



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in
David Hicks 1 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40
1B Non **TUESDAY 31 JANUARY 2023 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 23 January 2023

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to provide independent “critical friend” challenge and to work with the Council’s Executive and other public service providers for the benefit of the public. The Committee considers submissions from a range of sources and reaches conclusions based on the weight of evidence – not on party political grounds.

Note: Non-Committee Members and member of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in line with the Council’s Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams, please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be watched live using the following link: <https://youtu.be/HWnI06YBUek>

Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council’s control.

Our Vision
<i>A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business</i>
Enriching Lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion excellent education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background. • Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to enable healthy choices for everyone. • Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of. • Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.
Providing Safe and Strong Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people. • Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care. • Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish. • Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all.
Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future. • Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy. • Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity. • Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.
Delivering the Right Homes in the Right Places
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future. • Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, to support and enable our Borough to grow. • Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment. • Help with your housing needs and support people, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes.
Keeping the Borough Moving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways. • Tackle traffic congestion and minimise delays and disruptions. • Enable safe and sustainable travel around the Borough with good transport infrastructure. • Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links.
Changing the Way We Work for You
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be relentlessly customer focussed. • Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around our customers. • Communicate better with customers, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough. • Drive innovative, digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.
Be the Best We Can Be
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice. • Embed a culture that supports ambition, promotes empowerment and develops new ways of working. • Use our governance and scrutiny structures to support a learning and continuous improvement approach to the way we do business. • Be a commercial council that is innovative, whilst being inclusive, in its approach with a clear focus on being financially resilient. • Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough. • Establish a renewed vision for the Borough with clear aspirations.

Appendix Acronyms

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EYFS	Early Years Foundations Stage
FGB	Full Governing Body
KS1	Key Stage 1
KS2	Key Stage 2
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
NLE	National Leader of Education
NLG	National Leader of Governance
RI	Requires Improvement
RSC	Regional Schools Commissioner
SDP	School Development Plan
SEF	Self Evaluation Form
SIB	School Improvement Board
SIO	School Improvement Officer
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TSA	Teaching School Alliance
WLP	Wokingham Learning Partnership

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillors

Andrew Mickleburgh (Chair)	Shirley Boyt (Vice-Chair)	Morag Malvern
Beth Rowland	Anne Chadwick	Graham Howe
Pauline Helliard-Symons		

Substitutes

Alistair Neal	Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey	Gary Cowan
Chris Johnson	Alison Swaddle	Laura Blumenthal
Rebecca Margetts		

Parent Governor Representatives

Vacancy, Parent Governor Representative
Vacancy, Parent Governor Representative

Diocesan Representatives

Richard Lamey, Church of England Representative
Vacancy, Roman Catholic Representative

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
42.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence.	
43.		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 November 2022.	7 - 16
44.		DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest.	
45.		PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of this committee. Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Committee or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions	

46.		MEMBER QUESTION TIME To answer any member questions	
47.	None Specific	YOUTH COUNCIL UPDATE To receive a presentation by Wokingham's Youth Council giving an update on their work.	Verbal Report
48.	None Specific	BERKSHIRE WEST SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22 To receive and consider the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2021-22.	17 - 38
49.	None Specific	ANNUAL WOKINGHAM BOROUGH SEND SURVEY To receive and consider the Annual Wokingham Borough SEND Survey 2022 (report available on the website).	
50.	None Specific	SEND VOICES WOKINGHAM SCHOOL TRANSPORT SURVEY 2022 To receive and consider the SEND Voices Wokingham School Transport Survey 2022.	39 - 78
51.	None Specific	UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES To receive a verbal update from the Executive Member for Children's Services on the work of Children's Services.	Verbal Report
52.	None Specific	EDUCATION UPDATE To receive and consider the Education Update report.	To Follow
53.	None Specific	TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION To receive and consider a report containing information about the Travel Assistance Policy Implementation.	79 - 90
54.	None Specific	FORWARD PROGRAMME To receive and consider the Committee's Forward Programme of work.	91 - 92
55.		EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.	
56.	None Specific	SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN A report containing details of schools causing concern	93 - 102

will be discussed in a Part 2 session.

Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent

A Supplementary Agenda will be issued by the Chief Executive if there are any other items to consider under this heading

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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2022 FROM 7.00 PM TO 10.30 PM

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Andrew Mickleburgh (Chair), Shirley Boyt (Vice-Chair), Morag Malvern, Beth Rowland, Graham Howe, Pauline Helliard-Symons and Rachel Bishop-Firth

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Rachel Bishop-Firth
Prue Bray via Teams

Community Representatives

Sarah Clarke

Officers Present

Luciane Bowker, Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist
Gillian Cole, Service Manager Schools
Adam Davis, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help
Rachel Oakley, Assistant Director Quality Assurance Safeguarding Standards
Hayley Rees, Category Manager Strategy and Commissioning
Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director Learning Achievement and Partnerships
Nicola Vines, Local Authority Designated Officer
Helen Watson, Director of Children's Services

Others Present

Emma Cantrell, First Days CEO
Jake Morrison, Citizens Advice CEO

26. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Anne Chadwick and the Reverend Canon Richard Lamey.

Councillor Anne Chadwick was substituted by Councillor Alison Swaddle.

27. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 7 September 2022 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to the amendment below, and signed by the Chair.

That on page 11 under item 20, in reference to the opening of Matthewsgreen Primary, it be added that the school will initially open for KS2, as there is a shortage of school places for that cohort.

Matters arising

In relation to SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme, page 8 of the agenda, the following recommendations were developed by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and would be put forward to the Council's Executive:

The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Executive:

- 1) Facilitates regular messaging across the Council that supporting SEND is an enduring responsibility incumbent upon all Members, Officers and activities of the Council; and

- 2) Explore with Officers ways of sharpening the focus on ensuring accountability in all SEND services, including all shared services.

28. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

29. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

30. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

31. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Chairman explained that this report was seeking to ratify the appointments of two co-opted members to join the Committee. Upon being put to the vote, Members were unanimously in favour of the appointments.

Members were pleased with the appointments and welcomed both new members to the Committee.

RESOVED That the Committee ratifies the appointments of:

- 1) Sarah Clarke, Chair of SEND Voices Wokingham (non-voting); and
- 2) Richard Lamey, Church of England representative (voting rights for education matters only)

32. YOUTH COUNCIL UPDATE

This item was deferred to a future meeting.

33. IMPACT OF THE COST OF LIVING CRISIS

The Committee received a presentation from Emma Cantrell, First Days CEO and Jake Morrison, Citizens Advice Wokingham CEO, both members of the Hardship Alliance.

Some of the highlights of the presentation are listed below:

- There had already been a drop in living standards nationally and locally;
- Children who grew up in poverty were four times more likely to develop mental health problems and the affected children were less likely to achieve the same level of academic success as their peers;
- Inequality was more stark in Wokingham due to the fact that this is an affluent area;
- The number of children living under the poverty line in Wokingham was listed in one of the slides, all wards had children living under the poverty line;
- The definition of poverty by the DWP was living with less than 60% of medium income of the area lived in. In Wokingham the median income was just over £34k;
- The cost of living crisis was affecting two groups in particular:
 - Those who were already living in long-term hardship – for these people there was now a sense of helplessness; and

- Those who were managing before but were not now – some in this group were not sure what options for help were available to them, the number of people falling into this category was growing;
- First Days expected to support over 6,000 children in Wokingham in the next 12 months with essential items;
- 33% of the families supported by First Days had one adult in work, this figure was 56% two years ago, it seemed that some low income families had dropped out of the job market;
- Over 1,500 requests for support had been received from Children's Services;
- Over 3,000 children were supported via the Outreach Team in the community;
- Local charities had seen a significant increase in demand for their services and some were over capacity with a waiting list;
- There was a risk of a potential increase in demand for statutory services;
- The voluntary sector was not able to sustain the level of demand. Charitable funding had dropped 40% since the same time last year and costs had increased due to inflation, some charities would not survive;
- Schools were having to deal with the social impact of the current crisis;
- It was important to ensure that families in need were accessing all the support that was available;
- There had been a significant increase in the number of single people living with children;
- Helplessness was a strong indicator of mental health issues, which could lead to suicidal thoughts;
- Citizens Advice had seen a 75% increase in the number of calls for support since last October;
- 57% of people on universal credit in Wokingham had children to support;
- Debt solution was being very difficult to achieve.

Councillor Bray agreed that the current crisis was very serious. She informed that the Council was helping as much as possible, for example with the cost of school uniform and school trips. She felt worried about the situation as there was no short or medium term solution to this crisis. In addition, the number of people who could help was reducing and the number of people who needed help was increasing.

Jake Morrison informed that Wokingham United Charities offered grants to schools for families who were struggling, however the uptake of this offer was low. He would share the details with Councillor Bray.

Councillor Bishop-Firth expressed her gratitude to the work being undertaken by the charities and the voluntary sector. The Council was providing vouchers during the school holidays to families whose children received free school meals. This scheme was funded until March 2023. The Council was committed to continuing funding it until May 2023, however funding from the government was needed after that.

Emma Cantrell explained that local authorities had been put into a difficult position since the grant for free school meals had been cut in real terms.

Emma Cantrell clarified that the figure of 33% of households with one adult in employment, was irrespective of how many adults lived in the house.

Councillor Helliar-Symonds was concerned that the Cowshed was located in Reading and it could be difficult for people to get there. Emma Cantrell explained that accommodation was a challenge for charities due to the high price of properties. Emma Cantrell stated that work was underway with the Council to try and identify resources.

Councillor Bishop-Firth asked what were the barriers preventing people from getting into work, in view of the significant drop in the number of households with adults in work.

Emma Cantrell explained that low wage incomes had not increased sufficiently to balance the budget, and childcare was very expensive. Also, flexible working arrangements were not available for low income jobs.

Councillor Howe was interested to know how the Council could help the charities and the voluntary sector, and how was their relationship in 2019. Jake Morrison stated that the relationship between charities, the voluntary sector and the Council was much improved at the time of the pandemic in March 2020, and it has continued to improve since. He explained that the current challenge was around resources. In the past his organisation had been able to answer 95% of the calls received, this number was now closer to 60%.

Emma Cantrell stated that the communication and information about what help was available could be improved.

Emma Cantrell explained that she ran a small team of five full-time equivalent positions. Her team were asking for an employee benefit programme, this was very expensive and she wondered if the Council could work in partnership with her charity to offer assistance in that respect.

The Chairman suggested that Town and Parish Councils could be approached to help charities and the voluntary sector.

Emma Cantrell stated that help with grant application processes would be very welcome.

Councillor Rowland expressed serious concern with the current cost of living crisis.

Councillor Boyt stated that the Council building was currently being underutilised, and suggested that maybe charities or nurseries could use the building. Emma Cantrell informed that imaginative ways to use the building were already being discussed.

Councillor Swaddle suggested that Emma Cantrell attend the Borough/Parish Liaison Forum to share her presentation with that group. She also suggested that the old library building could be an option of accommodation.

Emma Cantrell informed that the old library would be used during the winter for storage. However, the utility costs of that building was a big consideration for charities.

In response to a question, Jake Morrison explained that librarians would be trained to help people to maximise access to benefits, with a tool called benefit calculator. They would offer this help at local libraries.

Members were informed that consideration should be given to the fact that transport was expensive for people who were struggling financially, and that services needed to be available locally to avoid travel costs.

Councillor Boyt wondered if there was an opportunity for Council Officers to volunteer to help charities, for example working one day a week for a charity. Emma Cantrell explained that the volunteer idea was being explored, and also with businesses in the area.

The Chairman asked for more information about the relationship between Children's Services and the charities.

Emma Cantrell stated that her charity received requests for support from social workers from Children's Services. There was a very good working relationship with the Community Engagement Team. However, there was potential to improve the partnership with Children's Services.

Jake Morrison explained that recently there had been interaction with the Care Leaver's Team and that a course had been offered to care leavers as a result of this interaction. He believed that the communication between the Council and the voluntary sector could be improved further.

Adam Davis, Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help stated that his team welcomed the engagement with the charities and invited both Emma Cantrell and Jake Morrison to attend managers meetings to share information. Helen Watson, Director of Children's Services extended the invitation and welcomed the opportunity to work with the charities.

Councillor Howe stated that most big companies were involved in voluntary work and offered to share his expertise.

Members thanked Emma Cantrell and Jake Morrison for their participation in the meeting and for the work they were doing, it was much appreciated.

The Committee wished to make a series of recommendations and agreed that the final wording would be proposed by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman and circulated to Members for final agreement via email.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) The Committee recommends that the Executive:
 - i. Supports Wokingham Borough Council to lobby the government to ensure adequate provision of Household Support Funding beyond May 2023, when the present arrangements end.
 - ii. Supports efforts to help groups working to support families made vulnerable by the cost of living crisis, by looking at ways council-owned properties might be made available to assist such groups requiring premises for their activities.
 - iii. Work with Senior Council Officers to help improve communications between Council staff and local organisations, including the Hardship Alliance, to further increase awareness and understanding amongst Council staff about the current local offers of these organisations.
 - iv. Request that Officers investigate possibilities for a local volunteer scheme for Council staff; and explore ways of using the Council's Communications Team to support volunteer recruitment from amongst the public.

- 2) That Officers write to the Chair of the Borough Parish Liaison Forum to request that the Hardship Alliance be invited to attend one of their meetings to give a presentation and take part in questions and answers on the impact of the cost of living crisis.

34. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2021/22 was presented by Rachel Oakley, Assistant Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding.

The IROs acted independently of social workers teams, their role was that of a critical friend. They chaired the children's reviews and monitored the work being undertaken with the young person.

The number of looked after children had been increasing, however Wokingham continued amongst the lowest percentage of looked after children per 100,000 habitants in the country.

During the discussion of the item the following comments were made:

- Sarah Clarke asked how many of the Children In Care (CIC) had SEND, how many had educational breakdowns and how they were tracked into adult services;
- Rachel Oakley stated that there were no CIC because of educational breakdowns. *She subsequently informed that there were 18 CIC with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP);*
- It was explained that educational breakdown was a situation that occurred when a setting was not the right place for a child, which led to the child being at home without a placement, and in rare cases it could escalate to a child then going into care;
- Rachel Oakley explained that if a child was likely to need services into adulthood, contact with adult services would be made when the child was aged 14. There would be a transition worker, a social worker and a PA working with the child. The Care Leaver status continued to the age of 25;
- In response to a question Rachel Oakley stated that there were no formal challenges in respect to transitions in the last year;
- Rachel Oakley explained that the example on page 33 referred to 50% of a sample, not 50% of the whole population of CIC. The way that ethnicity was monitored was defined by the DfE, there was a project underway to work out sub-categories in order to better understand the data about the children;
- Councillor Boyt asked what was the percentage of Gipsy Roma Traveller (GRT) CIC in the borough. Rachel Oakley stated that it was between one and two percent;
- Rachel Oakley agreed to email information about the GRT training provided to officers;
- In reference to page 44, Councillor Helliard-Symonds was pleased to note that letters were being posted out in response to the difficulties with opening secure emails electronically;
- The Chairman asked for reassurance that important documentation was reaching the IROs;
- Rachel Oakley stated that officers were aware of the need to keep IROs informed;
- Adam Davis recognised that it could be challenging sometimes for social workers, to deal with critical situations and keep the IROs informed. He assured Members that IROs were always consulted when important decisions were being made.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

35. LOCAL AREA DESIGNATED OFFICER (LADO) ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Nicola Vines, Local Authority Designated Officer presented the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) Annual Report 2021/22.

The LADO was responsible for managing allegations made against professionals who work or volunteer to work with children. The level of allegations had now gone back to what it had been prior to the pandemic. During the pandemic there had been a decrease in the number of allegations.

Sarah Clarke asked for more information about the training offer to residential homes. Nicola Vines stated that there were various training sessions scheduled, which were open to anyone to attend, and in addition she had offered to go in person to deliver training at the residential children's home in Wokingham.

With reference to page 53 of the agenda, Councillor Helliard-Symonds was intrigued by the fact that some schools received more referrals than others, and wondered if this was due to their own pastoral teams.

Nicola Vines believed that there were a number of reasons as to why some schools had a higher level of referrals to LADO than others. This could be because of their ethos, particular cohorts or level of experience. She informed that Ofsted would contact LADO during inspections to ask if there had been any referrals made by the school. There was ongoing work to raise awareness of the LADO service.

Councillor Boyt pointed out that there had been an increase in the number of referrals for Early Years, and asked for more information about this. Nicola Vines stated that she had attended an Early Years Forum to deliver training. It was possible that Early Years settings were speaking to the Early Years Advisory Team before they contacted LADO. She observed that children were being more challenging post pandemic, lacking some of the skills that were expected at their age. The staff who worked in Early Years did not have the same level of training and experience that teachers had, this could be part of the reason for the increase in referrals for Early Years.

In response to a question Nicola Vines confirmed that out of 180 allegations 44 were investigated and 14 were substantiated. 7 out of the 14 had led to written warnings within disciplinary procedures and training required to continue within the role; 5 led to dismissal with a referral to DBS, one was against a childcare provider and was taken on by Ofsted to complete the investigation as to whether that childcare provider could continue registered, and one is undergoing further risk assessments by the employer and Children's Services.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

36. CHILD PROTECTION ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Rachel Oakley presented the Child Protection Annual Report 2021/22. She informed that the number of Child Protection (CP) plans had decreased this year, however the level of complexity had remained very high. Work continued with partners such as Health and the Police.

The Chairman asked why there were no CP plans for children at risk of exploitation outside the home (page 66 of the agenda). Rachel Oakley stated that the categories were set nationally, and only those categories could be used. The service was using multi-agency conferences to look at children who were at risk of exploitation outside of the

home. Traditionally social workers looked at harm from inside the home, this was a new area of work. There was work being carried out with partners to protect this group of children. This related to a small number of children in Wokingham.

In reference to the use of the old library's meeting room, the Chairman asked how that was moving forward. Rachel Oakley informed that there was a new conference room in Shute End which was going to be used. Hybrid and virtual meeting had provided an opportunity to improve engagement of all parties.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

37. UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Councillor Bray informed that the Safety Valve negotiations had started. This work was being carried out with the DfE, the Council had three months to work out a plan to bring down to zero, in five years time, the deficit in the High Needs Block (HNB).

The pressure continued for school places for junior and early secondary school years. It would be extremely difficult to provide sufficient school places for Year 7 next year.

The national transfer scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) number for Wokingham had been increased from 28 to 41, as predicted by Adam Davis. The local authority continued to be responsible for young people in care up to the age of 25, however, from 18 to 25 the funding was significantly reduced, and this added pressure on the system.

Councillor Bray informed that Helen Watson and herself were attending a Children and Adult Social Care Conference in Manchester, with the intention of learning and obtaining information about the current challenges and examples of good practice. She gave the following examples:

- Salford had given an interesting presentation about an initiative called Salford Family Partnership. This was one-stop offering for everything involving children.
- Hillington had an initiative about sharing intelligence about children at risk of criminal exploitation. The analytical system they used was worth considering for Wokingham.

Most local authorities faced similar challenges to those encountered in Wokingham. However, it was encouraging to notice that in Wokingham Borough there was a desire to work together in partnership to deliver good services for residents.

In response to a question Councillor Bray confirmed that planning was underway to prepare for the increase in demand for school places next year, however a solution had not been found yet.

Sal Thirlway, Assistant Director for Learning and Partnerships confirmed that there was significant growth in demand for school places, in particular for Year 7 next year. A higher number of applications than the Published Admission Number (PAN) was expected. However, it was also expected that some children would go to private schools and grammar schools. The local authority was actively discussing with schools the provision of additional places next year. There was a delicate balance that had to be taken into account when creating additional school places and the impact on schools' budgets.

Adam Davis added that a lot of work already took place in terms of sharing data with partners and layering information to safeguard children against exploitation.

In response to a question Sal Thirlway informed that there was a total of 2215 places were available in the borough for Year 7, and there had been 2512 applications made. He pointed out that although there was a shortage of places the figure was likely to change due to the factors already mentioned.

Councillor Howe added that there had also been growing pressure on school places for in-year applications for a few years. Sal Thirlway informed that the new Fair Access Protocol was helping with the challenges around in-year applications.

RESOLVED That verbal updated be noted.

38. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Key Performance Indicators report was considered, and the following points were made:

Dashboard item 7 – Children missing from home/care

- Councillor Swaddle asked for a breakdown of the number of permanent exclusions, in particular she was interested to know how many had SEND;
- Sal Thirlway agreed to provide a written response to this question.

Dashboard item 1 – Funded Education, Health and Care Plans

- The Chairman asked what were the possible solutions being explored to address the shortage of professionals which caused delays;
- Sal Thirlway confirmed that there were shortages within the Health providers who co-produced the EHCPs, there was also a shortage of educational psychologists within the local authority. This issue related to a national cap on the number of people who could train and qualify to become educational psychologists. Wokingham worked with universities and had psychologist trainees, however recruitment was difficult. Different ways to deliver those statutory responsibilities around assessments were being explored, for example by commissioning external educational psychologists to undertake virtual assessments when appropriate. There was continuous dialogue with Health colleagues to try and address the challenges.

Councillor Howe stated that peer reviews had taken place and suggested that these be shared with the Committee.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

39. FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Youth Council and the SEND Youth Forum would be invited to attend future meeting.

Helen Watson suggested that a pre-recorded video could be used to ensure the participation of the Youth Council, should they be unable to attend a meeting in person or via Teams.

RESOLVED That the Forward Programme be noted.

40. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for items 41 and 42 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

41. ACCOMMODATION ISSUES LINKED TO UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN

This item was discussed in a Part 2 session.

42. SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

This item was discussed in a Part 2 session.



Reading | West Berkshire | Wokingham

Annual Report 2021/2022



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Brighter
Futures for
Children



West
Berkshire
C O U N C I L



Berkshire West
Clinical Commissioning Group



THAMES VALLEY
POLICE

Foreword/Executive Summary from the Berkshire West Statutory Safeguarding Executive

Welcome to the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) Annual Report for 2021/2022, which provides an account of the work and progress undertaken by the multi-agency partnership to promote the safeguarding and wellbeing of children in Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham.

As an ambitious tri-borough partnership, we recognise that working across local authority borders can be challenging and effective partnership arrangements take time to embed. Throughout this document you will see examples of our positive progress, where working in partnership has made a difference. These include but are not limited to the alignment of Threshold Guidance to support continuity for practitioners working across Berkshire West, provision of support and training for schools (Alter Ego Productions) and clear and specific updated procedures as a result of case reviews.

Following the unprecedented increase in notifications of serious child safeguarding incidents and Rapid Reviews in the 18-month period from March 2020 (primarily due to the Covid-19 pandemic), our partnership continues to move toward the completion of the resulting Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review process requires significant resource from all our partner agencies, and it is a huge strength of our local safeguarding leads that they have, and continue, to commit to each review with openness, fully prepared to identify and respond to immediate learning. Please see page 14 for further information on these reviews and the learning identified.

We are clear that there is some way to go in embedding our arrangements and maximise the benefits from working over the wider footprint. As a Safeguarding Executive, we have spent time this year reflecting and focusing on strengthening our governance arrangements and specifically the roll and responsibility of Executive. Please see the Governance and Accountability page below for more information. In addition, throughout the report you will see ‘Scrutiny and Challenge’ boxes that highlight to us where we need to focus our attention. This information comes from our own analysis, what we have learnt in audit and case reviews, but also from scrutiny via Independent Reviewers.

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



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Message from the outgoing Chair of the Safeguarding Executive Group, Deborah Glassbrook

I have thoroughly enjoyed the privilege of Chairing this group for the past six months; I thank the partnership for this opportunity and wish the whole partnership well for the future. While this report recognises the positive advances made, the next steps need to focus on embedding the work started and evidencing positive impact for the children, young people, and families of Berkshire West. We recognise that there is always space for improvement, and I know that the partnership is in a stronger place with the members of the Executive Group, all our safeguarding leadership colleagues across our partner agencies, and our new Independent Scrutineer and Chair, David Goosey. I offer a warm welcome to David, who joined us in June 2022, and we are delighted that someone with his experience, knowledge and passion has taken on this post. The partnership is looking forward to the independent challenge and scrutiny that he will bring across the partnership but also as the new Chair of the Safeguarding Executive. Finally, I would like to thank our impressive Partnership Support Team, who manage all the partnership meetings, support the Chairs, and keep in communication with colleagues across the whole of Berkshire West. This is no mean feat, and we all appreciate the consistently positive nature of the team, the high calibre of work produced, and their ability to keep the partnership on track.

Governance and Accountability – review and future arrangements

Our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements were created as a result of revised statutory guidance (Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018) and have been in existence as the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership (BWSCP) since June 2019. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners hold the oversight, governance, and responsibility of the partnership arrangements, with delegated responsibility to the BWSCP Safeguarding Executive. The composition of the Safeguarding Executive from June 2022 is:

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

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

The statutory responsibility for the partnership arrangements sits with the Chief Executives of the safeguarding partners, who delegate this duty to the BWSCP Safeguarding Executive, but it is vital that the Chief Executives remain informed of progress and are themselves curious about risks or improvements made, plus the potential or realised benefits of a tri-borough shared arrangement. We recognised that this link needed to be stronger, therefore we initiated regular joint meetings between the three Local Authority Chief Executive Officers and the three Directors for Children's Services. These meetings have supported the Executive to focus on key themes such as assurance in relation to safeguarding training across the partnership and effective communication in relation to case review work, as well as ensure high level scrutiny of the partnership's effectiveness. As we develop, we will look to build on this work to include the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police and the Chief Executive of the new Integrated Care Board.

The Safeguarding Executive also recognise that the extent of independent scrutiny over the past year has been limited due to capacity. As you will read below, we have had strong Independent Scrutiny through a range of case review work, but we have been missing the full range of assurance required and evidence that local leaders have been held to account. Following a review of our scrutiny model in November 2021, we agreed that an Independent Scrutineer post was required, who would also provide support by Chairing the Safeguarding Executive and the three localised Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups. We are clear that this role does not hold responsibility for the partnership, which firmly remains with the Safeguarding Executive, but Chairing these groups will provide a vital communication link between them, and the consistency in Chairing provides a helicopter view across Berkshire West which is a clear benefit. This also allows the safeguarding leaders across agencies to focus on the required work, discussion, and evidencing of impact.

As a Safeguarding Executive we spent time at the beginning of the year reflecting on our role, responsibility, and place within the partnership structure. We recognised that more pace was required to move the partnership to where we want it to be, and particularly as we had lacked effective independent challenge. From November 2021 we started, and continue, to meet every month to ensure conversations can move quickly and discussion focusses on impact. To support this work, we have initiated the formal commissioning of projects to specific subgroups based on identified areas of concern or need. This has included the review of threshold guidance and gathering assurance in relation to safeguarding training.

We know we need to improve communication through the partnership, and the initiation of the partnership newsletter is an element of this. Further work will continue with closer links between the Executive and Subgroup Chairs as they are invited to periodically join the Executive meetings and discuss how the work of the groups can be better understood and shared.

A clear area of focus for us going forward is the need to improve our multi-agency audit planning and delivery, with a move to a more formal quarterly commissioning of audits. The lack of an Independent Scrutineer to Chair the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups has meant that these groups have not been coordinated enough and require more objective oversight to enable us to evidence the safeguarding assurance we require. This is a high priority for the new Independent Scrutineer.

Our partnership structure allows us to promote partnership collaboration, which has enabled constructive independent scrutiny from partner agency colleagues. This has been evident locally in our subgroups but is also replicated in our pan-Berkshire work in relation to the Berkshire Child Safeguarding Procedures, and Section 11 arrangements, which are well regarded across the county. Further details can be found in the following sections.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

We have recognised the challenges and improvements required in our high-level accountability and governance and our scrutiny model and the changes we have put in place, as detailed above, will support a much stronger culture of positive challenge to promote progress. During the 2022/23 year we expect the pace of partnership led work that we have implemented over the later stages of 2021/22 to continue, but we will continue to evaluate the way we work together, and the arrangements we have in place, to ensure a more robust approach to quality assurance and evidencing impact.

Our Key Priorities

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

Work to meet the priorities has been carried out across the local, Berkshire West and Pan Berkshire Subgroups. The BWSCP subgroup structure chart can be found in Appendix 1. Whilst individual organisations respond to emerging and existing safeguarding concerns, the information below represents the joint partnership approach, work, and outcomes in relation to these priorities. We are working towards a consistent Berkshire West approach to enable the sharing of skills and identify best practice across a wider footprint, to help improve the life chances for all our children.

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

Practitioners understand the approach to extra-familial risk – contextual safeguarding, exploitation, and serious youth violence

We recognise the importance of practitioners understanding the local approach to 'contextual and complex' safeguarding and how this work needs a response often outside of our usual safeguarding frameworks.

There are regular multi-agency meetings in each of the three areas that discuss individual cases and separate strategic meetings to agree a joint agency response. These are routinely reviewed and changes to approach taken where necessary. For example, in Reading the multi-agency risk assessment operational groups have incorporated serious youth violence into their agenda. Due to the inclusion of serious youth violence the meetings are in the process of transitioning to new names: Extra Familial Triage and Review meeting and Extra Familial Harm Operational Group to encompass their new remit and updated Terms of Reference have been written. Additional police representation and involvement is expected to enable fuller discussion in relation to serious youth violence. Progress of this transition will be monitored and reported on in the next annual report.

In Wokingham, the Exploitation and Missing Risk Assessment Conference (EMRAC) was evaluated in early 2021 with the aim of becoming more child focused and gaining an understanding of what disruption activities were required. Feedback from a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review has identified that this meeting requires further development to ensure that discussions and information sharing at these meetings are proportionate and timely and focus on supporting operational practice to assist with safety planning. This work is in progress as part of the case review action plan.

Each area continues to review the effectiveness of their strategic approach, with changes made in Wokingham and Reading over the past year to strengthen the partnership ownership and engagement at the highest levels. In Wokingham there has been a revised coordinated approach towards serious violence and exploitation, creating a collaborative board that looks at both issues with strategic direction and oversight from the Community Safety Partnership. In Reading in early 2021, the Safeguarding Exploitation Group merged with the Adolescent Risk Group of the One Reading Partnership (Children and Young People Partnership) to cover a broader range of risk concerns and drawing on a wider breadth of partner organisations. In West Berkshire, the existing group remains well represented, with strong links with Building Communities Together (Community Safety Partnership). These approaches in all three areas have strengthened the governance arrangements, bringing the front line and strategic processes closer, and learning and responding together.

Impact of Partnership working:

Adolescent Risk – Reading Festival – Concerns were raised by local services about the safeguarding and welfare of young people who attend large scale events such as Festival's. Schools across Berkshire West were invited to participate in a project aimed at reducing risk and staying safe ahead of Reading Festival; funding was secured by Festival Republic. A survey was sent young people in years 10, 11 & 12 in local Schools in order to gain the views of young people on the safety and safeguarding arrangements in place at events they attend. Following on from the completion of the survey a series of webinars were arranged to cover the areas of concern covering sex, bodies, consent and assault, substances, alcohol, risk, and choices. These webinars were delivered to pupils in the participating Schools and are in the process of being evaluated further. As part of this work a satellite medical facility, social workers, and safeguarding leads were available on-site for the weekend of Reading Festival as well as multiple health and safeguarding professionals being on-call and able to coordinate a response quickly should any issues have emerged. Learning from the work undertaken in Summer 2021 and has fed into the planning for the Reading Festival 2022 and so far, have led to the following improvements being implemented:

- A dedicated area adjacent to welfare tent to respond to incidents of sexual assault, with specially trained police officers available 24/7 and messaging to young men about their behaviour
- Brighter Futures for Children, Mental Health Team will be supplying mental health information and advice to welfare services at Reading Festival
- Lids for glasses and 'dip stick' testing will be available in the welfare tent so that young people who are worried that their drink might have been spiked can get it tested
- Additional safeguarding policy/process around employees including contractors will be developed in respect of abuse of power (inappropriate behaviour/supplying drugs)

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

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

Colleagues are also supported to use the Pan Berkshire Exploitation Indicator Tool, which is regularly revised to ensure it is fit for purpose. As a result of ongoing case reviews and a rise in serious youth violence locally, in September 2021, the Pan Berkshire Child Exploitation Indicator Tool was updated to include Serious Youth Violence, and further amendments to reflect changing terminology and phraseology to support a trauma informed approach, which is becoming a more standard practice model across the county. This work is undertaken by the Pan Berkshire Exploitation Subgroup, and therefore brings together a county wide approach and knowledge base. Locally, audits have shown the tool is well used and subsequent referrals are appropriate. For example, colleagues in West Berkshire undertook an exercise to review the Child Exploitation Indicator Tool trends in comparison to the previous year. Although most of the data was similar to that of the previous year, some of the emerging themes are thought to be due to the impact of Covid-19, for example the increase in exposure to domestic abuse, bereavement, and increase in substance misuse.

A survey with Schools in Wokingham was undertaken so that Thames Valley Police and School Leaders could understand students' thoughts in relation to weapon crime; this was commissioned due to the increase in serious incidents within the local area. Students were asked to answer a series of multiple-choice questions which formed part of the planning of a project to raise awareness and over 1000 responses were received. It was agreed that the scope of the survey would be widened to include other Wokingham Schools; all Schools in Wokingham have been contacted and are receiving knife crime seminars jointly presented with the Youth Offending Service.

In Reading, weapon crime continues to be a priority; officers have a process in place to stop and search "habitual" knife carriers in the community. Thames Valley Police will continue to provide safety arches in Secondary Schools when needed and the Neighbourhood Police Team have offered to support and undertake work with primary schools. Funding has been secured by Thames Valley Police to provide assemblies from St Giles Trust in Reading schools. The assemblies will be delivered to year group's seven, eight and nine and will focus on debunking the myths and stereotypes around crime, weapons, gangs, county lines and related issues.

The Reading, Thames Valley Police School Safeguarding Officers have also trialled a presentation in Schools around knife crime; the sessions are interactive and age appropriate. In the next academic year these presentations will be offered to all Schools.

In West Berkshire, three schools piloted a Drug Diversion Scheme and the outcome showed that it worked well; all West Berkshire Schools have agreed to participate in the scheme moving forward. When monitoring its impact in Schools it was found that there were no re-referrals. The same scheme was run in the community; this was also successful with high levels of engagement in drug education and harm minimalisation. When a School finds a student in possession or suspected of drug dealing, they the contact TVP Safeguarding Officers who divert the young person to local services for intervention.

Impact of Partnership working:

Starting Point – Navigator Programme - The Starting Point Navigator programme launched in June 2021 based within the Royal Berkshire Hospital over the weekend to support young people who come to the Emergency Department due to violence or risk-taking behaviours. Starting Point worked closely with NHS colleagues and the Violence Reduction Unit to agree the design and implementation of the programme. The Navigator programme is a Berkshire West service for young people and also includes SEND and care leavers. Since June 2021 Starting Point recruited 24 volunteer Navigators who have worked with 28 young people. Of these 28 young people 28% had injuries associated with violence, 58% were admitted due to drug and alcohol misuse and 90% reported that they struggled with their mental health. After engaging with the Navigators 100% of young people said they had found meeting a Navigator helpful and 42% went on to access support in the wider community. Starting Points Impact Report states *'It has been clear that the young people we meet very rarely have one issue resulting in requiring A&E assistance, but issues around violence, mental health and risk-taking behaviour are all interlinked'*.

Scrutiny and Impact:

In each area there is a continued drive to ensure processes and strategic direction are strong or improving, through evaluation and review. Whilst changes have been implemented our Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews have highlighted that more is required. These recommendations need to be acted upon quickly, and the learning shared widely. There continues to be significant examples of serious youth violence in our area, spanning our local borders, and the Safeguarding Executive must work together with Community Safety and Public Health colleagues to embed necessary changes in approach and practice.

Increasing our awareness and understanding of the risk of sexual abuse and harassment in schools:

Following the Ofsted Review into Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges, the three Education Safeguarding Engagement Groups evaluated their local processes, considered their involvement in the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and what support or guidance was required to support education settings. Following these discussions Brighter Futures for Children produced a local advice document to support Schools with their response to reports of Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB), Sexual Harassment or Sexual Violence; this document was shared across the Partnership as good practice guidance for all areas to consider. School Designated Safeguarding Leads also received a presentation that included range of local advice on the steps to follow when an immediate response is required.

The West Berkshire Education Group received a presentation from Thames Valley Police regarding work that was taking place within the locality relating to Violence against Women and Girls. Officers are engaging with young people in the community, reaching out to young males to encourage them to challenge their friend's behaviour and narrative around women and girls. A fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic is a concern for young people's naivety, due to the lack of socialising which has led to basic safety advice not being followed. The Neighbourhood Policing Teams will be completing work in schools around staying safe whilst out in the community.

Online safety and social media:

Locally, we have seen an increase in nude/semi-nude images being shared between young adults/students. As a response to this and other concerns with regards to young people's safety online the Partnership delivered an Online Safety Forum for all agencies which covered topics such as grooming, bullying, impact of covid-19, and self-generated indecent images. This was recorded and remains available on the BWSCP YouTube channel.

To further support schools, parents, and young people, we developed an Online Safety Page on the BWSCP website. It contains information relating to various types of online abuse that our young people can experience with links to guidance and agencies that can provide further information or support. There are also links to some useful articles for parents and carers about how to keep young people safe online. Online Safety features regularly in the BWSCP Facebook and Twitter posts.

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

Priority 2 - Intervening earlier to safeguard effectively

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

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

Each Berkshire West locality has their own Threshold Guidance document, due to locality differences in relation to referral routes and service provision. However, the last review of the guidance in 2019/20 initiated a move to a more aligned approach across Berkshire West. A subsequent Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) in Wokingham noted that the Wokingham document did not adequately reflect information in relation to the risks associated with domestic abuse, and the new Domestic Abuse Act. This has prompted a large-scale review of the content and layout of all three documents, with a view to:

- Address the issues highlighted by the DHR, but also update and improve risk and protective factors in relation to exploitation, special educational needs and disabilities and sexual harassment in schools.
- Fully align the document detail across the three versions, with the only differences being referral information and some specific service detail.
- Improve the layout to enable practitioners to more easily access the important information.
- Improve information and detail about consent requirements at each level of need.

These changes, which have been agreed in July 2022, further support practitioners who work with children across our Berkshire West footprint. Once published, these revised documents mean that whichever document a practitioner refers to they know that the detail within the levels of need and our approach to thresholds is the same in each local authority area. Details and links to the documents can be found here: [BWSCP website - threshold guidance](#)

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

Previous and more recent local case reviews had identified that there was a misunderstanding around Child in Need (CIN) processes, including the multiagency involvement, how it is communicated and how we effectively engage with families. To fully understand the changes required, alongside specific recommendations by

Independent Reviewers, we have undertaken a multi-agency Child in Need audit across Berkshire West. This has been a significant undertaking, with almost 80 cases audited, and has yielded learning both in terms of the audit results but also the audit process.

The recommendations include:

- The need for best practice guidance to be produced for all practitioners. This should be aimed at the wider workforce, to support their understanding and expectations of the Child in Need process, and the explicit need for consistent, engaged multi-agency involvement.
- That processes are enhanced to ensure that the practitioners that best know the family, from a range of agencies, are invited and contribute to the Child in Need process. This will support the family better and encourage improved engagement.
- Improvements in the way Child in Need Plan information is shared (both in terms of timeliness and with whom) to support effective ongoing discussions.
- Improved documentation for families, to help them understand the Child in Need process.

An action plan is in place following the agreement of the recommendations which will be progress throughout 2022.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

We have recognised that there is differing understanding both by practitioners across the network and families of the Child in Need status and processes. However, the scale of the Berkshire West footprint multi-agency audit and lack of ownership at senior management level has meant a delay in the final recommendations and actions being agreed. The learning from this audit needs to be embedded more swiftly and consistently across Berkshire West, with future auditing reflecting the need to be focused, owned, and completed at pace.

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

Domestic Abuse has been a significant feature in recent reviews; therefore, a multi-agency audit was undertaken in West Berkshire in early 2021 to test processes and practitioner understanding and identification of risk. We also wanted to know that the child's voice or lived experience was 'heard'.

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

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

The full audit has been shared with the newly formed Domestic Abuse Partnership Board in West Berkshire, and during a review of the action plan in the July 2022 Independent Scrutiny and Impact Group meetings, there was agreement to re-run this audit to evidence impact. Work to understand the level and reach of domestic abuse training was also agreed to provide Safeguarding Partnership colleagues with assurance.

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

Scrutiny and Impact:

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

Priority 3 - Engagement of Children, Families and Practitioners

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

Attitudinal Survey: West Berkshire conducted a Young Persons Attitudinal Survey in 2021 to understand the attitudes of young people, of school age, in West Berkshire to child exploitation, sexting and domestic abuse. The aim of the survey was to understand how aware young people are of child exploitation, sexting, domestic abuse, and their attitudes towards them. 2076 completed questionnaires from year 7 - 13 pupils and the findings included:

- 62% young people surveyed had heard of Child Sexual Exploitation
- 50.9% young people surveyed had heard of Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines
- 76.3% young people surveyed knew what sexting was with 75.3% considering it a big issue
- 3.2% young people surveyed thought there were occasions that people deserved physical, emotional, financial, or sexual abuse in a relationship

In comparison to the previous survey there had been a decline in some of responses received for example around information being obtainable in school; this is thought to be influenced by the impact of Covid-19 and Schools being closed for a period of time. Work is underway with the local Children's Delivery Group to consider and respond to the findings.

Reading Festival – as noted above, work across the Partnership with Festival Republic and IT Happens took place to prepare young people for Reading Festival and how to stay safe while attending events, with a survey with young people in Years 11, 12 and 13, to gather information about their understanding of staying safe when at parties and attending large events. This directly led to the supported and planning for the 2021 festival as well as 2022, which is detailed in the Partnership Impact box on page 5.

Crest Advisory: Crest Advisory worked with the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit and local Schools to look at the relationship between social media and serious youth violence. Using a case study based on a local incident they discussed the behaviours young people see or engage in online and how these behaviours can lead conflict and violence. A report relating to this work will be published in the Summer of 2022; this will include key findings around social media and violence and include recommendations on how to prevent and disrupt these behaviours.

Wokingham Weapon Crime Survey: A survey with Schools in Wokingham was undertaken so that Thames Valley Police and School Leaders could understand students' thoughts in relation to weapon crime; this was commissioned due to the increase in serious incidents within the local area. Students were asked to answer a series of multiple-choice questions which formed part of the planning of a project to raise awareness. There were over 1000 responses to the survey. It was agreed that the scope of the survey would be widened to include other Wokingham Schools; all Schools in Wokingham have been contacted and are receiving knife crime seminars jointly presented with the Youth Offending Service.

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

Auditing is also a key area where practitioners are able to reflect and feedback on areas of work or practice. Multi-agency and single agency audit (where there is a safeguarding element) findings are reported back to the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups with audit topics including (but not limited to) pre-birth assessments, first time entrants into the Youth Offending Service, referrals from the Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust to the three Children's Services, vulnerable caseload audit from Health Visiting and School Nursing, and the Berkshire West Child in Need audit.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

This continues to be an area of challenge for the BWSCP. It is positive to receive the results of surveys from our children and young people, but there is not enough direct evidence of subsequent decision making by the partnership as a result. Whilst there are plans to engage young people more directly within our partnership arrangements, for example within the Reading Adolescent Risk Strategic Group, we need to ensure this is done with care and clear purpose.

Priority 4 - Effectiveness of our Partnership Arrangements

We are aware that we have challenged ourselves locally by forming a tri-borough safeguarding partnership arrangement, with the aim of building on the positive aspects of previous local arrangements, sharing good practice and taking the opportunity to work more coherently and collaboratively across the three borough boundaries. Below are examples where we have made progress on these aims.

Supporting the Education Sector

As referenced in earlier sections of the report, we have three locality-based Education Safeguarding Engagement Groups, with Headteacher and Local Authority Safeguarding Leads/representatives, which provides a mechanism for education leaders to identify and inform the development of safeguarding and improvement across schools and ensure that issues specific to the school/education community have a voice and can be escalated for discussion to the Statutory Safeguarding Partners. Alongside these meetings are locality-based learning sessions for Designated Safeguarding Leads where we are able to share consistent but tailored safeguarding messages.

School Safeguarding Audit: A continuing success has been the alignment of the Section 175/157 (school safeguarding audit) process across the three authority areas; the return rate for this academic year was again positive, which demonstrates that schools find this process useful and supportive. We use the NSPCC audit tool, and for the 2021/2022 assessment a third option of 'Partially Met' was included; it is anticipated that as Schools become more familiar with this addition the use of this option will increase, therefore grading their safeguarding measures more accurately.

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

- The measures in place to prevent and respond to Peer-on-Peer abuse required further consideration, and as a result Peer-on-Peer abuse is now included in the Universal Safeguarding training and DSL training.
- Governor and Trustee training needed to be strengthened so they have the knowledge and information needed to carry out their responsibilities. As a result, a free Universal Training session for Governors was arranged.
- Schools to ensure that they work with other agencies such as children's social care to ensure the right steps are taken to keep Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children safe – meeting to agree response has been arranged.
- Topics such as relationships and sex need to be relevant to all children, and discussions, for example about healthy relationships, should include all types of relationships so all children can feel represented.

NSPCC Bereavement Pack: Following discussions at the Pan Berks Child Death Overview Panel, a Bereavement Guide was produced for school professionals on how to respond to a sudden or unexpected death of a child or young person. The guidance outlines the Child Death process and other statutory functions that need to be considered as well as providing useful contacts, resources, and links to local support services. This has been shared with schools across Berkshire West.

Thames Valley Police Intelligence Sharing: Through the three locality-based Education Safeguarding Engagement Groups, school colleagues raised that there were ongoing concerns with regards to sexual exploitation/images/threats/weapon crime/vaping and wanted to understand the way of reporting soft intelligence to the Police so that they had an overview of what was happening in the community to create a bigger picture of safeguarding concerns and areas of focus. The Thames Valley Police Intelligence Submission Form was shared with Schools and DSLs across Berkshire West to enable them to report incidents or potential safeguarding concerns, and Officers have attended these meetings to answer questions.

Alter Ego: In order to support our local Schools with ongoing concerns relating to Online Safety the partnership has funded 10 Alter Ego sessions in each area for Primary Schools focusing on Online Safety. The partnership has also funded 10 Secondary performances in each area focusing on Sexual Violence and Harassment. These will take place in the Autumn Term 2022.

Website and eLearning

One of the main mechanisms for sharing information with the wider workforce and our families is through the BWSCP website; this continues to be updated regularly and contains a wide range of safeguarding information, guidance and links for support and training.

From April 2021 to March 2022 there were over 130,000 views on 74 pages. The most accessed page was eLearning with over 6,000 views; this is where the Universal Safeguarding Training is hosted alongside various other learning opportunities, and it is positive that the workforce knows where and how to access this. Across Berkshire West we have, for many years, provided a free online level 1 universal safeguarding training module, available to anyone working with children and young people. It has always been our aim to retain this element of training for our workforce as free to access, and it is hugely positive that over the past 12 months 3625 people have successfully completed the online Universal Safeguarding Training.

We have increased our social media presence with regards to promoting safeguarding campaigns. Some of the identified areas of focus for this year have been:

- Summer campaigns on water safety and the danger of open windows
- Safe Sleeping
- Weapon Crime
- Online Safety
- Healthy relationships & Domestic Abuse

Pan Berkshire Arrangements

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

The Section 11 Panel requests that representatives from key agencies who work across two or more Berkshire local authority areas attend the panel to present their Section 11 self-assessment return. A tool is provided to enable agencies to demonstrate and provide evidence that they are fulfilling their safeguarding duties under the Children Act 2004. Panel members scrutinise the return, ask questions of the presenter and provide feedback on areas for improvement. This is seen as an effective process, which agencies value.

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

Impact of Partnership Working: This group also reacts to findings from local case reviews, an example being revisions in the Child Protection Conference chapter following a West Berkshire Child Safeguarding Practice Review. The chapter is now clear that when a case is stepped down from a child protection plan that a child in need plan is in place for at least three months and be subject to management scrutiny and review before closure. It now also states that if there is a significant change within 3 months of the conference that removes a child's name from a Child Protection plan then a multiagency strategy meeting should be convened, to determine whether a s47 enquiry is necessary to enable the local authority to decide whether it should take any action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, for example, a Child Protection conference should be held. It is positive that an issue raised in one local authority area can positively impact procedures that are accessed by six local authority areas.

BWSCP local datasets support focussed discussion on key topics

Our three areas have very different demographics, and as such are never in the same group of statistical neighbours. However, our children and families regularly cross the borders and as a Berkshire West area we obviously share many safeguarding risks. To support discussions on our local potential or known concerns the Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups (ISIGs) now review a combined Berkshire West dataset that includes the same information from all three Children's Services to provide a comparison, as well as data from other key partners. A selection of the data included in the dataset can be found in Appendix 2.

The comparison of local data has led to several discussions regarding specific topics over the year, such as referral numbers. Over a period of time, it was identified that in Wokingham the referral rate had remained low and had not returned to pre pandemic levels; this had not been the case for Reading or West Berkshire. Various reasons for this were considered such as school holidays, covid-19 pandemic restrictions and school closures. After the initial concern was raised, a review of referrals was undertaken in Wokingham to identify if there were any unidentified issues. The review concluded that there were no concerns or issues identified with threshold application and provided assurance that for the foreseeable future this is likely to be the new normal for Wokingham.

We also encourage thematic discussions at the ISIGs which can lead to better multi-agency involvement. For example, during, and following the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a recognised national increase in Elective Home Education, and locally numbers have continued to increase. The Southeast Sector Led Improvement Programme (SESLIP) are undertaking work in this area and colleagues agreed to consider the results, and to establish if numbers remain raised at the beginning of the school year. As a safeguarding partnership we recognise that School is a protective factor in children's lives. Children who do not attend school can become hidden, which means that we are less able to help and protect them. Following on from discussions at the ISIGs the Safeguarding Executive have commissioned a project to consider:

- How we identify those families that are genuinely keen to Electively Home Educate as opposed to those that have become disenfranchised with schools?
- How each area assures itself that children are receiving appropriate and adequate learning opportunities, particularly for the harder to reach families?
- How they ensure that universal services are aware that they must inform the local authority if they become aware that a child is EHE?
- A plan to implement the awaited new Government Statutory guidance.

Case Complexity: Locally, agencies are reporting that there is an increase in the complexity of cases; this increase is thought to be due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been a significant increase in concerns raised regarding young people's emotional health and wellbeing, and this is reflected in data received within the Independent Scrutiny and Impact groups. A survey was undertaken with Schools in Wokingham to identify the key areas of focus; the survey highlighted Families in Acute Stress as the highest area of concern; this is reflected in the work undertaken in Reading to identify where the increase in case complexity has come from. There is not one singular factor, but families are in acute stress with multiple factors presenting. This surge in complexity has seen an increase in the cases coming into the front doors across Berkshire West with cases, in all areas, being open for longer than they would have been previously. West Berkshire have seen the number of children and young people subject to Child Protection plans increase significantly, due to complexity; however, a review of cases has been undertaken which concluded that the right families are receiving the right services at the right time. In addition, feedback from Ofsted recognised that the Family Safeguarding Model used in West Berkshire is effective and caseloads have been well managed.

Scrutiny and Challenge:

We recognise that working over a Berkshire West footprint is complicated and it requires continued engagement, ownership, discussion, and willingness for it to work at all levels and to be successful and provide added value. Our tri-borough partnership provides us with the opportunity to think more creatively, for example, the opportunity of cross boundary working allows us to identify common safeguarding issues and consider the strengths of joint discussion and co-working with partners. The examples above provide some evidence of the positive impact for our workforce of working in this coordinated way. However, the Safeguarding Executive and all the subgroups recognise that improvements need to be made, and this continues to be the challenge for the forthcoming year.

Case Review Activity

Rapid Reviews

As partly detailed in last year's annual report, from the first lockdown period in March 2020 up until June 2021 the Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership completed Rapid Reviews for 22 children across Reading, West Berkshire, and Wokingham. This unprecedented number of notifications of serious child safeguarding incidents partly reflected the strain that families countrywide were facing as a result of the pandemic. The significant rise in non-accidental injuries was not only seen locally but nationally, plus we saw a rise in serious youth violence, which tragically resulted in fatal stabbing incidents in Reading. This directly led to seven of the notifications as we sought to understand the role of multi-agency support to the alleged perpetrators in their lives before the incident, as well as that of the victim. The Rapid Reviews have progressed to five individual Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, plus a thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review focussing on serious youth violence (see below for more information).

Independent Scrutiny:

Following this large number of notifications, the Partnership were keen to ensure that the learning identified in the subsequent Rapid Review was not lost in the increased pressure on workload for all agencies due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, an independent appraisal was commissioned to undertake a concise evaluation of the 22 Rapid Reviews completed by the Partnership. The key aims of this analysis were to:

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- Independently evaluate the effectiveness of the multi-agency BWSCP process to undertake Rapid Reviews, highlighting any issues with effective engagement or information sharing by organisations and providing an assessment on the quality of the multi-agency discussion and report produced as a result.
- Review the Rapid Review reports, with supporting documentation and minutes of meetings if required, to draw together learning themes.
- Ascertain through discussion with key colleagues and the Case Review Group, that the learning identified has or is being progressed, discuss, and suggest recommendations to support the embedding of learning, and identify any impact evidence; and
- Link the findings/learning/recommendations from the Rapid Review reports with those of any local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews subsequently initiated to ensure concerns and findings were taken forward and considered in these reviews.

The Independent Reviewer found 'that the quality of Rapid Review reports is judged to be high; the documents are coherent, comprehensive, concise, and well written; the report template is user friendly and sensibly structured and consistently reflect a good level of discussion, reflection, and analysis. This is something that the CSPRP has noted in a high number of the reports submitted to them'. Discussion with local colleagues also found that they agreed that the process enabled good communication between partners, with good engagement and transparency from all agencies, allowing productive and proactive discussion, even when the situation may be challenging.

The reviewer found that there was not a consistent approach within and across agencies to deal with learning gained through Rapid Reviews. This includes, for example, learning points being taken to other forums and scrutinised to consider the best way to disseminate it across an agency, plus action tracking, oversight, and governance. This has meant that checking how effectively learning has been embedded was acknowledged as more problematic. However, there were examples provided of direct influence on practice of the learning identified in Rapid Reviews, which are captured in the Impact box below.

Impact of Partnership Working:

The Rapid Review process allows for immediate learning to be taken back to agencies. Examples given as part of the Independent Review include:

- In West Berkshire, learning and resources in relation to water safety following the drowning of a child in Newbury Canal and safe sleeping advice (from a separate incident) with the Lullaby Trust, were shared across services. There is evidence of both being used in our front door Children and Family Services Triage service and Early Response Hub. In addition, as unborn children and under 1s were identified as particularly vulnerable, enhanced screening tools were developed during Covid-19 which have continued to be used and expanded to develop additional enhanced screening which includes Domestic Abuse.
- In Brighter Futures for Children, an example of identified learning was in relation to the lack of fathers being involved in the work undertaken with the family. This was addressed through case review learning being disseminated through service meetings and then an audit undertaken to establish how this learning has positively impacted on practice, and in this instance specifically, social workers involving fathers in the single assessments being completed.
- In Wokingham Children's Services, an example of improving the sharing interim safety plans with other agencies when a family is under-going an assessment, was swiftly implemented due as the manager involved in the Rapid Review took the learning back to the respective members of the workforce.
- Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust have reported an increased number of referrals staff make to Children's Services. Professional training and development, in part originating from learning from case review activity, will have played a part in this, but the Rapid Review process has also highlighted the importance of designated post-holders being accessible and visible as a means of supporting and empowering practitioners to learn and develop their safeguarding practices.

The Independent Reviewer identified a number of themes that were highlighted across the Rapid Reviews. These include:

- Information Sharing
- Assessment and management of risk
- Escalation and challenge
- Recording
- Thresholds
- Professional curiosity
- Communication
- Non- or dis-engagement by parents
- Decision making
- Hearing the child's voice
- Contextual safeguards
- Covid-19 impact

Suggested areas for development:

- Make adjustments to the Rapid Review Report template to distinguishing learning from remedial action, to support agencies with improvement activity.
- Improve use of single and multi-agency action plans and tracking sheets to better evidence development and improvement activity.
- Develop and embed a process for to assess, scrutinise and evidence progress and impact.
- Consider time limited 'theme lead' approach to learning and improvement, based on the identified key themes, targeted at either a strategic or operational level and act as a lever for raising the profile of the theme, thereby influencing practice and cultural change.
- Create a more systematic approach to sharing and disseminating learning identified in Rapid Reviews and most full case reviews.

This report was presented to the Case Review Group and the Safeguarding Executive in May 2022, and actions to address these recommendations are being taken forward and will be reported in the next annual report.

Case Review Group Activity

The Case Review Group continues to promote active discussion about any cases that colleagues may feel meet criteria for a level of multi-agency review. This was particularly important considering the significant drop in 2021/2022 of cases being identified that met the criteria for making a notification of a serious child safeguarding incident. Due to the reduction, consideration was given to the process in place and challenging discussions took place to review whether any cases may have been missed.

During this period the Case Review Group continued to review cases of concern, that didn't meet the criteria for notification, to ensure that there was a multi-agency view and to consider if any further local-based work was required. This is an open, honest but challenging group, where individuals actively scrutinise safeguarding practice.

An outcome of the case review process discussion and the Independent Reviewer report was that it highlighted that the Safeguarding Executive had not been fully sighted on all the Rapid Reviews from across Berkshire West, at the different stages of review. This inadvertently meant a lack of clear ownership and direction at the Executive level which subsequently impacted on the ability of the Safeguarding Executive to be fully assured about the process, learning identified and the impact. A thorough review of the process has been undertaken, to ensure that appropriate Safeguarding Executive members are informed or involved at key stages of the process.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

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

Published CSPRs:

Three CSPRs have been published in the first half of 2022. These relate to two cases of known or suspected non-accidental injury of a young child, and one case of sexual abuse. All our CSPR reports are published on this page: [Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership - Safeguarding Practice Reviews](#).

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

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

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

- Clear identification of vulnerabilities in families and multi-disciplinary discussions being undertaken.
- Early referrals when concerns identified, and examples of quality assessments.
- Swift responses after an incident to safeguard children and their siblings.
- Practitioners effectively sharing information and communicating, and examples of cultural sensitivity.
- Positive examples of practitioners being child focussed and challenging decisions when they felt it was appropriate.

- Significant support was initially put in place for a family, which was appropriately reduced when good progress was made.
- Examples where the multi-agency response when some new information was received was timely and coordinated.

Recommendations and action plans are in place for these reviews, are being actively monitored and acted upon through the Berkshire West Case Review Group and the locality based Independent Scrutiny and Impact Groups. These include single and multi-agency actions, and we expect to report in more detail the results of these reviews in the next annual report. A number of actions have been completed which include:

- Undertaking the multi-agency Child in Need audit, leading to practitioner and family guidance being produced to help support more effective engagement in the process.
- Review and update of the Threshold Guidance.
- Review and update of the Escalation Guidance and procedures.
- A range of locality and agency specific, plus Berkshire Wide procedures and processes have been reviewed and updated as a direct result of CSPR learning.

Ongoing Reviews related to Serious Youth Violence:

We currently have reviews ongoing that we aim to publish in Autumn 2022 that relate to, and were triggered by, incidents of serious youth violence. Whilst not yet published, much of the process of the reviews, including discussions with families, practitioners, and managers across the partnership, took place with this annual report period. Key themes identified in these reviews include:

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

Sharing learning:

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

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

[Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership - Safeguarding Practice Reviews](#)

Review of National Cases of local interest

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

Following the tragic death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, the trial of his dad and his partner and the subsequent Joint Targeted Area Inspection in Solihull colleagues across Berkshire West initiated a project to review local services against the JTAI findings; this work is due to conclude in the Summer of 2022 and will be reported on in our next annual report.

Impact of Partnership Working:

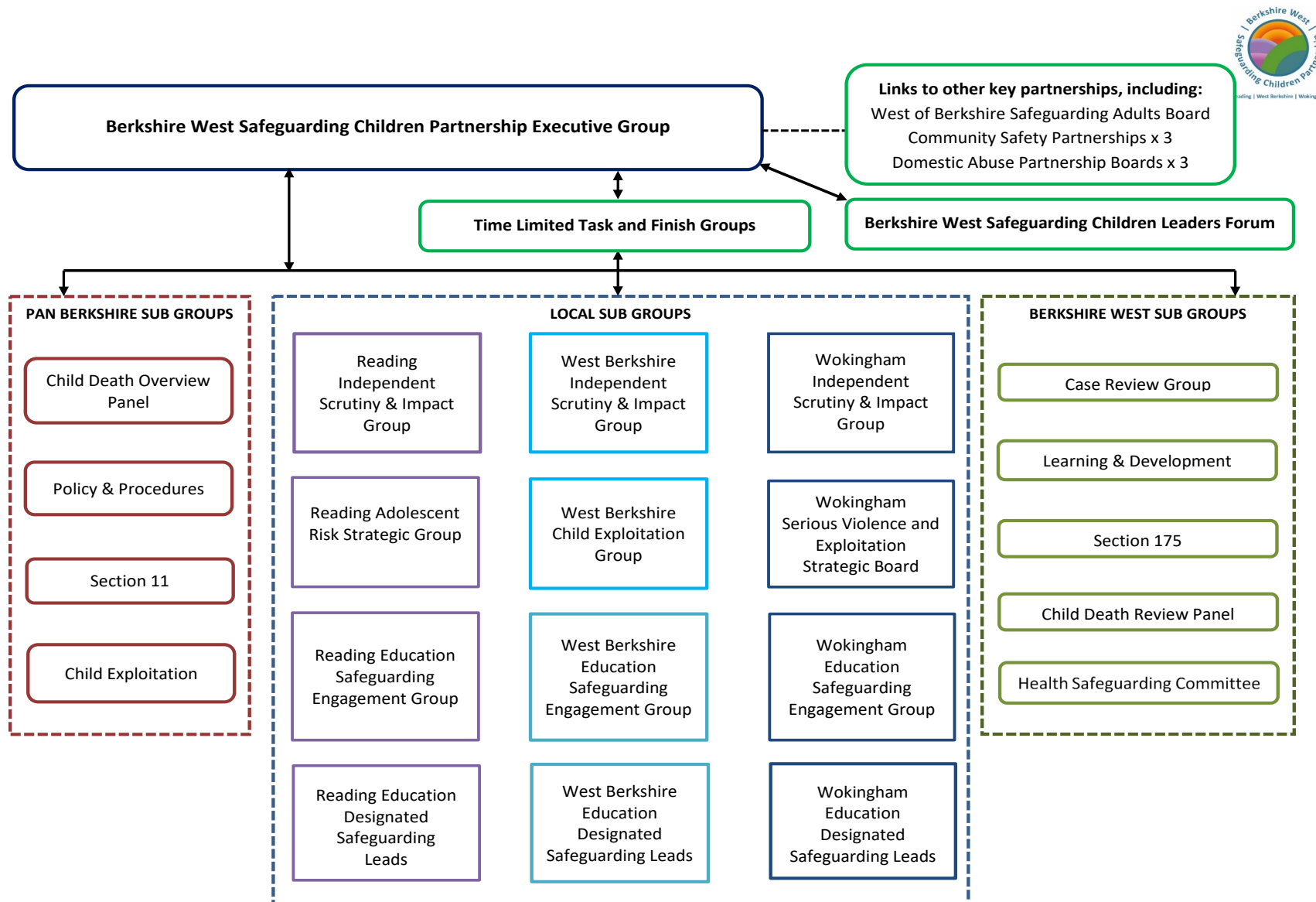
Learning from local and national safeguarding case reviews highlighted the need for a clear escalation policy that all practitioners felt confident to use. To support our local practitioner's additional escalation guidance was produced to explain how to work towards the best outcome for a child, particularly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

Scrutiny and Challenge:

There is considerable independent scrutiny built into the case review process, with multi-agency partners scrutinising information at the Rapid Review stage and Independent Reviewers brought in for Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. The multi-agency discussion of cases prior to notification to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has improved, eliminating some of the previous unnecessary notifications. The Case Review Group continues to scrutinise any cases of concern to ensure the appropriate decision has been made.

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

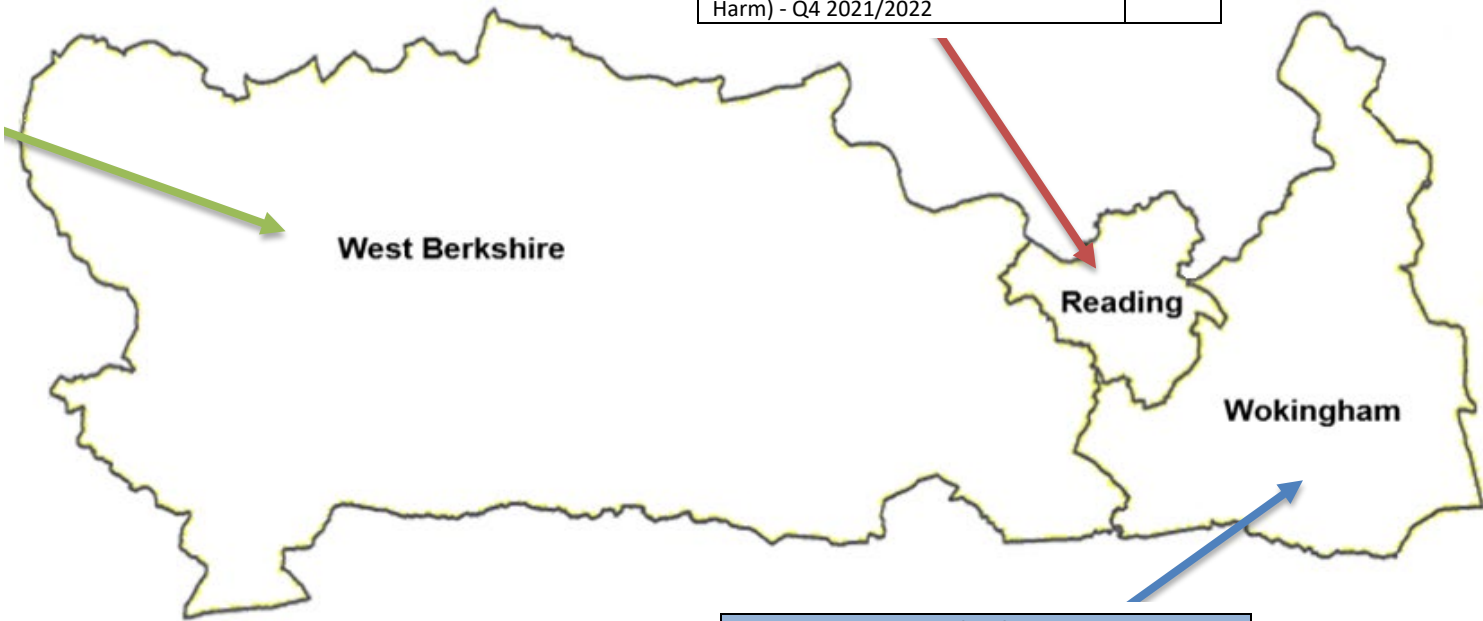
Appendix 1 – Berkshire West Safeguarding Children Partnership Sub-group structure chart



Appendix 2 – Knowing our children

West Berks	
West Berks Under 18 Population	35,595
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	52
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	348
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	46
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2021/2022	351
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2021/2022	44

Reading	
Reading Under 18 Population	37,254
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	58
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	406
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	63
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2021/2022	596
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2021/2022	72



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Wokingham	
Wokingham Under 18 Population	40,417
Children Subject to Child Protection Plan (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	40
Number of Children in Need (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	140
Children in Care (Rate per 10,000) March 2022	33
Domestic Incidents involving Children Q4 2021/2022	259
Total number of children 0-18-year-olds admitted to RBFT (including MH & Self-Harm) - Q4 2021/2022	52

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SEND Voices Wokingham School Transport Survey 2022

December 2022



Background

Following numerous issues with Home to School Transport in September 2021 a number of changes were made to the Transport process during 2022. In order to understand if these changes have improved the process or if there are still areas that can be improved, SEND Voices Wokingham parent carer forum in repeated the SEND Transport survey originally run in 2017 and an additional poll run in 2020 to evaluate parent carers priorities for Home to School Transport when the new Policy for this was being written.

The survey was sent out to all families in receipt of Home to School Transport from Wokingham Borough Council, this also included those who receive mileage expenses, which is 408 children/young people. The survey ran from 28th November until December 23rd 2022 enabling us to capture results of back to school in September 2022, the time of year when historically, most issues have arisen.

There were 100 responses which represents 24.5% of the Wokingham Borough cohort who are receiving school transport either within Wokingham or to school outside of the borough. This is slightly lower than the 110 responses (38%) we received for the 2017 survey when 289 children received SEND transport.

The survey results section contain **ALL** respondents comments, names have been removed to avoid identification.

Highlight Summary:

Areas showing improvement:

- **Concerns decreasing** about other children travelling in same transport, indicating that correct transport being allocated and Transport Panel working effectively
- **Significantly less concerns raised** to SEND Voices Wokingham at the beginning of term 2022, a dramatic reduction this year versus previous years.
- **Behaviour or driving/safety** of the driver or escort

Areas for improvement:

- **Communication** – these are various;
 - From the transport – ahead of the start of term, when they are changing drivers/escorts/cars
 - From CTU – direct contact number for them, changes to children in transport, adding/removing escorts, confirming mileage payments
- **Training** for drivers/escorts – this is an ongoing request from parents that taxi drivers and escorts are given training about SEND.
- Opportunity to develop a continual **feedback mechanism** to ensure that **CTU** are made aware of any concerns so that this can be taken into account when commissioning services ongoing
- **Green Metro Cars** - directly raised as an issue.

Summary of Results

It is concerning that there has been an increase, with **over 63% of the respondents said that no preparations were made for the driver/escort to care for the child's needs** while they were transporting them. This was higher than the 50% reporting no preparation in 2017.

The majority of children do not require car seats, but within the 0 – 8-year age group of the 6 children requiring a car seat 5 of them (83%) did not have a car seat provided by the transport company (42% in 2017).

Driver star rating = 3.76 - overall the satisfaction Driver rating has decreased since 2017

44% of respondents rated their driver as 5 star (48% in 2017), 16% rated the driver as only 1 or 2 star (18% in 2017).

Escort star rating = 3.73 - overall the satisfaction Escort rating has decreased since 2017

42% of respondents rated their escort as 5 star (49% in 2017), 12% rated the escort as only 1 or 2 star (22% in 2017).

As has been the case previously, **for many transport is excellent**, however for some it is not good at all.

Driver behaviour/safety - has improved

20% of respondents have had concerns about the behaviour or driving/safety of the driver or escort, (25% with concerns in 2017). Of **particular concern is that Green Metro Cars** are specifically mentioned by a couple of parents.

Travelling with Others – has improved (For those who travel with other children)

12% have concerns about the behaviour of other children in the vehicle, (39% in 2017), indicating that added by input from the SEND Team and the Transport panel, more children are being allocated the right transport provision. Where there are concerns most parents raise concerns with school, instead of contacting CTU, a dedicated phone contact number on the main WBC SEND School Transport webpage would aid this.

Summary of Results cont.

Where there are concerns about the driver/escort, parents raise most often raise these with the Transport company directly, then the school. There is an opportunity to develop a feedback mechanism to ensure that CTU are made aware of any concerns to so that this can be taken into account when commissioning services ongoing.

Of those who responded, 27% of 0–11-year-olds are travelling over the recommended 45 minutes to school each day. One child over 11 years old is travelling over the recommended 75 minutes per day

Rating for the Transport service provided by the Local Authority = 3.77 (67% rate 4 or 5 stars)

Rating for the Transport provision provided by the transport provider (taxi company etc) = 3.73 (61% 4 or 5 stars)

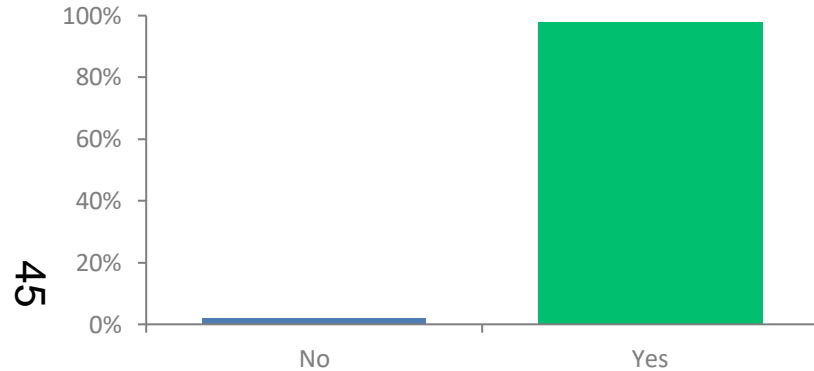
Survey Results

Individual question data and respondents comments is contained in the following section.

44

Q1: Are you a Wokingham Borough resident (pay your council tax to Wokingham Borough)?

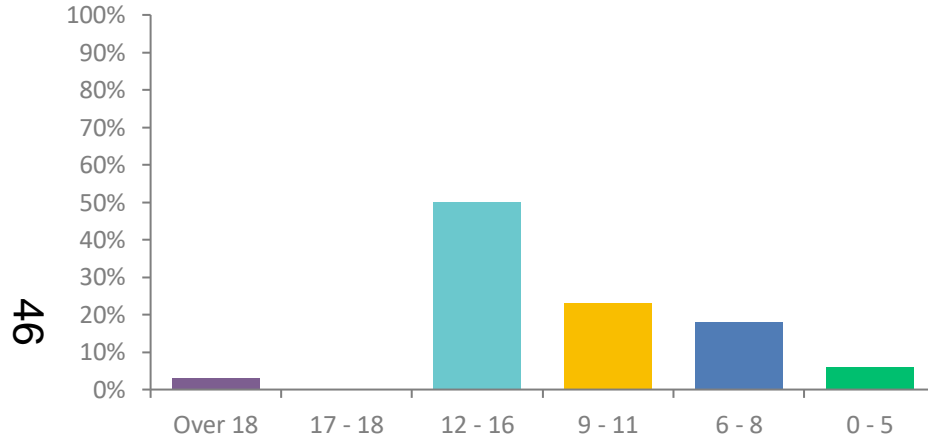
Answered: 100 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	98.00%	98
No	2.00%	2
TOTAL		100

Q3: How old is your child / young person

Answered: 100 Skipped: 0



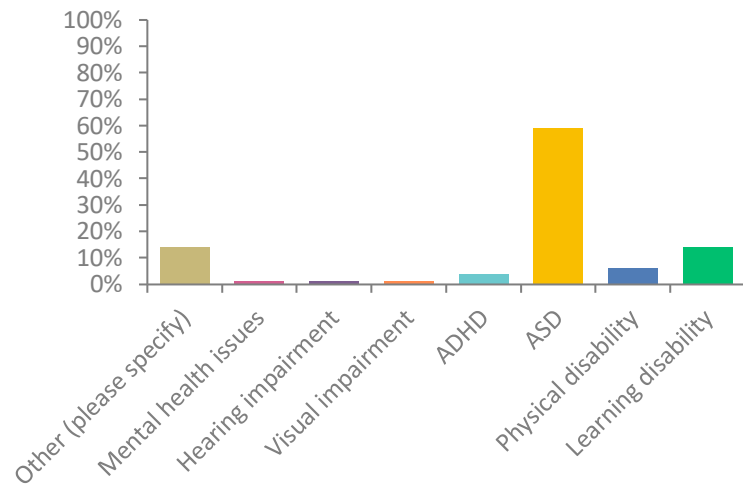
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0 - 5	6.00%	6
6 - 8	18.00%	18
9 - 11	23.00%	23
12 - 16	50.0%	50
17 - 18	0%	0
Over 18	3.00%	3
TOTAL		100

- There is representation across all age groups except 17 – 18 year olds (as these YP are fare payers and not funded by WBC)

Q4: What is your child or young person's main special need or disability ?

Answered: 100 Skipped: 0

47

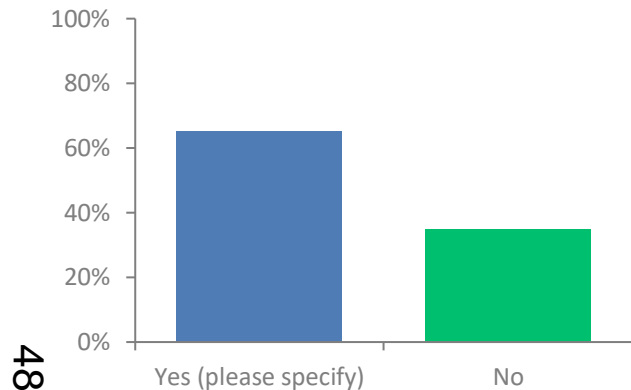


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Learning disability	14.00%	14
Physical disability	6.00%	6
ASD	59.00%	59
ADHD	4.00%	4
Visual impairment	1.00%	1
Hearing impairment	1.00%	1
Mental health issues	1.00%	1
Other (please specify)	14.00%	14
TOTAL		100

Good representation across disabilities and in line with the figures for Wokingham Borough.

Q5: Does your child or young person have any additional special needs or disabilities ?

Answered: 100 Skipped: 0



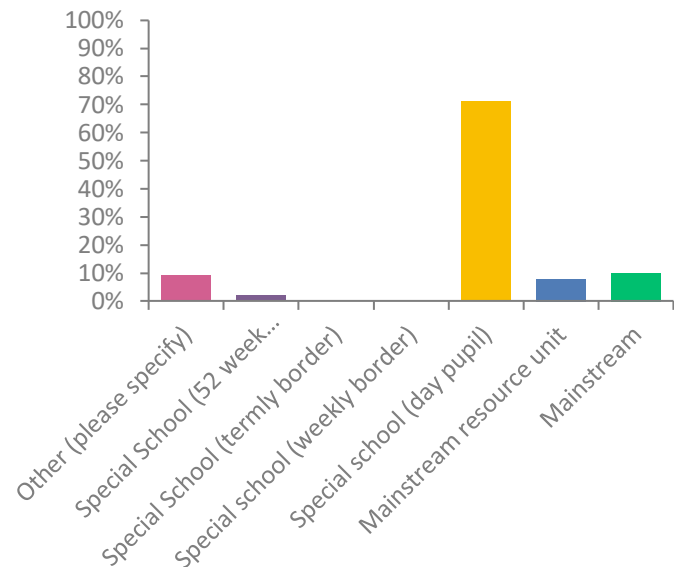
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No	35.00%	35
Yes (please specify)	65.00%	65
TOTAL		100

65% of the respondents said that their child had a secondary disability which includes: Downs Syndrome, visual impairment, ASD, ADHD, physical/mobility difficulties, Cerebral Palsy, complex medical needs, behavioural problems, epilepsy, communication problems, learning delay, hearing loss, auditory processing disorder, anxiety/mental health problems, feeding tubes and more. Highlighting there is a huge range of needs to be accommodated.

Q6: What type of school does your child or young person attend ?

Answered: 100 Skipped: 0

49

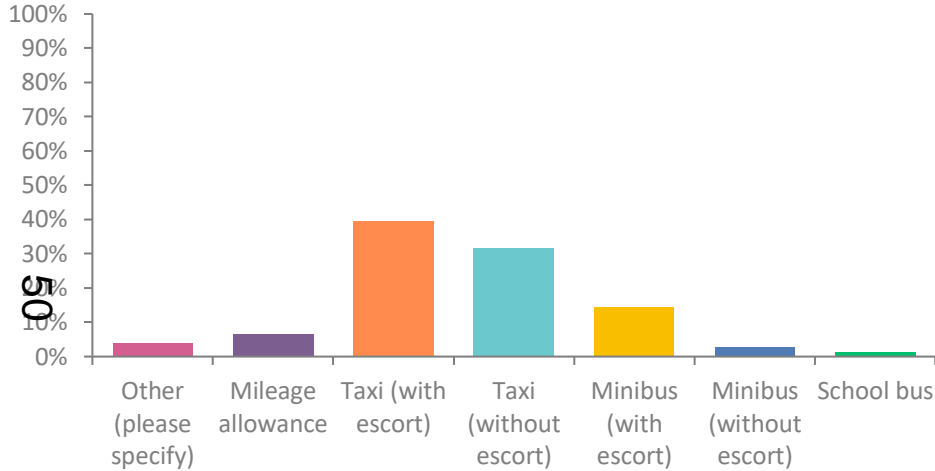


The majority of journeys are daily

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPO NSES	
Mainstream	10.0%	10
Mainstream resource unit	8.00%	8
Special school (day pupil)	71.00%	71
Special school (weekly border)	0%	0
Special School (termly border)	0%	0
Special School (52-week placement)	2.00%	2
Other (please specify)	9.00%	9
TOTAL		100

Q7: What type of school transport does your child or young person use ?

Answered: 76 Skipped: 24

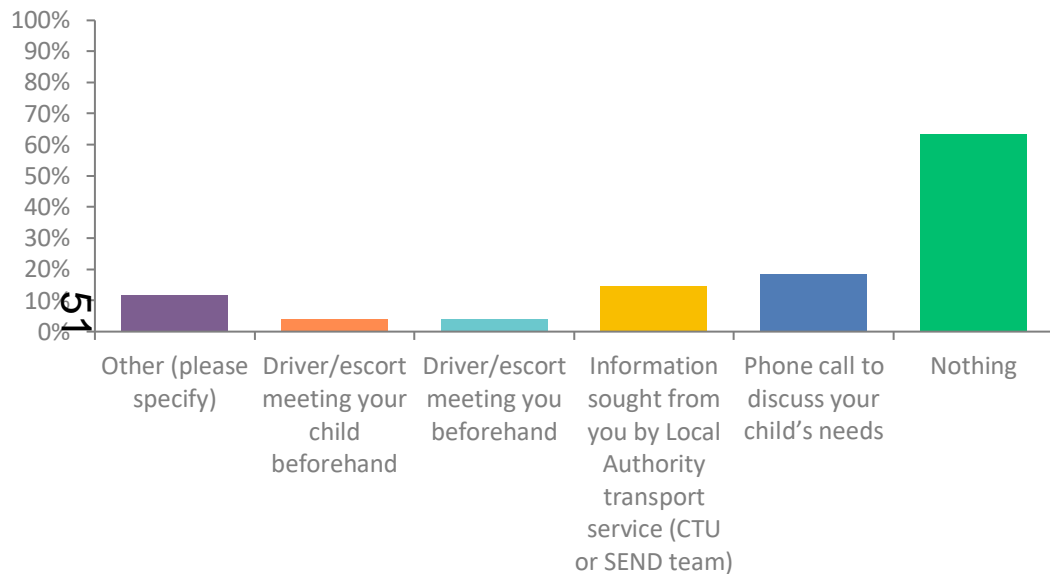


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
School bus	1.32%	1
Minibus (without escort)	2.63%	2
Minibus (with escort)	14.47%	11
Taxi (without escort)	31.58%	24
Taxi (with escort)	39.47%	30
Mileage allowance	6.58%	5
Other (please specify)	3.95%	3
TOTAL		76

There is good representation across all types of transport. The majority of responses were from those using taxis either with or without escorts.

Q8: What preparations were made for the driver and escort (where applicable) to care for your child's needs ahead of back to school in September 22 ? (Tick all that apply)

Answered: 76 Skipped: 24



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Nothing	63.16% 48
Phone call to discuss your child's needs	18.42% 14
Information sought from you by Local Authority transport service (CTU or SEND team)	14.47% 11
Driver/escort meeting you beforehand	3.95% 3
Driver/escort meeting your child beforehand	3.95% 3
Other (please specify)	11.84% 9
TOTAL	88

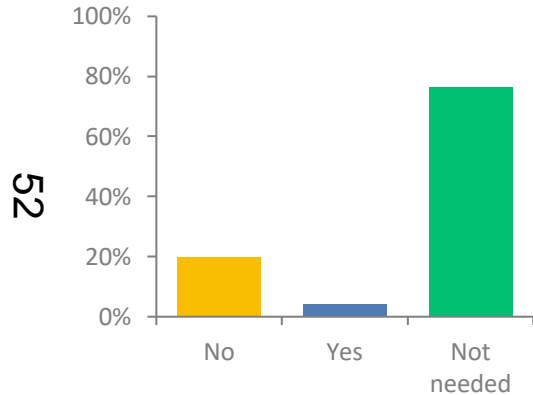
It is concerning that over 63% of the respondents said that no preparations were made for the driver/escort to care for the child's needs while they were transporting them. This was higher than the 50% reporting no preparation in 2017.

Q9: If needed, is your child supplied with a car seat by the transport company ?

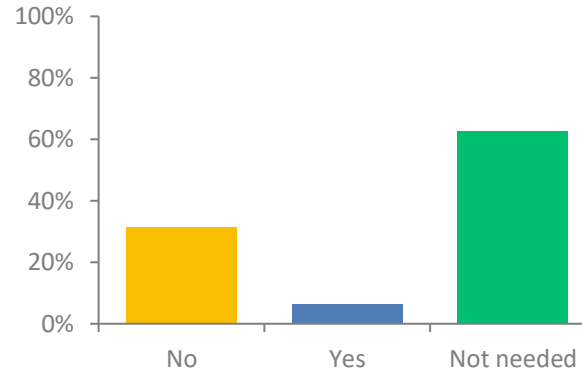
Answered: 76 Skipped: 24

Answered: 16 Skipped: 8

All ages



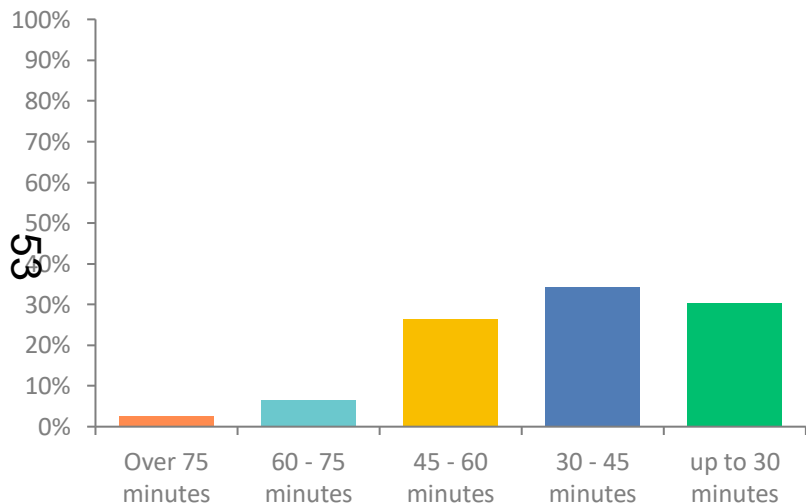
0 – 8 years old



The majority of children do not require car seats, but within the 0 – 8-year age group of the 6 children requiring a car seat 5 of them (83%) did not have a car seat provided by the transport company (42% in 2017).

Q10: How long does your child normally spend in the transport from being picked up to arriving at school? (Minutes, excluding exceptional circumstances such as roadworks, bad weather etc)

Answered: 76 Skipped: 24

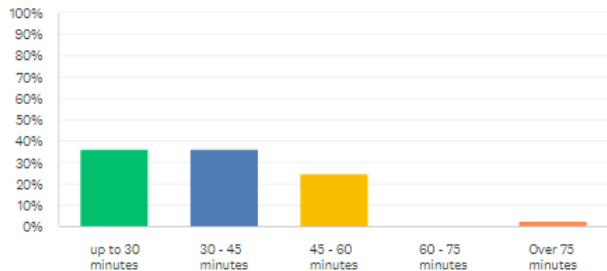


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
up to 30 minutes	30.26% 23
30 - 45 minutes	34.21% 26
45 - 60 minutes	26.32% 20
60 - 75 minutes	6.58% 5
Over 75 minutes	2.63% 2
TOTAL	76

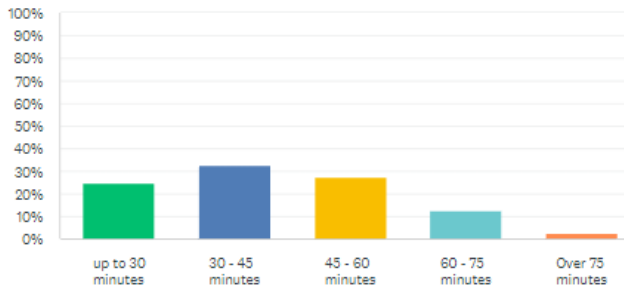
The majority of children are travelling for up to 60 minutes to school each day.

Q10: How long does your child normally spend in the transport from being picked up to arriving at school? (Minutes, excluding exceptional circumstances such as roadworks, bad weather etc)

0-11 years old



12 – over 18 years old



54

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ up to 30 minutes	36.11%	13
▼ 30 - 45 minutes	36.11%	13
▼ 45 - 60 minutes	25.00%	9
▼ 60 - 75 minutes	0.00%	0
▼ Over 75 minutes	2.78%	1
TOTAL		36

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ up to 30 minutes	25.00%	10
▼ 30 - 45 minutes	32.50%	13
▼ 45 - 60 minutes	27.50%	11
▼ 60 - 75 minutes	12.50%	5
▼ Over 75 minutes	2.50%	1
TOTAL		40

27% of 0–11-year-olds are travelling over the recommended 45 minutes to school each day. One child over 11 years old is travelling over the recommended 75 minutes per day.

Q11: How happy are you happy with your current driver ?

Answered: 76 Skipped: 24



55

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	14.47%	6.58%	11.84%	22.37%	44.74%	76	3.76
	11	5	9	17	34		

44% of respondents rated their driver as 5 star (compared to 48% in 2017)
16% rated the driver as only 1 or 2 star (compared to 18% in 2017).

Q12: If applicable, how happy are you with your current escort ?

Answered: 49 Skipped: 51



56

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	10.20%	14.29%	10.20%	22.45%	42.86%	49	3.73
	5	7	5	11	21		

42% of respondents rated their escort as 5 star (compared to 49% in 2017)
12% rated the escort as only 1 or 2 star (compared to 22% in 2017).

Q13 Please tell us about any experiences where you feel the driver and/or escort went above and beyond

Answered: 35 Skipped: 65

- Left bags in the car, texted to let us know, kept until the next day. General day to day communications goes via the Taxi company which works well. Due to the time of morning pick up they are very responsive to any last minute cancellations due to illness. Communication via email for any weekly changes to pickups/drop offs works well.
- Waited for a long time on the first day and agreed to bring him home at the end of the day despite our son refusing to get in on the outbound journey.
- He is texting ever morning to us. If I need go early to work he is helping as well
- He is very friendly to our son. He has even set him Maths challenges in the past.
- Waited for X when running late, and went back on one occasion for him
- The driver comes early when needed, such as days where there is a school outing.
- X has had several drivers and escorts, which is not helping his mental health issues. None of the escorts are experienced in special needs. They are all friendly but do not understand his mental health or behaviors. This means they can't support him in the taxi travel for 45 minutes minimum each way daily. 1.30 minutes a day without the correct care and attention. The language barrier is the biggest issue, including their inability to communicate with me about his behaviors. The school also says the taxi is a trigger.
- He will wait on our driveway if our son is struggling to leave the house.
- Always let me know when bus is late (extremely rare) due to traffic, beyond their control.
- is being safe and courteous going above and beyond?
- Advised getting my son a book or game to distract him on the journey to school as he gets restless at times.
- Always smiling helps him in and seems to be pleased to see him
- They double check with me if X gives them information. They are reliable and very pleasant to deal with
- He doesn't mind any delayed pick ups and always shows concern if my son has a hospital appointment which i

Q13 Please tell us about any experiences where you feel the driver and/or escort went above and beyond cont.

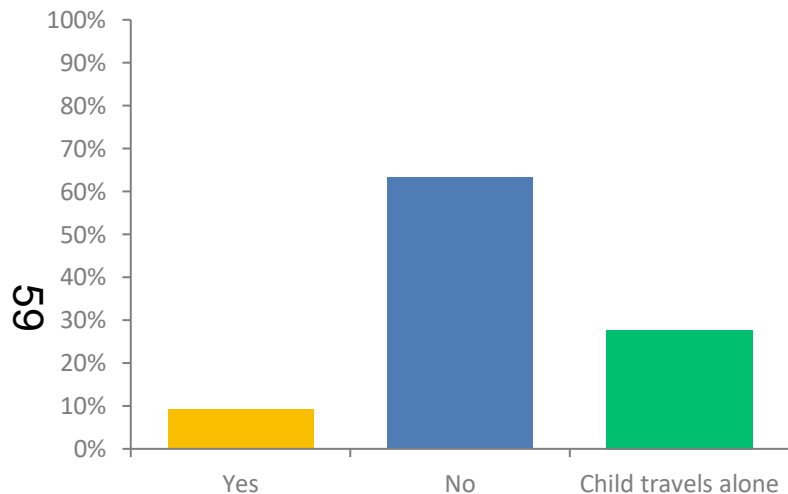
Answered: 35 Skipped: 65

- Always friendly
- The driver and escort were so unprofessional. They did not even allow me to introduce my son. Immediately I started to tell them about his needs They speak a different language and drove off.
- The driver always keeps us up to date. He is really kind.
- The driver and escort were both unprofessional and very rude. My son is nonverbal and the way they treated me is so unfair.
- Nope
- Escort gave my daughter a birthday gift.
- None
- Had awful drivers and escorts hence why I take
- Yes I had some issues with the escort she was a senior citizen and I thought she couldn't handle my child coz sometimes my child used to run off so we had some concerns n the council replaced her thanks
- When I have been a few minutes later(traffic) they have waited with him
- Spoke to me when he felt my child was distressed
- I think the fact they are mostly consistent is enough
- none
- None
- n/o
- They do tell me if they felt my son dull during pick ups from school.
- Temporary driver has returned home after AM pick up as child forgot something

58

Q14: Since September 22 have you ever had concerns about the behaviour of other children who travel in the same vehicle as your child?

Answered: 76 Skipped: 24



ANSWER CHOICES		
Child travels alone	27.63%	21
No	63.16%	48
Yes	9.21%	7
TOTAL		76

For those who travel with other children 12% have concerns about the behaviour of other children in the vehicle. This is much lower than the 39% expressing concerns in 2017.

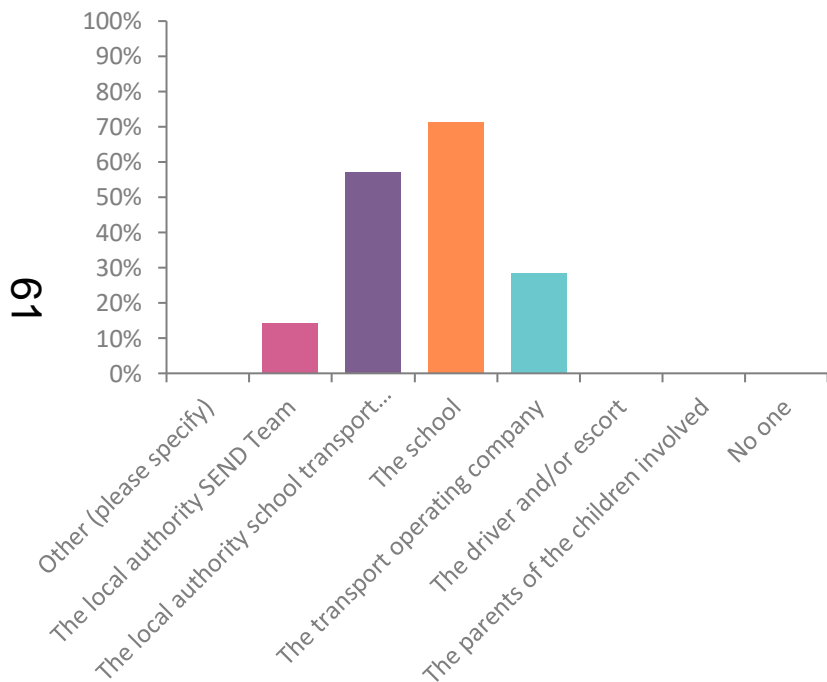
Q15: Please tell us about your concerns regarding others on the same transport

Respondents comments:

- I have had to escalate twice to the taxi company and to WBC that the taxi service provided has been inappropriate. My young person has both learning and physical disabilities and attends a schools program at a college so he is often paired with older college students who have intimidated him. They have also crammed him into the middle seat of a small car with two older adult college students because he is the smallest. Not only is it inappropriate from a safety aspect, but he also have encopresis and enuresis (uncontrollable soiling & wetting) which would make the experience very upsetting for him if he is placed in such close proximity with others and is smelling foul. On the first occasion this happened they also told him he has to wait for an hour after school ended to return with the college students when his day ends at 3.30pm.
- The other child shouts which causes anxiety for mine.
- Other children are loud and swearing. Not aware of any actions taken to address this behaviour
- My son gets very angry by noises. He starts crying and hitting himself when other children in the bus start making noise or shouting or crying. Sometimes is more than 30 minutes to come home from school,(depend on traffic)and all this time he cry and hit himself, and then all his face or part of body get bruised from his hitting. I'm very concerned about this for my son. In previous years he has gone to school by taxi , and he was more quiet during the way going or coming home from school. I don't know why they changed it and put my son with other kids. He is very sensitive from noises around.
- We had concerns as another child wasn't being safe in the taxi.
- Behavioral issues due to special needs, which were poorly managed by the escort. Escort was not supervising kids appropriately on journeys, preferring to sit in front passenger's seat with the driver.
- My daughter travels with another young person of which school are aware of a personality clash which can result in verbal confrontation between my daughter and the other young person. School, myself and the parent of the other young person have asked if a larger vehicle could be used so that there is space etc

Q16: Who did you raise your concerns with ? (Tick all that apply)

Answered: 7 Skipped: 93



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
No one	0%	0
The parents of the children involved	0%	0
The driver and/or escort	0%	0
The transport operating company	28.57%	2
The school	71.43%	5
The local authority school transport department (CTU)	57.14%	4
The local authority SEND Team	14.29%	1
Other (please specify)	0%	0
TOTAL		12

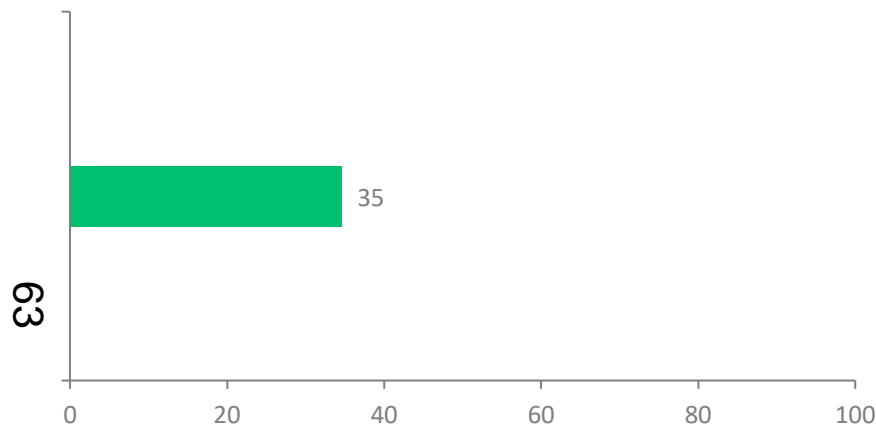
Q17: Please tell us about how your concerns were dealt with by each party you raised them with

Answered: 7 Skipped: 93

- The taxi company says they have no choice as this is how the council schedules shared taxi's so they did not take accountability for resolving the concerns. Once raised with the transport team, the situation was resolved immediately. But after the summer term, he was placed back on a shared schedule with college students again and he just refused to go to school because he could not stomach getting into the already full car with others and being crammed into a middle seat unsafely and uncomfortably for a 45 minute journey which is quite significant for a young person with anxiety disorders and physical disabilities. After raising it again, the situation was resolved immediately - but it has made me lose faith that it won't happen again.
- solution of ear defenders was given. We have found middle ground with alternative options to keep my child occupied during the journey.
- Escalated to taxi co
- I've contacted last year the local authority school transport, and I've explained my worries and concerns about my son. But it seems that they didn't get my concern seriously .
- The school were great but local authority took longer to deal with the issue.
- The escort was advised to sit with the children in the back of minibus rather than with the driver in front seat by operating company manager.
- Just told it's not an option it's what is contracted and supplied

Q18: Please tell us overall how happy you feel that the issue was resolved to your satisfaction

Answered: 7 Skipped: 93



Score of 35/100

The score of 35 out of 100 (1 = very unhappy, 10 = very happy) indicates that parent carers were generally not pleased with the way that issues were resolved.

Q18: Please tell us about why you answered the way you did

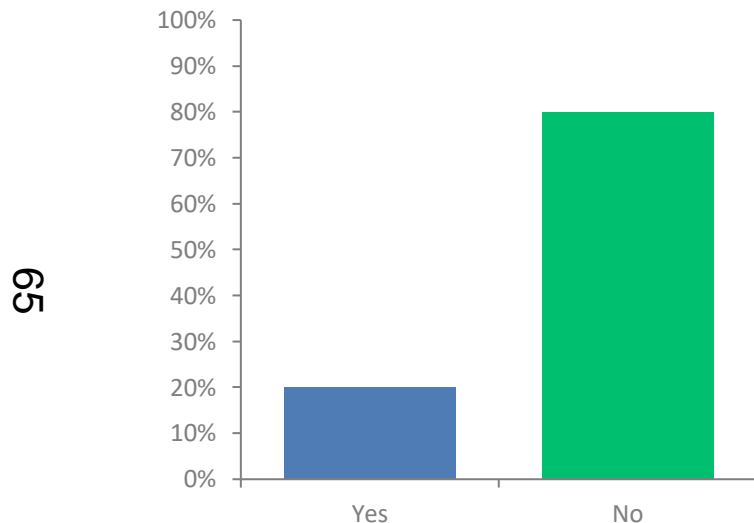
Answered: 7 Skipped: 93

- Because I'm not convinced it wont happen again!
- We are still in the testing phase of this alternate solution.
- Because this is the way I'm feeling .
- I feel my child is now safe in his taxi.
- The driver and escort do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding what Autism and other learning disabilities and special needs all about. We are not sure what exactly is happening on the bus, when parents are not there to see. The escort and driver not friendly or approachable.
- I know the other young person has not been getting the transport because of the issues.

64

Q20: Since September 22 have you ever had concerns about the behaviour or driving/safety of the driver or escort ?

Answered: 75 Skipped: 25



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
No	80.0% 60
Yes	20.0% 15
TOTAL	75

It is a concern that since September 22, 20% of respondents have had concerns about the behaviour or driving/safety of the driver or escort. However, this is an improvement from the 25% with concerns in 2017.

Q20: Please tell us about your concerns about the driver and/or escort (since September 22

Respondents comments:

- Drives over the speed limit. Runs through red lights in traffic (we caught him doing so and even a family friend stopped to have a chat with him about driving safely with children onboard) Let's young children lean out of the passenger window Drives too fast and barely waits for the escort to close the bus door or put his seat belt on
- My child has reported unsafe driving to me on regular occasions
- Various drivers attend - we have had issues when asked for their ID, driver's have been rude and very reluctant to produce ID - or have no ID and can only produce what has been sent on their phone. Never see the driver who drops our son off as they never bring him to the door just sit in their car. We have had drivers stomp off, spit on our driveway, mumble and moan when asked for their ID. They do not wear their ID's. Spoke to Wokingham School Transport and put in complaint about Green Metro Cars - my son is repeatedly getting into school late.
- They can not manage my child's behavior, and he's got out of the taxi numerous times by opening the window and using the outside handle to open the door. The Huckleberry therapeutic school, Wantage, can tell you more as they witnessed this and the issue with the taxi.
- Please refer to the last question
- The not understanding why they need a car seat for a four year old, but also for a child that has additional needs.
- Not witnessed first hand, only incidences my daughter has told me about. However, I'm unsure if her perception of what happened may differ to the actual incident. She has hated school transport ever since her taxi company changed in September 2021, and she lost most loveliest of drivers she had travelled with for 2 years. She has never been happy with any driver since, (not that I blame her, as we have had very poor experiences with Green Metro since, which have been handled by CTU)
- Permanent driver is very elderly
- Not happy at all. My Child who is autism and learning difficulties . Drivers Keep changing and Escort. This really stresses him out. He does not like change at all

Q20: Please tell us about your concerns about the driver and/or escort (since September 22 cont.

Respondents comments:

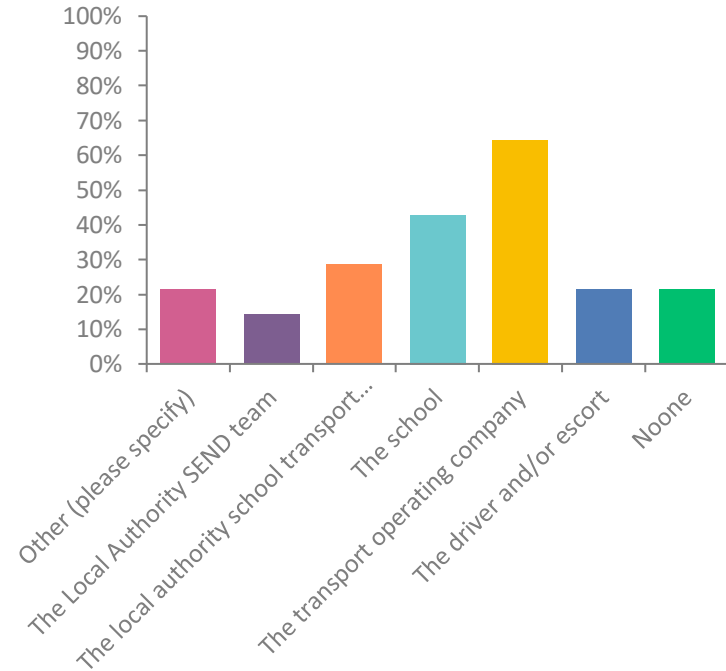
- Had to be reported to LADDO.
- Driver got lost when first doing the journey of which my daughter was texting me and panicking I rang the transport people who contacted driver it took 1.5 hours to get home that day
- Did not collect my child despite being told twice in one day that they are collecting from school. School have also reported that they often get to school late to collect my child
- I explained above about escort and driver.
- That was a different driver and escort in September, they were not briefed about my child's needs, the driver seemed disinterested and the escort was so old and frail, I was concerned she will not be able to handle my child. We refused the service at the time.

67

Q22: Who did you raise your concerns with ? (Tick all that apply)

Answered: 14 Skipped: 86

89



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Noone	21.43%	3
The driver and/or escort	21.43%	3
The transport operating company	64.29%	9
The school	42.86%	6
The local authority school transport department CTU)	28.57%	4
The Local Authority SEND team	14.29%	2
Other (please specify)	21.43%	3
TOTAL		30

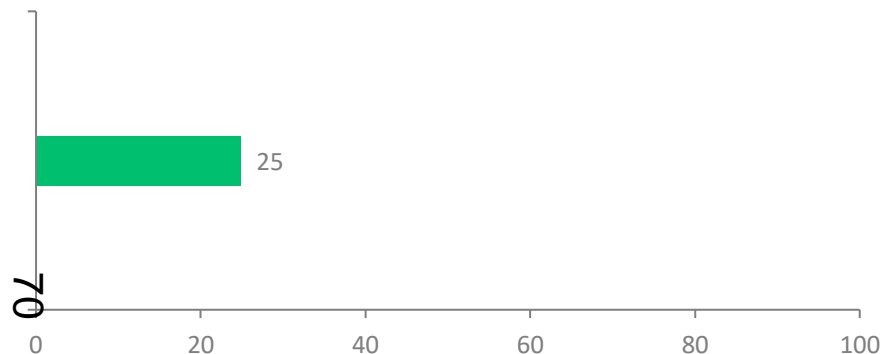
Q23: Please tell us about how your concerns were dealt with by each party you raised them with

Respondents comments:

- Nothing has been done, considering raising a formal complaint to the Council as we have several witnesses to confirm our claims
- This has not been raised (yet)
- Firstly general email about traffic. Not happy with response. Then told drivers will have ID and asked parents to be understanding
- Nothing has been raised, just a warning that they may refuse to take him in a taxi. This is a great support to a single mother who works and has a child with a lot of mental health and disabilities. I am trying to apply for Mobility from DLA so I can give up work and drive him to school. 140 miles per day 5 days a week
- Nothing has been done yet
- The taxi company wasn't very help at all. And although things were promised, they did not happen. Once spoken to the council they were quick to help solve this.
- n/a
- Driver is currently off and has been replaced with a different driver
- Emailed transport and seems to be ok now
- School said they would keep an eye, transport company said nothing and that it was a misunderstanding and escort apologised
- We were promised by operating company manager that escort will start supervising kids on the bus by sitting with them rather than with the driver in front.
- It took about 2 months to address the issues, as these were not dealt with before start of school. Appropriate harness had to be ordered even though I did let them know before hand that my son was using harness with Readybus. It resulted in my son missing schooling for up to two hours a day each day as had to take 3 kids to 3 different schools myself.
- Don't know no one has told me the outcome of the complaint
- t was dealt with by the company and the issue didn't repeat

Q24: Please tell us overall how happy you feel that the issue was resolved to your satisfaction

Answered: 14 Skipped: 86



Score of 25/100

The score of 25 out of 100 (1 = very unhappy, 10 = very happy) indicates that parent carers were not pleased with the way that issues were resolved.

Q24: Please tell us overall how happy you feel that the issue was resolved to your satisfaction

Respondents comments:

- Just stating facts as we believe the driver is not taking our child to school
- Child still getting into school 5-10 minutes late at least twice a week. Paying for a service not being received.
- Taxi has always been an issue as they are untrained escorts. We had one gentleman who was in his 70s and found my son challenging to deal with. This gentleman also opened my front door and walked into my living room on more than one occasion, returning my child. The other escorts have always knocked or rung the bell or let my child enter and see me in the home. I have not had a taxi or escort yet that knows anything about my child's needs or disability. Only one has been of good English but was 70 and entered our home without an invite. I feel no preparation goes into transport, it's last minute, and in less than two years, my child has had several different escorts and taxi drivers with no understanding of his care needs.
- ~~Main~~ reason is due to child safety .
- I just feel that although I'm very grateful for the help in getting my child to school. I also feel very let down and I feel like he is also let down from this experience. And experience that will more than likely last his schooling life.
- n/a
- as above
- I am very happy with our current driver and the escort
- I don't know what happened
- Issue not repeated

Q26: How would you rate the TRANSPORT SERVICE PROVIDED BY the LOCAL AUTHORITY?

Answered: 64 Skipped: 36



	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
72 ☆	10.94%	7.81%	14.06%	28.12%	39.06%	64	3.77
	7	5	9	18	25		

Q27: How would you rate the TRANSPORT PROVISION provided by the transport provider (taxi company etc) ?

Answered: 63 Skipped: 37

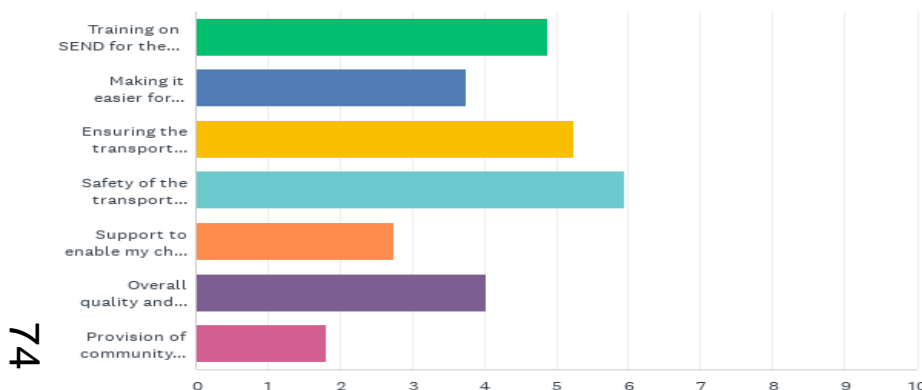
73



	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
☆	11.11% 7	9.52% 6	17.46% 11	19.05% 12	42.86% 27	63	3.73

Q28: Please rank your priorities for Home to School Transport with 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important

Answered: 64 Skipped: 36



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	TOTAL	SCORE
Training on SEND for the people providing the transport	18.97% 11	20.69% 12	20.69% 12	17.24% 10	17.24% 10	1.72% 1	3.45% 2	58	4.88
Making it easier for parents to raise any issues or concerns with their transport	6.78% 4	10.17% 6	8.47% 5	22.03% 13	33.90% 20	16.95% 10	1.69% 1	59	3.76
Ensuring the transport provided is appropriate and suitable given my child's needs	13.79% 8	29.31% 17	32.76% 19	18.97% 11	3.45% 2	0.00% 0	1.72% 1	58	5.24
Safety of the transport provided	54.10% 33	13.11% 8	14.75% 9	9.84% 6	8.20% 5	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	61	5.95
Support to enable my child to travel independently	0.00% 0	6.78% 4	13.56% 8	6.78% 4	16.95% 10	33.90% 20	22.03% 13	59	2.76
Overall quality and reliability of the transport provided	5.00% 3	20.00% 12	13.33% 8	23.33% 14	15.00% 9	20.00% 12	3.33% 2	60	4.03
Provision of community transport for socially isolated resident	4.92% 3	3.28% 2	0.00% 0	1.64% 1	4.92% 3	21.31% 13	63.93% 39	61	1.82

The top 3 priorities for parents of SEND children are:

- Safety of the transport provided
- Ensuring the transport provided is appropriate and suitable given my child's needs
- Training on SEND for the people providing the transport

This is exactly the same as the results in the 2020 poll.

Q29: Please feel free to give us any other comments related to school transport

Respondents Comments:

- Disabled transport provision in Wokingham is rarer than pixie dust especially if you need transport at the same time as the school run
- My child has been taxied for the past 4 years. This company has been the absolutely worst - even when I call the company Green Metro Cars with the number I have been provided with - you can hear the person is on a job himself. No consideration given to child's needs - drivers are rude about being asked for ID - one driver pointed at his car and said can you see I'm a cab driver and spat on the floor as he walked off. Continually late with no call or message to give estimated time of arrival - given they supposedly understand the child's needs and he suffers from high anxiety - has the audacity to state in their responding email that they are not deliberately trying to cause the child or parent a problem - so unprofessional. We even had to state that our child is not an amazon package !!!!!
- On the whole the service is good but there have been issues on occasions with my son not being collected. However I am satisfied the taxi company have put things in place to stop this happening again.
- WSC should work with parents to provide personal budgets so that parents can afford to transport their children/young people, however their payments need to be realistic .45 per mile is not.
- Third different driver, this term, and different vehicle starts next week. We were not consulted by Wokingham when passenger assistant (escort) was removed, after a settling down period, to check if we (as parents) were still happy with the transport arrangements.
- This service is invaluable for me as the sole carer of a child with multiple disabilities. It also assists with an environment not local to us. I truly appreciate everything that is done for us.
- I feel putting the safety of transport as an option is wrong. Safety for any car on the road, especially a taxi, should never be questioned. Quality and reliability, again, are things that need to be in place to ensure the child attends school. Without these selections, all my answers 2/3/5 would be my top 3 concerns for my child, which I believe this survey should be more focused on !!!! The clear issue is that taxi drivers and escorts are not training for children with or without SEND. They are randoms paid by the taxi company with no experience working with children. Do you even know the names of the people in the taxi - I don't even get told this basic piece of information for communication. No names to give my child!! The other issue is sometimes a SEND child takes time to settle and get in and the taxi is not prepared to wait or show understanding when this happens. child with trauma can trigger anytime.

Q29: Please feel free to give us any other comments related to school transport

Respondents Comments:

- Our sons escort was stopped without warning us. We never met drivers and had different ones every day until recently where it is now consistently the same driver and car. This has helped a lot. We don't know how much the driver knows about our sons needs, or SEND. Would the driver know what to do in a difficult or dangerous outburst from our son?
- Generally the taxi always turns up with only one or two exceptions, however, I need to drive my other son to school which takes ~30mins and then get to work. I've asked on several occasions for a specific pick up time, ideally 8am so that I have time to drive my other child to school but this hasn't been given. By 8.15am I know I'm going to get caught up in Wokingham traffic and be late for work. Having an 8am pick up time would help reduce stress levels in the morning for me and my two boys who both have Aspergers. Without a specific pick-up time we have to be ready early and potentially wait around for 30mins. We are never contacted if there are delays. When it gets to 8.15am I call the office to see where the taxi is. Sometimes they don't pick up the call and I try to call the school to see if they know anything. Improved communication and a slightly earlier pick up time would help a lot
- Over all we are concern about the escort service as we think I might be difficult for an elderly lady to handle two autistic children specially if they have meltdowns or urge to runaway . The driver and the escort should have some SEND training to handle challenging behaviour from children. The driver and the escort both should have a Extended DBS changes . Where possible the drop off timing should be same as the routine is very important part of autistic children . Where possible ,the driver and the escort should be same everyday for chid reassurance and fimilarity . We have a very positive experience in 2019-2021.where the services were provided by same taxi driver and the same escort everyday.
- The LA has not been forthcoming for years in relation to transport and re-imbusement.
- I do not believe Green Metro Cars are a suitable company to provide school transport, especially not for children with SEND. They do not seem interested in the child they are transporting, and do not make any effort to talk or make the child feel comfortable. Their communication skills are pretty much non-existent - no communication at all at the beginning of the academic year with information about the taxi, driver, other children sharing the transport. There is no communication if a different driver/taxi is collecting/dropping off, nor if the driver is running significantly late due to traffic etc. This is not helpful at all for a child who's main needs are SEMH, and who needs a lot of reassurance. We NEVER experienced any of these issues by the previous transport company (ABC Travel), so I know suitable companies do exist! It definitely seems that the council are more interested in protecting their purse, rather than making the safety and wellbeing of extremely vulnerable children their priority!

Q29: Please feel free to give us any other comments related to school transport

Respondents Comments:

- Would of been nice to meet the driver before my daughter having to travel with them. Only started using transport on the 21st Nov. Its the 29th Nov now and we have seen 3 drivers. We have different drivers in the morning and afternoon. No notice of change of drivers.
- Am so disappointed with Wokingham bourgh transport. My son has been using transport for one year without any issues with his previous transport. He just changed a new one for just three days and it's be cancelled. Its so unfortunate and unfair for my son whose needs are so severe and he doesn't have any awareness of things. His been out of school since . Both me and my husband are non drivers and will find it really hard to get to his school where two buses are involved and will take us one to two hours to get to kennel lane. My son is a British citizen and have a right to education, so since his been denied some of his rights due to his disability, i think is so unfair. This has affected me emotionally. But it is well I will take it in good faith.
- It would be helpful if myself and taxi escort could exchange numbers so that they can tell me if they are going to be late or early.
- Biggest frustration with transport company is not letting you know if driver is running late. Driver is obviously not allowed to text whilst driving but escort could but they dont seem to have a mobile phone so communication is poor
- Would never trust the transport again Would be nice to have a reminder of getting milage allowance before September
- We are happy with the transport
- The transport it very good. However trying to talk to anyone at Wokingham council has been really hard,they don't listen to parents and their concerns there is no dedicated team to contact
- Mostly they are good and reliable. It would be good that, when traffic delays are expected from roadworks, that maybe some thought could be given to adjusting routes or timing to allow for delays, if possible
- More mandatory regular training for transport providers about special needs and disabilities. More accountability from transport regarding lateness to pick children up in the mornings.
- The school bus for Emmbrook Secondary School is run by Horseman coaches. It has broken down, been late on numerous occasions, and even provided one minibus when there were too many kids to fit on it leaving them at school. The school & transport company are always made aware when this happens.
- You should be putting childrens needs above costs.

Q29: Please feel free to give us any other comments related to school transport

Respondents Comments:

- I've tried scoring the statements above but each time I move on to the next statement it removes my score from another. So I would say I think the priorities are:# SEND training = 1 Raising issues = 4 Appropriate to needs = 2 Safety = 1 Independence = 7 Quality = 1 Community transport = 2
- Everything is ok. Thank you so much. My child is very happy Last year he had morning different driver afternoon diffrent. Now he is happy with one driver. Like him and trust
- They have changed the way my child gets picked up . Last year he was collected from the house which is what we prefer. Now he has to walk to a bus stop and wait to be collected which can take upto 20 minutes in the rain . As a SEND child he finds this difficult
- with the LA it is simply contractual - we complete info on disability but its not digested do not listen to parents when concerns and clear issues are raised
- Can a standard be set regarding the occupancy of a vehicle and type of vehicle supplied. ie a black cab for 3 ASD and or ADHD young people and chaperone is too close confines for a 45 min journey
- Some initial hiccups but sorted promptly. It might be good to know contact details of WBC transport team at the start.

on
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TITLE	Travel Assistance Policy Implementation
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 31 January 2023
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

OUTCOME

To Provide Members with an overview of the key outcomes from the implementation of the revised Home to School Transport Policies, which came into effect in September 2022

RECOMMENDATION

That members note the content of this report.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The overall cost of providing home to school transport is rising. In 2021/22, the cost to the Local Authority was £4,196,000. Of that, Mainstream travel assistance cost £1,121,000. Travel assistance for children with a Special Educational Need/disability (SEND), which includes Post-16 SEND was £3,075,000.

By the end of Q3 in 2021, the Local Authority had spent £2.5m on HTST, compared with £3.5m in Q3 2022, following the implementation of the new HTST policies. Should we see similar spend in Q4 for the 2022/23 financial year, then we could see an overall spend of over £5m.

The key contributing factors to rising transport costs include:

- Inflationary costs of transport (fuel, driver wages, lack of suppliers)
- Increased numbers of eligible students (higher birth years and inward migration)
- Increase in the number of students with an EHCP.
- Increased numbers of students travelling longer distances (lack of school places)

To address the cost of providing home to school transport, potential savings have been highlighted, and a review of the home to school policy was one of these saving streams. This report looks at the key experience impacts under the new policies, and how expenditure and demand have impacted the home to school transport since the new policy was introduced.

Within this document **SEN support** refers to the children that require additional support often provided by teachers and **SENCo** but the child does not have an **Education, Health, and Care plan (EHCP)**.

EHCP refers to a pupil who has an **EHC plan or statement of SEN** where a formal assessment has been made. A document is in place that sets out the child's needs and the extra help they should receive.

HTST refers to Home To School Transport

IB refers to In-Borough Transport

OOB refers to Out of Borough Transport

References to the financial year within the document

Apr - Jun	Q1 of the financial year
Jul - Sep	Q2 of the financial year
Oct - Dec	Q3 of the financial year
Jan - March	Q4 of the financial year

Background

The Council is committed to ensuring it continues to meet its statutory responsibilities for Travel Assistance, enabling children and young people to access their place of education safely and be ready to learn. The Council acknowledges that without this service some of the borough's children and young people would be unable to access their school or college, especially those who have significant additional needs, or deemed extremely vulnerable.

At the same time, the costs of providing home to school transport and travel assistance are extremely high and have increased significantly in recent years, and much of this cost must be met by the Council's core budget. This affects the Council's ability to provide high quality services to all Wokingham residents and creates significant additional pressures on its budget.

In the Spring and Summer of 2020, Wokingham Borough Council reviewed its Home to School Transport (HST) policy, and approaches to provision of Travel Assistance for eligible children and young people in the Borough.

The new Home to School Transport (5-16 years) and Travel Assistance policy (16 years +) were approved by executive on 25th March 2021. These policies came into effect for the 2022/2023 academic year and commenced in September 2022.

The new policies were developed to help parents, carers and professionals to more easily identify and apply the relevant eligibility criteria to applications and assessments and to ensure that the Council's provision of Home to School and Home to College transport arrangements were in-line with legal responsibilities and statutory duties. The Policies also better clarify circumstances under which the Council has no legal duties to provide Travel Assistance.

The policy review, however, was just one part of a broader programme of work to address wider system issues, including SEND sufficiency of placements, the inclusion agenda in mainstream provision and some technical route optimising to ensure all transport links are more effective and cost efficient.

Key impacts under the main policy changes

Impact on Under 5s

Under the old policy, the Local Authority provided transport for pupils below the statutory school age, known as the “rising 5s”, who were admitted into primary education at qualifying schools and who met the entitlement criteria for transport assistance.

There is no legal obligation to provide free transport for this age group, but a blanket refusal had the potential to be considered discriminatory (for example, if a four-year-old attends a special school some distance from home and could not access education without transport). The wording in the new statutory school age Travel Assistance Policy states: **“There is no statutory duty to provide Travel Assistance for those under the age of 5. The Council may exercise its discretionary power and provide home to school Travel Assistance for children under the age of five on a case-by-case basis.”** This states the legal position about Travel Assistance for under 5s and has avoided a negative differential impact which could have arisen from a blanket refusal.

Whilst discretionary power to provide Travel Assistance to under 5s on a case-by-case basis has been retained, there has only been 3 applications relating to this policy change since the new policy was introduced in September 2022, all 3 applications were rejected, and no subsequent appeals were made for those cases.

Travel Training

Independent Travel is not a blanket policy/requirement in either of the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies, but Independent Travel Training is one of several potential options featured in both Travel Assistance Policies that may benefit the child/young person.

The wording in the statutory school age Travel Assistance Policy and in the Post-16 Travel Assistance Policy states: **“The Council is committed to supporting all children and young people to achieve their maximum potential and become as independent as they are able to be. To better support young people to travel independently, the Council may offer Independent Travel Training (ITT) in their travel assistance offer.”**

The Local Authority does not have a fully established travel training programme currently in place, so the impact of this policy change has not yet been seen. Discussions need to be progressed with some of our local schools, such as Addington and Chiltern way, about the possibility of developing independent travel.

Collection Points

In line with other local authorities, Wokingham Borough Council’s new home to school transport policy now expect parents to take children to pick up points instead of collecting children from home, where appropriate. This is legal and is based on individual assessments, not a blanket policy.

Eligibility for Travel Assistance is assessed based on the pupil’s registered home address, but any transport provided may not necessarily now be door to school gate. Local Authorities can use reasonable pick-up and drop-off points in appropriate individual cases. This may be a bus stop or other place where young people can safely wait for their vehicle.

The Council aims to ensure there are safe and appropriate pick-up points within reasonable distance from schools and centres of population. Pupils can be required to walk to and from a central pick up and/or drop off point. This will usually be within one mile walking distance from the child's home, and total walking distance will be within the relevant statutory mile walking distances according to age and ability, and in the light of any identified Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.

Following the implementation of the new policy in September 2022, we now have pick up points on routes for The Coombes, Oakbank, St Crispins, and Floreat schools affecting 46 pupils. No formal complaints have been received regarding the introduction of these pick-up points, although 2 stage 1 appeals were made and refused by a Senior Officer, and neither progressed to a stage 2 appeal. The Local Authority will look to expand the use of pick-up points moving forward with the possibility of including SEN students in the future where appropriate.

Charging for transport for young people of 6th form age (Post-16)

The Policies retain the lawful right to apply a charge for Travel Assistance for young people of 6th form age, so there is no major policy change here. However, the new policy better clarifies that this charge is to help contribute towards the costs of the service; that discounts are available for young people eligible for free school meals; and that payments can be made in monthly instalments to make payment more manageable.

The new post-16 Policy States: "If you are assessed as eligible under the Council's policy, a charge towards the cost of Travel Assistance will be applied". This charge is currently £785 for this academic year.

Expenditure and demand

The new home to school policy delivers better clarity on when the Local Authority will and will not provide free travel assistance to school or college and has removed some non-statutory discretionary services. The policies also enable officers to better identify and apply the relevant eligibility criteria to applications, to ensure that decisions to award transport are appropriate, and based on eligibility.

There have also been improvements in the efficiency of the provision of its home to school transport services and ongoing route optimisation. However, it is important to understand that there are significant underlying drivers causing a continued pressure on the home to school transport budget, despite the implementation of more robust policies and operational controls.

Table 1 below shows the current position after Q3 (October – December 2022), following the implementation of the new HTST policy, in comparison with the end of Q3 in 2021. There has been a 25% increase in spend on primary transport and a 26% increase in spend on secondary transport. The spend on providing SEND in-borough (IB) transport has increased by 51%, and the spend on out of borough (OOB) transport has seen an increase of 35%. Overall, compared with the end of Q3 in 2021, there has been a 35.4% increase in spend on HTST.

Table 1: Total spend on HTST Q1 - Q4 2021 and Q1 - Q3 2022

	2021					2022			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2021/2022 Total spend	Q1	Q2	Q3 (new policies)	2022/2023 Total spend
Primary Transport	£ 81,867.53	£102,444.01	£ 166,913.32	£ 171,923.03	£ 523,147.89	£ 175,884.25	£ 75,687.19	£ 188,366.42	£ 439,937.86
Secondary Transport	£109,073.54	£ 40,679.70	£ 185,803.79	£ 262,835.77	£ 598,392.80	£ 166,978.49	£ 17,403.85	£ 240,863.92	£ 425,246.26
SEND IB Transport	£179,907.06	£223,878.75	£ 241,938.79	£ 435,145.30	£1,080,869.90	£ 342,737.30	£ 112,491.81	£ 524,238.49	£ 979,467.60
SEND OOB Transport	£259,033.70	£387,410.77	£ 575,348.57	£ 659,683.83	£1,881,476.87	£ 599,220.71	£ 224,526.34	£ 830,778.53	£ 1,654,525.58
Total Spend	£629,881.83	£754,413.23	£1,170,004.47	£1,529,587.93	£4,083,887.46	£1,284,820.75	£ 430,109.19	£1,784,247.36	£3,499,177.30

The total spend on HTST for mainstream (primary and secondary) and SEND (IB and OOB) including post-16, in 2021 was just over £4m. By the end of Q3 in 2021, the Local Authority had spent £2.5m on HTST. In comparison, by the end of Q3 2022, the Local Authority had spent just under £3.5m, and this is following the implementation of the new HTST policies. Should we see similar spend in Q4 for the 2022/23 financial year that we did in 2021, then we could see an overall spend of over £5m.

Increasing number of children with SEND & Sufficiency of SEND provision.

In September 2021 there were 1523 children in the borough with EHCP plans in place, rising to just under 1,800 in January 2022, equating to approximately 2.5 per cent of the school aged population, with projections that this could rise by 60 per cent to 2,400 EHCPs by 2025. In January 2023, the Local Authority already had 1811 children with an EHCP plan. Nationally, the number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) increased to 1.49 million pupils in 2022, representing 16.5% of all pupils. This is the highest rate recorded since 2014.

SEND – Out of Borough (OOB)

There is an increasing number of children with educational, health and care plans (EHCPs) in the Borough, as noted above, and with not enough local provision in Wokingham, they are having to spend additional time travelling to schools outside of the borough. This is reflected in the increase in expenditure on Home To School Transport for SEND OOB provision.

Currently, the borough has two SEND schools, Addington in Woodley, and Chiltern Way Academy in Wokingham, with Oak Tree in Winnersh due to open September 2023. Currently around 40 per cent of those with an EHCP need to be in a specialist SEND school or specialist provision within a school, meaning that a lot of children are being sent out of borough for their schooling.

In the 2021/2022 financial year (Q1 – 4), the Local Authority was funding an average of 153 eligible students to schools within the Borough costing £1.8m (See Table 2 below).

Table 2: SEND OOB Transport Quarterly Spend

	2021					2022			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2021/2022 Total spend	Q1	Q2	Q3 (new policies)	2022/2023 Total spend
SEND OOB Transport	£259,033.70	£387,410.77	£ 575,348.57	£ 659,683.83	£1,881,476.87	£ 599,220.71	£ 224,526.34	£ 830,778.53	£ 1,654,525.58

The average number of students being transported between Q1 and Q3 of 2022 however has increased to 186 and the total spend was £1.65m during this period, just under the total for the whole of 2021/2022.

If we look at Q3 in Table 2 above (October and December 2021), the Local Authority spent just over £575k on OOB HTST. This is compared to £830k for the same period in 2022, following the implementation of the new HTST policies. This equates to an average spend of approximately £70 per day per student in Q3 2022, compared to £63 per student per day in Q3 2021.

This increase in average spend per student can be attributed to not only the increase in demand, as shown in Table 2, but also the increase in the number of students requiring sole transport, due to their complex SEND needs, and where a child may be the only child going to a particular school. For example, by the end of Q3 2022 there were 22 sole transport routes amounting to an overall annual cost of £592k.

SEND In- Borough (IB)

In the 2021/2022 financial year (Q1 – 4), the Local Authority was funding an average of 181 eligible students to schools within the Borough costing just over £1m (See Table 3 below).

Table 3: SEND IB Transport Quarterly Spend

	2021					2022			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2021/2022 Total spend	Q1	Q2	Q3 (new policies)	2022/2023 Total spend
SEND IB Transport	£179,907.06	£223,878.75	£ 241,938.79	£ 435,145.30	£1,080,869.90	£ 342,737.30	£ 112,491.81	£ 524,238.49	£ 979,467.60

The average number of students being transported between Q1 and Q3 of 2022 has increased to 201 and the total spend was just under £980k during this period, again just under the total for the whole of 2021/2022.

In Q3 (October and December 2021) the Local Authority spent £241k on IB HTST. This is compared to £524k for the same period in 2022, following the implementation of the new HTST policies. This equates to an average spend of approximately £44 per day per student in Q3 2022, compared to £33 per student per day in Q3 in 2021.

The increase in average spend per student can be attributed to demand, but also the increase in the number of students requiring sole transport due to their complex SEND needs and where a child may be the only child going to a particular school. By the end of Q3 2022 for example, there were 12 IB sole transport routes amounting to an overall annual cost of £246k.

The total spend on providing SEND (IB and OOB) sole transport between April and December (Q1 – Q3) 2022 was £840k and is likely to increase by the end of Q4 (March 2023).

Mainstream Transport & School Place Sufficiency

There is an increase on the pressure of school places, predominantly in years 5 to 9, caused in the main by people moving into the Wokingham Borough mid-phase. Part of this pressure is attributable to an immigration route being opened on 31 January 2021, providing British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status holders from Hong Kong and their eligible dependants, with the opportunity to come to the UK to live, study and work, on a pathway to citizenship. This has seen more than 734 school place applications being processed from September 2021 to December 2022 for children moving into Wokingham with their families, and over 200 of those 734 have been for years 5 and 6 in the primary sector.

Wokingham has seen one of the biggest influxes of Hong Kong Nationals in the whole of the South East, the outstanding schools and attractive location making Wokingham a place that many families want to settle.

The Community Transport and the Budget Manager for HTST now have strong links in place, robust application processing controls and communication channels. The new HTST policy has reduced the local eligibility criteria for home-to-school transport towards the statutory minimum, yet due to the increase in demand for school places, the cost of providing mainstream home to school transport is increasing, particularly in the primary sector.

The majority of the schools in Wokingham are all now at capacity, particularly in years 5 and 6 for primary and 7, 8, 9 and 10 for secondary. This has meant that children moving into the area are in many cases, unable to access their local school, and therefore become statutorily eligible for transport assistance to the nearest school which can be offered. This has had a direct impact on the HTST budget, with £300k of a £500k spend this financial year, being on children who cannot access a local school.

Mainstream Provision – Primary

Overall, in the 2021/2022 financial year (Q1 to Q4), the Local Authority spent just over £500k on transporting young people to local primary schools within Wokingham. By the end of Q3 of the 2022/2023 financial year the spend on primary HTST was already £440k (See Table 4 below).

On average the Local Authority is transporting 150 primary school aged children to and from school per month, an increase on average of 32% year on year.

Table 4: Mainstream Primary Transport Quarterly Spend

	2021				2021/2022 Total spend	2022			2022/2023 Total spend
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3 (new policies)	
Primary Transport	£ 81,867.53	£102,444.01	£ 166,913.32	£ 171,923.03	£ 523,147.89	£ 175,884.25	£ 75,687.19	£ 188,366.42	£ 439,937.86

In the first half of the 2022/2023 financial year, Floreat Montague Primary School, The Coombes Primary School and Gorse Ride Infant & Junior Schools were the most common schools' children were diverted too when their local schools were full. The Coombes primary school, however, has seen a marked increase of eligible children being transported to the school, rising from 14 eligible pupils to 43 pupils in Q3.

The spend per student per day has not significantly changed in the 2022/2023 financial year in comparison with 2021/2022. It has remained around £21 to £23 per student per day on average across the quarter. It is the demand here that is having the most significant effect on the spend in primary HTST.

Mainstream Provision - Secondary

Overall, in the 2021/2022 financial year (Q1 to Q4), the Local Authority spent just under £600k on transporting young people to local secondary schools within Wokingham. By the end of Q3 of the 2022/2023 financial year the spend on secondary HTST was just over £425k (See Table 5 below).

On average the Local Authority is transporting approximately 400 primary school aged children to and from school per month, and whilst it has been steadily increasing, the numbers remain very similar to 2021/2022.

Table 5: Mainstream Secondary Transport Quarterly Spend

	2021				2021/2022 Total spend	2022			2022/2023 Total spend
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3 (new policies)	
Secondary Transport	£109,073.54	£ 40,679.70	£ 185,803.79	£ 262,835.77	£ 598,392.80	£ 166,978.49	£ 17,403.85	£ 240,863.92	£ 425,246.26

The biggest cost to school transport in mainstream secondary is the lack of safe walking routes to schools, which cost the Local Authority £165k for Q1 – Q3 2022. These pupils are most likely to be attending Bohunt School, as much of the area to the west and south of Bohunt is rural, and Bohunt is the nearest school for children living in that area. The difficulty of pupils being able to walk to Bohunt School results in a large quantity of children receiving school transport due to the safety of routes. This has cost the Local Authority £55,800 in Q1 to Q3, with an annual forecast set to be around £122,800.

As with the primary sector, the spend per student per day has not significantly changed in the 2022/2023 financial year in comparison with 2021/2022. It has remained around £10 per student per day on average across the quarter. It is the demand here as well as lack of safe walking routes to Bohunt school that is having the most significant effect on the spend in secondary HTST.

Transport for young people over 16 (Post-16)

Every local authority in England has a statutory duty to prepare and publish an annual post 16 transport policy statement. This must comply with the requirements of section 509AA of the Education Act 1996 regarding the adequate provision of transport to facilitate the attendance of persons of sixth form age receiving education or training.

Whilst there is a requirement to publish a policy statement, there is no statutory requirement on local authorities to provide free or subsidised post 16 travel support. 'Sixth form age' refers to those young people who are over 16 years of age but under 19 or continuing learners who started their programme of learning before their 19th birthday (academic years 12, 13 or 14).

Overall, eligibility to transport arrangements across these groups is up to the local authority but underpinning the Local Authority decisions must be the duty to ensure that learners are able to access the education and training of their choice.

In accordance with the new Local Authority Post-16 Travel Assistance Policy, where a young person has an education health and care plan (EHCP) or a learning difficulty/disability, the council currently offers some students support with travel on a discretionary basis, depending on their needs. If a young person qualifies for travel assistance based on their needs, there is a charge they must pay to contribute towards their transport, which is currently £785 per academic year.

Young people who do not meet the eligibility criteria can also pay for a seat on a school bus. It currently costs £785 for a fare payer school bus pass.

The total spend on providing non-statutory post-16 transport by the end of Q3 of 2022/2023 was £482k and the income generated by the charge was £38k, transporting an average of 42 students per month. The average spend per day, per student, for post-16 travel is £40, similar to the daily spend on SEND in-Borough students.

The total spend on providing post-16 non-statutory transport by the end of the financial year 2021/2022 was £337k and the income generated was £28k, transporting an average of 35 students per month.

As highlighted above, the Local Authority has seen an increase in the demand for post-16 travel assistance, and this is linked to the dramatic increase in children and young people with an EHCP in the Borough, and the income generated by the charge, contributes little to the overall spend.

Analysis and Conclusion

Over the years, Childrens Services has striven to contain the transport overspend within the overall budget allocation. This has been managed by protecting the transport budget during savings rounds, by redirecting funding from other areas wherever possible, by using accumulated reserves to offset overspends at year end and by consulting on and implementing changes to the most recent policy which has led to the removal of the majority of discretionary spending. Transport route management has also played a key part in ensuring effective use of resources.

However, there is continued and additional pressure on the home to school & college transport budget. The pressures experienced by the Local Authority, which can all serve to increase the number of children potentially eligible for mainstream home-to-school transport, and therefore have a statutory entitlement to home to school transport assistance, include underlying population growth, such as the large influx of Hong Kong Nationals, and families fleeing the war in Ukraine, new housing developments, increasing

numbers of families in temporary housing, increasing numbers of looked after children, and the changing landscape of schools.

Wokingham has seen a dramatic increase in mid-phase arrivals into the Borough, which has caused the majority of schools to reach capacity in certain year groups, particularly year 5 and 6, and as such, the 'nearest suitable school' for many children, is not their local school. There appears to be a clear relationship between available capacity in mainstream schools within the Local Authority and spend on home-to-school transport.

Like Wokingham, many local authorities have managed these pressures by reducing their local eligibility criteria for home-to-school transport towards the statutory minimum. However, by doing that, brings an unresolved tension at the heart of home-to-school transport policy, between the responsibilities of parents in getting their children to school versus the expectations of parents in the level and type of assistance that local authorities can provide.

The Local Authority is also experiencing a range of market pressures affecting the cost of providing home-to-school transport. Inflationary costs of transport such as higher fuel costs, driver minimum wage increases, coupled with commercial providers ceasing to offer public transport routes which are no longer profitable and commercial providers stopping trading, reducing the pool of providers with whom the Local Authority can contract, have all collectively driven up the costs of providing home to school transport. The Local Authority has addressed these inflationary pressures as much as possible through smarter commissioning with attention to both cost and quality, carried out strategic reviews of routes and sharper income generation from unused capacity on buses.

The picture for SEND home-to-school transport is very different to that of mainstream transport. For SEND we have seen a significant rise in both the numbers of children in receipt of transport and the associated costs of providing that transport year on year. The increasing number of children with educational, health and care plans (EHCPs) in the Borough coupled with a lack of local provision, means children are increasingly having to be transported to schools outside of the borough. This is reflected in the increase in expenditure on Home To School Transport for SEND out of Borough provision.

The increasing complexity of needs of children with SEND is also contributing to the growing expenditure on SEND transport for the Local Authority. Increasing numbers of children with complex medical needs or profound and multiple disabilities for example is creating demand for more costly forms of transport, for example specially equipped buses, and more skilled passenger assistants who could provide medical support in an emergency. At the same time, increasing numbers of children presenting with extremely challenging behaviour is also leading to greater use of individual taxi journeys for this cohort.

Understandably, the Council is concerned, and has been for some time about the rising cost of providing home to school transport. The service, however, is essentially demand-led, and increasing demand, particularly in SEND has led inevitably to increased expenditure.

The general arrangements in place for supervising and reporting on the home to school transport budget are robust with strong links now between SEND, Community Transport, and the budget manager for HTST. Despite these controls, however, home to school transport expenditure has continued to rise. The demand-led nature of the service is a major

factor here, as is the lack of SEND provision within the Borough. Whilst the Local Authority continues to have to send students with an EHCP to be educated outside of Wokingham, there will be a continued pressure on the HTST budget, regardless of any policy changes.

Finally, the Local Authority has seen a 79% increase in free school meals (FSM) eligibility in May 2022 compared to May 2018, likely to be caused by the cost-of-living crisis. This is having a direct impact on the home to school transport budget as more families become eligible for transport.

This will have a lasting impact on transport budgets as in accordance with the statutory guidance, any child who became eligible for FSM on or after 1st April 2018 will continue to receive it whilst Universal credit is rolled out. Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out (Expected date March 2023), any existing pupil who no longer meets the eligibility criteria at that point will continue to receive free school meals until the end of their current phase of education, i.e., primary or secondary. As the FSM eligibility of the children are protected, once they became eligible for FSM, should the parents' financial situation change, it will not impact their eligibility and the child could continue to receive home to school travel assistance.

Moving forward, PeopleToo consultancy have been appointed to look at the issues that have been highlighted in this report, to ensure Home to school transport continues to be appropriately managed through robust eligibility criteria and review.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?) N/A – Report not requiring a decision

Public Sector Equality Duty
N/A

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030
Please state clearly what the impact of the decision being made would be on the Council's carbon neutral objective. N/A

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Home to School Transport Policy 2022/2023

Contact Zoe Storey	Service Learning Achievement and Partnerships
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CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2022/23 WORK PROGRAMME

DATE OF MEETING	ITEM	PURPOSE OF REPORT	REASON FOR CONSIDERATION	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER / CONTACT OFFICER
22 March 2023	Key Performance Indicators	To monitor the performance of the service.	Challenge item	Children's Services / Helen Watson
	Report and Q&A with the Executive Member for Children's Services	To receive an update from the Executive Member for Children's Services.	Regular update	Councillor Prue Bray
	Care Leavers CAMHS Provision Update	To receive an update on the implementation and delivery of the CAMHS provision for Care Leavers	Challenge item	Children's Services / Adam Davis
	Fostering Transformation Update	To receive an update on the Fostering Transformation	Update item	Children's Services / Adam Davis
	Schools Causing Concern – Part 2	To consider the work being undertaken to support schools causing concern in a part 2 session	Standing item	Children's Services/ Sal Thirlway
	CSO&S Forward Plan	To consider the forward plan of the Committee	Standing item	Democratic Services/ Luciane Bowker

Unscheduled items:

- SEND Youth Forum

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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WOKINGHAM SCHOOLS

School	Phase	Date	Inspection Grade	Status/Organisation	Ofsted Link
Addington School	Special	Oct-17	Outstanding	maintained	Ofsted Addington School
Alder Grove	Primary			Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted Alder Grove Church of England Primary School
Aldryngton Primary School	Primary	Dec-11	Outstanding	maintained	Ofsted Aldryngton Primary School
All Saints Primary School	Primary	Sep-21	Good	Frays MAT	Ofsted All Saints Church of England Primary School
Ambleside Centre	Nursery	Nov-21	Outstanding	maintained	Ofsted The Ambleside Centre
Bearwood Primary School	Primary	Mar-19	Good	maintained	Ofsted Bearwood Primary School
Beechwood Primary School	Primary	May-18	Inadequate	Frays MAT	Ofsted Beechwood Primary School
Bohunt	Secondary	May-19	Good	Bohunt Trust	Ofsted Bohunt School Wokingham
Bulmershe School	Secondary	Nov-17	Good	maintained	Ofsted The Bulmershe School
CAMHS Phoenix	PRU Hospital	Oct-17	Outstanding	maintained	Ofsted CAMHS Phoenix School
Chiltern Way	Special	Oct-18	Special Measures	Chiltern Way	Ofsted Chiltern Way Academy Wokingham
Colleton Primary School	Primary	Sep-22	Good	maintained	Ofsted The Colleton Primary School
Coombes Primary School	Primary	Jan-22	RI	Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted The Coombes Church of England Primary School
Crazies Hill CE School	Primary	Mar-16	Good	Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted Crazies Hill Church of England Primary School
Earley St Peter's Primary School	Primary	Sep-21	Good	Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted Earley St Peter's Church of England Primary School
Emmbrook Infant School	Primary	Jan-19	Outstanding	maintained	Ofsted Emmbrook Infant School
Emmbrook Junior School	Primary	Apr-22	Good	maintained	Ofsted Emmbrook Junior School
Emmbrook School	Secondary	Mar-17	Good	The Circle Trust	Ofsted The Emmbrook School
Evendons Primary School	Primary	Jun-17	Outstanding	Bellevue Place Education Trust	Ofsted Evendons Primary School
Farley Hill Primary School	Primary	Oct-19	Good	maintained	Ofsted Farley Hill Primary School
Finchampstead Primary School	Primary	Oct-18	Good	maintained Cof E	Ofsted Finchampstead CofE VA Primary School
Forest School	Secondary	Jul-21	Good	Stand Alone Academy	Ofsted The Forest School
Foundry College	PRU	Feb-18	Good	maintained	Ofsted Foundry College
Gorse Ride Infant School	Primary	Nov-19	Good	maintained	Ofsted Gorse Ride Infants' School
Gorse Ride Junior School	Primary	Apr-22	Good	maintained	Ofsted Gorse Ride Junior School
Grazeley Parochial Primary School	Primary	Sep-22	Good	maintained Cof E	Ofsted Grazeley Parochial Church of England Aided Primary School
Hatch Ride Primary School	Primary	May-22	Good	Corvus	Ofsted Hatch Ride Primary School
Hawkedon Primary School	Primary	Oct-18	Good	maintained	Ofsted Hawkedon Primary School
Hawthorns Primary School	Primary	Jun-22	Good	maintained	Ofsted The Hawthorns Primary School
Highwood Primary School	Primary	Dec-21	Good	maintained	Ofsted Highwood Primary School
Hillside Primary School	Primary	May-18	Good	maintained	Ofsted Hillside Primary School
Holt School	Secondary	Jun-08	Outstanding	Stand Alone Academy	Ofsted The Holt School
Keep Hatch Primary School	Primary	Oct-18	Good	Frays MAT	Ofsted Keep Hatch Primary School
Lambs Lane Primary School	Primary	Jan-22	Good	maintained	Ofsted Lambs Lane Primary School
Loddon Primary School	Primary	Jan-18	Good	maintained	Ofsted Loddon Primary School
Maiden Erlegh School	Secondary	Mar-20	Outstanding	Maiden Erlegh Multi-Academy Trust	Ofsted Maiden Erlegh School
Montague Park	Primary	Jun-19	RI	GLF Trust	Ofsted Floreat Montague Park Primary School
Nine Mile Ride Primary School	Primary	Jun-22	Good	The Circle Trust	Ofsted Nine Mile Ride Primary School
Oakbank	Secondary	Jan-20	RI	Anthem Schools Trust	Ofsted Oakbank
Oaklands Infant School	Primary	May-22	Good	Corvus	Ofsted Oaklands Infant School
Oaklands Junior School	Primary	Apr-22	Good	Corvus	Ofsted Oaklands Junior School
Polehampton Infant School	Primary	Jan-11	Outstanding	Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted Polehampton Church of England Infant School
Polehampton Junior School	Primary	Nov-12	Outstanding	Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted Polehampton Church of England Junior School
Radstock Primary School	Primary	Jan-22	Good	maintained	Ofsted Radstock Primary School
Rivermead Primary School	Primary	Nov-18	Good	maintained	Ofsted Rivermead Primary School
Robert Piggott Infant School	Primary	Jun-18	good	maintained Cof E	Ofsted Robert Piggott CofE Infant School
Robert Piggott Junior School	Primary	May-18	Good	maintained Cof E	Ofsted Robert Piggott CofE Junior School
Shinfield Infant School	Primary	Feb-19	Good	The Circle Trust	Ofsted Shinfield Infant and Nursery School
Shinfield St Mary's Junior School	Primary	Feb-18	Good	maintained Cof E	Ofsted Shinfield St Mary's CofE Junior School
Sonning Primary School	Primary	Mar-16	Good	Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted Sonning Church of England Primary School
South Lake Primary School	Primary	Mar-13	Outstanding	maintained	Ofsted South Lake Primary School
St Crispins School	Secondary	Mar-17	Good	The Circle Trust	Ofsted St Crispin's School
St Dominic Savio Primary School	Primary	May-19	Good	maintained Catholic	Ofsted St Dominic Savio Catholic Primary School
St Nicholas Primary School	Primary	Apr-19	Good	Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted St Nicholas Church of England Primary, Hurst
St Paul's Junior School	Primary	Jun-11	Outstanding	maintained Cof E	Ofsted St Paul's CofE Junior School
St Sebastian's Primary School	Primary	Oct-21	Good	Keys Trust C of E	Ofsted Saint Sebastians Church of England Primary School
St Teresa's Primary	Primary	May-10	Outstanding	Frassati Catholic Trust	Ofsted St Teresa's Catholic Academy
The Piggott CE School	All through	Nov-17	Good	Stand Alone Academy	Ofsted The Piggott School
Waingels College	Secondary	Feb-18	Good	Stand Alone Academy	Ofsted Waingels
Walter Infant School	Primary	Nov-13	Outstanding	maintained	Ofsted Walter Infant School
Wescott Infant School	Primary	Dec-10	Outstanding	The Circle Trust	Ofsted Wescott Infant School
Westende Junior School	Primary	Jan-20	Good	The Circle Trust	Ofsted Westende Junior School
Wheatfield Primary School	Primary	May-17	Good	GLF	Ofsted Wheatfield Primary School
Whiteknights Primary School	Primary	Dec-18	Good	Bellevue Place Education Trust	Ofsted Whiteknights Primary School
Willow Bank Infant School	Primary	Jul-22	Good	maintained	Ofsted Willow Bank Infant School
Willow Bank Junior School	Primary	Jul-17	Good	maintained	Ofsted Willow Bank Junior School
Windmill Primary School	Primary	Jan-20	good	GLF	Ofsted Windmill Primary School
Winnersh Primary School	Primary	Jan-20	Good	maintained	Ofsted Winnersh Primary School
Woodley Primary School	Primary	Nov-18	Good	maintained Cof E	Ofsted Woodley CofE Primary School

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