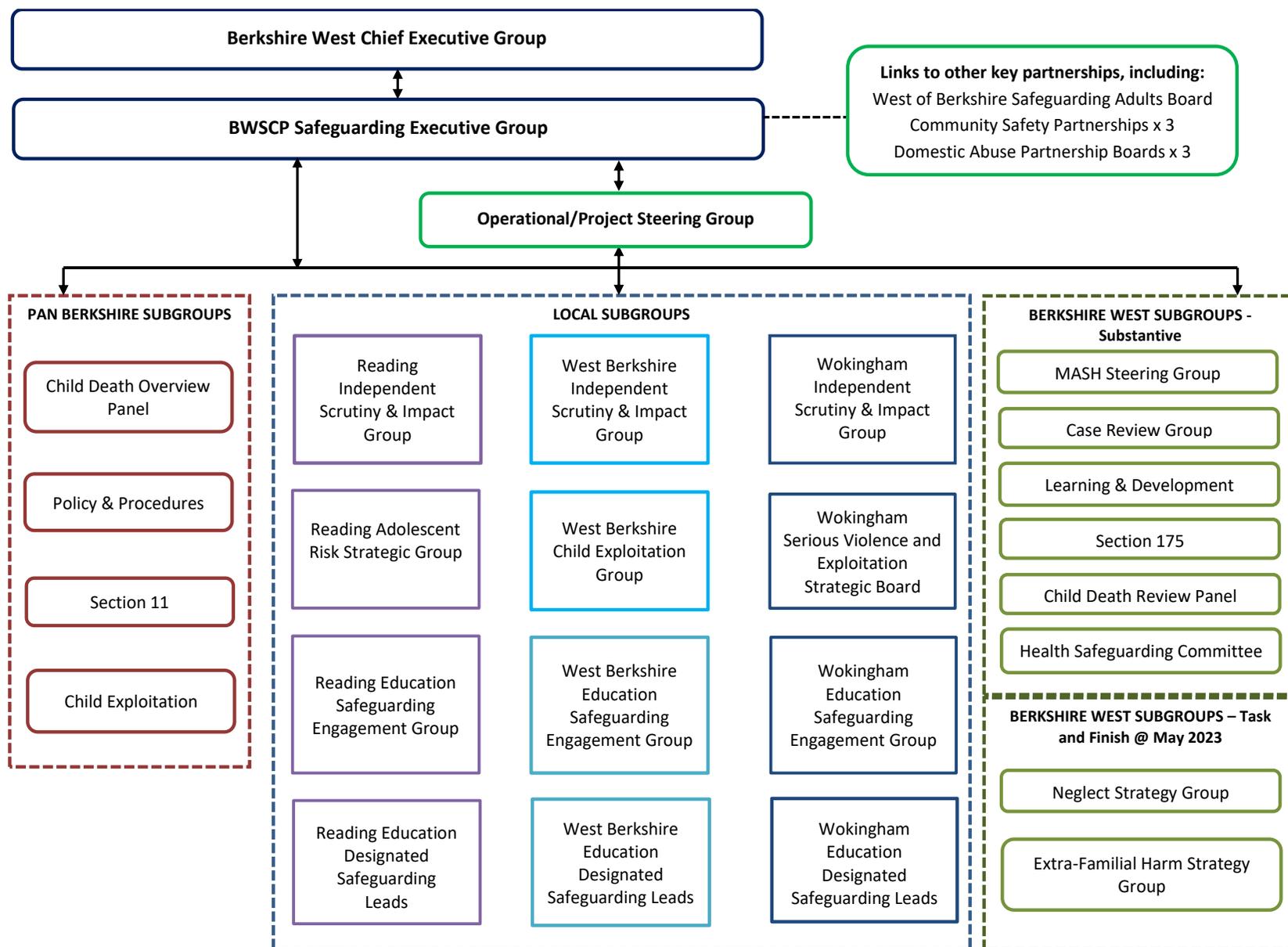


Scrutiny and Challenge:

This continues to be an area of challenge for the BWSCP. It is positive to receive the results of surveys from our children and young people and practitioners, but there is not yet enough direct evidence of subsequent decision making by the partnership as a result. Any plans to engage young people more directly within our partnership arrangements needs to be done with care and clear purpose.

SECTION 6: APPENDICES

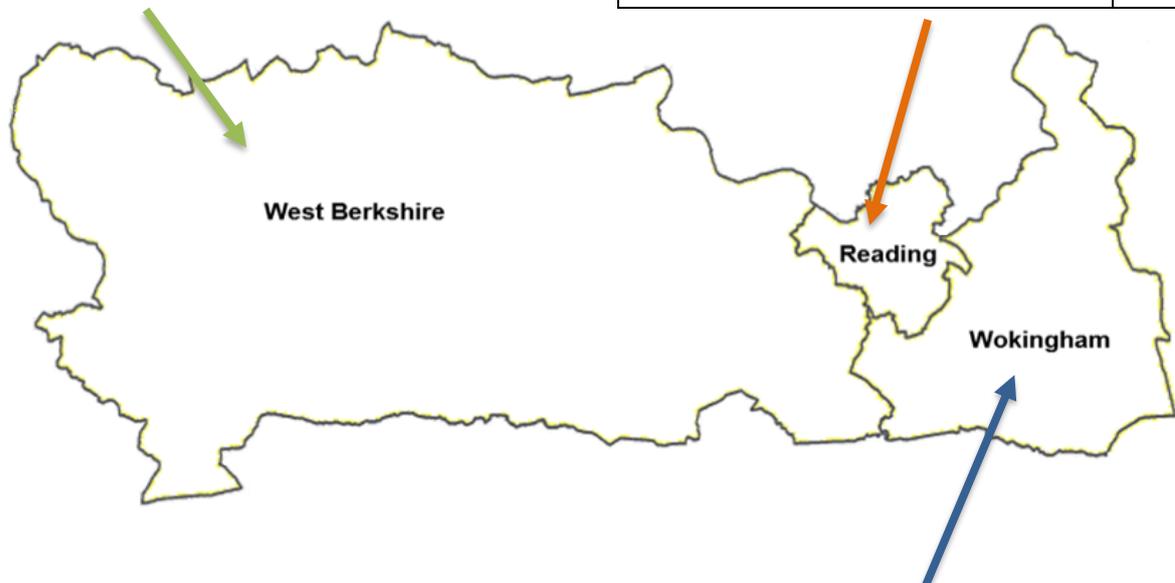
Appendix 1 – Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Sub-group structure chart



Appendix 2 – Knowing our children

West Berks	
West Berks Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	37,122
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	95
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	421
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	55
Domestic Crimes involving Children Q4 2022/2023	250
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2022/2023	25

Reading	
Reading Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	41,808
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	50.2
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	430.3
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	72
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2022/2023	310
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2022/2023	30



Wokingham	
Reading Under 19 Population (Census 2021)	44,375
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	37.8
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	146.6
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2023	33.2
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2022/2023	168
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2022/2023	23