

TITLE	Child Protection Annual Report 2021/22
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 November 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

This report provides an overview of children subject to child protection plans; the activity relating to child protection conferences and the role of child protection chairs in quality assuring the safety planning for children at risk of ongoing significant harm and the contribution of multi-agency partners in their duty to safeguard children in the borough.

RECOMMENDATION

That this report is considered by the Overview and Scrutiny panel. For information and questions.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Consistently high number of CP plans during the year. Since April 2021 there has been between 161 and 179 children on CP plans. This is an increase on the previous year when it was between 139 and 161. At the end of 2021-22 there were 164 children (40.6 per 10,000), who were the subject of a Child Protection (CP) plan; an increase from 149 children at the end of 2020-21. During the year 199 children became subject to a CP plan compared to 158 in 2020-21. This increase in children on CP plans has been experienced by other LAs in Berkshire and the South East, and a recent audit of children on plans for a second and subsequent time suggests thresholds are being applied appropriately.

Capacity and Impact of the CP Conferencing service:

The workforce in the QAST team has remained stable and has continued to provide independent oversight and a consistent approach to chairing child protection conferences. CP Chairs have a dual IRO role in Wokingham, so the increased numbers of children in care and on CP Plans, along with the complexity of cases, has impacted on the workload of the team during 2021-22.

We are able to offer high quality hybrid meetings. The conference rooms have been upgraded to Teams meeting rooms so there is more capacity for fully face to face attendance or hybrid CP conferences with the CP Chair, parents and social worker attending in person and other professionals on Teams.

Promoting the child's voice in conferences:

The child protection agenda puts the focus on the voice of children being at the beginning of the conference. Social Workers are expected to engage with children and to use direct work techniques to gather the children's views, helping the conference to understand their lived experience, as well as capturing the needs of babies and non-verbal children who are not able to

express their views.

Advocacy: The Wokingham Advocate is an additional resource to help the conference gain an understanding of the child's perspective and to help young people who want to be supported to attend the conference and present their views themselves.

Background

Working Together to Safeguard Children, states that child protection conference chairs should be independent of operational and/or line management, and accountable to the Director of Children's Services. The team is structurally located outside of the line management of children's social care, to provide a greater degree of independence from the line- management of the case.

Analysis of Issues

Managing complex child protection issues and parental issues:

38% of ICPCs noted a combination of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse present for parents. This demonstrates the challenge for social workers working to safeguard children while also trying to engage parents who are dealing with enmeshed problems and who may not be ready or able to engage with services which could help. We do not record poverty or debt as a parental factor, but it is likely that many parents will struggle to manage the cost of living pressures in the coming year.

Managing complex family circumstances:

The CP Chairs are noting a greater complexity within CP conferences with families with different make ups, often meetings have to be arranged to accommodate different birth fathers for each child, separated and acrimonious parents, and the team have to take care about what information can be shared between attendees. This requires more split meetings, redacted minutes for some parents, longer conferences, and additional preparation for CP Chairs who are calling each parent before the conference.

Quoracy and involvement of agencies:

Quoracy has declined within the year. The child protection process is based on multi-agency arrangements and although local relationships with partner colleagues are positive with regular dialogue, we need to continue to monitor the contribution of each agency and to address any capacity issues or barriers which exist. Particularly the involvement of drug and alcohol, domestic abuse and mental health services.

Length and accessibility of CP plans provided to conference and parents:

The length of plans was noted by Ofsted in the last Focussed Visit, and in a recent audit and we have recently set up a working group to address this issue. We also want to ensure that plans are concise and easy to understand for parents who may have literacy needs, learning difficulties or where English is not their first language.

Children at risk of exploitation outside the home:

We do not have a CP plan category for children who are at risk of exploitation outside the home. It is therefore difficult to analyse the prevalence or trends in relation to these risks, and whether children at risk of exploitation are coming to ICPCs, or being managed under child in need plans, or under the child exploitation and missing process (EMRAC). This theme about having the appropriate meetings to cover the issues which are pertinent to these risks was noted in one of the Wokingham Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Further work is planned for the coming

year to develop an agenda which can be used within CP conferences and Child in Need meetings. We will also consider how we can extract better data on exploitation as a risk factor for young people on CP Plans, by using the CP chairs QA tool.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources 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		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	n/a		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	n/a		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Not applicable

Cross-Council Implications

Not applicable

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

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.

List of Background Papers

Child Protection Annual Report

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