



Buckinghamshire Council

Children's & Education Select Committee

Agenda

Date: Thursday 7 September 2023

Time: 10.00 am

Venue: The Oculus, Buckinghamshire Council, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury HP19 8FF

Membership: J Ward (Chairman), M Dormer, S Adoh, K Bates, D Blamires, L Clarke OBE, I Darby, C Jones, S Kayani, S Lewin, Dr W Matthews, A Osibogun (Vice-Chairman), D Summers, P Turner, Z Williams and T Wilson

Agenda Item	Time	Page No
1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE		
2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST		
3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 15 th June 2023.		3 - 16
4 PUBLIC QUESTIONS Public Questions is an opportunity for people who live, work or study in Buckinghamshire to put a question to a Select Committee. The Committee will hear from members of the public who have submitted questions in advance relating to items on the agenda. The Cabinet Member, relevant key partners and responsible officers will be invited to respond. Further information on how to register can be found here: https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/your-council/get-involved-with-council-decisions/select-committees/		
5 PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY For the Select Committee to consider the Placement Sufficiency Strategy which sets out the aims of the department to provide places for children in care.		17 - 36

Contributors:

Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Education

Richard Nash, Service Director – Children's Social Care

Sandra Carnell, Head of Children's Care Service

6 PRINCIPAL SOCIAL WORKER ANNUAL REPORT 37 - 70

For the Select Committee to consider a progress report on the work of the Principal Social Worker during 2022/23 to promote and improve the quality of social work practice, highlight the achievements for this year and identify priorities for the coming year.

Contributors:

Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Portfolio Holder Children's Services and Education

Richard Nash, Service Director – Children's Social Care

7 UPDATE ON OFSTED WORK 71 - 76

For the Committee to receive an update on progress with Ofsted work and to receive the annual engagement meeting letter from Ofsted with regards to social care and education, 30 June 2023.

Contributors:

Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Portfolio holder for Children's Services and Education

John Macilwraith, Corporate Director for Children's Services

Richard Nash, Service Director Children's Social Care

8 WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024 77 - 78

For the Select Committee to receive the work programme for the forthcoming year and make any suggestions thereon.

Contributors:

All Members

Katie Dover, Senior Scrutiny Officer

9 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Select Committee will take place on Thursday 2nd November at 2.00 p.m. in the Paralympic Room, The Gateway, Aylesbury.

If you would like to attend a meeting, but need extra help to do so, for example because of a disability, please contact us as early as possible, so that we can try to put the right support in place.

For further information please contact: Katie Dover on 01296 531339, email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.



Agenda Item 3
Buckinghamshire Council
Children's & Education Select
Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHILDREN'S & EDUCATION SELECT COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY 15 JUNE 2023 IN THE OCULUS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL, GATEHOUSE ROAD, AYLESBURY HP19 8FF, COMMENCING AT 2.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 4.00 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

J Ward, S Adoh, K Bates, D Blamires, C Jones, S Kayani, S Lewin, Dr W Matthews, D Summers and T Wilson

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

R Stuchbury, K Dover, R Nash, E Albert and S Wilson

Agenda Item

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that Councillors Clarke, Darby, Dormer, Osibogun and Turner had submitted their apologies for the meeting. Apologies were also received from Zoe Williams, co-optee.

Councillors Stuchbury and Wilson were also in attendance at the meeting.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman appointed Councillor Ade Osibogun as Vice-Chairman of the Select Committee for the ensuing year.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Cllr K Bates declared a personal interest as a school governor.
- Cllr D Blamires declared a personal interest as an employee of Bourne End Academy and as a parent of a child with SEND at a local authority school in Buckinghamshire.
- Cllr S Kayani personal interest as a Policy Advisor for the Dyspraxia Foundation and as an employee at Bourne End Academy.

4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings of the committee held on 23rd March 2023 and 17th May 2023 be AGREED as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

In relation to the addendum to the minutes Katie Dover noted that the responses to items 12 to 14 would be circulated to committee members this month.

5 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received in relation to this agenda of the Select Committee. It was noted that Councillors Stuchbury and Wilson attended the meeting to ask questions under specific items.

6 CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's and Education; Richard Nash, Service Director – Children's Social Care and Errol Albert, Service Director – Transformation and Improvement, to the meeting.

In their presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- The update report on the work of the Children's Services Department had been forwarded to Cabinet for consideration. A number of significant issues had been highlighted in the Cabinet report, including the issues relating to the substantial increase in demand levels nationally, the progress of the schools' white paper, the Care Review and the government's response to it. Demand levels and changes at the national level had a significant impact on how the service would meet the challenges of the future.
- Mr Nash commended Sandra Carnell and her team's excellent work for children's homes as two had received outstanding Ofsted ratings and the positive inspection outcome for the youth offending service. However, he recognised the need for ongoing improvement and highlighted the challenges in finding appropriate placements for children in need.

During the discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- A Member asked if Buckinghamshire would receive any of the £27 million in funding for carer recruitment and retention. Mr Nash clarified that the mentioned figures were national and that the report was written before the specific division of funds among local authorities was known. They were currently awaiting further information on how the allocation will be distributed. Mr Nash acknowledged the importance of having clarity on the funds and stated that as more information becomes available, the Committee would be updated accordingly.
- Concerns about the clarity of paragraph 2.9 regarding social worker pay in the report were raised. They sought clarification on the specific roles and types of social workers being referred to, and questioned whether the conditions of service were determined at the local authority level or followed a national pay and terms structure. Mr Nash acknowledged the need for detailed answers and committed to providing a written response with the necessary information. He mentioned that efforts were made to ensure pay parity with other local authorities, aligning with prevailing pay rates for similar roles.

ACTION: RN

- A Member noted that the care review suggested abolishing the role of Child Protection Conference chair, which was not mentioned in the strategy. Mr Nash advised that there had been no proposals to change these roles, though there had been an ongoing debate regarding the role of independent reviewing officers for looked-after

children.

- It was noted that the county was falling behind in meeting the completion targets for the digitalisation of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs). Mr Nash acknowledged that the demand for EHCPs was increasing annually by approximately 16% and emphasised the need to consider digital solutions to improve performance. Potential barriers that certain parents and carers may face in accessing digital services were highlighted. Mr Nash agreed with these concerns and emphasised the importance of developing a strategy that ensures easy access to digitalisation for all individuals, acknowledging that some exceptions may be necessary to address the challenges associated with digitalisation. A written response concerning the specific details of this issue would be provided to the Committee.

ACTION: RN

- The upcoming kinship care strategy with £9 million in funding was discussed. Mr Nash highlighted the significance of kinship care and the local authority's commitment to supporting kinship carers. There was currently a lack of information on the government's timeframe, but Mr Nash expressed eagerness for guidance and potential additional funding from central government.
- A Member raised concerns about workforce stability in frontline teams, and asked about plans to improve it. They also inquired about the frequency of peer reviews. Mr Nash acknowledged the national shortage of social workers and the demanding nature of child protection work. He emphasised the importance of supporting social workers and creating the right conditions to perform their roles effectively, aligning with the ongoing transformation programme. He also explained that peer reviews are part of the sector-led improvements and are conducted annually. Additional processes, such as comprehensive quality assurance, were also in place to ensure the service was running effectively.
- A Member raised the issue of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's observations regarding academic selection testing measures and the higher levels of stress experienced by students. They asked if the Cabinet Member for Children's Services was aware of the observations and if Cabinet would formulate a response. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the importance of the suggestion and mentioned the ongoing work of the school improvement team in providing enhanced support to students. She also expressed willingness to investigate the matter further.

ACTION: AC

- In response to a Member's question regarding how the national co-production for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Week would be publicised, as well as the co-production charter mentioned in the local inspection report, Mr Nash noted that a written response would be provided to the Committee.

ACTION: RN

- It was noted that Buckinghamshire was not one of the 12 pilot areas for early intervention scheme funding.
- Several questions regarding funding and support for children with SEND were raised. Mr Nash explained that the distribution of the government's committed funding of £200 million and £30 million was yet to be confirmed. However, Buckinghamshire Council would receive £188,000 over two years to support the increase in leaving care allowances. The high needs block funding for Buckinghamshire Council had increased by 49% from 2019-2020 to 2023-2024, reaching £123.5 million. This increase had helped the council meet the growing demand for support in education, health, and care plans, as well as SEN support. However, the high needs budgets still faced pressure due to increased demand and complexity, and the council was carrying a deficit in its high needs

block. A written response would be provided to address the questions more comprehensively.

ACTION: RN

Councillor Stuchbury attended the committee to speak to his question which had been submitted with notice as follows:

*“**Paragraph 2.4** of the report details the six pillars for reform of the Government’s Implementation and Strategy Consultation and these are underpinned by £200 million of funding. The Care Review called for **£2.6 billion** support over 5 years. **Paragraph 2.24** also refers to the £200 million to support children – I am assuming this is national funding.*

***Paragraph 2.19** of the report states that **£30 million** will be spent of programmes supporting families of care leavers and children in care and **paragraph 2.20** notes the increase in grant for those leaving care from **£2000 to £3000**, and the bursary for those in apprenticeships will increase from **£1000 to £3000** – broadly in line with the care review recommendations.*

***Paragraph 2.24** states that the LGA analysis reports on an estimated **£1.6 billion** shortfall per year to maintain current service levels, and the care review recommended an additional **£2.6 billion** over 4 years prior to the impact of inflation. Despite increasing their budgets by over £700 million in the year 2020/2021, councils still overspent by £800 million that year.*

***Paragraph 2.38** states the government’s significant investment into children and young people with SEND and in AP, with investment increasing by more than 50% compared with 2019-20 - to over £10 billion by 2023-24.*

*Although we are grateful for the additional funding, given the substantial size of these figures it is **important** we understand what these figures mean, what percentage they represent in terms of Westminster’s decision and how they relate to our outcomes in Buckinghamshire. We need to know the methodology within the Buckinghamshire Education Plan for those with SEND whose parents face particularly difficult challenges in order to gain the support they need to meet their child’s specific needs.*

To summarise my question is:

(i) What does the £200 million commitment by the Government mean in financial terms and support to Buckinghamshire Council and the county’s children? and

(ii) what of the £30 million will be allocated for Buckinghamshire’s care leavers and children in care?

(iii) what will be the difference that the additional funding makes to meeting the needs of those with special educational needs in meeting the high demand for EHCP reports and to funding for children with challenges such as autism, dyspraxia and extrasensory conditions.

I hope this is received enthusiastically considering the importance of the subject to be discussed. and the shared journey, the local authority has been on since 2013 in respect to children services and education

The response to Councillor Stuchbury’s Question was as follows:

“Thank you for your question Cllr Stuchbury as this highlights the additional funding that will be made available to support improvements within children’s services across the country. In relation to your first and second question, whilst the government has announced an additional £200m and £30m commitment respectively, how that funding is to be distributed across different initiatives and individual local authorities has yet to be confirmed. However, Buckinghamshire will receive a total of £188k over two years (£94k per year) to support the increase in leaving care allowances from £2,000 to £3,000.

On your final question, the High Needs Block funding for Buckinghamshire Council has increased by 49% from 2019-20 to 2023-24, increasing from £82.7m in 2019-20 to £123.5m in 2023-24. The increase in funding has supported the council to meet the increase in demand for support for pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans and pupils on SEND Support across all types of provision and type of need. High needs budgets remain under pressure due to increases in demand and complexity and the council is still carrying a deficit against its high needs block.”

7 CHILDREN'S SERVICES TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

The Chairman invited Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children’s and Education, Richard Nash, Service Director – Children’s Social Care and Errol Albert, Service Director – Transformation, to speak on this item.

In their presentation, the following points were highlighted:

- The transformation programme was prompted by a rise in demand for services, including higher referral rates compared to similar areas. Nationally, there was a 32% increase in child protection plans, and the number of children in care was projected to surpass 100,000 in the next decade.
- The council acknowledged the need to improve risk management and support for children with emerging needs, creating an environment conducive to effective social work by addressing caseloads and providing adequate support. Buckinghamshire Council’s Children’s Services have improved significantly and were striving to achieve a good rating from OFSTED.
- The comprehensive programme of change would be implemented to ensure that children and young people were at the centre of decision-making at every stage of the process, moving away from traditional practices. The proposed changes aimed to consider new demands and emerging risks, minimise the need for repetitive storytelling by families, provide continuity of support, and utilise local services effectively. Any changes requiring job transitions would involve formal consultation.
- A cultural workforce framework was being established to ensure consistency in values, expectations, and support provided to social workers. The goal was to recruit and retain social workers successfully by focusing on staff development and well-being.
- A triangle model was used to illustrate the focus on strengthening support at the early stage to prevent concerns from escalating. The narrow end represented statutory duties related to child protection and safeguarding, while the wider end represented the aim to reduce the need for intensive intervention. The middle part involved targeted intensive family help through multi-agency teams, including qualified social workers and family support workers. The goal was to identify and support families at an earlier stage by providing easily accessible services, which would reduce the need for intensive statutory interventions such as child protection plans, care proceedings, or removal from home.

- The transformation journey was already underway, with phase one focusing on early help pathways and preventing the escalation of needs. Services within the organisation and external partners were being assessed for their potential contributions. This included developing smaller, cohesive multi-agency teams that are attuned to local communities, including schools and voluntary community partners. This shift also allowed for the identification of a trusted lead professional who could develop relationships with families and ensure they receive the right services. Collaboration with partners was crucial to provide continuity of support. Phase two would involve wider services and their alignment with the model. Discussions and engagements were taking place with various boards and partners, and staff feedback and ideas were being gathered to shape the system and identify their roles in achieving the desired outcomes.
- Strategic commissioning was also a priority, especially in the challenging area of children's placements. Efforts were being made to recruit and support foster carers, strengthen the adoption offer, and prevent children and young people from entering care whenever possible.

During discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- The Chairman commended the inclusion of social worker wellbeing in the programme, particularly in light of social work's sensitive and distressing nature.
- Concerns were raised about the increasing number of referrals nationally and within the county. Mr Nash explained that not all referrals are negative, as it was crucial to be informed of any changes in a child or young person's circumstances. The definition of re-referrals had changed, and process issues resulted in a false increase in recorded figures. Additionally, increased pressures on families in recent years contributed to some children and young people returning for support. Re-referrals could also arise if previous work had not been thorough enough. Mr Nash emphasised the importance of gaining a detailed understanding of re-referral figures in shaping future actions.
- A Member emphasized the need for flexibility in recruiting trusted lead professionals and suggested considering school staff, including safeguarding leads and trained members, for the role. Mr Albert agreed and stressed that the trusted lead professional role should not be limited to one person or role. He acknowledged the important role of schools in supporting children, young people, and families, emphasizing their established relationships. Additionally, he highlighted that everyone has a responsibility to support and safeguard children, and volunteers with lived experience and community connections can have a significant positive impact on families. Overall, flexibility and inclusivity in selecting trusted lead professionals were considered crucial.
- Concerns about potentially losing the positive outcomes achieved through the transformation of early health services in 2019 were raised. The stressful nature of previous staff consultations and the need to prioritise staff well-being were highlighted. Mr Albert explained that both the pandemic and the new challenges that children and young people faced necessitated innovative approaches. While commitments were made during the previous consultation, the focus now was on ensuring that services were appropriate for specific areas and building on the successful aspects of the previous work. Ongoing mapping and collaboration with colleagues in other parts of the organisation were part of the efforts to achieve this.
- A Member inquired about the planning process for the locality support teams, asking about the factors that would determine their locations and team sizes. Mr Albert acknowledged the need to align the transformation of the teams with information from other parts of the organisation, such as the Better Buckinghamshire Programme and the Opportunity Bucks Programme, as well as considerations of wards and their levels of deprivation. He emphasised the importance of ensuring that services were accessible

and tailored to local needs, which would be achieved through ongoing discussions with colleagues from various parts of the organisation. He noted the different challenges faced by families in various areas, highlighting the need to engage with the right individuals and develop local solutions that address the prevalent needs in each area.

- To provide an example of a positive outcome from the transformation programme, Mr Albert mentioned the availability of parenting classes and other parenting support resources that have made a positive difference, especially for families dealing with adolescent behaviours. He highlighted that these services, if accessed by families, can prevent the need for a referral to children's social care and the allocation of a social worker. Mr Albert emphasised the importance of building on such services and ensuring they were tailored to the specific needs of local areas as they move forward with the transformation.

- A Member inquired about the involvement of the voluntary sector in the early help partnership. Mr Albert acknowledged the significance of voluntary organisations in Buckinghamshire, noting that many of them are unknown but offer diverse services to children, young people, and adults. He emphasised the ongoing process of scoping and discovering these organisations' expertise through events, surveys, and individual meetings. The aim was to actively involve them in the transformation, seeking their input and exploring how their services can address family challenges effectively. The intention was not just to save money but to tap into the valuable expertise of the voluntary sector and ensure their meaningful participation in the initiative.

- The use of the term 'family' in the proposed operating model was questioned, as it could exclude certain individuals with diverse circumstances. Mr Albert acknowledged the importance of inclusivity and assured that changes to terminology could still be made. He emphasised the need to communicate the transformation in a way that includes everyone and promised to give further thought to the issue.

- It was suggested that a separate model for prevention be formulated in addition to the statutory model, highlighting a need for effective communication, actions, and cultural change among staff. Mr Albert explained that family issues were dynamic and required a system to support families throughout their circumstances. The aim was to create a system that combines qualified statutory roles with early help family support roles, providing consistent support and addressing issues comprehensively. The objective was to establish a one-stop-shop approach that manages family journeys effectively and reduces the need for repeated referrals.

- A Member suggested conducting case studies to showcase both good practices and challenges faced during the transformation process. Mr Albert explained that they were already working on case studies with staff, seeking their input and ideas. They highlighted the importance of recognising the expertise and skills of non-qualified social workers who often have valuable experience in working with families.

- The need for a unified approach to providing support services was highlighted, suggesting the need for further budget allocations within schools to address emerging needs prior to escalation. Mr Albert acknowledged the presence of existing resources, such as school link workers serving as family support workers, who successfully diverted referrals to the appropriate channels. The speaker mentioned ongoing discussions with school heads to explore and utilise available resources, emphasising the need for a support system to ensure the effectiveness of such interventions.

- A Member asked about the number of envisaged locality support teams and whether officers had visited successful teams in Hampshire and Hertfordshire to learn from their best practices. In response, Mr Albert acknowledged the importance of partnership, communication, and viewing the children's workforce as a cohesive group. He mentioned that his team had engaged in discussions with other areas, including Hertfordshire and Hampshire, to understand their successful approaches and improved outcomes. The goal

was to create a similar positive model in Buckinghamshire to enhance recruitment and retention of the workforce. Based on initial modelling and data analyses, there would possibly be 21 different locality teams, though consultation and engagement with stakeholders were needed to determine the final number. Based on the Committee's previous inquiry into social worker recruitment and retention, a locality-based model would have a positive impact on recruitment and retention, as social workers valued reduced travel times and stronger relationships with the families they work with.

Cllr Wilson attended the Committee to speak to his question, which had been submitted with notice as follows:

"The Children's Services Update presented to Cabinet in May 2023 has provided a vivid and transparent description of the challenges facing Children's Services. The Update notes in the risk section that there are significant financial pressures associated with a number of areas detailed within the report, particularly pertinent to the mandated transfer scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, demand pressures faced across the Service and the reliance on agency staff due to the significant social worker recruitment challenges.

It outlines a Transformation Programme that it deems fundamental to improve service practices and progress beyond the 'requires improvement to be good' Ofsted judgment. It also believes the Programme is critical to securing a permanent and stable workforce. This will involve moving to a locality-based model of delivery to rebalance workforce skills and knowledge from appropriately qualified practitioners to provide the appropriate support for children and young people.

In paragraph 3.9 of the Update report, it briefly states that the locality-based model will also support the service to address the financial pressures and to deliver services within this financial envelope of the medium-term financial plan (MTFP).

In order to meet the Council's statutory duties, there was a clear need to substantially increase spending on Children's Services in 22-23 due to the well-documented demand and cost pressures. Full year numbers have yet to be reported, but 22-23 will close at £5m over Budget. The ongoing pressures taken into the 23-24 Budget outline a further increase of £13.3m versus the original Council Budget/MTFP. The Budget for 23-24 was for one year only, so there is no updated MTFP for 24-25 and beyond, other than that published in 21-22 which would now appear to be considerably outdated given the substantial rise in demand and complexity, as well as staffing costs.

What are the detailed financial projections for the Transformation Plan in Children's Services by year and cost centre that demonstrate how the Service will address the financial pressures and deliver services within this financial envelope of the MTFP, ensuring that the locality-based model can meet all its statutory service requirements, improve service practice, secure a Good or better Ofsted rating and secure a permanent and stable workforce? How will these substantial cumulative savings be delivered over and above all existing saving programmes assumed in the Better Buckinghamshire and subsequent reviews?

The Director's responded as follows to Councillor Wilson's questions:

There is corporate and political recognition that we must work differently in order to realise our shared ambition to deliver good quality services to children. The service has refined throughout its improvement journey a comprehensive self-assessment from which a whole system Children's Services Transformation Programme has been developed. A significant part of the

Transformation Programme aims to:

- ensure children and families are supported at the earliest possible stage through effective partnership interventions that improve outcomes without the need for escalation to more intrusive statutory support.
- reduce hand off points and minimise assessments for families and enable the system to respond to changing risks by developing a new model be based on multi-disciplinary locality-based working that is closer to the communities, boosting the contribution of partners.
-

Savings targets (as detailed below) associated with the transformation relate to the reduction of additional agency staff who have been employed to support the service in meeting additional demand post pandemic. The move to a locality-based model will (a) mean the service is better placed to manage demand as the whole system will enable children to receive a more consistent, purposeful and child centred approach wherever they are on their journey of need from early help through to being in care, and (b) support the service to address the financial pressures relating to staffing and to deliver services within the staffing financial envelope of the medium-term financial plan.

Description	Sum of Savings 2023-24	Sum of Savings 2024-25	Sum of Savings 2025-26
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Reduce requirement for additional staffing through development of a locality-based model.	-332	-2,331	-2,883

In addition to the delivery of the above, there are additional savings targets attached to the Strategic Commissioning workstream of the transformation programme. Since October 2021, it has become increasingly difficult to find placements, particularly for children aged 12 plus with complex needs. As a result, a revised Placement Sufficiency Strategy has been developed that accurately reflects the current position and clearly articulates the service's plans to increase the availability of provision for our children and young people that meet their needs and provides them with a safe place to live and thrive within Buckinghamshire. Savings associated with this workstream (as set out below) relate to delivering the actions set out in this strategy which will in turn reduce the number of high-cost placements for children looked after. Full business cases for the £1,325m saving relating to the increase in the availability of inhouse placements still need to be developed and agreed through the Service Improvement Board (Better Buckinghamshire Programme). Due to the national challenges in placement sufficiency and the impact on placement availability and unit cost, our placement budgets continue to be at risk in the current financial year and across the MTFP.

	Budgeted Savings 23/24	Future Savings	Total
Description of change	£'000	£'000	£'000
Creation of an Edge of Care Team that will work intensively with adolescents and their parents/care givers to negate the need for them to come into care.	390	390	780

The development of an inhouse Parent & Child Provision	620	300	920
Increase in the availability of inhouse placements	0	1,325	1,325
Total	1,010	2,015	3,025

- Mr Nash noted that the overall aim of the transformation programme was to support children and families at an early stage, reduce assessments and handoff points, and implement a multidisciplinary locality-based working model. The savings targets involved reducing reliance on agency staff and strategic commissioning efforts to improve placement sufficiency. He also acknowledged the challenges in finding suitable placements for older children with complex needs and the associated budget risks. Mr Nash assured that a more comprehensive written response with financial tables would be provided to address the specific financial projections requested.

ACTION: RN

The Chairman thanked the presenters for their attendance and participation.

8 REVIEW GROUP REPORT ON PATHWAYS FOR CHILDREN WITH SEND

Councillor Blamires, Chair of the SEND task and finish review group, provided the following update about its progress:

- The inquiry focused on improving the experience for parents of children with autism, ADHD, anxiety or depression awaiting diagnosis when accessing pathways to services for SEND. Surveys had shown that over 90% of parents suspecting their child might have one or more of these conditions were correct, emphasising the need to offer substantial support from the outset and easy access to key information.
- Several recommendations were made to improve access to pathways to SEND services which had arisen through the extensive interviewing of relevant key officers, staff of the authority and parents.
- One recommendation was made to provide additional training for teaching and nursery staff to validate parents' concerns. Failure to offer timely support may result in the escalation of needs and increased costs for children's services. The need for more educational psychologists, including trainee positions, was also raised, as their input could be valuable even before a formal diagnosis was made.
- Issues were raised regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of the section of the council's website called the 'local offer', which was for the provision of SEND information. Many parents reported difficulties navigating the website and suggested improvements such as short videos in simple language and clear signposting. The term 'local offer' used nationally by the government for local SEND provision appeared to be not adequately understood.
- Additionally, schools reported positive experiences when children or returning students with ADHD and autism spoke openly about their conditions, helping to reduce bullying and stigma while increasing understanding among their peers. Schools also highlighted the importance of showcasing successful individuals with ADHD and autism as role models, providing inspiration and boosting confidence for students facing similar challenges.

During the discussion, comments and questions raised by the Committee included:

- Attendees commended the work of the inquiry group on the report.
- A Member asked if there were one or two key issues that could be focused on to make a difference, considering the overwhelming number of issues discussed. Cllr Blamires highlighted the lack of information as a recurring problem. Many parents, especially those new to the system, struggled to find the right information and resources. The overall aim should be to simplify and streamline the process of accessing relevant information, creating clear and accessible pathways for parents and professionals.
- A Member noted that progress had been made in the early pathway communication, particularly with the implementation of written statements of action. Initiatives like the AET (Autism Education Trust) programme could be expanded to include other conditions, providing quick and effective interventions at the beginning of the diagnostic pathway.
- Although not formally recommended, the value of parent-led organisations was acknowledged, with several individuals highlighting the significant support they offer. It was proposed that the council promote the formation of local parent groups during their interactions with specific organisations, as parents involved in such groups found them highly beneficial.
- A Member suggested considering an alternative name for the 'local offer', mentioning the possibility of including the term 'SEND' in the name to ensure its relevance for concerned parents who may search for related information online. Mr Nash explained that the term 'local offer' was mandated by the Children and Families Act 2014, which posed a challenge in finding an alternative term.
- The crucial role of school staff in daily interactions with children was highlighted, emphasising the need to enhance their skills in understanding and addressing the challenges faced by children with SEND.
- Recommendation 8, which focused on training more educational psychologists, was considered particularly significant. The role educational psychologists played in providing expert advice, guidance, leadership, and input, complementing the work of practitioners in schools and colleges, was highlighted.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Blamires and Members of the inquiry group for their work on the report, which would be presented to Cabinet at its meeting in September.

9 WORK PROGRAMME

The Select committee received the draft work programme. Members were advised to contact the Scrutiny Officer for the committee with any additional topics they wished to be include.

The following suggestion was raised during the meeting:

- It was requested that the principal social worker annual report, scheduled for the 7th of September meeting, include quantitative data alongside qualitative data. It was also suggested to include key performance indicators (KPIs) in the report to gauge the extent of success and provide guidance on the current status. Having qualitative and quantitative data would offer a more nuanced view and prevent misinterpretation of the information.
- A Member suggested exploring alternative provision (AP) in more depth, possibly in conjunction with the ongoing transformation project. They highlighted the potential risk

of students returning to mainstream settings without experiencing positive developments, which could potentially contribute to long-term consequences like permanent exclusion. They proposed conducting a detailed examination of the AP landscape in the county and its potential impact on other services.

10 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Select Committee will be Thursday, 7th September 2023. However, the start time has been changed to 10 a.m.

Children’s and Education Scrutiny Committee – Actions 2023

	Date/Committee Item	Action	Update
12	23-3-23 – Education Standards	SJ to provide examples of detailed information from schools in intervention categories, and an example of traits of a good school, to allow understanding of how these schools had achieved this	Information Circulated August 2023
13	23-3-23 – Education Standards	SJ/GD to provide information comparing our non-selective schools to those elsewhere by looking at the national averages as most other areas were non-selective.	Information Circulated August 2023
14	23-3-23 – Education Standards	SJ/GD to provide education standards information relating to geographical areas	Information Circulated August 2023
15	23-3-23 – Update on social worker recruitment and retention	JM to share a central government paper on social worker recruitment and retention	Information circulated August 2023
16	23-3-23 – Update on social worker recruitment and retention	JM to investigate the suitability of transcription software for social workers and report back to committee	The Principal Social Worker will be running a number of focus groups with front line staff during the summer term to understand what hardware/software would assist them in their roles. Following this, a report will be presented to the Children’s Services Leadership Team for consideration.
17	15-6-23 – Children’s Services Update	RN to provide a more detailed written response with regards to the social worker salaries, roles and conditions of service	Once the govt has provided further information on what changes will be implemented in order to standardise agency social worker rates, information will be fed back to the committee

18	15-6-23 – Children’s Services Update	More information required on the digitalisation of EHCPs	At this stage, there is limited information available. The intention is that EHC plans will be standardised nationally from 2025, with increased use of digital technology.
19	15-6-23 Children’s Services Update	United Nations Committee – Rights of the Child - observations on academic testing	Cllr Cranmer sent response to Cllr Lewin
20	15-6-23 Children’s Services Update	More information required on SEND co-production charter	Information circulated August 2023
21	15-6-23 Children’s Services Update	More information required on addressing the deficit of funding in the high needs block	Information circulated August 2023
22	15-6-23 Children’s Services Transformation	A comprehensive response on funding available for projected spend was requested	Whilst the Government’s strategy ‘Stable homes; Built on Love’ commits £200 million in additional funding to support children’s social care; there is no further detail available currently on how much Buckinghamshire will receive.



Placement Sufficiency Update

Report for Select Committee on the sufficiency of placements for Buckinghamshire's Children Looked After

September 2023

Author:

Sandra Carnall

Head of Children's Care Services & Children's Commissioning



Introduction

1. The council has a 'sufficiency duty', which states that it must take steps to secure, as far as possible, sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the needs of children that it is looking after.
2. It is evident that the quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people 'doing well' in care – the higher the quality, the better children and young people do' (Sinclair et al, 2007).
3. Following the approval of our 3-year Placement Sufficiency Strategy in April 2021, there have been unprecedented changes to the availability and cost of placements for children in care both nationally and locally.
4. In response to the national pressures, the Department for Education (DfE) has accepted the Independent Review of Children's Social Care's recommendation to regionalise placement commissioning, through the establishment of regional care co-operatives (RCCs).
5. This presentation provides an overview of the CLA profile based on the latest available benchmarking data, the current position and associated challenges and our future priorities to increase the availability of provision within the county for our CLA.



CLA Profile Data 2022



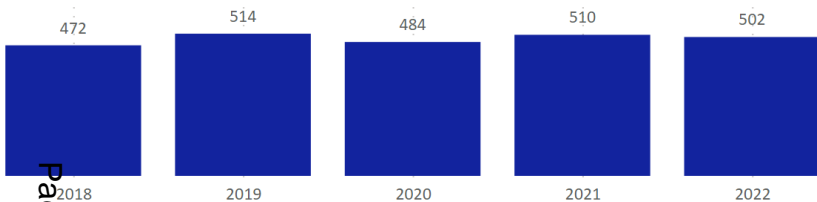


CLA in Buckinghamshire as at 31st March 2018 - 2022

CLA numbers and rates

Total Number of CLA in Buckinghamshire

2018 472	2022 502	Percentage Change 6.4%
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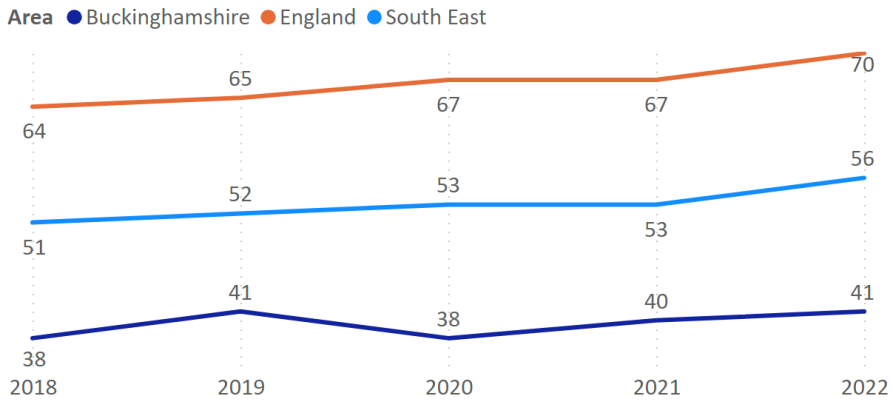


Percentage Change - South East 8.5%
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Percentage Change - England 9.0%

Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Buckinghamshire	472	514	484	510	502
South East	9990	10270	10430	10480	10840
England	75360	78140	80000	80780	82170

Rate of CLA per 10,000 population



Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Buckinghamshire	38	41	38	40	41
South East	51	52	53	53	56
England	64	65	67	67	70



CLA in Buckinghamshire as at 31st March 2018 - 2022

CLA by age

% of CLA by age group

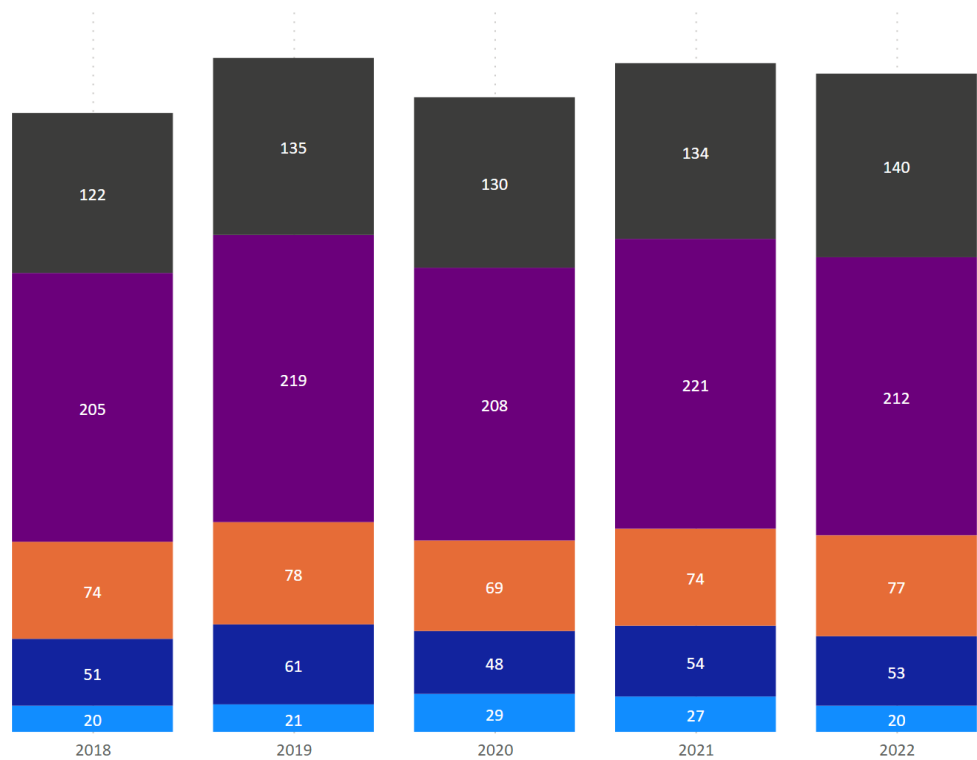
Area 2018 2019 2020 2021 2022

Area	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Buckinghamshire					
Under 1 year	4	4	6	5	4
1 to 4 years	11	12	10	11	11
5 to 9 years	16	15	14	15	15
10 to 15 years	43	43	43	43	42
16 years and over	26	26	27	26	28
South East					
Under 1 year	5	5	5	4	5
1 to 4 years	11	11	10	11	11
5 to 9 years	18	18	17	17	17
10 to 15 years	41	41	40	40	40
16 years and over	26	26	28	27	28
England					
Under 1 year	6	5	5	5	5
1 to 4 years	13	13	14	14	14
5 to 9 years	19	18	18	19	18
10 to 15 years	39	39	39	39	39
16 years and over	23	24	24	23	25

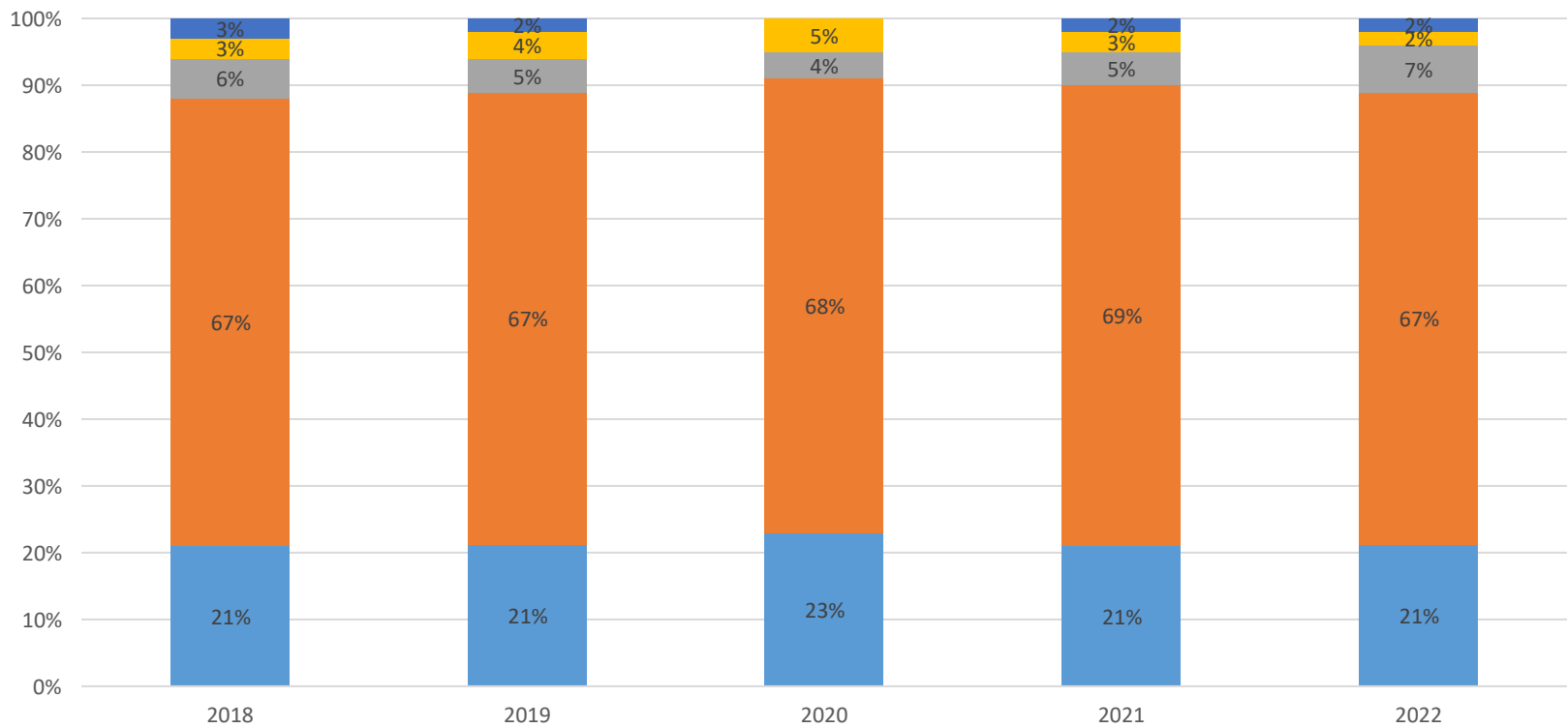
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Number of Buckinghamshire CLA by age group

● Under 1 year ● 1 to 4 years ● 5 to 9 years ● 10 to 15 years ● 16 years and over

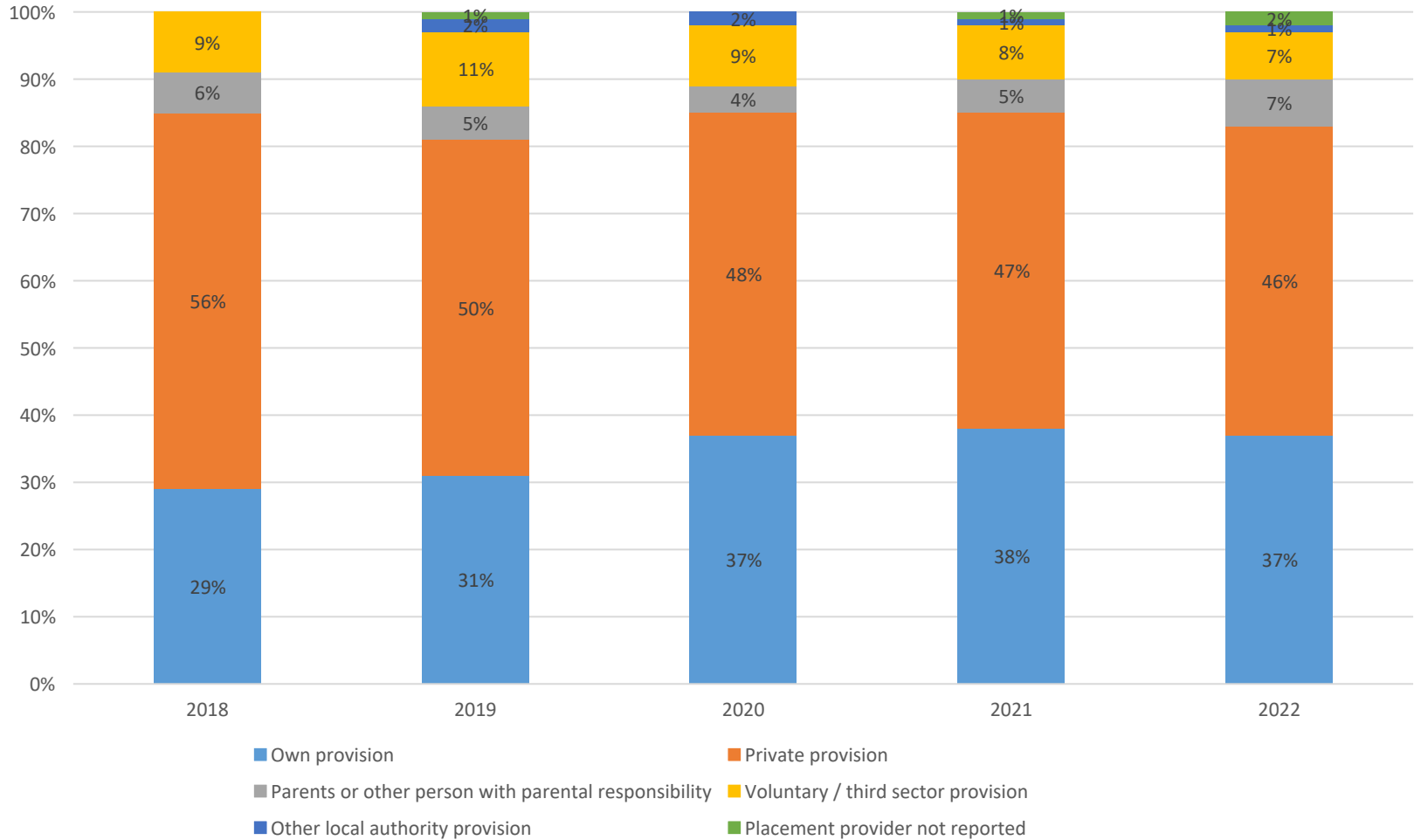


% of Buckinghamshire CLA by Placement Type



- Secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation
- Foster placements
- Parents or other person with parental responsibility
- Placed for adoption
- Other type of placement

% of Buckinghamshire CLA by Provider Type



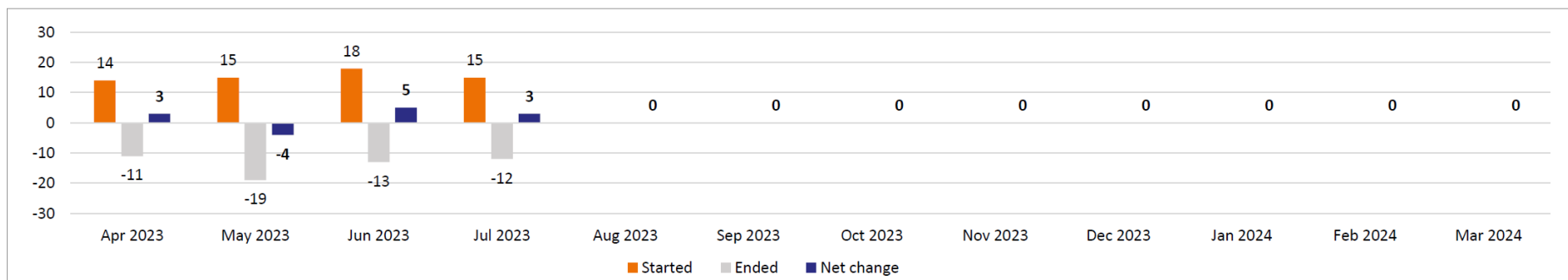
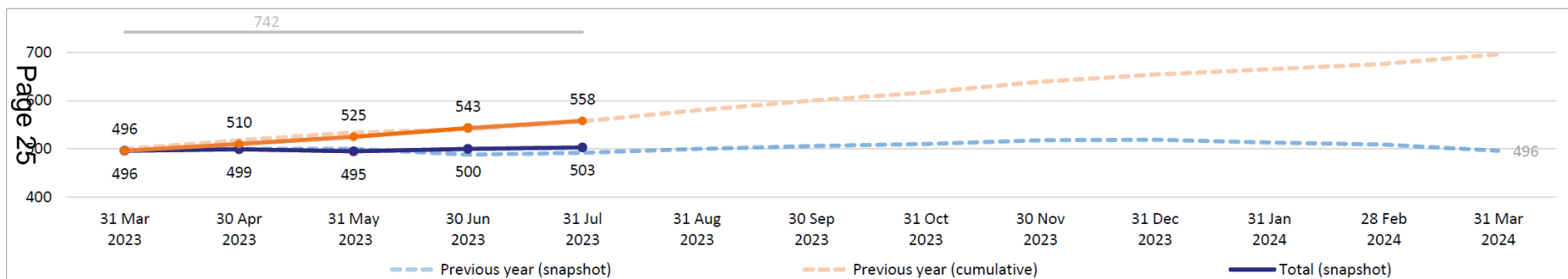


Current Position and Challenges



Number of CLA

1. As at the end of July, our number of CLA was 503.
2. The rate of CLA per 10,000 children aged 0-17 in Buckinghamshire at the end of July is 41 compared to 60 in the South East (Q3 2022/23). If our rate was as high as the South East level of 60 per 10,000 children, this would equate to 742 looked after children (which would equate to an additional 239 children).
3. Although our number of CLA has remained circa 500 for a number of years, it is important to note that our cohort of CLA is extremely volatile as children are continually entering or leaving care. For example, since April 2023, 62 children have become looked after and 55 have ceased to be.



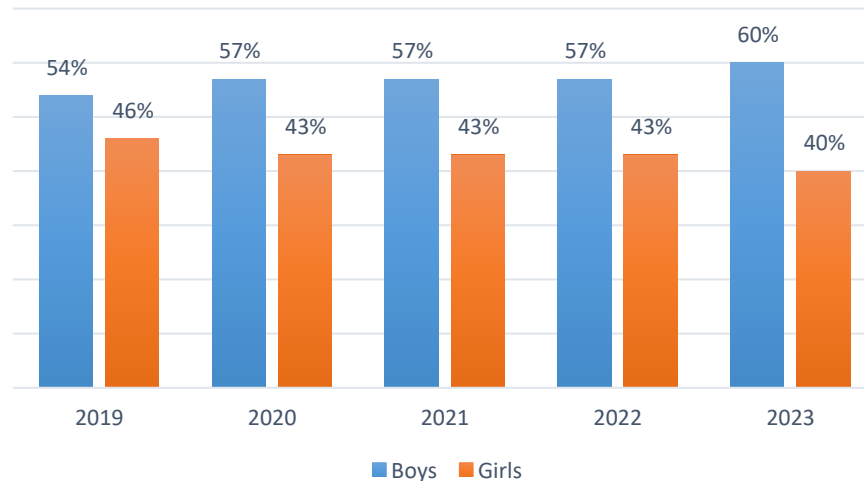
All information in this report is from the Children's Social Care System LCS. Data extracted from LCS on the 01 August 2023 and excludes all children over the age of 18.

Profile of CLA

1. Within our CLA population the gender demographic has changed significantly from an 8% to 20% difference in gender between boys and girls, with males now making up 60% of CLA.
2. In addition, an increase in the average age of the care population, particularly boys, is one of the most significant recent changes in the cohort. The significant increase in 16- and 17-year-old males is attributable to the increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
3. Adolescents are now the largest and fastest growing age cohort in the care population and so a system which was designed to meet the needs of younger children is now needing to adapt to a different set of risks and needs.

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Gender profile of CLA



Age profile of Buckinghamshire boys looked after

Age	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	3%	6%	4%	4%	2%
1 – 4	11%	10%	11%	11%	6%
5 – 9	15%	14%	15%	15%	11%
10 – 15	45%	41%	43%	44%	37%
16 – 17	26%	29%	27%	26%	43%

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

1. Buckinghamshire Council has now, along with all other local authorities, been mandated to take UASC when they are referred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).
2. The Council is also now required to continue to receive referrals until it reaches 0.1% of the child (0-18) population (124 individuals for Buckinghamshire) compared to the previous ask of 0.07%, 89 individuals for Buckinghamshire.
3. At the time of writing, the Service supports 73 UASC, an increase from 30 in April 2022. In addition, the service is also supports a further 89 unaccompanied individuals over the age of 18.
4. In response to the significant increase, we have created a specialist UASC team with the skills required to support this unique and increasing cohort of young people seeking asylum.
5. These decisions by central government are having a significant impact directly and indirectly on the Council's budgets. The direct impacts are on placement costs and on subsistence payments. Indirectly, the impact on placement availability for all children has and continues to decrease supply.

Placements for CLA

1. Since October 2021, it has become increasingly difficult to find placements, particularly but not limited to children aged 12 plus with complex need. As a result, this has affected the overall % of our CLA placed in foster care and the number of children placed with a Buckinghamshire Council foster carer.
2. During the last 2 years we have also seen a decline in the number of people willing to be foster carers.

	% of CLA placed in foster care	Number of CLA placed with an inhouse foster carer
May 2021	69%	171
May 2022	67%	164
May 2023	58%	138

3. Conversely, we now have three of our own children's homes (14 beds) within the county providing a safe home for our CLA. Building on the success of our current homes, we plan to open additional homes in the future as detailed later in the presentation. In addition, we have also recently opened our first parent and child assessment centre (4 bed) to ensure that parents who require residential assessments can remain within the county.

Current Pressures (1)

Workforce

A lack of registered managers for Ofsted semi-independent placements has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of residential placements available. It is now taking 4 to 6 weeks to find a placement, and there is usually only one option which can lead to children being placed a significant distance from home. We are anticipating that the shortage of registered managers will impact on the number of semi-independent providers who are able to meet the more stringent Ofsted registration requirements which come into effect by October 2023, this will lead to closures, less placement options for 16+ and increased placement costs. In addition, availability of domiciliary carers and residential care home workers has led to

- significant delays in domiciliary care packages being delivered with subsequent impact on the waiting lists for children requiring respite at our residential respite units.
- local and national providers closing or reducing the number of children they can offer placements to which, in turn, increases competition.
- emergency residential placements being impossible to find for any child 12+ and it is now taking on average 4 to 6 weeks to identify a suitable placement.

Demand outstripping supply

As a result of the diminishing supply of placements, there is increased demand and competition in respect of finding suitable accommodation and care for our Looked After Children. Placement costs across the board have increased significantly, a specific example of this is unregistered provisions now cost between £15,000 and £60,000 per week, dependent on the level of risk and staffing required.

Current Pressures (2)

Unregistered provisions

Prior to last year, this Council had never placed a young person in unregistered provision, and it is always our intention not to do this. However, as the availability of placements for the most complex children and young people became virtually non-existent, this has led the Council and all other local authorities in the country to be faced with using provision that is not Ofsted registered for some under 16-year-olds.

Some of our children have been in unregistered provision for longer than we would like, and they are our most complex high-risk children. All of whom have carefully planned arrangements that are monitored and agreed by the Service Director. Placement searches have continued with over 140 Independent Fostering Agencies and 550 residential placements contacted but no formal offers received. The impact being:

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- Children are held in a transient position whilst placement searches continue.
- Children can experience disruption to their education due to the duration of the provision being unclear.
- Engaging with external services (i.e., CAMHS) can be challenging due to the transient nature of the provision.
- There is an additional burden on social care budgets to fund food, clothing and activities which would ordinarily have been covered by placement costs.

Secure accommodation

Children who are a significant risk to themselves or others meet the criteria for secure accommodation. The secure estate has faced significant challenges for the last 3 years, the waiting list for beds has been at 70+ each week with 1 or 2 vacancies. We have been advised by the secure estate that some of our children are too high risk to meet the criteria for a secure bed. For the children who we have successfully placed in a secure bed it has taken on average 6 weeks to identify a bed.

Current Pressures (3)

Placement Stability

This in the main, impacted upon by a change in the child's needs/risks which the care providers do not feel able to meet or they are concerned about the impact of the child's behaviours/risks on their Ofsted judgement. Residential providers and foster carers are aware that there are more children than placements available so they can choose which children they wish to care for.

Therefore, more children are experiencing placement moves and there are limited options available for complex children with carers/providers being aware that they can choose less challenging/complex children.

Reduction in the number of inpatient mental health beds

There are a limited number of specialist provisions across the country who, if they have capacity, will offer placements for those under 16. No providers are offering residential placements for children aged 16+ so we are using semi-independent placements to solve this challenge, this however does not always reduce the level of risk and we are not able to provide care in these placements. This means Looked After Children are not placed in provisions where their complex mental health needs are met, which can lead to multiple short term hospital admissions and/or children being placed in placements who do not have the skills/knowledge/experience to meet their needs.

Access to social housing

Housing colleagues are reporting a 65% increase in referrals for social housing over the last 12 months. This will impact on the availability of local placements as they become full of care leavers who are ready and able to live independently.



Future Priorities



Our future priorities (1)

Buckinghamshire Children's Services is currently assessing the logistical and financial viability of:

1. **Increasing our local residential capacity** through in-house development and increasing our cross regional project beds, whilst exploring other alternative residential options including a secure unit.
2. **Developing a residential academy** to address the challenges in the recruitment and retention of residential staff.
3. **Increasing the post 18 offer of accommodation for UASCs** to offer a variety of accommodation and support options whilst they await the outcome of their asylum claims that negate the need for them to remain in expensive external placements.
4. **Improving the stability and support to foster carers, special guardians, and adopters** by developing a dedicated placement support and life story team to a consistent offer of life story work to all children with a permanency plan of adoption, special guardianship, or long-term fostering alongside improved training and support from the fostering support team.

Our future priorities (2)

5. **Building on the work with the fostering support service** to ensure the offer we provide to the carers matches or improves the offers they receive from independent fostering agencies. This includes high levels of support from their allocated social workers, CAMHS consultations, life story work team, joint cross-service training, enhanced training offer, increased financial package, access to PAM assist.
6. **Reviewing our current recruitment and communications plan** to ensure we are maximising the recruitment options for both fostering and adoption.
7. **Enhancing the package of support provided to children placed in unregistered provision** and ensure there is senior management oversight of risks.
8. **Reviewing the threshold for service provision** in the Children with Disabilities service to ensure that services are consistently provided based on the needs of the child.

Questions?

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Children's Services Principal Social Worker Annual Report 2022 - 2023



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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of activities undertaken within the Children's Services Principal Social Worker (PSW) role between April 2022 - March 2023. During November 2022 and March 2023, the PSW role remained vacant; however, the focus on quality assurance, workforce development and learning as well as recruitment and retention of staff remained a high priority for the service.

Please see a summary of the key headlines below:

1. Sustaining service delivery to keep children safe whilst continuing to drive forward improvements.
2. Streamlined quality assurance programme to include evidence of audit activity across all areas of Children's Services, such as SEN, LADO and feedback from children and families, as well as engagement of all senior leaders in auditing casework.
3. A total of 344 case file audits were completed with 2 escalations. Neither escalation derived from any immediate risk of significant harm to a child/young person.
4. 9 out of the 11 audit tool categories demonstrate an improvement in grading, and 2 areas remained the same as the 2021-2022 annual audit findings.
5. Bespoke audit and dip sample activity of 215 children to support an understanding of the increase in demand being experienced in Child Protection work; this included looking at children subject to a Child Protection (CP) Plan for whom the presenting risk is in relation to Contextual Safeguarding (15 cases), Quality of Child and Family Assessments (100 children), Children subject to a CP Plan who were previously subject to a Child in Need (CIN) Plan (50 children) and children subject to a CP Plan who have previously received support from the Family Support Service (50 children).
6. A focus on recruitment and retention in the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) Academy to ensure we can support and nurture our home-grown Social Workers. In 2022-2023, 39 Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) were recruited into the ASYE Academy, of which 37 continue to work within our front line teams.
7. We continue to take part, with our colleagues in Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes, and Central Bedfordshire in the Step up to Social Work programme, with each Local Authority giving places to 5 students.

Despite continued challenges regarding recruitment and retention of social workers and increased complexity, Buckinghamshire Children's Services continue to work hard to build on the significant improvements made. We remain solely focused on ensuring our children and families receive the best possible service and every child has an opportunity to thrive in their family setting.

Recommendations

1. Support embedding of agreed practice methodology approach which is underpinned by our core principles of practice.
2. Build on existing QA framework to include feedback from children and families and “lived experience” training and development opportunities for staff.
3. Increase evidence of impact of learning and development through case work examples which demonstrate improved outcomes for children and families.
4. Support staff within the wider Children’s Services Transformation Programme.
5. Recruitment and retention of staff continues to be a key area of improvement, and will continue to remain an important focus for the PSW alongside HR colleagues.
6. Gather workforce voice to support highlighting areas of strength and development for the organisation.



Introduction and Background

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of the report is to provide a progress summary on the work of the PSW and the PSW Team. The report offers an insight into the work we have undertaken to promote and improve the quality of social work practice in 2022–2023 and outlines priority areas of work to be undertaken in 2023–2024.

Introduction

I have been part of Children’s Services in Buckinghamshire since 2018. It is with great pride that I continue to have the opportunity to not only work with one of the most dedicated, committed team of Practitioners, Leaders and Partners I have had the privilege to collaborate with but most importantly, to be able to continue the job I started when I joined, which is to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families in Buckinghamshire.

This report is both a record of progress made in Children’s Services and a recognition of the work undertaken to promote and improve the quality of social work practice in Buckinghamshire and ultimately, an improvement in the lives of the children and families we support.

All staff in Children’s Services have worked with exceptional commitment this past year to continue their support for the children and families of Buckinghamshire. This support is made all the more effective as we collectively pull together across teams, the wider council and our partner agencies, in recognition of our collective vision.

Thank you everyone who has contributed, your dedication is commendable.



Amanda Andrews
Principal Social Worker

Background

In 2011, Professor Eileen Munro in her review of child protection, recommended that each local authority should designate a PSW. A person identified as a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice development within the local authority. The vision for the role was to be a conduit between front line practitioners and senior management, taking responsibility for relating the views of social workers to all levels of management, whose decisions have a direct impact on the work of front-line staff and in turn affect the outcomes for the children and families we support. Munro's vision was for the role of the PSW to act as 'a bridge' between front line practice and senior managers, ensuring 'better communication' and a route to healthy challenge of decisions being made. In addition, Munro saw the role one of championing best practice, increasing reflexivity in practice, reducing bureaucratic processes that impede development and progress and ultimately support social workers to be the best they can be ensuring better outcomes for the children and families we support.

In Buckinghamshire, the vision for the PSW includes:

- Being an advocate for children and social work professionals alike.
- Being visible and accessible across the organisation.
- Having a broad knowledge base on safeguarding.
- Leading and overseeing excellent social work practice.
- Embedding research into our practice and assessments across Children's Services.
- Ensuring the child / young person remains at the centre of the work we undertake.
- Promoting partnership working in line with the core principle of Working Together to Safeguard Children.
- Developing a learning culture across the organisation.
- Being part of a regional network that supports retention, recruitment and practice by way of collaboration and sharing.



Role of the PSW and the PSW Team

Following improvements made throughout 2021-2022 in which Buckinghamshire Children's Services moved to 'requires improvement to be good' following an Ofsted inspection, work continued to embed improved practice. Although there was a gap where the PSW role was vacant between November 2022 and March 2023, a relentless focus remained on ensuring quality assurance work remained a high priority and learning opportunities were provided to staff.

The PSW vacancy made it challenging to fulfil all aspects of the role and there was a need to focus on key aspects critical to service delivery including:

- Recruitment and retention of Social Workers
- Development of existing audit programme
- Continued learning for staff to improve practice

Principal Social Work Team

The Principal Social Worker for Buckinghamshire has the responsibility to lead, develop and oversee social work practice within Children's Services, ensuring that the best quality service is provided. The team is made up of 4 elements: the ASYE Academy, Practice Development Team, Workforce Development Team and LCS Training and Support Team.

The Practice Development Team

The PSW manages Practice Development Workers who support the delivery of audits and inhouse learning events. This ensures best practice is embedded throughout the service offering learning and development opportunities to the workforce linked to audit findings.

The ASYE Academy

The ASYE Academy continues to grow from strength to strength. It is expected that those recruited to join Buckinghamshire in the Academy will go on to be recruited into vacant posts in the teams halfway through their ASYE year, moving to positions where their skills are best suited. This is a "grow your own" model, and the quality of practice for those who come through the academy is of a high standard. A recent amendment to the programme reflects the increased complexity of families that are being worked with, and the need for NQSW's to be "resilient" and "well prepared" for the reality of Social Work. This offers space to develop curiosity, partnership working, crisis management and risk management whilst observing and working alongside some of our most skilled social work practitioners, prior to commencing direct work themselves. In 2022-2023, 39 NQSWs were recruited into the ASYE Academy, with 37 continuing to work within our front line teams.



The Workforce Development Team

The Workforce Development Team plan the training calendar of events to staff across Children's Services. They seek out opportunities to engage with training providers to ensure the best quality training is offered to our workforce. The training is linked not only to those themes identified via audit activity but also through any wider learning. The combination of external and internal providers has continued to grow enabling a variety of learning methods.

The LCS Training and Support Team

The LCS Training and Support Team provides training to all levels of staff on our LCS information management system, including but not limited to an induction session and other modules dependant on an individual's role and the team that they belong to.

One year on

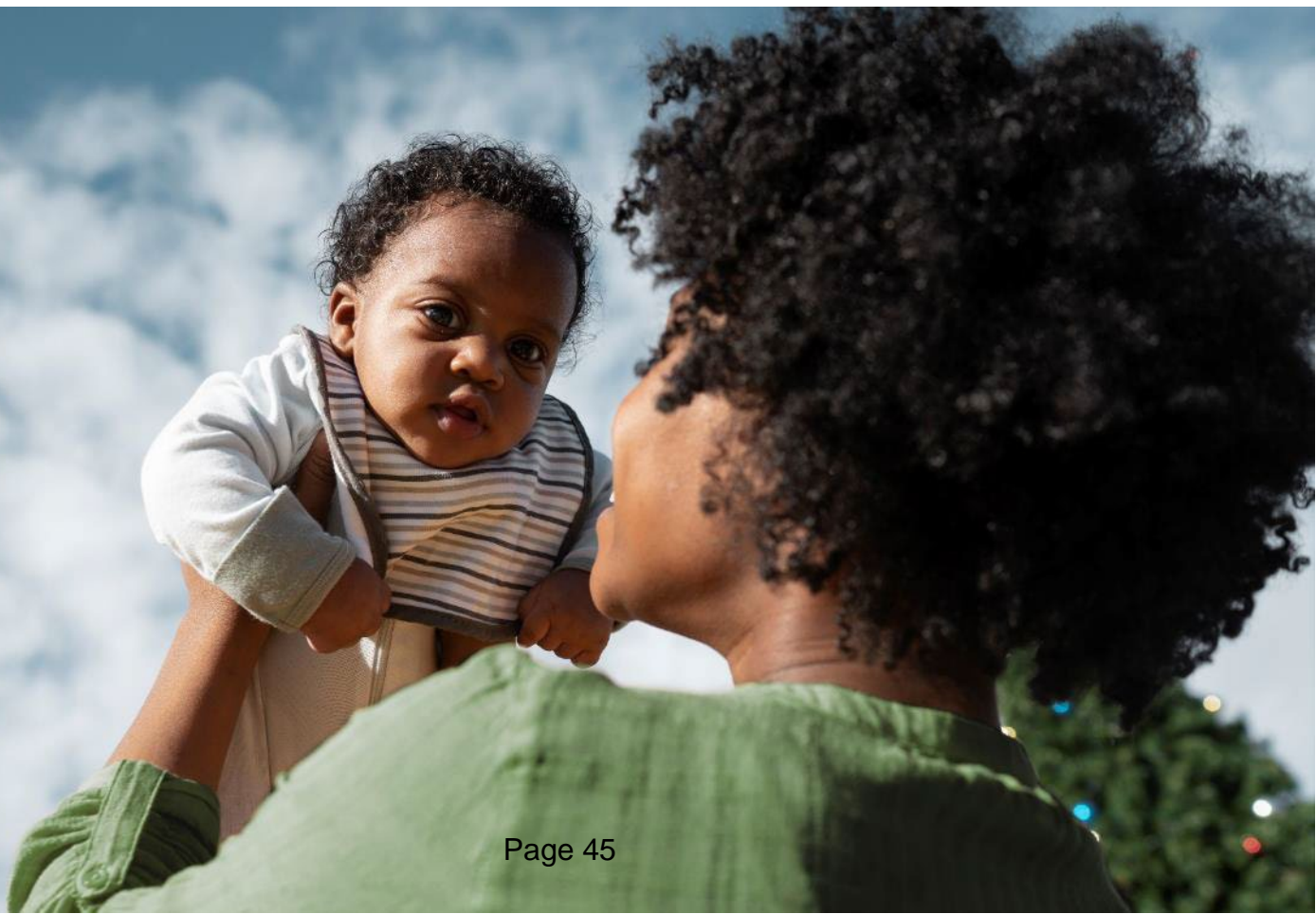
The "Independent review of children's social care" published in May 2022¹, where the impact of cost and stability for families was noted and has led to a government consultation, demonstrates the national challenges faced by local authority social care services. Buckinghamshire's Children's Services including social care has embarked on a transformation programme which aims to ensure national recommendations are considered and most importantly ensure that children receive a consistent, purposeful and child centred approach wherever they are on their journey of need from early help through to being in care.

As part of the wider transformation plan for children's services, one of the key priorities is to ensure a consistent approach to practice is adopted and embedded which is well understood by all staff across children's workforce and is clearly evidenced in how staff work with the whole family. Approaches to families need to be systemic in their responses, giving consideration and due care to their experience of existing / past relationships as well as their social contexts and lived experiences.

¹ [Independent review of children's social care - final report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/105421/independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-final-report.pdf)

Underpinning any chosen approach will be our core principles of practice which are outlined below:

1. A focus on relationships – *Ensuring practitioners are continuously forging strong connections with the families and communities they work with, and able to be supported to build trusting relationships.*
2. A systemic approach - *This is a way of acting, thinking and viewing the world, which focuses on relationships and recognises that individuals are always embedded in their social context.*
3. An evidence-based approach – *Ensuring practitioners underpin their work through evidence-based literature, research, or professional judgement.*
4. A multi-disciplinary approach – *Recognising the significance of working together and the ability to provide support from within our services rather than a referral elsewhere increasing access for families.*
5. Continued training and support for staff – *Recognising the importance of revisiting and ensuring the organisation and leadership is clear on.*
6. A cycle of learning, testing of learning and evidence of improved outcomes for children and families – *ensuring our frontline managers and staff fully understand the ask in terms of practice and that this is monitored and evaluated through QA activity.*



The increase in demand, complexity and the difficulty being experienced nationally in recruiting and retaining social workers has continued to present unique challenges. Challenges which have encouraged us to think about how we work with our children and families differently, but also how we engage with frontline staff to have continued dialogue about high quality practice alongside the ever-important focus on how we support our staff in light of increased complexity and demand pressures.

Figures for 2022 published by the Department for Education show the number of professionals in Children’s Social Work has fallen for the first time since data collection began in 2017 – despite rising need. The figures show 5,400 social workers left the profession in 2022, a 9% rise on the previous year and the highest number since 2017. Vacancies are also at a record high of 7,900, a 21% rise on 2021.²

Recruitment and retention of staff is a key area for improvement and work is well under way to ensure we focus on the wellbeing of existing staff with regular wellness sessions, the introduction of regular learning and development sessions and PSW drop-in sessions to ensure the voice of frontline workers are heard by the corporate organisation. Our transformation programme is a further opportunity to consider how we attract and retain staff within the Workforce Development and Culture workstream of the programme.

Our ambition and aim is to have a stable, healthy and supported workforce who feel listened to and valued within the wider organisational context.



² <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-s-social-work-workforce>

Wellness Week as part of our recruitment and retention strategy

Buckinghamshire Children's Services 'Wellness Weeks' were born out of National Social Work week 2022; following daily Wellness activities offered to staff across Children's Services, along with promoting other events taking place nationally celebrating Social Work. However, this quickly became a unique offer to retain existing and attract new staff into Buckinghamshire.

Acknowledgement that the development of compassion fatigue across the workforce is a reality was another driver in promoting access to well-being activities as part of the working day; to increase access and remind staff their health and well-being is a priority. Coined by historian, Carla Joinson (1990), compassion fatigue impacts social work professionals daily by the nature of the work:

'Compassion fatigue is an overwhelming mental and physical exhaustion brought on by feeling the pain, stress, and other emotions of the people they are helping. The more empathetic and open they are to the suffering of others, the more likely they are to feel that suffering themselves. Compassion fatigue in social work can be caused by exposure to a single case of trauma or from residual emotion that builds over years.'

University of Kentucky College of Social Work (UKCOSW); 2023.



An annual impact report completed in April 2023 concluded that the investment in staff wellbeing is also a positive driver in recruitment to Children's Services.

While mental health related absence has continued to rise gradually across the whole of the council over the last year, it is declining compared to previous months over the last year.

In addition to this, the council's staff "Together Survey" includes the statement: ***"I feel Buckinghamshire Council cares about employee wellbeing"***. 72% of staff overall agreed or strongly agreed with this statement in the latest survey. Staff have fed back they value the fact the organisation encourages and promotes personal wellbeing.

Promoting Wellness Weeks externally to prospective employees has also been successful. In November 2022 Childrens Social Care representatives attended the Compass Fair Recruitment event to promote working for Buckinghamshire Children's Services. As part of the event, a talk was given to those in attendance about the importance of self-care as a social care professional and shared examples of the positives of Wellness Weeks. this was reported in an article in Social Work Today. In March 2023, in an interview process for Childrens Social Care, 3 external candidates stated they had "heard about the wellness offer" and this was part of what made them "want to apply".

Partnership collaboration with BSCP

Our partnership working with the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) has been pivotal in our learning from serious incidents. Our collaborative work has ensured learning across the sector is shared to ensure practice improvements are identified. In addition to this, the BSCP supported in the Practice Development Team's multi-agency audits which were carried out to support improved local understanding of the national increase in Child Protection Plans. This specifically identified a need to consider the impact and engagement of Mental Health services for adults and children at the earliest possibility.

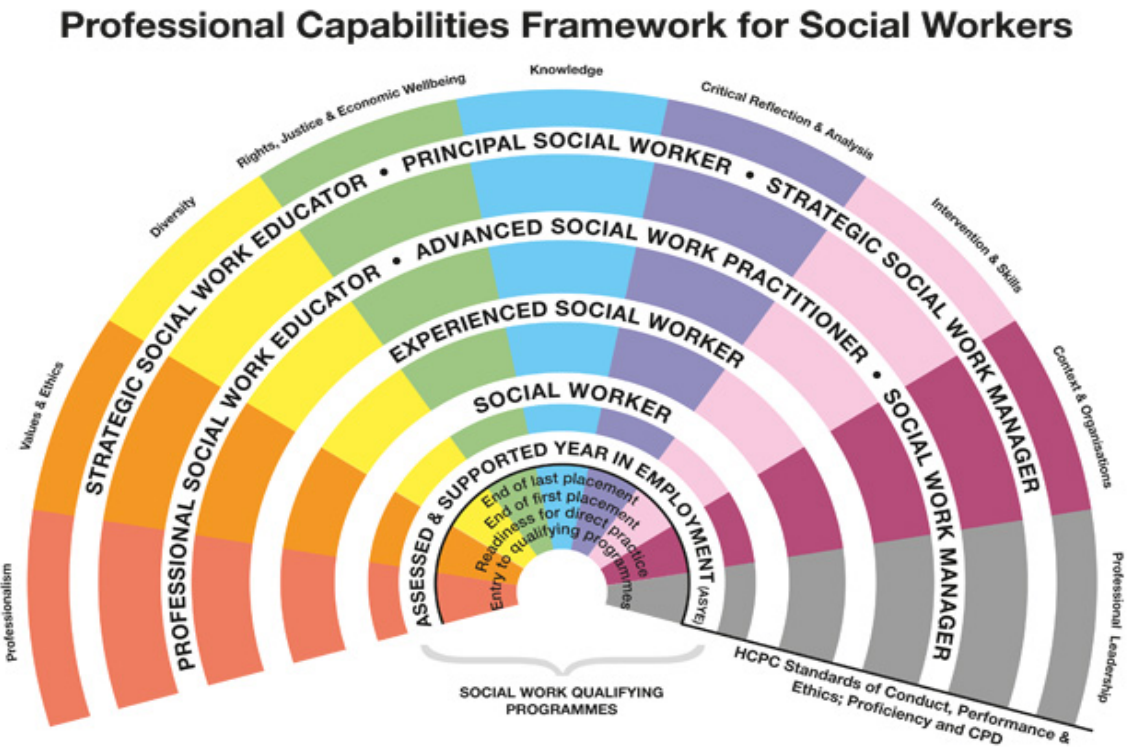
Buckinghamshire Children's ASYE Academy

The Academy has been a successful model for supporting the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme and career opportunities for our service. The Academy provides a beacon for professional standards and supports a model of continued learning within the organisation.

Within the Academy, the support needs of individual newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) are clearly identified and recorded, and plans are in place to meet these individual needs from the start of the ASYE programme. This is outlined in the NQSW's individual Records of Support and Progressive Assessment / Portfolio of evidence including 3, 6, and 12-month reviews with their assessors and updated Personal Development Plans. NQSWs completing their ASYE have to provide evidence for their assessor in the form of Critical Reflective Logs, 2 of which are formally marked by Bucks New University, Direct Observations and Client and Professional feedback.

Our programme consists of teaching opportunities to link theory to practice enabling the NQSW to consolidate learning as a Social Worker. For their first 12 weeks of induction NQSWs can shadow teams and “follow the child’s journey” from MASH through to Children in Care and Placements teams. At week 13, NQSWs are allocated case work from the geographical area that they will move to from the Academy whilst still being supported by the Academy’s Advanced Social Work Practitioners for a further 12 weeks.

During their first 6 months following the initial 12-week induction, our NQSWs will complete casework with a protected caseload to ensure that they are not overloaded or overwhelmed. For the next 6 months they will work within a front-line social work team. The model is flexible, in that the Academy can retain staff for a little longer if required and based on individual need which is assessed by the Advanced Practitioners. All NQSW casework held in the Academy is regularly overseen by the Advanced Practitioners including direction and oversight from the Team Manager.



The ASYE programme ensures that the knowledge and skills statement (KSS) and the professional capabilities framework (PCF) underpin NQSW professional practice. They are continually referencing throughout the portfolio and embedded in our teaching sessions during induction and program.

NQSWs receive regular reflective supervision (i.e., weekly for the first six weeks, fortnightly from six weeks to first six months and monthly thereafter). This is from a registered social

worker (Advanced Practitioner) who has demonstrable skills and experience in developing others. The focus is on learning and developing, critical reflection and supporting the NQSW to understand the links between theory and practice whilst supporting them to build the skills needed to practice social work. All of our NQSW's have 1 day per week that is protected learning and we have used this space to also meet with young people in our care, parents who have experienced our service, our family group conferencing team and contributions from the wider council like our legal colleagues.

In March 2023, a cohort of 12 NQSWs started in the Academy, which included 4 from the Step-Up programme. A further 8 social workers joined us in May from overseas taking our current cohort up to 20. Also, in May we saw 13 from our November 2022 cohort leave the Academy and join the Help and Protection and Assessment Teams.

In 2022-2023, 39 NQSWs were recruited into the ASYE Academy, of which 37 continue to work in our front-line teams. Our ambition to recruit a cohort size of 60 in 2022-2023 was achieved through international recruitment and bespoke events to attract NQSWs into the Academy.

A session was held with our overseas workers who were recruited two years ago to obtain feedback on how to improve the way in which we recruit and induct social workers from our global community. This consultation led to a better understanding of the experiences of our workers from overseas which will enhance our induction process and also led to this cohort of overseas workers offering to buddy our new workers.

The NQSWs also have opportunities to engage with senior members including our Director of Children's Services and our Service Director for Social Care, who took the time to talk about service direction, how proud they are of Social Workers and Managers across the service for continuing to meet the needs of Buckinghamshire's children and families at a time of heightened demand and complexity.

We are proud of our learning opportunities created by those with lived experience. A young person from one of our children's homes delivered a talk on 'language that cares' and two parents who have experienced the service have volunteered to come and speak with our NQSWs about the importance of good communication when working with families.

There is a continued focus on resilience, regular check ins, weekly group 1-1 supervision, and encouragement of buddy systems within the team as we know that, if nurtured, these support networks and relationships can form a lifeline for Social Workers throughout their careers. We have extended this to weekly catch-up meetings with the Advanced Practitioners within the Practice Development Team to ensure support and continuity of the ASYE programme whilst we recruit to vacancies.

Step up to Social Work Programme

Buckinghamshire Children’s Services form part of the Step up to Social Work Partnership where we collaborate with our partner agencies to support the fast track to social work programme.

Our current cohort consists of 20 Step Up students with the following allocations:

Buckinghamshire	5
Central Bedfordshire	5
Milton Keynes	5
Oxfordshire	5

18 students who started the cohort in January 2022 completed the 15-month programme in March 2023.

Department for Education meetings are held mainly during the application and onboarding process. Meetings are then as and when deemed necessary and are Countrywide. They provide an opportunity for feedback to the Department for Education and shared learning across the partnerships about the processes. The next DFE cohort (cohort 8) will start in January 2024 and run through to March 2025.

Workforce Planning and Development

Our Workforce Development Team (WDT) is made up of a senior training and support officer and a learning and development officer. The WDT have worked exceptionally hard this past year to ensure effective delivery of training and development to all staff across the sector.

A total of 62 courses were organised by the WDT between April 2022 and March 2023 and these were attended by 976 delegates from Children’s Social Care. These can be seen in Appendix 1.

A total of 70 Making Research Count webinars were attended between April 2022 and March 2023 and these were attended by 448 staff members from Children’s Social Care. These can be seen in Appendix 2.

Audit themes for year 2022-2023 were identified and the WDT have been able to align our training offer to compliment the audit themes and learning developed through the audit outcomes (see Appendix 3). The programme is flexible enough to enable bespoke additional activity to be added in as and when needed.

The below table shows the number of internal sessions accessed between April 2022 and March 2023. These sessions are delivered by different individuals from within the PSW team.

Session Type	No of Sessions	Number Attended Sessions
Journal Club	5	268
Learning & Development	9	460
Principal Social Worker Sessions	8	361
Practice Educator Support Group	7	60

Career Progression Panels

The Social Worker Career Progression scheme has been in place since May 2022 and has provided the opportunity for all Social Workers to progress from newly qualified to a Senior Social Worker, subject to evidencing the skills and capabilities required at each grade. A Panel meets to assess applications to progress through the career pathways and these will normally take place twice a year in May and November.

Practice Development Team

Throughout 2022-2023, the Practice Development (PD) Team has been involved in continued activity against learning outcomes identified via quality assurance work, as well starting up new initiatives.

In addition to the monthly Learning and Development Sessions, the PD Team delivered bespoke sessions to support workers within different parts of the service.

Weekly dip sampling for children in unregistered placements

From August 2022, weekly reviews of LCS case files have been undertaken to monitor how children in unregistered provisions/arrangements are being managed in their respective teams.

The focus of the dip samples included:

- Is the child being seen weekly?
- Are there any immediate risks due to the placement not being progressed?
- Quality of Management Oversights

Where needed, frontline teams were contacted by the PD Team directly to ensure any findings were followed up. It has been agreed a 6 monthly report will be produced to identify themes and support any learning.

Regular slots for less experienced staff in Child Protection Teams

It is recognised that it is a significant challenge to recruit experienced social workers, and a workforce that lacks experience can create additional pressures on frontline staff. In response to this, the PD team deliver 2 weekly sessions across all Help and Protection teams. One

which is called a “Reflective Support Session” which follows a group supervision model where staff can bring cases that they feel “stuck” with. The second are support sessions with a focus on supporting staff to understand processes, such as Legal Planning Meetings, how and what to refer to placements team, how to write analysis and court processes etc. In addition, some of these sessions also cover topics such as effective time management and how to manage day to day workload when a crisis happens.

Bespoke sessions for teams

The team have also led on bespoke pieces of work for a number of different teams, such as working with adolescents and trauma informed language for care leaving services. In addition, coaching support is being offered to a specific supervision group in the Assessment team to gain traction in improved quality of assessments.

Independent reviews

The PD Team also completed 6 independent reviews in 2022-2023. Some of these which came from longstanding complaints and resulted in resolutions for families without the need for a formal stage 2. Immediate themes are identified and shared back with workers, and wider themes are collated to inform service wide learning. The types of reviews are included in the table below.

Date	Type of review	Outcome
19.04.22	DBS information request	Responded to Section 40 of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (SVGA) 2006
03.07.22	MARFs for self-harm audit project	43 MARFs submitted for self-harm analysed – findings report drafted and shared with BSCP
19.07.22	Neglect	Findings from report shared with BSCP. Multi-agency Learning Event took place in Nov 22
19.09.22	Domestic Homicide Review Meeting request for an Independent Management Review	Completed report to Safeguarding Panel for assurance work
05.12.22	Unexplained injury to a non-mobile baby	Case review on three focussed questions shared with BSCP, suggested joint learning between CSC and health professionals
10.01.23	Multi-agency working/understanding cultural needs and values	File review alongside multi agency network, report drafted with input from mother and network. Shared with professionals to agree next steps in supporting mother and identifying learning (service wide training has been agreed for specific community group)



LCS Training and Support

The LCS Training and Support Team consists of the team manager and 3 LCS Training and Support Officers. The main aim of the team is to support and develop the Children & Families LCS system. This includes:

- Ensuring LCS is aligned to our service vision, values, and strategic objectives.
- Responding to user requests for support on LCS, analysing the problem and advising on a resolution.
- Advising on most efficient way to complete complex LCS tasks, and if a resolution needs to be escalated to ICT, service desk requests are sent to ICT to ensure prompt and efficient responses are received.
- Supporting new users to consolidate training and relate learning to practice.
- Responding to changes in processes through training and support.

The team also is responsible for ensuring data quality by:

- Analysing and amending records to create a single record where a duplicate record has been identified.
- Analysing, gathering and entering information to bring cases up to date in relation to missing data
- Analysing data from Children’s Information Team (BIT generated) reports identifying and amending records that are incorrect
- Liaising and completing cases with multiple involvements to resolve issues across teams.
- Maintaining records and produce up to date information for reports as required.

The LCS Training & Support Team have been working collaboratively with the Practice Development Team and Social Work Academy in driving best practice ensuring our workforce have a clear understanding of recording on LCS.

They have continued to support our new finance system since it went live in 2021, and deal with issues that are both known and unknown. The Team are now working towards delivering the new Occupational Therapy workspace in June 2023 with a view to being online in July 2023.

This team will also be fundamental to the wider Childrens Services Transformation Programme in terms of ensuring systems are aligned to any “new ways of working”.

Impact and Outcomes

Quality Assurance and Thematic Audits

Between April 2022 and March 2023, 344 case file audits were completed across the Family Support Service and Children's Social Care, and 186 dip samples completed.

Of these 344 audits;

- 3% (11) "exceeded good"
- 70% (242) "met good"
- 26% (91) "did not meet good"

Of the 91 audits that "did not meet good", 2 were escalated to the relevant HOS for remedial action due to drift and delay. No children were identified as being in unsafe circumstances or required an immediate visit.

Our "Quality Assurance and Continued Improvement Framework" [Quality Assurance Improvement Framework \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://proceduresonline.com) underpinned by an audit activity schedule provides an overview of the audit activity due to take place for the forthcoming months.

The framework is a multi-layered approach of quality assurance activity to deliver improved and sustained outcomes for children and families. The approach includes a range of activity, including case file auditing, dip sampling, bespoke focused auditing based on identified need and 'check and challenge' sessions with front facing social work teams.

Although forward planned, the audit schedule has been flexible enough to enable the service to respond to any specific needs which may require additional resource to review and be of significant importance at that moment in time.

Following a review in February 2023, the audit framework has been separated into phases to support understanding of how the cycle of auditing and reporting works.

- **Phase 1: Pre-Audit Data Structure** - 1 Week Period (5 working days)
- **Phase 2: Auditing Window** - 3 Week Period (15 working days) (This will include where an auditor feels a case needs to be escalated due to risk)
- **Phase 3: Feedback from auditors, Moderation, feedback from families & Management Oversight** - 1 Week Period (5 working days)
- **Phase 4: Escalations**, as soon as cases are submitted, they are reviewed and escalations *may* be identified at this stage too (where an auditor has not escalated but someone in QSP has following review a discussion will take place with auditor.
- **Phase 5: Audit Reporting** - 2 Week Period / 1 Week for Written Report and 1 Week for QA (10 working days)
- **Phase 6: Learning & Development** - 1 Calendar Month (25 working days)

In total the cycle of allocating an audit to having a report ready would be approx. a 6-week window.

This review in February 2023 enabled the service to focus on building on the foundation of the programme and we introduced;

- A more sophisticated dashboard which enables data to be reviewed by service area, team and worker within a week of the audit window closing.
- Dip sample audits with specific questions have been allocated to the Service Manager for both IRO and CPA service. This provides additional oversight and evidence of impact of IRO and CPA footprint and is included as part of the dashboard reporting.
- A proportion of cases that are audited are selected and families are contacted to gain family feedback which forms part of the reporting.
- All senior leaders now audit case work alongside the practitioner, up to and including the DCS.
- Ongoing programme of refresher training and training is delivered every month to all new managers.
- Quality assurance that takes place in other parts of children's services is collated on a quarterly basis to identify service wide themes, this includes SEN, LADO and YOS.
- Moderations continue to take place.

Training of Auditors and Moderations

In order to successfully implement our revised auditing programme, it was critical to train first line managers to understand what a good audit looks like and what the purpose of audits were within the framework. The training focuses on ensuring the audit concentrates on the impact of practice on the child's experience and provides tips for auditors on understanding how to write impact statements. There are tools to support auditors which are sent out along with the audit allocation email to support auditors. To assist auditors to truly embed this approach, further drop-in sessions are provided as an ongoing opportunity for auditors to clarify, reassure or raise points around their audit work. Work is underway to develop a training package that is consistent irrelevant of who delivers the training.

There is now a system where any new manager is flagged to ensure they attend the audit training within 2 months of their arrival. All Heads of Services and the DCS have also accessed the training to ensure auditing is consistent.

As of May 2023, we have 91 trained auditors with a further 9 new starters who will attend audit training in the coming months.

Audits completed between April 2022-March 2023

During the period between April 2022 and March 2023, full case file audits continued along a themed approach and looked at the following key areas:

MONTH	CSC AUDIT THEME	FSS AUDIT THEME
April	Strategy Discussions/Sec 47 & CSA	Step Up to Social Care
May	Father Involvement	Father Involvement
June	Exploitation/Contextual Safeguarding.	Assessment quality - naming risk and analytical
July	Children subject to CP - was progressing to ICPC most appropriate - could earlier support or alternative options been explored?	Network meetings - taking place & effectiveness
August	Learning Month	
September	Domestic Abuse	SMART plans - informed by analytical assessment
October	Analysis in Assessments & use of Chronologies	VOC and how this influences SMART planning
November	Smart planning	Honest conversations - naming & addressing risk with families
December	Learning Month	
January	No audits held to support move to new reporting framework	
February	Neglect	Case Summary Quality
March	Domestic Abuse	Management Oversight

All case file audits were undertaken collaboratively with case holding practitioners, using a generic audit tool now located in Forms on LCS. The cases were identified in advance of the activity, chosen at random from weekly data which is provided via the Business Information and Intelligence Team.

The audit will look at the last six months' worth of recording on casefiles with some discretion by the auditor to go back further depending on the complexity and need to understand the child's journey and decision making.

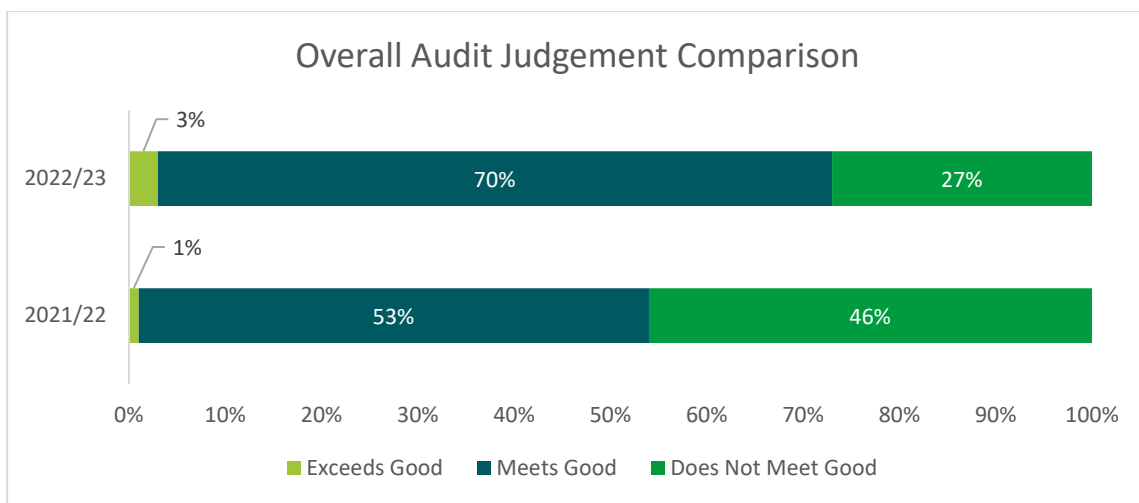
The parameters of the audit activity were:

- A meeting would be arranged with the case holding practitioner as soon as the auditor is allocated a case, to ensure that the audit was completed on time and undertaken collaboratively. If the practitioner was not available, the audit was undertaken with the manager. This was to ensure that an opportunity to reflect was made available with the practitioner and any findings could be triangulated.
- Any urgent/immediate safeguarding concerns that come to light during the audit are raised immediately with the line manager for the case, the Head of Service, and the Assistant Director of Quality Assurance.
- All twelve areas of the child's journey in the audit tool were required to be completed.

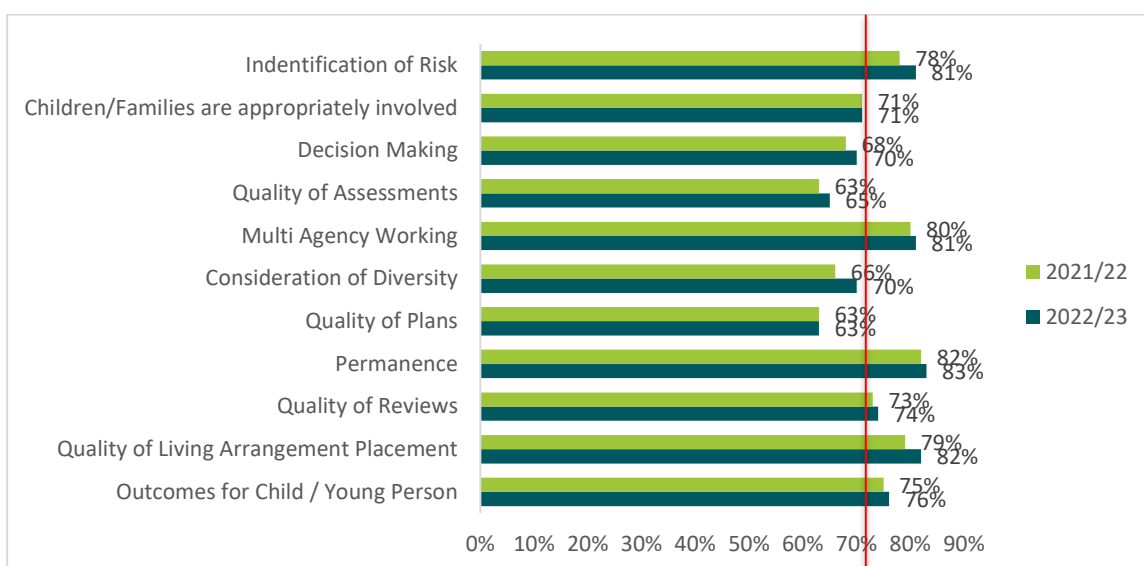
- Auditors undertaking the case file audits are trained in using the generic audit tool and provided with 'hints and tips' in writing a good quality audit based on judgment, evaluation and impact. Two good practice exemplars were provided to model the audit on, this has since increased to five.
- Completed audits (following moderation where applicable) were sent to managers and case holding practitioners for them to upload to the child's electronic file and add management oversight to address any actions identified in the audit.

Additionally, feedback was gathered from case holding practitioners whose cases were audited about their experience of the audit process and the learning they took from it

The below outlines overall year statistics in comparison to year 21-22.



The below outlines overall child's journey ratings from 21-22 to 22-23 for "meets good or better"



*Overall judgement average

Dip Sample Audit Themes

During the period between April 2022 and March 2023, dip sampling also continued along a themed approach and looked at the following key areas:

MONTH	DIP SAMPLE THEME
April	No dip samples completed
May	Child Development 0-5 years
June	Referrals that relate to teenagers (13-18yrs)
July	Impact of IRO footprint
Aug	LEARNING MONTH
Sept	Joint housing protocol
Oct	Direct Work
Nov	Engagement & Participation of Children in Care
Dec	Learning Month
Jan	No audits/ dip sampling held to support move to new reporting framework
Feb	Use of Reflective Supervision
March	Father/Other Significant Male Involvement

186 dip samples were completed during 2022-2023, and a bespoke piece of work took place which aimed to understand the local drivers to increased Child Protection Plans. Within this work audit and dip sampling activity was undertaken of 215 children. This included looking at children open to Child Protection Plans subject to Contextual safeguarding harm (15 cases), Quality of Child and Family assessment (100 children) Children subject to CP who were previously subject to CIN (50 children) and children subject to CP with previous FSS input (50 children).

Each themed dip sample audit tool is adapted for the audit theme each month to ensure specific data can be obtained to support analysis and learning from those audits.

The parameters of the audit activity are;

- Only those managers who have attended the case file audits training and subsequently completed at least one full file case audit were selected to complete a dip sample
- There was no expectation to meet with the case holding practitioner in order to complete the dip sample

- Any urgent/immediate safeguarding concerns that come to light during the audit are raised immediately with the line manager for the case, the Head of Service, and the Assistant Director of Quality Assurance.

Feedback from Auditees

Post completion of the audits, feedback is sought from the practitioners who held the cases at the time of the audit.

- Question 1: On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 not impactful at all – 10 very impactful) – How impactful was the audit activity in improving (your) practice?
- Question 2: Tell me about one thing you have taken away from the audit activity, that you will change in your practice which will have a positive impact on the child you are working with.
- Question 3: If there was one thing from the audit process you could change, what would it be?

It is positive to note that feedback from auditees has improved month on month, which can be attributed to the improved consistency of auditors.



Impact of this Work since April 2022

Following audit and learning

- Annual data on casefiles audited shows improvements in overall gradings and judgements by practice area have also improved, which can be attributed to the impact of learning and development following audit activity. 9/11 areas audited within the audit tool demonstrate an improvement in grading, and 2 areas remained the same as 21-22 annual audit findings
- Flexibility to target areas of high risk within the existing resource, such as unregistered placement and CP work
- Improved access to learning events
- Increased number of audit sections being rated as meets good across all areas of the child's journey
- Improved Management Oversight through check and challenge - evidenced through check and challenge minutes.
- Improved feedback from auditees - evidenced through monthly reports.
- Improved consistency of audits - evidenced through reduction in changes to judgement ratings at moderation stage.

Check and Challenge

As part of our Quality Assurance and Continuous Learning Framework, the Children's Social Care Service holds a weekly "Check and Challenge meetings". The meeting serves as an opportunity to review at team level, with team managers and assistant team managers, the performance information and quality assurance findings for that team. The forum explores strengths, weaknesses and the operational context whilst setting goals around improvement actions required and acknowledging good practice. Since being introduced in April 2021, check and challenge has led to some tangible improvements across teams and provided a greater depth of understanding about the conditions required to achieve consistently good practice, including improvements in consistency in use of management oversight guidance.



Reflections

Having represented Buckinghamshire Children's Services since 2018 I am continually amazed and encouraged to see that our staff continue to demonstrate the resilience and dedication to improvements for our children and young people and this must be applauded. I have had the privilege in that time of working with staff who were part of the service in 2018, continue to grow and journey with us along with new people joining us bringing new energy and purpose with them. As we move on from the pandemic and its impact on people's health, we still experience its impact on services and in the lives of our communities. It has been incredibly difficult at times to maintain service delivery with the same vigour and motivation and yet our workforce continues to deliver this.

Our 'wellness weeks' programme continues to support our staff with their wellbeing and the risk of compassion fatigue that can present itself with the relentlessness of the work at times. The feedback from our wellness weeks is positive and they are well received and utilised. It is worth noting that Buckinghamshire are innovators in this area of staff wellbeing, noted in the Regional PSW meeting. We have re-imagined our programme for our newly qualified social workers to ensure that they are equipped for the ever-changing societal landscape. The cost-of-living crisis and its impact on our communities must be understood to enable us to continue to assess and provide services equitably and with integrity.

I am energised going into 2023/24 as we continue to gather traction in our journey to ensure our practice is evidenced based and focussed on outcomes, and the improvement that is required is well underway. Our leadership continues to drive practice, and, as we embark on our change programme to improve services for children and families, we inject new motivations and energy into the workforce as our staff step up to engage in dialogue about transformation, and champion the change ahead.



Appendices

Appendix 1 - Courses delivered in Buckinghamshire between April 2022 and March 2023

Date	Training Course Title
05/04/2022	County Lines
06/04/2022	Serious Youth Violence
28/04/2022	Impact of Parental Mental Health
29/04/2022	Restorative Approaches
04/05/2022	Legal Planning Meetings
05/05/2022	Domestic Abuse
10/05/2022	SMART Care Plans
11/05/2022	Genogram
12/05/2022	Legal Planning Meetings
18/05/2022	Working with Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse
24/05/2022	Motivational Interviewing for Managers
08/06/2022	Life Story
09/06/2022	Legal Planning Meetings
14/06/2022	Section 47
16/06/2022	Impact of Trauma on Children
21/06/2022	Trilogy of Risk Toxic Trio
30/06/2022	Drug & Alcohol Awareness
06/07/2022	Working with Fathers & Other Significant Males
12/07/2022	Personal Safety
12 & 13/07/2022	Intra Familial CSA for Social Workers
19/07/2022	Culturally Competent Practice
21/07/2022	Motivational Interviewing for Non Managers
29/07/2022	Writing Research & Evidence Based Assessments
19/08/2022	Restorative Language Workshop
08/09/2022	Chronologies & Effective Writing
22/09/2022	Serious Youth Violence
27/09/2022	Domestic Abuse
04/10/2022	County Lines
13/10/2022	Genogram
14/10/2022	Restorative Approaches
19/10/2022	Autism Friendly Standards
19/10/2022	Life Story
20/10/2022	Restorative Language Workshop
03/11/2022	Impact of Trauma on Children
10/11/2022	Working with Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse
16/11/2022	Motivational Interviewing for Managers

17/11/2022	Drug & Alcohol Awareness
22/11/2022	Working with Racial & Ethnic Diversity
24/11/2022	Statement Writing
25/11/2022	Working with Fathers & Other Significant Males
30/11/2022	Culturally Competent Practice
06/12/2022	Impact of Parental Mental Health
07/12/2022	Section 47
07/12/2022	Breakaway Training for CWD
20/12/2022	Statement Writing
17 & 18/01/2023	Overview of Child Trafficking, Modern Slavery & Exploitation
20/01/2023	Trauma Informed & Relationship Based Practice
24/01/2023	Serious Youth Violence
31/01/2023	The Record Business
07/02/2023	Trilogy of Risk
09/02/2023	Breakaway Training for CWD
10/02/2023	Restorative Approaches
16/02/2023	Motivational Interviewing for Non Managers
21/02/2023	SMART Care Plans
22/02/2023	Autism Friendly Standards - Wycombe
28/02/2023	Personal Safety
03/03/2023	DOLs & MCA Module 1
08/03/2023	DOLs & MCA Module 1
16/03/2023	Working with Racial & Ethnic Diversity
17/03/2023	Neurodiversity & Child Exploitation
27/03/2023	Statement Writing
30/03/2022	Chronologies

Appendix 2 - Making Research Count (MRC) – Webinar Attendance between April 2022 and March 2023

Date	MRC Webinar Title
05/04/2022	Emotional Abuse
06/04/2022	Working With Domestic Abuse: Learning From Domestic Homicide Reviews
25/04/2022	Understanding Polish Women’s Experiences of Domestic Violence in the UK: Implications for Practice and Policy
26/04/2022	What is Good Practice in Supervision When it is Being Carried Out Remotely/Hybrid?
26/04/2022	Reuniting Children and Young People With Their Birth Families
27/04/2022	What Do We Mean By Trauma Informed Supervision
27/04/2022	The Impact of Trauma on Children and Young People
27/04/2022	Care Leavers: The Meaning of Corporate Parenting beyond the age of 18
29/04/2022	Book Group
05/05/2022	Developing Supervisees’ Capacity for Reflection, Analytical Thinking and Decision-Making Skills
10/05/2022	Working With Children and Young People Who Self-harm
18/05/2022	Valuing Children and Young People’s Participation Work as Safeguarding and Protection
20/05/2022	Managing and Promoting Good Practice: A Strength-Based Approach to Managing Performance
20/05/2022	Book Group
01/06/2022	Building Staff Wellbeing and Professional Resilience
07/06/2022	Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Contexts
08/06/2022	Women and Gambling Harms
14/06/2022	Remote and Online Working With Young People on Sensitive Topics
14/06/2022	Promoting Use of Self, Relationship-Based Practice and the Ethical Use of Authority in the Supervisory Relationship
14/06/2022	Learning Disabilities and Parenting
17/06/2022	Learning from Serious and Local Safeguarding Practice Reviews: Messages from Practice and Research
24/06/2022	Book Group
28/06/2022	How Child-Focused are Child Protection Conferences? Findings from a Qualitative Study
29/06/2022	Creating a Productive and Communal Safe Space for Participatory Work in the Context of Sexual Violence
01/07/2022	Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse
05/07/2022	Child Protection Conferences: The Evolving Role of the Child Protection Chair
15/07/2022	Book Group (CSC)
19/07/2022	Street Gangs and Coercive Control: The Gendered Exploitation of Young Women and Girls in County Lines
06/09/2022	Anti-Opressive Social Care Practice

06/09/2022	Identifying, Understanding and Disrupting Oppression in Social Care Encounters
21/09/2022	Covid and Mental Health in Young People
28/09/2022	Constructing, and Reconstructing, Childhood in Care
30/09/2022	Book Group (CSC)
04/10/2022	Trauma-Informed Practice
12/10/2022	Understanding Tics and Tourette Syndrome
01/11/2022	Understanding the Needs of Children Living with Parental Substance Misuse
08/11/2022	Pre-Birth Assessments: Effectively Addressing the Practice and Ethical Challenges
09/11/2022	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Children and Young People
17/11/2022	Understanding the Teenage Brain - Why This Matters For Social Care
25/11/2022	Book Group
25/11/2022	Developing Supervisees' Capacity for Reflection, Analytical Thinking and Decision-Making Skills
29/11/2022	Learning About Best Practice from People with Lived Experience of Homelessness
30/11/2022	Social Workers' Wellbeing: Learning the Lessons from The Pandemic
07/12/2022	Understanding Children and Young People With Autistic Spectrum Disorders
08/12/2022	Engaging Men in the Context of Children's Services
13/12/2022	Use of Self: Working with 'Sameness' and 'Difference'
13/12/2022	Managing and Promoting Good Practice: A Strength-Based Approach to Managing Performance
15/12/2022	Child Protection Conferences: The Evolving Role of the Child Protection Chair: A Quarterly Forum for Child Protection Advisors and Chairs
15/12/2022	Responding to Concerns About Domestic Violence and Abuse
15/12/2022	Auditing for Quality: How Quality Assurance Processes Can Support Good Outcomes for Children and Young People
12/01/2023	Understanding the Relationship Between Risk and Harm: A Strengths-Based Approach to Child Protection
12/01/2023	Building Staff Wellbeing and Professional Resilience
17/01/2023	Working with People Experiencing Homelessness
18/01/2023	Why People Die By Suicide, and What We Can Do to Prevent It
27/01/2023	Book Group
02/02/2023	Child Protection Conferences: The Evolving Role of the Child Protection Chair (Forum for Child Protection Advisors and Chairs)
02/02/2023	Working with Adolescent Violence Toward Parents
02/02/2023	Assessing and Responding to Neglect
09/02/2023	Outcomes for Mother-Child Relationships After Coercive Control
09/02/2023	What Do We Mean by Poverty Informed Social Work?
13/02/2023	Promoting Use of Self, Relationship-Based Practice and the Ethical Use of Authority in the Supervisory Relationship
16/02/2023	Building Professional and Organisational Resilience: A Systemic Approach

16/02/2023	Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse
21/02/2023	Commissioning, Governance, and Organisational Support for Practitioners Working with People Experiencing Homelessness
24/02/2023	Book Group
02/03/2023	Forced Marriage: Enhancing Protection and Prevention Responses
14/03/2023	Creating 'Good Work' in Social Care
28/03/2023	Children in Foster Care – Their Perspectives on Participation
29/03/2023	Domestic Violence Disclosure Schemes: Issues of Power and Responsibility
31/03/2023	Book Group

Appendix 3 – Audit Themes for year 2023-24 and Training Offered

Month/Year	L&D Session	Delivery Date <i>(3rd/ 4th Thursday of month 9.30-10.30am)</i>	Journal Club	Delivery Date <i>(Last Tuesday of the month 9.30-10.30am)</i>
March 2023	CWD & Transitions	23 March 2023	-----	
April 2023	Effective Assessments & SMART Planning	20 April 2023 (wider LE date)	Care Experienced Adults	25 April 2023
May 2023	Parental Mental Health, Parental Substance Misuse and DA (impact on child)	18 May 2023	Social Media & Exploitation	30 May 2023
June 2023	Mental Health/Self Harm children/young people	22 June 2023	Mental health in children/young people	27 June 2023
July 2023	Father/Significant Male involvement	20 July 2023	Men in SW	25 July 2023
September 2023	SW involvement in EHCP Process	21 September 2023	Children Missing Education	26 September 2023
October 2023	Diversity	19 October 2023	Diversity	31 October 2023
November 2023	Domestic Abuse	23 November 2023	GRT Communities	28 November 2023
December 2023	Direct Work	8 December 2023	Professional Curiosity	12 December 2023
January 2024	Toxic Trio	18 January 2024	Abuse/Neglect – what’s the difference?	30 January 2024
February 2024	Neglect	22 February 2024	Children Looked After	27 February 2024
March 2024	Analysing themes/family history	21 March 2024	Children with disabilities	26 March 2024

Appendix 4 – Community Care Inform (CCI) Most popular articles viewed between April 22 and March 23

Directory of direct work tools to use with children and young people - Childrens	181
Domestic abuse knowledge and practice hub - Childrens	127
Direct work with children	110
How Inform can help you meet the KSS standards - Childrens	109
Looked-after children hub	78
Domestic abuse: the impact on children and young people - Childrens	76
Child development practice support tool - Childrens	61
child neglect	60
Working with autistic children and young people - Childrens	56
Child sexual abuse knowledge and practice hub - Childrens	53
Attachment knowledge and practice hub - Childrens	50
How to use professional curiosity to understand social and emotional responses - Childrens	48
Using trauma informed research for direct work with children	48
Supported learning tools - Childrens	46
Parental mental illness - Childrens	43
Trauma-informed practice with young people affected by extra-familial harm - Childrens	42
Cultural competence - Childrens	39
Confident direct work with children	36
Analysis and decision-making	34
Trauma-informed knowledge and practice hub - Childrens	34
ADHD or trauma: working with the potential for misdiagnosis - Childrens	32
Domestic abuse and child contact: quick guide - Childrens	32
Engaging fathers with child protection: research review	30
Learn as a group: domestic abuse and professional judgment (Child K serious case review) - Childrens	30
Assessment of looked-after children	30
Working with domestic abuse, substance use and mental ill health - Childrens	30
Video: neglect - a lived experience - Childrens	29
Restricting access to mobile phone and social media - deprivation of liberty?: Manchester City Council v P (Rev1) [2023] EWHC 133 (Fam) - Child	29
Multi-agency working: leading the professional network and chairing meetings - Childrens	29
Guide to applying systemic practice in social work	28
Child development: summary of stages - Childrens	28
Developing emotional resilience in social work Community Care Inform	27
Direct work tool: assessment framework bubbles - Childrens	27
Kinship care	27
Child sexual exploitation (CSE) knowledge and practice hub - Childrens	26
A trauma-informed approach to domestic abuse: quick guide - Childrens	26
Responding to criminal exploitation and county lines - Childrens	26
Social Work England CPD requirements: how CC Inform's CPD log can help you - Childrens	26
Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children: research review	26
Working with disabled children knowledge and practice hub - Childrens	25
Special guardianship orders	25
Contact with birth family	25
What is a trauma informed approach?	24
Supporting children and young people facing death or bereavement - Childrens	23
Deprivation of liberty, complex needs, no suitable placement: A County Council v A Mother & Others [2021] EWHC 3303 - Childrens	23
Asylum age assessment	23
Deprivation of liberty of children and young people under the inherent jurisdiction - Childrens	22
Neglect: lessons from research	21
Direct work tools: "why do drug dealers live with their Mums?" - Childrens	21
Teenage life	21
Practice guidance - Childrens	21
Pre-birth risk assessments	21
Webinar: Rebekah Pierre - a care experienced perspective on language in case records - Childrens	21
Video: supervision - two approaches to monthly/routine supervision - Childrens	20
Writing chronologies - Childrens	20
Domestic abuse: lessons from research - Childrens	20
Matching in foster care: lessons from research	20
Criminal exploitation and county lines	20

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24 July 2023

Mr John Macilwraith

Corporate Director for Children's Services
Buckinghamshire Council

Sent by email to: john.macilwraith@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Dear John

Annual engagement meeting about social care and education, 30 June 2023.

Thank you for meeting with Tom Anthony, Sue Cox and myself to discuss education and social care in Buckinghamshire.

Education

We discussed the decline in the number of early years settings in Buckinghamshire which mirrors the national picture; however, this has not affected the overall sufficiency of early years places across the county. You also ensure that parents are made aware of alternative early years settings, should their local provider be closing. You talked about the work of your early years team to strengthen the take up of early education places, particularly those eligible two year olds through improved partnerships, including with health services. The role of the local authority linked officer for every early years setting continues to provide you with oversight of provision both from a quality and sustainability perspective.

There continue to be some staffing challenges in early years settings, particularly around the recruitment and retention of qualified managers. You are continuing to strengthen training for early years practitioners and are working in partnership with a local college to deliver the early years SENDCO award. Additionally, you are taking steps to ensure that students and apprentices on placement have quality learning experiences as well as offering bursaries to those who are both looking to join or progress within the early years' workforce.

You shared the headline data for schools. Overall outcomes for each key stage remain strong. However, you recognise that the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils in Buckinghamshire and their peers nationally has grown in the early years and the primary

phase. You talked about the challenges associated with pockets of deprivation within areas of relative affluence. Your data analysis shows that outcomes for disadvantaged pupils vary considerably between schools. Typically, you have found that where leadership is strong and there is a culture of inclusion reflected in high-quality provision, pupils do well. You explained some of the challenges faced by rural schools where numbers of disadvantaged pupils are typically low. You are encouraging schools to work together, including through formal federations to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.

Through the council's programme, 'Opportunity Bucks' you have identified ten wards where you will be focusing your resources to improve life chances and outcomes for pupils. You are also continuing to draw on expertise and research findings from the Education Endowment Fund. This work has culminated in a tool kit for all schools to support leaders in narrowing the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils. Additionally, you are focusing on support for literacy, language acquisition, phonics and learning behaviours through the Buckinghamshire Challenge plan.

We were pleased to hear of your work to quality assure registered alternative provision. You also shared with us your support and guidance to help leaders understand and fulfil their responsibilities when commissioning alternative provision. We discussed the information that Ofsted is gathering about alternative provision during inspections. You are continuing to work with schools to improve attendance and are planning to increase the capacity of the local authority's attendance team whilst recognizing the fact that this is a new unfunded burden on the Local Authority. You explained the work you are doing with leaders to help reduce the number of children being electively home educated and to get children back into school as quickly as possible.

You have continued to expand the school improvement team and now have five school improvement partners. Through your 'side by side' model you have been able to strengthen your support for schools, seeing some rise out of categories of concern and others maintain 'good'. You are now completing a termly risk assessment for schools to determine the level of support and intervention you need to provide. We were pleased to hear how you are strengthening this work through the involvement of other teams. The percentage of schools judged to be good or better has dipped slightly during this school year although the percentage of children being educated in good or better schools remains above the national average. You believe that some smaller schools have found the current framework and structure of inspections through deep dives to be challenging. You would welcome further discussion about this.

Post-16 A level performance continues to be very strong, with the bulk of sixth-form provision in grammar schools. The percentage of students taking non-academic qualifications remains relatively low. You talked about the work of the virtual school in working with schools to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. You shared with us the positive work the virtual school staff are doing to ensure that pupils get the examination qualifications they need. We were pleased to hear that 42 care leavers have an offer to start at university this September.

You informed us of Buckinghamshire Business First's proposals to develop short flexible courses in construction and health and social care through the DfE's 'skills bootcamps' programme. You are clear about the need to ensure that these programmes deliver the

intended outcomes. We also briefly discussed internships and you told us about the support in two special schools for internships at DeVere and the NHS. You are seeking to increase capacity at Furze Down School in Winslow, to develop post-16 provision.

We discussed the progress the local authority has made in relation to the written statement of action following the area SEND inspection in March 2022. Although progress is being made, you would like this to be accelerated. You are pleased with the work to strengthen co- production and the involvement of the parent forum and other partners. You now hold bi- monthly meetings with these partners. You explained your work to strengthen early intervention to improve outcomes for young children who have emerging needs. Buckinghamshire, like some other local authorities, is working in a challenging financial context.

You shared with us your concern about the rise in the number of complaints about schools made to Ofsted, this currently stands at 79 this calendar year to June compared to 64 in the whole of the last year. You feel that some complaints are generic and that these should be directed to individual schools' complaints processes. We discussed the ways that complaints are categorised and that not all complaints result in an 11A. We agreed that it would be helpful for Ofsted to provide further clarification of the complaints process and how complaints are sifted alongside the expectation of response to a complaint required by Ofsted. We are happy to set up a future meeting with Jo Hutton from our complaints about schools team to explain more about how Ofsted deals with complaints and our legal responsibilities.

You explained the current challenges of staff recruitment and retention in schools, including for teaching assistant posts. You shared the work that you are doing to support headteachers including a two-year programme for new headteachers. We shared with you the ongoing work and response following the inspection of Caversham Primary School and the current consultation about our complaints processes. Additionally, you asked us to consider the current arrangements regarding local authority attendance at inspection feedback meetings of academy schools, given your statutory responsibility for safeguarding in all schools.

Social Care

Thank you for sharing your self-evaluation. This provides a helpful overview of your own assessment of the services that you provide. The conversation we had gave us further insights and helped us to understand the progress you have made, as well as the areas that remain challenging. It is encouraging that you now have a permanent senior leadership team in place, including a service director for transformation and improvement. This service director has a lead role in driving greater integration across all services for children and families, including liaison with voluntary, community and faith organisations. You explained your plan to create small locality teams that are closer to the communities, boosting the contribution of partners. This is intended to reduce the amount of 'hand offs' for children, as, in these teams, the same practitioner will undertake assessments as well as provide ongoing child in need or child protection support.

You described the contrasts that exist within the authority area. This encompasses areas of affluence as well as some wards which have significantly higher levels of deprivation. You

explained that 'Opportunity Bucks' is your five-themed approach to levelling up in the 10 most disadvantaged wards. You explained how you have been able to respond to a range of pressures, including a significant increase in contacts. This includes direct requests for early help support and requests for information, as well as a high volume of police contacts. Alongside the increase in contacts, there has been a reduction in referrals that meet the threshold for statutory services. A recent review found that your MASH is working well but there is more work to do, including with partner agencies, to further embed a shared understanding of the thresholds for voluntary as opposed to statutory provision. You are bringing training for school designated safeguarding leads in-house, to provide a better level of training and support. You have, when required, successfully moved staff to respond to pressures, for example when there have been high numbers of section 47 enquiries.

You are confident that your 0-25 exploitation hub provides an effective response to children and young people who go missing or are vulnerable to exploitation. You sometimes have to respond to vulnerable children or serious youth violence as a result of children or families having been moved into the authority area. You have stronger links with community safety officers and maintain a close overview of the most vulnerable children. You work hard to ensure that vulnerable children are in education, recognising this as a significant safeguarding factor.

You believe that the support you provide to children in care and care leavers has continued to improve, helped by the relative stability of the workforce. You face the considerable challenge of securing sufficient local suitable placements for children. You have opened your own parent and baby unit, alongside your three children's homes, and have had exploratory discussions with other local authorities to consider jointly commissioning more residential provision. There has been an improved offer of local housing for care leavers. Thirty-six care leavers have been able to access their own local social housing in the last year. The numbers of care leavers who are not in education, employment or training have reduced, but helping them all into meaningful activity remains a challenge. You said that this sometimes reflects the high levels of mental wellbeing and emotional support that care leavers need but struggle to access, once they become 18.

Staff recruitment remains an ongoing challenge, especially to secure staff to complete assessment, child in need and child protection work. About 27% of your staff are agency appointments, although many have been in post for some time, which provides children with stable and consistent support. You work hard to secure a stable workforce, including aiming to recruit additional cohorts of ASYE applicants this year. You have developed a mental wellbeing programme for practitioners. This is highly valued and is helping you to recruit new staff. Your children in care and care leavers services have greater staff stability, providing children with longer term support and relationships. Across the organisation you believe there is more work to do to ensure that regular and impactful management oversight is driving children's progress. As part of your transformation activity, you are also planning to strengthen supervision arrangements and have a plan to introduce weekly group supervision within the locality based teams.

You are proud of the range of quality assurance arrangements that you now have in place. Audits are increasingly embedded across the organisation, and you plan to routinely include the views of children and families in audit activity. You undertake extensive dip sampling as well as audit activity in other parts of system, including the LADO service, as a way of

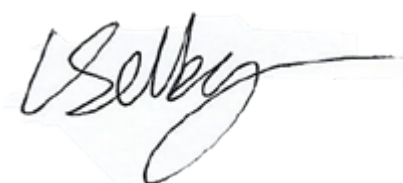
maintaining a line of sight to front line practice and supporting continuous improvement. Your 'Journal Club' provides an opportunity for practitioners to explore how research can inform practice. You have strong arrangements with the local children's safeguarding partnership. This has helped secure and cascade learning from audits and case reviews. You are ambitious about establishing a coherent and consistent practice methodology in Buckinghamshire and have concrete training plans to support practitioners to embed the approach.

At present you provide support to 67 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, some way short of your 0.1% target of 128. You have created a dedicated team to provide support to these children. You described the pressure this creates to identify suitable placements.

You currently have 10 children in unregistered children's homes, 9 of whom are subject to deprivation of liberty orders. You maintain tight senior management oversight of these children and undertake extensive daily placement searches to try to move them into suitable appropriate registered provision.

Thank you again for making the time to meet with us.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L Selby", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lee Selby

Senior His Majesty's Inspector, South East

Please note: This letter is not published by Ofsted and the comments made have not been evaluated as part of an inspection.

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Select Committee Work Programmes 2023/24

Children's and Education Select Committee (Chairman: Cllr Julie Ward, Scrutiny officer: Katie Dover)

Date	Topic	Description & Purpose	Lead Officer	Contributors
15 th June	Children's Services 6 month Update	An Update report with specific focus on Children's Social Care reforms, SEND and Alternate Provision	John Macilwraith Richard Nash Simon James	
	Children's Services Transformation	Overview and Case for change	John Macilwraith Errol Albert	
	Review Group report on Pathways for Children with SEND and Disabilities	To receive the report of the review group and hear the Officers' response.	Katie Dover	Cllr Diana Blamires
	Children's & Education Select Committee Work Programme	To receive the draft work programme for the forthcoming year	Katie Dover	Cllr Julie Ward
7 th September	Placement Sufficiency Strategy	This strategy sets out a summary of the action we will be taking over to make sure that we can provide placements for all children who need care.	Richard Nash Sandra Carnall	
	Principal Social Worker Annual Report	To provide a progress report on the work during 2022/23 of the Principal Social Worker to promote and improve the quality of social work practice, highlight the achievements for this year and identify priorities for the coming year.	Richard Nash	
	Update on Ofsted Work	Update on the outcome following the Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting	John Macilwraith	
2 nd November	Bucks Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report	This edition of the Safeguarding Children Partnership's Annual Report covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. It highlights the progress made during the last year against the	Walter Mcculloch Joanne Stephenson	

		BSCP's priorities as well as setting out future plans		
	SEND Improvement Programme follow up paper	To update the Committee on progress made	John Macilwraith Caroline Marriott	
	Children's Services Transformation	To update the Committee on progress made	John Macilwraith Errol Albert	
25 th January	Education Standards Paper	To share with the committee the latest educational outcomes achieved by the children and young people of Buckinghamshire.	John Macilwraith Gareth Drawmer	
	Youth Offending Team	Progress update one year on from YOS inspection	Richard Nash Aman Sekhon-Gill	
	New attendance duties	To provide the committee with an update on the new attendance duties and the implications for Buckinghamshire.	John Macilwraith Gareth Drawmer	
7 th March	TBC			
	TBC			