



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Child Protection Annual Report 2021-22

Report completed by:

Liz McAuley, Service Manager, Quality Assurance and Safeguarding

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Date for next report: June 2023

1.	<p>Purpose of this Annual Report:</p> <p>To provide 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.</p>
2.	<p>Profile of Children on Child Protection Plans and conference activity 2021-22:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. A total of 682 children were considered at CP conferences held over the course of the year which is significantly higher than 595 in 2020-21 and 627 in 2019-20. At the end of 2021-22, 22 children on CP plans were in care with the same CP Chair/IRO maintaining oversight. This was an increase from 18 at the end of March 2021. Of the 199 children who became subject to a CP Plan in the year, 5.7% had a subsequent child protection plan within 24 months which was a significant decrease on 12% the previous year. Of the 199 children subject to a child protection plan between 1/4/21 and 31/03/22, 29% had a previous child protection plan, which is significantly higher than March 2021 when it was 18.5%. Wokingham is now higher than England and the South East average. Neglect represents the highest proportion of CP Plans, followed by emotional abuse, with a smaller percentage of children being on CP Plans under Physical or Sexual abuse. At the end of the year, 5% of CP Plans were for sexual abuse which is slightly higher than the national average (4%). Over the past two years, the percentage of CP plans under the category of neglect has decreased from 63% to 56%, which is closer to the national average. Further improvement is needed on the timeliness of providing CP reports to the CP Chair and parents in advance of conferences. For ICPCs (reports shared within 2 days) this is 69% and for RCPCs (shared within 5 days) it is 36%. <p>Although the practice of sharing draft reports with parents in advance of meetings is now more embedded, the performance on meeting the procedural timescale remains low. A pilot carried out last year had made some progress, but further work is needed to improve this indicator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The data on multi agency reports and attendance at conferences in 2021-22 suggests that agency attendance at child protection conferences has increased for all agencies except for drug and alcohol services, which is lower. This may be due to meetings being held virtually. <p>We do not have pre pandemic data to compare. In spite of this, quoracy has decreased and this may be due to the attendance at RCPCs where the attendance of health professionals has reduced.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participation of parents increased in the year from 86% to 91% which may reflect the practice of holding virtual meetings. The QAST team's performance on the timeliness of initial conferences was 82% (a decrease from 85%) which was due to a number of pressures within the service in quarter four. 100% of review child protection conferences were held on time. The team's internal performance on child protection plans being sent out within 24 hours was 95% and

	minutes being sent within 20 working days was 87%. This performance was impacted by staff sickness in quarter four.
3.	<p>Emerging themes about the Child Protection system:</p> <p>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. 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. 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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</p>

	<p>was noted in one of the Wokingham CSPRs. 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.</p>
4.	<p>Capacity and Impact of the CP Conferencing service:</p> <p>Stable team: 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.</p> <p>We are able to offer high quality hybrid meetings: The conference rooms at Wokingham library 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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. The Advocate had 33 contacts with 62 children subject to the child protection process during the year, which is an increase on the previous year.</p>
5.	<p>The key strategic priorities of the CP conferencing service in 2022-23 are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To consistently provide good quality child protection conferences which promote the child's voice, the participation of parents and partners, and which produce a clear and concise plan which sets out the desired outcomes for the child and review conferences; to help drive forward the plan for the child. • To raise awareness about child protection processes and the wider issues relating to best practice, and the learning from local and national child safeguarding practice reviews cases. This will include work to promote awareness about the purpose of CP conferences and to promote participation by families and partner agency colleagues. In Wokingham we have had two significant reviews in 2021-22 which have provided learning about sexual abuse, neglect and harm outside of the home. • To demonstrate the effectiveness of the CP conferences with clear examples of what difference CP chairs in making in overseeing CP plans for children. This will include clearly demonstrating challenge and follow up when CP plans are not progressing as planned, or when the child's voice is not being presented to the conference, when parents are not receiving reports in advance of meetings or the partnership arrangements are not working as expected.

	The quarterly and annual reporting mechanisms enable this information to be shared with managers, senior leaders in Children's Services and the Berkshire West Safeguarding Partnership.
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1. Introduction and purpose

1.1 This annual report provides an overview of children subject to child protection plans. This comprises:

the activity relating to child protection conferences, 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.

2. Staffing structure

2.1 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.

2.2 The responsibility for the activity and the development of the service is held by the Service Manager for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding. The staffing establishment on 31 March 2022 was one Service Manager for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, and five full-time equivalent child protection chairs/independent reviewing officers (IRO).

There are currently four full time post holders and one team member working 3 days per week. The (Local Authority) Designated Officer, has a dual role as a child protection (CP) conference chair, two days per week and this has added extra capacity to the team.

2.3 The staff employed are able to perform a dual role. IROs provide continuity for children receiving services in the child protection arena who then come into the care system.

The team of independent chairs is made up of six females; all are white British. One CP Chair is a part time worker. The team is conscious that it is not ethnically diverse, but all have different perspectives and backgrounds and seek to learn about the unique lived experiences of others.

2.5 The Chairs are supported by an administrative team who arrange and send out invites, minute conferences and circulate decisions and reports. The administrators are managed by the Administration Team Leader who puts in place systems and processes, and monitors performance.

3. Statistical Data - 2021-22

Numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans

- 3.1** At the end of 2021-22 there were 164 children (40.6 per 10,000), who were subject to 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. The range over the year has been between 171 in July 2021 and 159 in January 2022.

Table 1: Numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
No Children subject to CPP at end of months	161	166	169	171	166	166	163	161	160	159	168	164	n/a
Rates per 10,000 population	39.8	41.1	41.8	42.3	41.1	41.1	40.3	39.8	39.6	39.3	41.6	40.6	n/a
No Children who became subject to CPP in month	23	27	13	10	6	13	13	22	8	20	21	23	199
No of Children who ceased to be subject to CPP in month	11	22	10	8	11	13	17	28	9	23	13	28	184

- 3.2** During the year, 184 children ceased to be subject to a CP plan, compared to 151 in 2020-21. Of the children ceasing to be subject to a child protection plan, 159 stepped down to child in need plans (an increase from 107 in 2021), 33 children came into care (an increase on 20) and 22 moved or were transferred out, which is an increase from 18 the previous year.

Child Protection conferences by type

Table 1 - Child protection conferences by type, 2021-22

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
ICPC	19	26	14	10	6	14	12	20	10	21	26	23	201
RCPC	25	47	37	51	27	42	37	42	27	63	32	55	485

- 3.3** A total of 686 children were considered at CP conferences held over the course of the year. This is significantly higher than 595 in 2020-21 and 627 in 2019-20. 201 children were the subject of an initial conference (an increase from 165 in 2020-21) and 485 were considered at review child protection conferences, an increase from 397 in 2020-21.

There have been 16 pre-birth conferences over the last year. This is an increase from 11 in 2020-21. Eight children were transferred in from other local authorities, and seven moved or transferred out. A 'paper review' takes place for children who have transferred out as the responsibility has transferred to the receiving local authority.

Profile of Children on Child Protection Plans: ethnicity, age, gender and disability

Ethnicity

Table 2: Children subject to CPP by ethnicity

Ethnic group	No on CPP – England 2019-20	No. on CPP – WBC Mar 22	WBC as a whole	WBC Children in care
White	73%	55% (91)	82.4%	62%
Mixed	9%	5% (8)	6.25%	18%
Asian or Asian British	7%	5% (8)	9.73%	13%
Black or Black British	5%	0% (0)	1.63%	7%
Other Ethnic Groups and unknown or refused ethnicity	6%	35% (57)		

Department for Education (2020 Characteristics of children in need in England) not 100%

It can be noted that the percentage of white British children on plans (55%) is significantly lower than England at 73%. The percentage of children of mixed heritage decreased from 7% to 5% this year and is lower than the England average at 9%.

There was a decrease in the percentage of Black/Black British from 2% to 0% at the end of the year. Asian or Asian British (5%) is also lower than England but 'other ethnic groups' has increased from 4% to 35% which is significantly higher than previous years and with the England average. This data has been checked three times, but it may need to be checked again as it indicates an unusual trend. There is also some disparity with the ethnic breakdown of children on CP plans and population of children in care in the borough, with no children on CP plans being Black or Black British compared with 7% children in care in Wokingham. This may require further exploration, through auditing activity in the coming year.

A project is also underway to try to capture more detail in the way ethnicity is recorded to better represent the group of young people described as mixed/other due to them representing a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

3.7 Age

The age profile of children subject to Child Protection Plans is based on a snapshot at the end of the year. The end of year split is broadly in line with the previous year, and also in line with the national statistics. We do however have more 5-9 and 10-15 year olds compared to national statistics.

Table 3 – Children subject to CPP by age at 31/03/22

Age	Unborn	0-1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16 +
No of children – Wokingham (March 21)	0	17 (10%)	27 (17%)	67 (41%)	60 (36%)	5 (3%)

No of children - England	2%	9%	25%	29%	31%	5%
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Department for Education (2020 Characteristics of children in need in England)

3.8 Gender

Table 4: Children subject to CPP by gender

Gender	No on CPP WBC Mar 22	No on CPP – WBC Mar 21	No on CPP – England 2020-21
Female	53% (88)	51% (77)	48%
Male	46% (75)	48% (72)	50%
Unborn	1% (1)	1% (1)	2%

Department for Education (2020 Characteristics of children in need in England)

Of the 164 children subject to Child Protection Plans at the end of March 2022, 88 (53%) were female; an increase from 77 (51%) in March 2021 and slightly higher than the average for England (48%).

There were 75 (46%) males, lower than the average for England (50%). One CP plan at the end of the year (1%) was for an unborn child. The gap in male and females on CP plans has grown slightly since the previous year when the split was 51% female and 48% male.

3.9 Children with Disabilities on CP Plans

At the end of March 2022, 13 children on child protection plans were recorded on mosaic as having a health need or disability. There was one child on a CP plan allocated to the children with disabilities team. which was a reduction from three children on CP plans at the end of 2020-21.

3.10 Children in care on CP Plans (dual plans)

At the end of 2021-22, 22 children on CP plans were in care with the same CP Chair/IRO maintaining oversight. This is an increase from 18 at the end of March 2021. The team follows the Berkshire West Safeguarding Partnership child protection procedures, so that when a child who was subject to a child protection plan comes into care, they will have their first child in care review joint with the review child protection conference.

The aim is for children to only have a CP Plan and Care Plan (dual plan) for a short period and if possible, to cease by the time of the first child in care review. This process provides continuity of planning and also reflects the need to manage risk while longer term care options are being assessed.

The reason for this higher number at the end of the year appears to be due to a number of children in court proceedings who are placed with parents in assessment processes, or where review child protection conferences were pending to remove the child protection plan.

4. Activity in relation to Child Protection Plans

Children on CP Plans for second and subsequent time

- 4.1** The tables below show the proportion of children that have been made subject to a plan for the second or subsequent time in 24 months and second or subsequent time ever. This indicator requires careful monitoring as it may suggest that the decision to end the child protection plan had been premature or that the step-down arrangements were not robust enough.

A system is in place whereby requests for Child Protection Conferences involving children who have previously been on a plan are flagged with the Service Manager for Safeguarding and the S47 is then reviewed with the team manager to understand the reasons for the case coming back into the child protection processes.

An audit has been commissioned to provide more detailed analysis of the reasons for this, and so learning can be identified to apply to current cases which are approaching step down and closure.

Table 5: Children subject to a CPP for a second or subsequent time (within 24 months)

Indicators	WBC Jun 21	WBC Sep 21	WBC Dec 21	WBC Mar 22
Children who became subject of a CPP for a second or subsequent time in 24 months	9.5%	7.2%	0%	5.7%

- 4.2** Of the 199 children that became subject to a CP Plan in the year, 5.7% had a subsequent child protection plan within 24 months, a significant decrease on 12% the previous year. Children who cease to be subject to CP Plans have a trajectory as part of their plan. This provides a pathway towards closing the case and includes a step down to a child in need plan for at least three months. This helps to ensure that the work done on the CP plan has been continued, and that there is a family and professional network in place to support the children beyond case closure.

Table 6: Children subject to a CPP for a second or subsequent time (ever) 2021-22

Indicators	WBC Jun 21	WBC Sep 21	WBC Dec 21	WBC Mar 22	England	South East
Children who became subject of a CPP for a second or subsequent time ever	16.6%	20.89%	3.5%	28.9%	21.9%	23.4%

Department for Education (2020 Characteristics of children in need in England)

- 4.3** Of the 199 children subject to a child protection plan between 1/4/21 and 31/03/22, 29% had a previous child protection plan. This is significantly higher than March 2021 when it was 18.5%. Wokingham is now higher than the England and South East average.

- 4.4** This indicator has been rising throughout the year and it is more difficult to identify trends when children come back into the process after a significant period without a CP Plan. One reason may be that many families are vulnerable to chronic issues such as domestic abuse, mental health problems and substance misuse. These issues can re-emerge as they have additional pressures, larger families, new partners and changing circumstances.

Table 7: Child protection plans lasting 2 years or more

Indicator	WBC Jun 21	WBC Sep 21	WBC Dec 21	WBC Mar 22	England	South East
Children who have ceased to be the subject of a CPP who remained on a plan for 2 years or over	0.5%	0%	0%	3.7%	3.6%	0%

Department for Education (2020 Characteristics of children in need in England)

- 4.5** Good performance is indicated by a low percentage; however, it is recognised that some children need to be subject to a child protection plan for longer. At the end of March 2021-22, six children (three families) who had been subject to a plan for over two years. This is an increase from one at the same time last year and is higher than the England average.

The reasons are primarily related to cases going into pre proceedings (PLO) and court proceedings after a significant time on CP plans, or when there has been a change of circumstances or new concerns requiring additional work on the CP plan. These cases are monitored via a tracker system within CSC by the QAST team and are highlighted in weekly performance data.

In completing this annual report, we have identified that the DfE calculate this differently from the way in which we have historically counted children on plans for over two years. When children have been on plans twice, the DfE add the length of the first and second plan and when this is done, it shows that Wokingham is low in the country in terms of national performance. Going forward, we need to ensure we monitor this indicator in the same way as the DfE.

Chairs receive a weekly report indicating the length of plans and the manager is reviewing the plans over one year in supervision with a view to avoiding plans reaching the two year point. At the time of writing the number of CP plans for two years has reduced.

4.6 Duration of CPP's which ceased during the for year

Table 1 – CPP's ceased in the year

		0-3 months		3-6 months		6-12 months		1-2 years		2 years and over	
	Total CPP	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%

England CPP ceased 2019-20	66,970	12,520	18.7%	7,610	11.4%	28,350	42.3%	16,100	24%	2,400	3.6%
Total CPP ceased 2020-21	148	26	18%	7	5%	65	44%	49	33%	1	1%
WBC CPP ceased Apr 21- Jun 21	43	2	5%	15	35%	16	37%	9	21%	1	2%
WBC CPP ceased Jul 21- Sept 21	32	5	16%	2	6%	12	38%	13	41%	0	0%
WBC CPP ceased Oct 21- Dec 21	48	0	0%	4	8%	25	52%	15	31%	4	8%
WBC CPP ceased Jan 22- Mar 22	61	9	15%	1	2%	33	54%	18	30%	0	0%
Total CPP ceased 2021-22	184	16	10.3%	22	12%	86	47%	55	30%	5	2.7%

Department for Education (2020 Characteristics of children in need in England)

- 4.7** The table above shows the duration of CP Plans for the year. Of the 184 children who ceased to be subject to a child protection plan during the year, the majority had been on a CP Plan for 6-12 months (47% increase from 44%). This is followed by 30% requiring 1-2 years on a CP plan, which is in line with the previous year.

2.7% of children had been on plans for two years, an increase from 1%. 10.3% had been subject to a plan for three months, a decrease from 18% which may indicate good practice (not stepping down too soon) or children who come into care remaining on CP plans for longer. Analysis indicates that this is due to cases being in pre court (PLO) or court proceedings and requiring a dual plan for longer.

5. Performance on child protection conferences

Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences

Table 2 – ICPC taking place within 15 working days of strategy discussion, 2021-22

2021-22	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
No. of ICPC	19	26	15	10	6	14	12	21	10	21	27	25	206
No. of ICPC's held within timescales	18	18	13	7	6	14	7	21	10	17	21	13	165
% completed within timescales	95%	69%	87%	70%	100%	100%	58%	100%	100%	81%	78%	52%	80%

- 5.1** The table above shows that 80% of conferences were held within 15 days of the strategy discussion that initiated the Section 47, a decrease from 84% last year. There have been several months with 100% held within the timeframe.

There is a well embedded system in place for social workers to provisionally book ICPCs as soon as the strategy meeting has been held and the S47 initiated. The child protection administrators closely monitor the timescales and this approach works well. The main reasons for delay are:

- requests for ICPC's being made too late to set up conferences within the 15 days
- the availability of parents or other professionals particularly in school holiday periods
- capacity issues within the QAST team in quarter four.

Timeliness of Child Protection Reviews:

Table 3 : Child Protection Review timescales

Indicators		WBC Jun 21	WBC Sep 21	WBC Dec 21	WBC Mar 22
Child protection reviews within timescales		100%	100%	100%	100%
Indicators	WBC 2021-22	England 2019-20		South East 2019-20	
Child protection reviews within timescales	100%	91.5%		89.5%	

Department for Education (2020 Characteristics of children in need in England)

- 5.2** The table above shows the percentage of Review Child Protection Conferences that were reviewed within statutory timescales during 2021-22 and the previous years and compares performance.

This is a snapshot of the number of children with a CPP on 31st March who at that date had a plan continuously for the previous 3 months. Systems are in place to book conferences at approximately five months into the CPP, to allow for time if a conference has to be reconvened.

The performance indicator is cumulative and reports that 100% of conferences have been held in timescale, which is higher than comparators (England 91.5% and South East 89.5%). This was a busy year for the team working with higher numbers on CP plans and an increase in children in care, so we are very pleased with the performance on timeliness of review conferences.

Timeliness of social worker reports to conference:

Table 11 – Social worker report received at least 2 days before initial conference, 2021-22

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Annual
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No of ICPC	19	26	15	10	6	18	12	21	10	21	27	25	210
No of reports in timescale	15	10	10	6	5	9	8	21	10	8	19	23	144
% Of reports in timescale	79%	39%	67%	60%	83%	50%	67%	100%	100%	38%	70%	92%	69%

5.3 The table above shows the performance on providing a completed signed off report to the CP Chair and the parents within 2 days of the conference. This performance measure denotes good practice in preparing for the meeting and being aware of all the information in advance. The performance for the year based on the average is 69%. The monthly scores indicate that practice is inconsistent.

5.4 The table below for RCPCs to be submitted within 5 days 36% annual average. Although the practice of sharing draft reports with parents in advance of meetings is now more embedded, the performance on meeting the procedural timescale remains low.

A pilot carried out last year with one team and although some progress had been made, the highest monthly score was 53% so further work is needed to improve this indicator, which as noted above is evidence of good practice and preparation.

Table 12 – Social workers report received at least 5 days before review conference, 2021-22

	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Annual
No of RCPC	25	47	37	51	29	46	37	43	30	63	34	56	498
No of reports in timescale	11	13	11	10	12	14	17	18	12	20	18	21	177
% Of reports in timescale	44%	27%	30%	20%	41%	30%	46%	42%	40%	32%	53%	38%	36%

5.5 Berkshire Child Protection Procedures set a timescale for ICPC reports to be provided to the parents and the Chair two working days before the ICPC, and five working days before the RCPC.

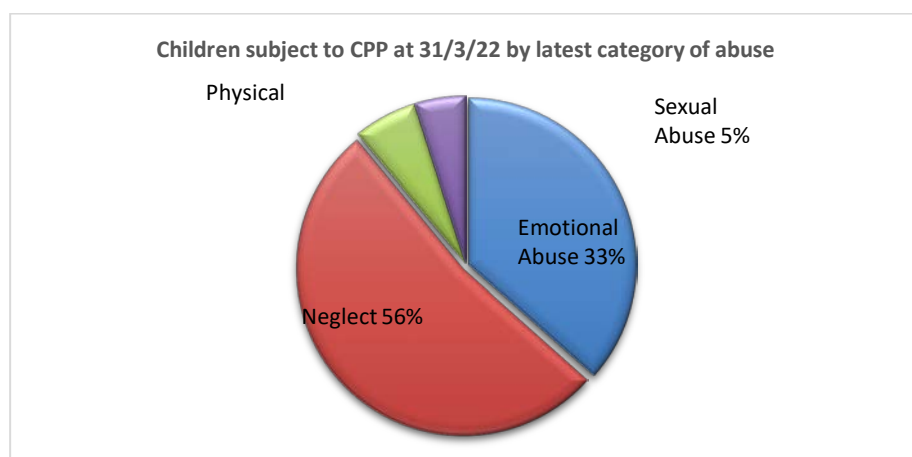
This timescale was recently reviewed in the procedures group and the decision was made to retain the five-day timescales, which are felt to be beneficial to parents and help them prepare for conferences. The performance for reports to ICPCs has varied throughout the year. Not receiving reports impacts on the preparation of the family, the Chair and the quality of the conference and is often a noted in feedback and complaints from parents.

5.6 Further improvement is needed on the timeliness of providing CP reports to the CP Chair and parents in advance of conferences. For ICPCs (reports shared within 2 days) this is 69%, and for

RCPCs (shared within 5 days) it is 36%.

Although the practice of sharing draft reports with parents in advance of meetings is now more embedded, the performance on meeting the procedural timescale remains low. A pilot carried out last year had made some progress, but further work is needed to improve this indicator.

6. Categories of Abuse and Parental Risk Factors



- 6.1** At the conclusion of a conference, professionals decide which category of abuse captures the type of significant harm children have suffered or may suffer. Recording a category of abuse in the conference than in traditional types of conference but recording a category helps to identify trends.

The chart above shows that neglect makes up the highest percentage, followed by emotional abuse, with a smaller percentage of children being on CP Plans under Physical or Sexual abuse. At the end of the year, 5% of CP Plans were for sexual abuse which is higher than the national average of 4%.

Table 13: Child Protection Plans at end of quarter by latest category of abuse

Latest Category of Abuse	WBC Jun 21	WBC Sep 21	WBC Dec 21	WBC Mar 22	England Percentage 2020-21
Emotional Abuse	35% (59)	40% (66)	39% (84)	33% (54)	38%
Neglect	55% (93)	51% (86)	52% (112)	56% (92)	50%
Physical Abuse	8% (14)	7% (11)	7% (15)	6% (10)	6%
Sexual Abuse	2% (3)	2% (3)	3% (6)	5% (8)	4%
Multiple Categories	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	2%

Department for Education (2020 Characteristics of children in need in England)

- 6.2** At the end of quarter two, there was a decrease in plans under the category of neglect and Wokingham was closer to the England average. By the end of the year however, the percentage rose to 56% compared to 50% for England.

Neglect encompasses physical and emotional neglect, or failure to protect. It is often linked to parental issues such as substance misuse, mental health or a combination of factors which result in a child's needs not being met. The breakdown of parental risk factors below provides further detail.

Table 4 : Parental factors and sub-categories of Child Protection Plans: 2021-22

Parental risk factors	ICPCs - 214	RCPCs - 491
Domestic abuse (DA)	150 (70%)	254 (52%)
Mental Health MH)	106 (49%)	212 (43%)
Drug and Alcohol (D&A)	76 (35%)	150 (30%)
DA, MH and D&A present	82 (38%)	60 (12%)

- 6.3** Domestic abuse is the most prevalent factor at ICPCs and RCPCs, followed by mental health and substance misuse. Anecdotally, there is a view that many of the situations being referred are more complex, and that harm to some children is of a more serious level.

We can measure complexity to some degree by highlighting conferences where there are multiple parental risk factors impacting on children. The table above shows that 38% of ICPCs noted all three risk factors above were present. 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 that could help.

The CP Chairs are noting a greater complexity within CP conferences from families with different make ups. Meetings often have to be arranged to accommodate different birth fathers for each child, separated and acrimonious parents, and the team have to take care when sharing information 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.

Table 15 - Parental risk factors per quarter

Parental risk factors – 2021-22	Q1 ICPCs (68)	Q1 RCPCs (104)	Q2 ICPCs (30)	Q2 RCPCs (131)	Q3 ICPCs (44)	Q3 RCPCs (106)	Q4 ICPCs (72)	Q4 RCPCs (150)
Domestic abuse (DA)	34 (50%)	55 (52%)	14 (47%)	70 (53%)	25 (56%)	51 48%	43 (60%)	78 (52%)

Mental Health issues (MH)	34 (50%)	27 (26%)	17 (57%)	58 (42%)	28 (62%)	43 (40%)	27 (37%)	84 (56%)
Drug & Alcohol issues (D&A)	18 (26%)	38 (47%)	15 (50%)	28 (21%)	19 (42%)	34 (32%)	24 (37%)	50 (33%)
DA, MH and D&A present	10 (15%)	17 (16%)	10 (33%)	13 (10%)	15 (33%)	11 (10%)	17 (24%)	19 (13%)
Emotional abuse present	45 (66%)	49 (47%)	19 (63%)	74 (56%)	35 (77%)	56 (53%)	50 (69%)	99 (66%)

7. Conference Quorum and partner agency involvement

Table 5 – Conference Quoracy, 2021-22

2021-22	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Inquorate	15 (9%)	41 (25%)	19 (13%)	46 (20%)	121 (17%)
Quorate	157 (91%)	118 (74 %)	130 (87%)	177 (79%)	582 (83%)
Not known or transfer out conference	0	2 (1%)	5 (3%)	4 (1.7%)	11 (2%)

7.1 The table above shows the performance on quoracy, defined as the attendance of two other agencies in addition to children's social care. In 2021-22 quoracy increased slightly from 81.5% to 83%. Some children have a small number of professionals involved, (e.g., for pre-birth conferences some will always be inquorate due to only involving a midwife). In such cases the conference will go ahead, however, in other situations the Chair may decide not to proceed, such as when key professionals are missing.

The service aims for a high percentage of quorate conferences. 17% of conferences were inquorate, an increase from 12% in 2020-21 and closer to 19% in 2019-20. Some are recorded as not known or were transfer out conferences, held as paper reviews due to the conference being held in another area.

8. Administration of Child Protection Conferences

Table 18 - Completion and distribution of conference plans and minutes by QAST team

2021-22	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual average
Number of Conferences	176	164	150	211	701
CP plans sent within 24 hours of the conference	167 (95%)	164 (100%)	139 (93%)	195 (92%)	665 (95%)
CP Minutes sent within 20 working days of the conference	167 95%	162 (99%)	140 (93%)	144 (68%)	613 (87%)

- 8.1** The administration team prepares conference invitations, reports and conference packs, minute taking, typing up and circulating child protection plans and records). The administrators collate the details of children on Child Protection Plans on a weekly basis. The administrators also manage the list of children on child protection plans who are temporarily resident in the WBC. Although there is room for improvement, the systems in place for completing distributing minutes and plans are working well. The dip in performance in quarter four is due to staff sickness.

9. Child Participation in the conference process

- 9.1** The table below captures the overall percentage of child participation which includes attendance, as well as the views of the child being represented by an advocate or another adult at the meeting.

The child protection agenda puts the focus on the voice of children being at the beginning of the conference. Social Workers are expected to use direct work techniques to gather the children's views and present them at the ICPC's.

The needs of babies, younger children and non-verbal children with disabilities or communication issues should also be presented to help the conference focus on the child. 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.

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. The Advocate had 33 contacts with 62 children subject to the child protection process during the year, which is an increase on the previous year.

This work has involved:

- attending conferences with children and young people or on their behalf
- sharing the voice of the child in the conference
- attending professionals' meetings on their behalf.

Table 19 - Child Participation in the conference process

Participation	End 2021-22	End 2020-21
CP9 - Percentage of CPC Participation - Children aged 7-11	93%	90%
CP10 - Percentage of CPC Participation - Children aged 12+	96%	94%

10. Participation of parents

Table 19 – Parental participation

Participation - Parents	End 2021-22	End of 2020-21
CP8 - Percentage of parents attending CP Conferences	91%	86%

10.1 Parents are invited to attend conferences. When they are not able to do so, the CP Chairs endeavour to ensure that their views are presented and heard in the conference. This increased from 86% to 91% in 2021-22.

10.2 Throughout the pandemic, when safe to do so, the team offered parents the opportunity to attend in person if they desired to do so or did not have access to reliable technology. The take up of face-to-face meetings was low, and since the government restrictions changed in March 2022, we have been promoting face to face initial conferences.

The number of parents attending is slowly increasing, but this has been impacted by high rates of Covid since March. Many parents still report that they prefer the convenience of virtual meeting, the common reasons being not having to travel or arrange childcare. Some parents also feel safer and more comfortable attending meetings from their own homes. The Chairs, however, feel that meeting parents at ICPCs in person is beneficial, and will progress the plan more effectively than virtual meetings.

11 Parental feedback

11.1 The QAST team has sought and analysed feedback from family members and professionals attending conferences at several points in the year. The team has used a mix of electronic feedback forms which we collate and read. Additionally, the team sought direct feedback by phoning parents twice over the year.

Although these samples were small, the team felt it was a useful exercise because the conversations provided some helpful feedback and are now exploring ways in which the team can demonstrate how the feedback is helping to improve the service.

12. Challenge and oversight

12.1 During the year, the CP chairs recorded 420 case notes on by way of CP chair oversight. There have been seven challenges recorded on Mosaic, in addition to more informal exchanges by conversations and email. This is a decrease from seventeen in 2020-21, but chairs continue to raise issues informally and in the course of their preparation for conferences.

They have also been holding pre-meetings with social workers, joining meetings to review the danger statements and safety goals before conferences, and this has helped to iron out issues in advance.

Challenges have related to:

- missing documentation/paperwork
- core groups not being held between conferences
- the plan not progressing for the children
- concern about lack of progress on CP Plans

12.2 Compliments and good practice:

Areas of good practice have also been identified by the CP Chairs and passed back to the individual workers and their managers. They are recorded in the compliments log. Additionally, the CP Chairs have received some positive feedback in 2021-22.

Compliments from conference participants:

'I thought that the Chair was amazing. She kept on task, had empathy and respect for everyone at the meeting and I felt she put everyone at ease at a difficult time'.

'The Chair was very professional in handling the conference, she went straight to the point. She ensured that confidentiality was maintained throughout. Furthermore, all professionals involved contributed positively to ensuring the success of the conference.... We didn't know what to expect from the conference as that was the very first time, we came across the term "child protection" As parents we felt that we are the ones that have parental responsibility and therefore should be protecting our children.... As a family there has been a lot of positives for us, there has been lessons learnt and adjustments made which has had a positive impact on our family relationship'.

'I wanted to feedback was how much he appreciated you as the chair and felt that you were the first person to identify that the parent's mental health was a significant issue that needed addressing. I think that he found your approach respectful and supportive.'

Compliment from CP Chair to a social worker:

"I wanted to highlight the excellent work that you have done - Your report provided a balance of what is going on and highlighted the gaps in the work that needs to be completed. Your approach to this family is respectful and gentle, both of which have enabled you to undertake direct work with the children and work on triggers with the parents."

13. Emerging themes about the Child Protection system in 2021-22

• **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. 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. 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.

- **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 CSPRs. 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.

14 Summary:

Throughout 2021-22, the CP chairs and conferencing team adapted to the challenge of living with COVID-19 and have been able to flex and change as the pandemic has progressed. This has been helped by having a stable workforce and experienced CP chairs. We are now in a new phase of doing more face-to-face meetings, while retaining virtual and hybrid options. Moving back to where we were pre-pandemic seems a long way off, but we feel this needs to be done with incremental change over time. The service has had a challenging year, dealing with capacity issues within the team alongside a significant increase in children coming into care and on CP Plans. We have reviewed our priorities and

plans for the coming year, which are set out below. The child protection process is based on multi-agency arrangements, and although local relationships with partner colleagues are positive and we have regular dialogue, we need to continue to monitor the contribution of each agency and to address any capacity issues or barriers which exist.

The key strategic priorities of the CP conferencing service in 2022-23 are:

- **To consistently provide good quality child protection conferences** which promote the child's voice, the participation of parents and partners, and which produce a clear and concise plan setting out the desired outcomes for the child. For review conferences to help drive forward the plan for the child.
- **To raise awareness about child protection processes and the wider issues relating to best practice and the learning from local and national child safeguarding practice reviews cases.** This will include work to promote awareness about the purpose of CP conferences, and to promote participation by families and partner agency colleagues. In Wokingham, we have had two significant reviews in 2021-22 which have provided valuable learning about sexual abuse, neglect and harm outside of the home.
- **To demonstrate the effectiveness of the CP conferences** with clear examples of what difference CP chairs in making in overseeing CP plans for children. This will include clearly demonstrating challenge and follow up when CP plans are not progressing as planned, or when the child's voice is not being presented to the conference, when parents are not receiving reports in advance of meetings or the partnership arrangements are not working as expected.

