



Reading | West Berkshire | Wokingham

Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024/2025



Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire
and Berkshire West
Integrated Care Board



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual report for 2024/2025, which provides a summary of activity for the work and progress undertaken by the multi-agency partnership to promote the safeguarding and wellbeing of children in Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Creation of a Berkshire West Wide Neglect Strategy
- Extra-familial Harm: Contextual Safeguarding, Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence
- Establishing a Berkshire West wide Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) & Front Door Arrangements Leadership Group
- Development of the Partnership Learning and Development Group Training offer
- Continuing Development of the BWSCP Partnership

Progress against these priorities is discussed within this report. Additionally, although outside of this reporting period, the Partnership entered 2025/2026 with 5 new Priorities, to be progressed over 3 years into 2028 as of April 2025:

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

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

BWSCP priorities are informed by

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

BWSCP Ways of Working

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

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

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

BWSCP: Learning Together

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

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

Inspectors found that:

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

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

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

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

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

On behalf of the Lead and Delegated Safeguarding Partners in the BWSCP, we would like to thank those who continue to collaborate and support the BWSCP across our Tri Borough footing in what has been and continues to be a transitional period of activity, **with the aim of improving our oversight and the impact of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for all children across the Berkshire West area.**

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024/2025

Strategic Priority	Strategic Intent
Creation of a Berkshire West Wide Neglect Strategy	To develop an agreed Berkshire West approach to Neglect in relation to principles, training, and evaluation of service provision, enabling consistency but flexible enough to allow each area to deal with the issues relevant to their population.
Update on actions and impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strategy and tools were released in 2024 - Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership - Neglect: Information and Guidance A Berkshire West wide multi – agency neglect themed audit took place in November 2024. This priority and the ongoing BWSCP understanding and response to Neglect, sits with operational delivery group supporting ‘Priority 5 - Safeguarding & Support for Pre-School Children, Reducing Neglect.’ 	

Strategic Priority	Strategic Intent
Extra-familial Harm: Contextual Safeguarding, Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence	To work towards locality-based strategies for Extra-Familial Harm that are more aligned, supporting a more combined and collaborative approach across Berkshire West.
Update on actions and impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the May 2024 workshop, colleagues agreed that alignment across the three local areas would be beneficial. However, due to the disparities in local need, overall complexity, and the operational differences of the three local authority teams, it was decided that a single Berkshire West strategy was not currently a viable consideration. Police colleagues would value a more aligned approach and are working with partners to achieve this. This topic was reviewed and revisited at the BWSCP October 2024 conference, an output of which was the 5 BWSCP Priorities, including ‘Priority 2 - Safeguarding & Support for Children and Young People from Extra 	

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

Strategic Priority	Strategic Intent
Establishing a Berkshire West wide Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) & Front Door Arrangements Leadership Group	Development of a Berkshire West MASH Oversight Group to provide scrutiny, advice, and challenge on how the MASH arrangements are working in each locality and identify improvements.
<p>Update on actions and impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In person meetings have continued through the financial year rotating between local authorities to aid conversations and relationship building. • A Berkshire wide data dashboard remains in development to focus on identifying themes and requires the input of all statutory partners. • Local area Threshold of Need guidance reviews were initiated in April 2024; this work has progressed to incorporate the Families First Partnership Programme, which was officially launched (March 2025). • Thames Valley Police shared a new automated process, which allows real time review of daily demand and MASH checks. Regular updates of the proposed local area Berkshire West Local Command Unit structures were shared to improve joint working across the local area. • The new Reading Emotional Mental Health Triage service was shared with the group in February 2025. Reading’s Emotional Health Triage is a preventative system that is embedded in the Children’s Single Point of Access to enable consistent one point of entry to Reading’s Family Help system. Its aims include but are not limited to enable children and young people to receive the right help, at the right time and support from one partner agency or multiple complementary agencies where appropriate. 	

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

- Update on actions and impact:**
- A significant task of the partnership in this reporting year and last, has been the relaunch of the learning and development programme, in part due to staff changes.
 - The Learning Improvement framework remains from last year - [bwscp_lif_v3.pdf \(berkshirerwestsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk\)](https://berkshirerwestsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk) - providing a clear strategy on how learning is identified, disseminated, and implemented in practice within a multi-agency context across the partnership.
 - Co-Chairing arrangements remained with the Brighter Futures for Children Local Authority Designated Officer and the Wokingham Borough Council Learning and Development Manager.
 - The first partnership wide training offer for ‘Professional Curiosity’ was delivered in June 2025.
 - More work is required to establish the Partnership wide live training offer. Learning and Development colleagues from Wokingham have stepped forward to support the process in summer 2025 to lead on the development of a framework with the support of key statutory partners.
 - The Universal Safeguarding Training offered to the Partnership continues to be well received and accessed, around 4,200 times through the financial year.

Strategic Priority	Strategic Intent
Continuing Development of the BWSCP Partnership	Improve oversight and the impact of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for all children across the Berkshire West area.
<p>Update on actions and impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review the subgroup structure, form, processes, and practice to ensure the system remains fit for purpose, can support delivery of partnership priority areas of work, and that subgroups Chairs are in place and feel supported to lead the workstreams. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meeting subgroups have been reviewed: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. A Partnership wide ‘Independent Scrutiny and Impact Group’ (ISIG) was formed in April 2024. This was in response to acknowledging that Health and Police updates across the Partnership were being presented in triplicate across the 3 local area meetings. This Partnership wide meetings was stepped down in March 2025 and a BWSCP subgroup chairs meeting has been implemented to ensure a clear link between the subgroup chairs, local area based partnership groups and Delegated Safeguarding Partners. II. The local area place based ISIG’s were stood down and replaced with Quality Impact Partnership Groups, (QIP) operational from September 2025. III. The three local area Education Engagement subgroups were consulted on moving to a single Partnership meeting during the early stages of 2024. A single Education Engagement Group was piloted through the reporting year with positive feedback, a benefit being that Health and Police agencies can be present in one meeting with local authority social care representatives. IV. The three Education Engagement group chairs attended the Delegated Safeguarding Partners meeting (DSP) from September 2024, as part of a pilot. During the reporting year the three local area Directors of Education became named members of the DSP, alongside an agreed School Leader representative, in order to facilitate that Education have strategic input and oversight of the children’s multiagency safeguarding arrangements. ● Form closer links between the DSP and Subgroup Chairs – this is now in place with the introduction of the BWSCP ‘Subgroup Chairs’ meeting group. ● Embed the Quality Assurance Framework, providing assurance and evidence of progress and impact. ● Single-agency audits took place within the last reporting year and one BWSCP Neglect multi-agency audit. The safeguarding partnership recognises that we need to increase our opportunities for joint shared learning and development, rooted in an improved understanding of children and families experience of our arrangements and how we work together to improve children’s circumstances for the better. A multi-agency Quality Assurance Framework is being taken forward in this forthcoming year, supported by a jointly agreed plan and supported by the work and oversight of the QIP’s. 	

LOCAL CHILD SAFEGUARDING REVIEWS AND RAPID REVIEWS

A Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) case is triggered when a child has died or been seriously harmed, and abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected. Prior to a LCSPR being commissioned, a Rapid Review, involving the three safeguarding partners and any other involved agencies takes place first.

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

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

Rapid Reviews

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

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

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

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

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

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPR)

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

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

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

Reflective Learning Reviews

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

Supporting children with mental health difficulties:

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

Safeguarding Infants:

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

Safeguarding adolescents:

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

BERKSHIRE WEST SUBGROUP SUMMARY

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

Case Review Group

The group's purpose is to monitor and discuss Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Reviews outside of the Partnership are encouraged to be presented to the group, as learning opportunities. Near misses or areas of learning are also discussed.

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

Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups

The purpose of these meetings was to understand the impact of services delivered to children and any safeguarding concerns and or themes. Meetings were chaired by the Independent Scrutineer, on a quarterly basis.

A key mechanism and request from the scrutineer was for agencies to share their agency annual services reports. These continued to come forward during the reporting year from the 3 local authorities (including Education based reports e.g. Children Missing Education), Health agencies and Police.

Quality and Impact Partnership Groups

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

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

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

Local Area Child Exploitation, Adolescent Risk and Serious Violence Groups

Each local area has its own response and structure to Child Exploitation and Serious Violence. These groups include members of each local areas Community Safety Partnership.

Reading Adolescent Risk Strategic Group

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

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

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

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

West Berkshire Child Exploitation

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

Wokingham Serious Violence And Exploitation Strategic Board

- In the previous reporting year, to help drive the current Serious Youth Violence plan, 6 workstreams had formed, chaired by different members of the Strategic Board.
- Workstreams included:
 - Data and Targeting
 - Communities and Partnership
 - Early Intervention and Prevention
 - County Lines and the misuse of drugs
 - Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice
 - Children and Young People survey, consultation, and engagement events

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

Education Engagement Subgroups

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key area events: Reading Festival

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

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

Designated Safeguarding Leads Groups

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section 175/157

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

What is going well:

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

Areas of concern:

- Training gaps
- DSL training for childminders (Childminders have now been instructed to complete).
- Governor safeguarding training (refresher sessions are now available).
- Paediatric first aid (Staff members have agreed to take immediate action).
- Induction gaps for new staff without safeguarding training.
- Online safety, GDPR, and image consent protocols.
- Cultural competency in safeguarding curriculum (ethnic diversity and LGBTQ+ inclusion).

- Policy gaps
 - Intimate care and asylum-seeking children.
 - Online safety and cyberbullying risk assessments.
 - Child sleeping/eating policies.
 - Missing employment documentation for long-term staff.

Proposals for improvement:

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

PAN BERKSHIRE ARRANGEMENTS (working with the Three Children Safeguarding Partnerships in East Berkshire)

The BWSCP continues to support Pan Berkshire safeguarding arrangements through:

Pan Berkshire Policy and Procedures – the multi-agency group responsible for scrutinising amendments suggested by the procedure's provider, tri.x, and a timetable of chapters for local review (on a 2-year cycle). Members from the group share the reviewing process of the chapters. This approach ensures the practitioners across the Berkshire locality have access to up-to-date localised online procedures. The group is well attended by colleagues across Berkshire. 44 chapters were reviewed through the reporting year and 28 chapters were amended and subsequently published. The BWSCP Business Unit continues to administrate and chair this meeting for Berkshire.

Section 11 – the auditing process to enable agencies to demonstrate and provide evidence that they are fulfilling their safeguarding duties under Section 11 (S11) of the Children Act 2004. A member of the BWSCP Business Unit sits as one of the S11 panel members responsible for scrutinising returns and providing feedback on areas for improvement. The S11 panel and organisation happens care of the business unit at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. The Section 11 panel was held in September 2024. Returns for the 5 statutory partners and all partners are due on 3 yearly cycles, West Berkshire, Wokingham and Brighter Futures for Children/Reading Local Authorities are scheduled to present in April 2026. Thames Valley Police and the Berkshire West Integrated Care Board presented in May 2025.

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

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

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

BWSCP Multiagency Auditing

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

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

Next steps from the audit included:

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

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

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

SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – THAMES VALLEY POLICE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Evidence of impact of safeguarding training provided by TVP to staff

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

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

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

What service users say about TVP service they received

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

76% surveyed said they trusted their local police force

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Evidence of improved practice

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our partner NHS Trusts include:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 2024 we established our transformation programme to:

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

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

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

Key achievements over the past year include:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – WEST BERKSHIRE COUNCIL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Safeguarding Priorities for 2025/26

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

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

SAFEGUARDING PARTNER FEEDBACK – WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

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

1. Helping Early / Family Help Strategy Update

Overview

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

Leadership & Capacity Building

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

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

Practice Development

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

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

Youth Justice & Prevention

Our Prevention and Youth Justice Service continues to strengthen:

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

Delivering the Strategy

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

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

Multi-Agency Early Help Assessment (MEHA)

A review of the MEHA is planned to:

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

Practice Improvement

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

Performance & Oversight

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

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

2. Stable and Loving Homes

Overview

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

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

Placement Types

Children we care for live in a range of settings:

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

Care leavers live in

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

Sufficiency Planning & In-Borough Resources

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

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

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

Regional Collaboration & Innovation

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

Fostering Team and Recruitment

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

3. Workforce

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

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

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

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

4. Closing Summary

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

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

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

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

INDEPENDENT SCRUTINEER CLOSING THOUGHTS

Partnership Functioning

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

Themes from Scrutiny and Reviews

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

Evidence of Impact

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

Gaps and Areas for Development

Four areas show limited progress across all partners:

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

Learning from Serious Incidents

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

Key Decisions and Implementation

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

Voice of Children and Families

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

Costs and Value for Money

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

Education Representation

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

Data and Information Sharing

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

Independent Scrutiny and Leadership

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

Implementation of National Reforms

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

Summary Judgement

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

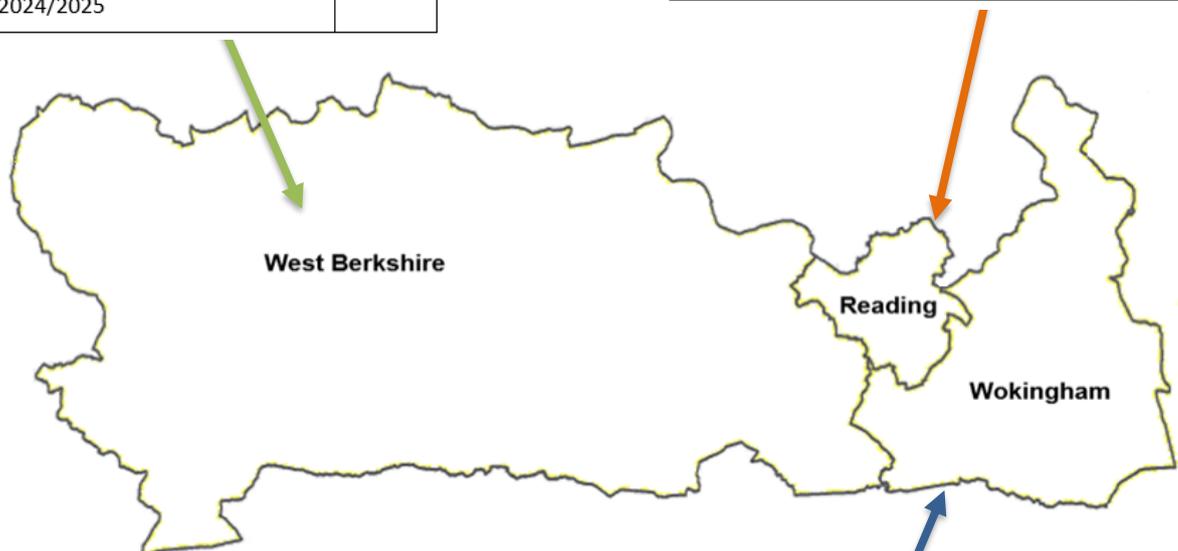
David Goosey

Independent Scrutineer

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

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

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



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

APPENDIX 2: BWSCP FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

BWSCP FINANCE REPORT 2024/2025

BWSCP 2024/2025 Finance – Contributions	Amount
Reading (Brighter Futures for Children) – hosting agency	£50,000
West Berkshire Local Authority	£50,000
Wokingham Local Authority	£50,000
Thames Valley Police	£20,000
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Board	£50,000
Underspend from 2023/2024*	£46,000
Total Contributions for 2024/2025	£266,000

*Underspend includes remaining S31 grant monies received from 2023.

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

APPENDIX 3: BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE CHART

