

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/107111/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.

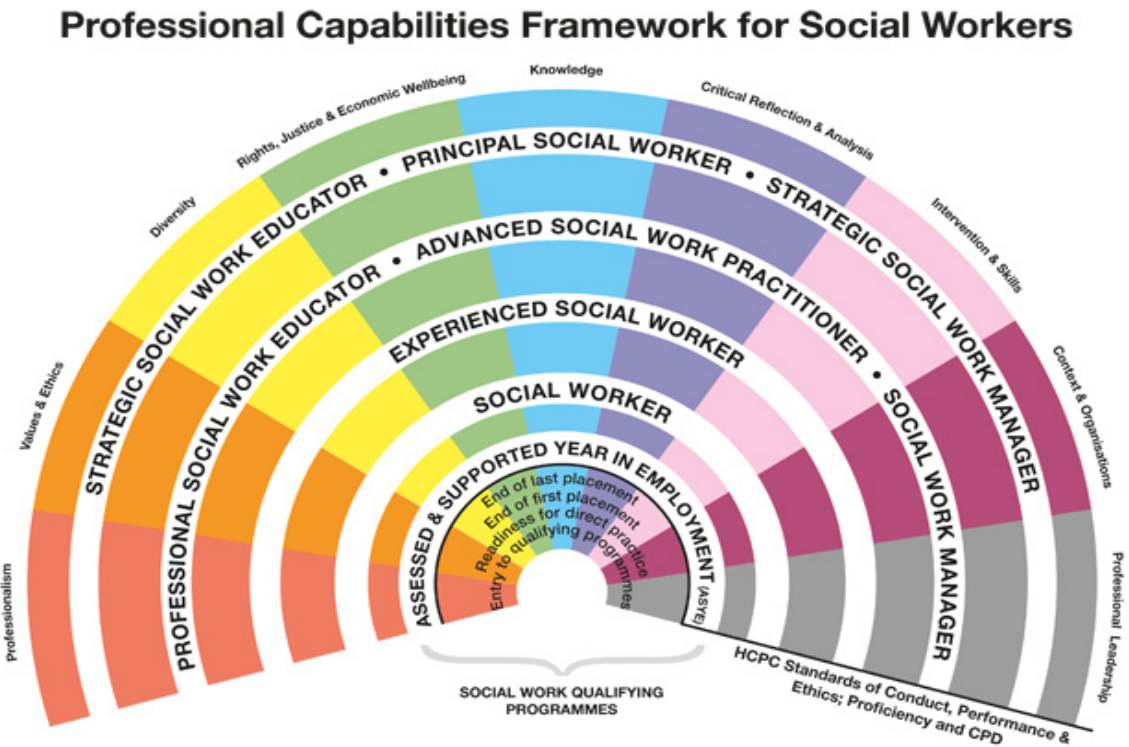
Buckinghamshire Children's ASYE Academy

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.

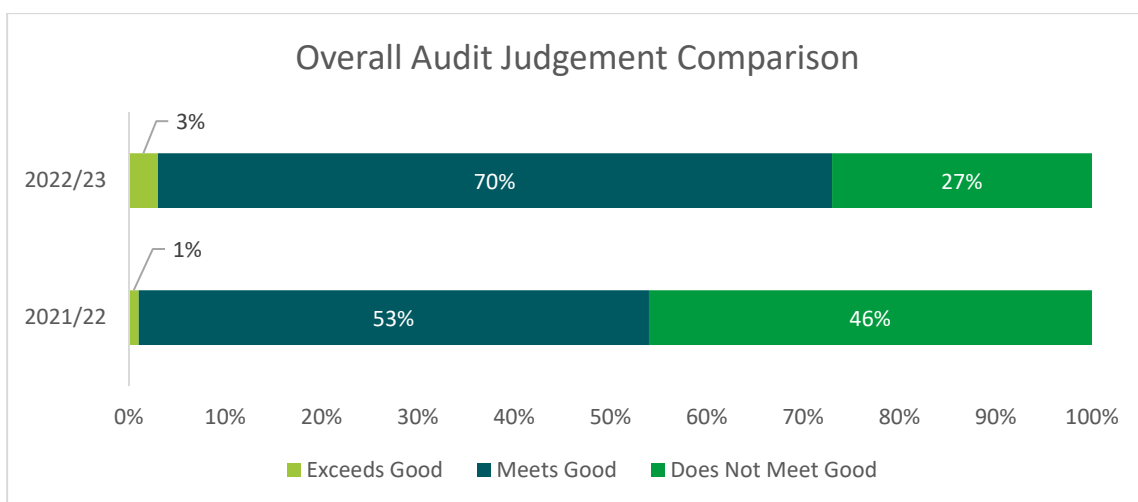
The parameters of the audit activity were:

- 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.

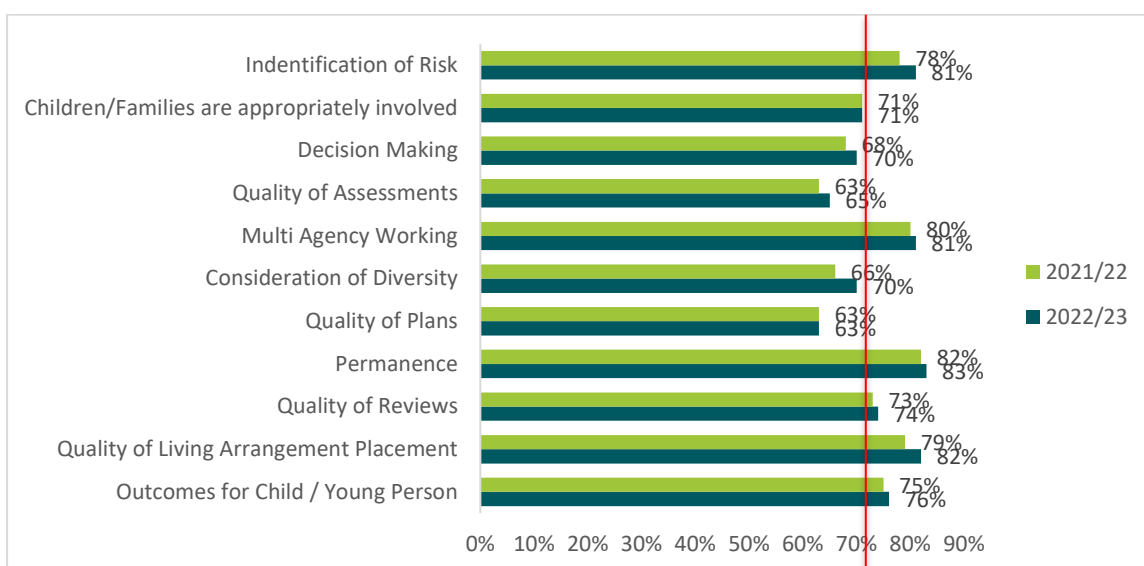
- Auditors undertaking the case file audits are trained in using the generic audit tool and provided with 'hints and tips' in writing a good quality audit based on judgment, evaluation and impact. Two good practice exemplars were provided to model the audit on, this has since increased to five.
- Completed 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