

Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Partnership

Impact Report April 2024 – March 2025



Worried about a child?

If you're worried that a child is at risk of neglect, harm or abuse, it's important that you tell someone. You are not being asked to make judgements or interfere unnecessarily in other people's lives, the Partnership just want to make sure that the child gets the help, support and protection they may need.

Who to tell?

If you think the child is in immediate danger, call

Bedfordshire Police - 999 or 01234 841212 or

NSPCC Child Protection Helpline: 0808 800 5000

If the child's not in immediate danger, but you're still concerned about them,

please contact us online: [Report a concern about a child](#)

If you are unable to use the online form you can phone

Bedford Borough Council Children's Integrated Front Door - 01234 718700 (office hours) or

Emergency Duty Team on 0300 300 8123 (out of hours)

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1. Safeguarding Partners' Reflections on this reporting period

Bedfordshire Police

As a partnership, we have sought to work collaboratively and support each other across the system and at all levels of our organisations to continue identifying and responding effectively to children in need of safeguarding. Our focus remains on partnership efficiency, enabling partners to operate at the required level to safeguard children and vulnerable people.

We continue to engage at both statutory and voluntary levels around key issues highlighted nationally, to focus our efforts locally. These issues include Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, Neglect, Domestic Abuse, Missing children, and vulnerable people. Recent reviews, such as the 'Casey Review,' highlight the need for agencies to share information regarding those posing the most risk, ensuring that information sharing remains at the forefront.

Our engagement with schools, using preventative tools, ensures that children are educated and aware of risk situations they may encounter during their childhood. This empowers them to respond, and report matters to professionals as soon as possible. Enhanced methods of partnership training across Child Protection, Domestic Abuse, Trauma-informed practice, voice of the child, and understanding neglect continue to drive operational awareness and understanding.

Continuous professional development is key, as we strive to ensure our staff and officers are trained to identify vulnerability at the earliest opportunity.

Our focus is on proactively identifying those posing the most risk to children, targeting those causing harm, disrupting activity, and ensuring we remain proactive in apprehending responsible individuals. Throughout, we must remain suspect-focused, victim-centred, and context-led.

We continue to support through Strategy meetings, including Initial Child Protection Conferences where appropriate, and determine the best way forward for children, considering their voice throughout their journey. We seek funding opportunities through intervention and diversionary methods to focus on procedural justice for victims.

We remain committed to investing in and driving the Victims Strategy throughout the partnership, seeking ways to improve and understand our communities better. Listening to our public is fundamental to shaping our response as a partnership, enabling us to understand our priorities more clearly. By ensuring professional challenge and demonstrating how we can achieve better outcomes, we continue to embed a culture of learning that strengthens our commitment to safeguarding children across the partnership.

John Murphy, Assistant Chief Constable

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board

BLMK ICB along with our health partners in Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) and East London Foundation Trust (ELFT) continue to work with our system partners to ensure the health needs of our babies, children and young people are met. That together we continue to deliver our statutory functions to safeguard children and families in Bedford Borough.

Our team of Designated professionals and Named professionals provide the expertise, support and guidance across the systems and have contributed to the development of an implementation of strategies, processes, and policies across Bedford Borough place and the Pan Bedfordshire footprint. Working collectively to understand emerging themes and trends that are impacting children and young people and using that knowledge to inform the commissioning of services.

Population Health and health inequalities continues to drive our priorities across the health system. Understanding and shared learning from our Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs), Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) and Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) as well as our rapid reviews tells us there are more to do to safeguard our population especially around Neglect, Serious Violence, Violence Against Women and Girls, Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism. The ICB promotes a culture of continual learning and improvement which enables professionals to improve practice which impacts on outcomes for children and young people. The Designated professional team supports and encourages professionals across the system through safeguarding supervision and reflective practice. Through this approach feedback has indicated increased confidence in recognition of potential safeguarding concerns and subsequent referrals into support services.

The ICB have restructured the role of their designated professionals to capture an all-age approach to strengthen the transition to adulthood and the focus on the whole family. We have appointed a full time Children in Care Designated professional to work closely with our LA colleagues and other health teams across the system to achieve improved outcome for children in care and our care leavers. The Children in care Designate is a member of the corporate parenting panel and works closely with the LA to understand the views and voice of children and young people who have lived experience in the care system.

The ICB remain a committed partner, working collaboratively with others to safeguarding our Children and Young People across Bedford Borough.

[Sarah Stanley, Chief Nurse](#)



Bedford Borough Council Children's Services

There is a great deal in this Annual Report, which is to be celebrated, and I thank colleagues from across the partnership for their continued hard work and commitment to safeguarding the children and young people within our Borough.

The recent ILACS inspection that took place in July 2025 highlighted some challenges that the partnership face in relation to improving outcomes for Children, Young People and Families. This coupled with the need to deliver the Social Care Reforms and implement the Families First Programme means that there is an even greater need for the partnership to galvanise and focus on what really makes a difference for children and families and to evidence the positive impact the partnership is having on the day to day lived experiences of children and families.

We have a strong partnership that has developed over the years and despite the current challenges all statutory partners face in relation to increased demand and complexity in a context of stretched and dwindling resources and capacity, I remain confident and optimistic that the partnership is capable of meeting these challenges and will keep the safety of children within our Borough at the very heart of what we do. This in no doubt will be challenging but the maturity and strength of the relationships within the partnership are a sound base on which to undertake the transformative work that is required to deliver the very best outcomes for children and families, because they deserve it.

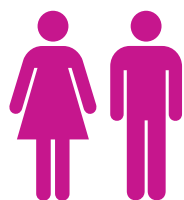
Harmesh Bhogal, Director of Children's Services



2. What does Bedford Borough look like?

Approximately **43,070** children and young people under the age of 18 live in Bedford Borough, which is 22.7% of the total population [2023 MYE 189,891]. Of those children and young people aged under **16,711** are living in a low-income family. Bedford Borough is a relatively prosperous and fast-growing borough, but with areas of significant deprivation. As of January 2025, **50.7%** of all children and young people attending maintained schools and academies in Bedford Borough are from minority ethnic groups, compared to 39.6% in England as a whole. The largest minority ethnic group of children and young people attending in Bedford Borough is Asian, which accounts for 16.4% of children compared to 13.8% in England as a whole.

Bedford Borough Safeguarding Snapshot as of March 2025



43,070 children under the age of 18 live in Bedford Borough

22.7% of the total population

15.1% of children are living in low income families



281 different ethnic groups live in Bedford Borough



27.6% of children in primary schools speak English as an additional language

23.8% of children in secondary schools speak English as an additional language



144 children and young people were subject to Child Protection Plans as of March 2024



21.2% of children in primary schools are in receipt of free school meals

22.2% of children in secondary schools are in receipt of free school meals



10,489 contacts were made to MASH and **1,997** referrals were made to Bedford Borough Children's Services



871 Early Help case episodes started and **1,530** Single Assessments completed



655 child protection investigations were undertaken



196 Initial Child Protection Conferences were held



603 open Children in Need cases as of March 2024

3. Introduction

This is the fourth annual report of the Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Partnership (BBSCP) [Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements \(MASA\)](#) and covers the period from April 2024 – March 2025, which brings the BBSCP reporting arrangements in line with Working Together 2023 requirements. Our vision and ambition is to **keep Children, young people, and families central to everything we do now and in the future.** To achieve this, the BBSCP has reviewed its existing objectives, and throughout this report, there are examples of work and good practice in the last 12 months to demonstrate how the partnership addressed the priorities agreed by the Partnership.

The BBSCP MASA cover the Local Authority area of Bedford Borough. The three Safeguarding Partners are Bedford Borough Council, Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board, and Bedfordshire Police. The Partnership's core objective is to coordinate and hold partners to account to make sure they are protecting children and young people in Bedford Borough who might be or are at risk, and to ensure that timely learning from serious safeguarding incidents is identified and implemented.

The BBSCP has continued to work collaboratively with our neighbouring Safeguarding Children Partnerships in Central Bedfordshire and Luton to ensure there is a more joined up approach to safeguarding, this includes several Pan Bedfordshire groups. This is particularly important where agencies are delivering services across the three local authority areas and are represented on several Partnerships. In agreeing a common approach and response to specific safeguarding and child protection issues such as child exploitation, neglect for example Pan Bedfordshire groups operate across the three Partnerships. Please see the BBSCP structure (see Appendix 3 page 46)

The BBSCP acknowledges the support from relevant agencies with their participation in Bedford Borough and Pan Bedfordshire groups, delivery of training and engagement with multi-agency audits and case reviews for example. All the relevant agencies have a role to play in safeguarding children and young people across Bedford Borough. The BBSCP will continue to review its relevant agencies on an annual basis as part of its annual Development Day.

Lead Safeguarding Partners

The following Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) lead and drive the changes that the government set out in Working Together 2023.

- Bedford Borough Council – Laura Church, Chief Executive.
- Bedfordshire Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICB) – Felicity Cox, Chief Executive.
- Bedfordshire Police – Trevor Rodenhurst, Chief Constable.

All three LSPs have equal and joint responsibility for the BBSCP MASA. On behalf of their agency the LSPs will speak with authority, take decisions and commit them on policy, resourcing and practice matters. They are responsible for holding their own agency to account, on how effective they participate and implement the BBSCP MASA and are responsible for discharging their own statutory duties.

Delegate Safeguarding Partners.

The following Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) are senior representative from one of the three statutory safeguarding partners who are responsible for the operational delivery of safeguarding arrangements within Bedford Borough. DSPs are vital for the effective operational implementation of the MASA, working collaboratively to protect and

promote the welfare of children. speak with authority for the safeguarding partner they represent take decisions on behalf of their organisation or agency and commit them on policy, resourcing and practice matters hold their own organisation or agency to account on how effectively they participate and implement the MASA.

- Bedford Borough Council – Harmesh Bhogal, Executive Director for Children, Education & Families.
- Bedfordshire Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICB) – Sarah Stanley, Chief Nursing Director and Simon Hardcastle-Waugh Deputy Chief Nurse.
- Bedfordshire Police – John Murphy, Assistant Chief Constable and Zara Brown, Detective Chief Superintendent.

The DSPs and Independent Scrutineer met quarterly this year to provide space to reflect on previous Board meetings and plan for future Boards. These were also opportunities to assure themselves that the MASA was embedded and working. The Strategic Board continued to develop and improve the format for their meetings, to give a greater focus on scrutiny and assurance regarding key practice and safeguarding priorities. The meetings provided opportunities for collective reflective sessions to enable partner agencies to provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of their safeguarding arrangements for children and young people within their agency and multi-agency. This meant that the Strategic Board could challenge, utilise and seek assurances around practice and safeguarding priorities.

Scrutiny Arrangements.

Scrutiny is provided by the BBSCP Independent Scrutineer, Sally Rowe, who took over the role in December 2024 from the previous Independent Chair and Scrutineer Maggie Atkinson.



4. What is going well

- Early Help Offer has been maintained and is a strong and diverse, with assessments and reviews that effectively address family needs. This aligns with the Golden Thread of Early Help and supports the strategic priority of Neglect.
- IFD has clear systems and responsive management oversight ensured swift action for children in need of urgent protection. This reflects strong leadership and information sharing, both key strategic priorities. These improvements are recent and require continued commitment and development from partners to be sustained.
- Multi-Agency exploitation response via a specialist team provides robust, persistent engagement with children at risk of exploitation, reducing risk and improving outcomes. This supports the Child Exploitation priority and the Contextual Safeguarding golden thread.
- Participation and Co-Production lead to young people contributing to service development, including co-producing resources for Practitioners and participating in the Corporate Parenting Board. This aligns with the Golden Threads of Co-production and Voice of Children and Practitioners.
- The Partnership's commitment to addressing child neglect has informed all workstreams with some positive progress against our planned activity.
- Rapid Reviews have been commended by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel for their quality.
- Engagement with sports/community/faith settings has received renewed focus, with a range of events to increase interaction with these partners.
- Engagement with education partners continues to be championed, including through the work of the Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Education group, DSL Forums, and other bespoke activities.
- Training....
 - ✓ Launched Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training
 - ✓ Increased attendance across agencies, including Early Years and on Working Together training.
 - ✓ Increased Partner engagement with the training pools and established a Child Sexual Abuse Training Pool.
 - ✓ Increased eLearning completions and launched eLearning evaluations and face to face training.
 - ✓ Increased free/ funded learning events; developed and delivered with Partner Agencies.
- Continued development of the [Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Partnership website](#).
- Commenced quarterly [Safeguarding Children Partnerships newsletter](#)
- Working with Pan Beds Exploitation Lead to coordinate Exploitation themed briefings (funded by [BAVEX](#) and [VEPP](#))
- The creation and development of the Pan Bedfordshire Neglect Campaign with the NSPCC.
- Bedfordshire Hospitals received the Innovation of Care Award in December. This was related to work undertaken within the Trust for their contribution to Domestic Abuse Practices within the hospital
- Bedfordshire Hospitals also received commendations in recent Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews in recognition of Domestic Abuse Practices within the Acute Trust.



5. Progress against statutory guidance

Key deadlines for the implementation have been met, including publishing our updated MASA in December 2024. Key changes outlined in the revised arrangements include:

- In January 2025, the introduction of the Partnership Chair role, which will be rotated amongst the BBSCP Delegated Safeguarding Partners, with Harmesh Bhogal, Executive Director for Children's Services, taking up that role first.
- Sally Rowe, the new Independent Scrutineer, took up her post in January 2025
- The Pan Bedfordshire Coordinating Group was renamed the Pan Bedfordshire Assurance and Improvement Group and has a revised terms of reference which better reflect the group's role, including ownership of progressing recommendations from audits, learning from the three Partnership Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, and other reviews and oversight of the Pan Bedfordshire sub-groups.
- The reintroduction of the BBSCP Performance Group to assist the Partnership to evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by BBSCP Partner Agencies, individually and collectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It has oversight of the analysis of performance data about safeguarding within relevant agencies in Bedford Borough.

5.1 Our Governance Structure and arrangements.

In 2024-25, we reviewed our governance structure to ensure that we have robust arrangements in place to appropriate oversight of partnership activity. Our structure is led by our Strategic Board, which consists of the three delegated statutory partners (DSPs), and the relevant agencies.

The BBSCP Strategic Plan was reviewed in September 2024 and the

BBSCP has continued to focus on the areas of the Strategic Plan via themed Strategic Board meetings. In the last 12 months the meetings have focussed on Children Looked After, Early Help, Front Door, Reforms ["Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive"](#) (Nov 2024), [Children's Well-being and Schools Bill](#) (Dec 2024), [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) and ["I wanted them all to notice"](#) Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment (Nov 2024).

The Pan Bedfordshire Strategic Leaders of Children's Services Group has membership from each of the Safeguarding Partners from across the Pan Bedfordshire footprint and are responsible for agreeing Pan Bedfordshire priorities and joint areas of focus. The BBSCP has continued to work with other partnerships including Bedford Borough's [Health and Wellbeing Board \(HWB\)](#), [Community Safety Partnership \(CSP\)](#) and [Bedford Borough & Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Adults Boards](#).

The three Safeguarding Partners come together on a quarterly basis with the BBSCP Independent Scrutineer to debrief the last Strategic Board and agree the agenda for the next Strategic Board whilst also reviewing the [BBSCP MASA](#) and discussing any localised issues.

5.2 Strengthening Education.

There are 67 primary schools and 24 secondary schools in Bedford Borough. This includes a variety of school types, such as nursery schools, lower schools, primary schools, secondary schools, upper schools, academies, and special schools. 9% of Bedford's schools are private schools and additionally, some schools set their own admissions criteria, while others follow the local authority's guidelines.

In strengthening all our education settings given their importance to the developing lives of children and young people and how they are kept safe,

the BBSCP sees Education as our fourth safeguarding partner with equal status in its arrangements. Education settings have a wealth of knowledge and breadth of practical experience in safeguarding, care and needs of Bedford Borough communities.

In recognition of Working Together 2023’s emphasis on ensuring there is education representation within the strategic leadership of the BBSCP, four school leaders have been established as representatives on the BBSCP Strategic Board. They provide a ‘voice of education’ to the Strategic Board when making decisions about the strategic direction of the BBSCP, and nominations have been requested for their attendance at the Pan Bedfordshire Strategic Leaders of Children's Services Group to offer a similar perspective.

The Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Education Group was established in 2022 to support, strengthen and inform the vital work of the BBSCP. It is chaired by the three Bedfordshire Local Authority Service Directors for Education (on a rotating basis) and has representatives from schools across Bedfordshire. The group provides a communication channel between education settings, including Governors, Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) forums and the three Safeguarding Children Partnerships. It provides support and Governance to the local cluster/hub arrangements as they share themes, challenges, and good practice in their safeguarding work.

The Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Education Group has met four times this year with engagement in the meetings being good. The group has discussed a range of topics linked to both practice reviews and the Partnerships priorities. As part of the groups standing agenda there is a dedicated time for the DSL and Cluster Forums to raise issues or information that they would like feedback to from the Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Education Group. Local schools and

colleges are invited to take part in audits and case reviews where relevant and the BBSCP communicates with schools via a local monthly newsletter dedicated for schools.

5.3 Funding of the partnership.

The BBSCP budget is provided by the three safeguarding partner agencies below and Probation and their percentage contributions are based on previous years. Work to review the budget and establish equitable contributions is in progress. The funding is used to directly support the work of the BBSCP and the expenditure for 2024/2025 covered the Business Manager’s salary, Scrutineer costs, a proportion of the training teams salaries, shared costs towards the Pan Bedfordshire Child Protection procedures and Safeguarding website, contribution to the Voluntary Organisations for Children Young People and Families (VOCypf) and miscellaneous costs which totalled the budget available below.

Agency	Agreed Contribution 2024 – 2025
Bedford Borough Council	£62,174
Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board	£62,663
Bedfordshire Police	£18,300
National Probation Service	£2200
Total	£145,337

5.4 Performance and use of data analysis.

This is still an area of development for the BBSCP following the reintroduction of a BBSCP Performance Group in March 2025. The aim of the group is to provide an overview of how data is being used to encourage learning within the MASA and evidence of how information sharing has improved practice and outcomes. The group will put into place a multi-agency performance framework which they will monitor and scrutinise on a quarterly basis to understand local emerging trends and themes. The performance monitoring arrangements will also aim to capture/highlight the impact our partnership work is having on improved outcomes for our children and young people. Information will then be reported up to the BBSCP Strategic Board. In addition, performance indicators linked to themes/priority areas are also being developed by the priority area groups for discussion and scrutiny within those individual groups. This local Analysis will be further strengthened by a Pan Bedfordshire Data Analysis which is being recruited to.

5.5 Year in Review Data on children and young people.

In the six months leading up to April 2025, Bedford Borough Council Children's Social Care recorded a high volume of activity across the early stages of the safeguarding pathway, with **5,129** contacts and **1,124** referrals, indicating sustained demand on front-line services. Partners are making more contacts to Children's Service for more children. The proportion of referrals that meet threshold remains the same however suggesting a period of increasing need for children living in Bedford Borough. Notably, **19%** of referrals were re-referrals. Sampling of this revealed that some children are re-referred when step-down from social care has not resulted in sustained change. For other re-referrals related to the way contacts were managed within LCS. Changes to practice with

in the IFD has seen the re-referral rate drop to be in line with statistical neighbours and the national average. Referrals with no further action are not at expected levels having been historically high.

The data suggests that Bedford Borough Council Children Social Care and its safeguarding partners are holding a disproportionately high number of strategy meetings and s.47's for the size of child population. The rate of ICPC's per 10,000 is far more in line with statistical and national neighbours. Sampling of Strategy meetings suggests that threshold is applied appropriately in considering whether a meeting is required but the rate of s.47's that do not conclude in conference suggests the outcome of those meetings may be risk adverse. Further review of s.47s is planned for 2025/26. The Child and Family Assessment process demonstrated strong performance, with **91%** of the **828** completed assessments meeting the statutory timescale of 45 working days, and an average duration of 36 days, reflecting effective case management. However, the presence of **418** ongoing assessments highlights continued pressure on assessment teams.

There has been an improvement on last year in the timeliness of ICPC's which now reaches **90%** despite a significant increase in demand. In terms of child protection, **107** CPPs were initiated, and **91** ceased during the period, with **19%** of new plans being re-registrations. Again, this highlights some of the challenge in sustained change when exiting Social Care. The end of year position shows **144** children subject to CPPs, with neglect remaining the most common category of abuse. These figures collectively underscore the importance of strengthening work and ensuring robust step-down planning to reduce repeat interventions.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- The revised MASA ensure full compliance with the obligations as set out in Working Together 2023.
- The BBSCP structure addresses the complexity of the BBSCP & Pan Bedfordshire structures and prevents duplication.
- The BBSCP proactively identify and respond to new and emerging safeguarding issues and develop multiagency policies, procedures, and work streams, such as Child Sexual Abuse.
- There has been coordinated effective and reflective responses to serious safeguarding incidents reported to the BBSCP.
- The BBSCP oversees, evaluates, and seeks assurances on the effectiveness of single/multi-agency safeguarding practice to drive improvement.
- The work of the Partnership has resulted in recommendations when planning services for children and young people in Bedford Borough that is driven by analysis of multi-agency intelligence and learning.
- Improved Multi-Agency Coordination through Strategy meetings and assessments has led to better identification of risk and timely interventions, improving safety and stability for children and young people.
- The continued development of Education Cluster groups provides feedback from schools.
- Education representation has increased at the BBSCP Strategic Board meetings and sub-groups.
- Excellent examples of work by the Public Health Team within education settings supporting both children, young people, staff, parents, and the community in respect of mental health issues, and where there have been incidents of young people and suicide.
- Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Education Group has provided a space to consider education perspectives on safeguarding system matters.
- Bedford Borough Council Children's Services attended the DSL Forums to consult with schools on the functionality of the Integrated Front Door (IFD). This resulted in changes being proposed to the IFD, such as the consultation telephone line which has been implemented.
- The Virtual School worked collaboratively to overcome barriers and support children's learning, contributing to improved educational attainment. This applies to children in care and children in need. This is supported by close working relationship with schools.
- There are ongoing discussions and actions to address and minimise the risk to safeguarding practice and support partner capacity.
- Enhanced Support for Disabled Children through packages of care that enable children and young people to remain at home, with sensitive and regular social work visits.
- Children in care reported positive relationships with Social Workers, they felt safe and supported, with meaningful direct work helping them understand their experiences.
- Increased number of children being seen by 0 – 19 service and so the opportunity to identify needs earlier and address.
- Public health messaging has been shared with more families in Bedford Borough to promote good health, wellbeing and development.
- Cambridgeshire Community Services identify the right health representative to advocate for children supported by a safeguarding plan.
- Capacity released to enable School Nurses to raise their profile and work with schools to focus on public health/early intervention work.

6. Scrutiny and Assurance

Independent scrutiny.

The role of the Independent Scrutineer is to ensure the BBSCP is compliant with our statutory obligations, act as a critical friend, and support the continuous improvement and development of the partnership. In December 2024, our previous Independent Chair and Scrutineer, Maggie Atkinson, stepped down from the partnership after four years. Sally Rowe was recruited to the role of Independent Scrutineer in December 2024 with extensive experience of multi-agency working and scrutiny. Sally's career includes multiple senior leadership roles up to Director of Children's Services.

More recently, Sally has been working alongside statutory safeguarding partners, undertaking CSPR's, providing strategic and operational challenge in their approach and focus to deliver upon their safeguarding ambitions. In her role, Sally attends the BBSCP Strategic Board, chairs the BBSCP Case Review Group and the new BBSCP Performance group, as well as sharing the chairing of the Pan Bedfordshire Assurance and Improvement Group with Jon Brown the new Independent Scrutineer for the Central Bedfordshire and Luton Safeguarding Children Partnerships. Her role is to provide constructive challenge to drive forward necessary changes in practice. As part of this attendance, she will provide a quarterly 'reflections report' directly to the BBSCP Strategic Board in which she shares her views on areas of strength and weakness and potential areas for further scrutiny.

In addition to these core governance meetings, she also routinely meets directly with key partners, attends focus groups and workshops and contributes to our shared forward plan.

Independent Scrutineer's reflections

I am writing this as the newly appointed Scrutineer for the Partnership having been formally in role for the final 3 months of this reporting year. The previous Independent Chair and Scrutineer has overseen the significant changes in Governance during 2024/5 to ensure compliance with Working Together 2023. The new structure is now in place and the next year will give us an opportunity to ensure our ways of working are effective. I have already started a review with the Scrutineer from Luton/ Central Bedfordshire to test out these arrangements which will form the basis for our work in 2025/6.

From my initial overview of the Partnership, it is clear there are committed partners whose focus is to ensure children and young people in Bedford Borough are safeguarded. The training offer is a key strength and is underpinned by robust knowledge through audit and an understanding of the context of the life of children in the area. It is recognised that an area for development is the collection and understanding of the partnership data available to us and this work is now underway.

The audit work gives an understanding of the quality and contribution all partners make to safeguarding children and I have already experienced action being taken to improve capacity of services and quality of work directly because of this.

The work across Bedfordshire with the Pan Beds arrangements is a definite positive to how we work together. This shows recognition by the 3 local authorities that many partners have a wider geographical footprint and that some things are better delivered in that way. There is a balance to be had however between this wider footprint and ensuring a focus on place and this has been the subject of a number of discussions in strategic meetings I have attended. It is expected the current scrutiny on the new arrangements will help set the strategic focus on this issue for the next

few years albeit there will continue to be challenges in respect of partners form and function over that time.

I have been impressed by partners willingness to show thoughtful reflection in respect of individual situations in my chairing of the Case Review group so far. This has enabled us to be clear about the priorities for the coming year such as the continued focus on neglect.

I look forward to continuing to work with partners over the next 12 months to strengthen the work outlined in this report.

Sally Rowe

Independent Scrutineer for Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Partnership



7. Engaging children and young people to hear their views and lived experiences

The **Pan Bedfordshire Voice of the Child group (VOC)** is a core element across all three Safeguarding Children Partnerships and following recognition of a gap, the Pan Beds VOC Group was reinstated in back into the partnership structure in 2024. There had been Task and Finish group meetings held to deliver the VOC conference in November 2024 to address the following issues **Bullying & Healthy Relationships**. Follow-up sessions were held in special schools and alternative provisions, and their feedback was incorporated into partnership plans.

Plans are underway for the next Conference in November 2025 with the theme of **Feeling safe in our community and lives**. Work is underway to engage some young people to join the group with recognition and reimbursement schemes being explored. The group have developed a VOC Strategy and annual calendar of engagement opportunities revised its Terms of Reference, and work plan which were agreed in Jan 2025.

Emerging themes & risks identified by the Pan Beds VOC group to take forward in 2025/2026

- Lack of robust transition processes in education → vulnerability for pupils not placed in first-choice or without clear pathways.
- Need to embed harmful behaviour & unhealthy relationship education in schools.
- Continued focus on reducing disproportionality in youth justice.
- Growing capacity challenges in participation teams (ELFT reduced from 7 to 2 staff).
- Importance of safeguarding language to avoid victim-blaming in exploitation cases.

Some examples of programmes & initiatives across the Partnership:

- **Mentors in Violence Prevention** pilot in Bedford Borough schools to shift from passive to active bystander behaviours (links to misogyny, knife crime prevention).
- The **VERU/VEPP** have commissioned navigators in schools, A&E, and communities to address serious youth violence, domestic abuse, and exploitation.
- **Bedford Borough Healthwatch** shared information about their “Your Voice Matters” podcast, youth panels, and service feedback loop, “You Said, We Did”, which has a focus on education exclusions).
- Bedfordshire Police are developing listening circles to improve child engagement and perception of policing.
- **Bedford Borough Youth Cabinet** have been involved and are collaborating to form a Pan Bedfordshire Youth Parliament.
- Bedford Borough Council Engagement Team have adopted the Lundy Model and rewriting their youth engagement strategy.
- The Partnership provides VOC training which is promoted across partnerships.
- In **ELFT** young people are involved in website development.

Here are some examples of partner agencies engagement with children and young people.

Bedford Borough Council Engagement and Development Team supports 'voice of the child' and 'youth voice' focused work across three levels; this also involves working across the wider Local Authority not just within Children's Services. Through **Level one** – Working directly with children and young people via groups, projects and activities - **Level two** – Support and guidance to staff and teams to develop practice around the voice of the child and **Level three** – Ensuring change and advocating the voice of the child at strategic level.



Case study from Bedfordshire Fire Service

Alfie's daily life offered little in the way of stability, consistency, or support. This lack of structure was a significant factor in the disengagement observed by school staff throughout their time in education. Adolescence is a critical period for cognitive development, self-image, health, and wellbeing. Unfortunately, for Alfie, his limited understanding, opportunity, and protective factors created barriers that made sustained progress extremely difficult. He has mild autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which sometimes made communication with others challenging. However, he demonstrated an impressive capacity for hyper-focus and the ability to understand complex systems when engaged. Alfie was referred to Bedfordshire Fire Service by the PREVENT Policing team following a safeguarding concern raised by his school's pastoral team. Alfie's deep interest in the Emergency Services (particularly the Fire and Rescue Service) was the foundation upon which their work together began. Bedfordshire Fire Service saw an opportunity to support and encourage Alfie where other services had struggled to connect. Their first meeting with Alfie was intentionally informal but purposeful. He was curious and open and soon felt comfortable enough to discuss his current situation and personal interests. In subsequent sessions, Alfie was gently encouraged to explore the opportunities Bedfordshire Fire Service offers young people, and he did so with enthusiasm and commitment. Alfie is now thriving and building positive relationships and learning within a busy, supportive Cadet Unit. He is now socialising with peers in a safe environment and actively nurturing his interests and passions. Excitingly, Alfie will also be returning to education in the new academic year, a testament to his resilience and the progress he has made.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- Based on young people's comments a provider was decommissioned re conducting Return Home Interviews (RHI) and switched to the allocated workers completing the RHIs. This has improved uptake and led to intelligence sharing which has informed the initiation of two Police operations to disrupt child exploitation.
- Increased engagement in RHIs has meant though still variable, more children and young people are sharing their experiences post-missing episodes, informing better safeguarding responses.
- By hearing from children and young people directly this influences the support provided locally by practitioners they know.
- Partners have described children and young people being involved in making choices and influencing decisions about their own lives, for example co-producing their education, health and care plan or a child working with their teacher to agree their learning targets.
- For Cambridgeshire Community services co-production has strengthened language use, communication strategies, and safeguarding standard operations. Their service users are empowered to ask "curious questions" that guide improvement.
- Cauldwell school have identified that the Voice of child has fed into TAF/CIN/CP plans to improve life chances for the children.
- Young people who have used Bedfordshire Open Door services have been supported into opportunities such as paid employment and volunteering at Bedfordshire Open Door and facilitating BOD POD..

8. Achievements and Impact on Priorities

8.1 Neglect

Pan Bedfordshire Neglect Group

Addressing neglect remains a significant challenge in Bedford Borough and therefore it continues to be a primary focus for the BBSCP. The Pan Beds Neglect Strategy 2024–25 and action plan were updated and monitored with partners submitting highlight/assurance reports twice yearly to evidence impact. The revised Terms of Reference were signed off. The following practitioner briefings were drafted consulted on and agreed adolescent neglect, affluent neglect, medical neglect, and tips for identifying and working with neglect. Guidance was also developed and signed off regarding a Dental Neglect and Obesity (highlighting safeguarding considerations).

The group continued to work on the roll-out and embedding of the GCP2 (Graded Care Profile 2), [Neglect Screening Tool](#), and [Day in My Life tools](#), with targeted promotion across health, education, and social care. Learning from audits and reviews was shared at the group who have worked to address barriers including time constraints, multi-agency engagement, and practitioner misconceptions. ELFT developed a neglect training module for Level 3 safeguarding.

Progress was made on the Pan Beds Neglect Scorecard to track indicators and compare performance across Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, and Luton. There was noted significant variance in neglect prevalence data across boroughs (Central Beds 20%, Luton 5–6%, Bedford much lower). Agreed changes to data definitions for more consistent reporting, with requirement for agencies to provide commentary alongside figures. Recruitment of Pan Beds Data Analyst will strengthen analysis and contextual interpretation.

Campaigns & Public Engagement

- Designed and soft-launched ‘Stop, Think: Neglect’ Campaign in November 2024, with official launch in February 2025.
- Three strands: practitioners, community/parents & carers, and young people.
- Launch featured lived experience speakers, Police, Health, and NSPCC “Listen Up, Speak Up” sessions. Campaign to run for 2 years with ongoing youth input, including a young person–designed logo.

Partnership & National Links

- Contributed to the National Safeguarding Review Panel thematic review into neglect, focusing on love and care as core parental responsibilities.
- Engaged with NSPCC research (“Too Little, Too Late”) highlighting early help funding, national neglect strategy needs, and multi-agency coordination.

Specialist Issues

- Dental neglect barriers addressed through interim parent resources.
- Review of parental problematic drug/alcohol use shows differing patterns across boroughs.
- Recognition that childhood obesity may signal neglect in some cases, prompting practitioner awareness guidance.
- Medical neglect audit revealed challenges in assessing missed appointments’ significance and consent issues.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- Tools such as 'A day my life' provide a rich, granular understanding of the impact of neglect and the BBSCP is starting to see evidence of the use of this tool and other tools in case reviews/audits.
- Partners have shared that their practitioners are delivering the key messages from the ICON programme on home visits, and within parenting groups, etc and that the appropriate staff are regularly reminded of the messages to ensure information remains current and the messages are not forgotten. ICON is embedded in routine clinical practice, contributing to reduced incidence of abusive head trauma.
- The revised Injuries and Bruising Protocol for Immobile Children 0-18 years guidance is embedded in practice, following the refresh of this guidance this year after further notifications of serious incidents of Non Accidental injuries to under 2 year olds.
- The BBSCP has clear expectations on when the GCP2 is used and there are mechanisms in place to monitor its usage and impact.
- CCS Staff are confident in using assessment tools to evidence neglect concerns and support multi-agency referrals.
- Cauldwell DSL delivers the NSPCC Speak Out Saty Safe program to children in their school.
- More children have access to a toothbrush and toothpaste and have a better understanding of how to effectively brush and look after their teeth.

8.2 Early Help

Bedford Borough Council Children's Services Early Help - Early help is the term used in Bedford Borough to describe the approach to providing support to children, young people and their families with the aim of supporting them in the right way with the right actions at the right time to prevent problems escalating. Early help can be provided through a single agency or a multi-agency response as appropriate to the needs of the child, young person and their family. The Bedford Borough early help approach is in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children also includes evidence based, proactive and planned support for children and young people stepping down from social work interventions or specialist provision. It aims to enable families to find their own solutions and build their own capacity to effect change so ensuring they can work with the right services and access the best interventions is essential. This Early help approach includes our ambition to enable families to access support even earlier through the development of community-based support. It will assist and support families to come together to utilise their own resources and strengths to overcome challenges. Early Help is a collective approach and relies on all agencies working together with families to identify who needs help and then to meet the varied needs. Quality Early Help work is delivered across Bedford Borough by schools, health services, children's centres, early years settings and the voluntary sector.

"Our shared vision is to give all children and young people firm foundations in life, through a strong network of family, friends and communities, with the earliest and best support that can be offered to build capacity and resilience."

Integrated Front Door (IFD) & Early Help Integration

- Early Help is embedded in the IFD, improving early identification of need.
- Over **25% of contacts** to the IFD lead to Early Help or Team Around the Family outcomes.
- Weekly case discussions between Social Care and Early Help ensure smooth transitions and shared thresholds.

Strengthened Early Intervention Services

- Early Help services successfully prevent escalation to statutory services – only **16 of 721** cases escalated to Social Care.
- A total of **143 Early Help Assessments** completed, with regular audits to drive quality improvement.
- Two **Family Hubs** established, with a third launching in Summer 2025, ensuring place-based multi-agency support.

Targeted and Tailored Support

- The Early Help Assessment (EHA) panel meets daily to coordinate responses to vulnerable early years children.
- Dedicated **Early Help Professionals** linked to all 74 schools, offering direct advice and support.
- **Team Around the School** pilot active in 25 schools, enhancing school-led intervention.

Mental Health and Behavioural Support

- Partnership with NHS England and Anna Freud Centre brought in **Child Wellbeing Practitioners** using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to support mild/moderate needs. A team of 4 Child Wellbeing Practitioners are now in place
- Parenting support enhanced through universal **Triple P** programme (131 parents attended) and **Non-Violent Resistance** programme (27 families completed).

Support for Resettled and Vulnerable Families

- Resettlement Team assists asylum-seeking and refugee families with safeguarding, integration, and mental health support.
- Over **200 families supported** through housing, education, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and medical care.

Training and Innovation

- **Mentors in Violence Prevention** rolled out in 4 secondary schools tackling safeguarding topics like exploitation and weapons.
- **Monthly audits** drive continuous quality improvement, with adjustments made to service delivery.
- **Multi-agency forums, Serious Violence and Mapping meetings** are attended by Early Help to safeguard adolescents from exploitation. A better picture of young people and their potential of exploitation risks and missing episodes has emerged.
- **Top of statistical neighbours for school attendance.**
- MARAC Co-ordinator now based in the Integrated Front Door (IFD), supporting the identification of high-risk domestic abuse cases and facilitating information-sharing for families known to MARAC. This has had a positive outcome on professionals understanding of the impact of domestic abuse and cases being appropriately managed in terms of thresholds.
- Collaborated with Bedfordshire Police to redesign MARAC (Domestic Abuse Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference) arrangements, increasing frequency from monthly to twice weekly. The change aimed to ensure timely safeguarding interventions for families, enable quicker perpetrator disruption, and deliver actions with greater significance and impact on case outcomes.

Early Help Case Study

Summary

Tom is a high-achieving and motivated pupil who enjoys school, particularly maths, and aspires to become an accountant. He has experienced significant medical challenges due to hearing loss. While he maintains a positive outward appearance, concerns have been raised about his tendency to mask emotions, increasing anxiety, and reluctance to wear hearing aids or discuss related issues. He lives in a stable, loving home with supportive parents and a strong family network. Concerns from both school and family focus on his emotional wellbeing, particularly his ability to process medical experiences and express feelings. Tom was referred for early therapeutic support, including Guided Self-Help sessions and an emotional diary intervention, aimed at developing emotional literacy and regulation strategies.

What worked well.

The use of Tom's interests (e.g., Pokémon, maths, gaming) helped build initial rapport and ease engagement. Introduction of an emotional diary allowed a private and structured outlet for emotional expression. The joint session with Mum resulted in increased engagement and, for the first time, Tom verbalising his distress to his parents. School-based sessions supported consistency and routine. Emotional strategies such as grounding and journaling were positively received by both Tom and his family.

What impact has the work made for Tom.

Tom showed improvement in emotional communication, especially during joint sessions. He began identifying and recording feelings such as frustration and demonstrated self-soothing behaviours like reading. The family reported Tom's growing ability to express emotions directly, which marks significant progress. A shared understanding of goals and concerns has been established between practitioner, school, and parents. Ongoing interventions have helped normalise emotional discussions and reduce the pressure Tom places on himself to appear "perfect."

Bedford Borough Family Hubs are a one stop shop for parents and carers to find information, ideas and support for their family, no matter what the age, culture or background of their children. They offer information on things to do with their children, help for their family, or just an answer to a question. The Hubs have information to support learning, health, development, emotional wellbeing and much more. A Family Hubs Festival was held on the 30th of October 2024 and attracted around 1,000 attendees. The event provided an opportunity for families to explore the many services available through the Family Hubs and Children's Centres in Bedford Borough.

"It was fantastic to see so many families enjoying the activities, while also learning about the wide range of support services available through our Family Hubs and Children's Centres. We're proud to be able to offer such valuable resources to local families, and it's heartening to see the positive impact these services are having across our community." Cllr Walker

Bedford Borough Council have worked with young people and the professionals who work with them to design the 3rd hub called Central Family Hub which is due to open in summer 2025. The Central Family Hub and has been specially designed with young people aged 11–18 in mind, a safe, welcoming place to spend time with friends, try out fun activities, learn new skills, and access support from local services. During the day, the Hub will also offer sessions and support for families with younger children. In the evenings and at weekends, it will become a vibrant youth hub focused on older age groups with sessions beginning over the summer.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- Partnership working is strong, with promising developments like multidisciplinary teams.
- Only **16** out of **721 Early Help cases** stepped up to statutory Social Care.
- Positive external inspection feedback from ILACS, JTAI, and SEND reviews confirming the **strength, responsiveness, and reach** of Early Help services.
- Early Help contributes actively to **neglect identification** using the GCP2 model and provides feedback to inform strategy.
- Parents feel better supported through 0 – 19 universal access to health information and advice to promote wellbeing and close and loving relationship with the baby.
- Needs / risks are identified early which enables parents to be supported with the area of need which was identified.
- Safeguarding concerns can be raised early to enable a multiagency response to ensure the safety of children when needed.
- Early years children with disabilities are given a creative outlet at EMBRACE to express their needs helping to improve their behaviour and wellbeing.
- The services at EMBRACE are led by the young people and their families meaning it's the right service and the right time, meeting the need to improve their health and wellbeing and ultimately their quality of life.
- Young people at **EMBRACE** are heard, valued and empowered and their views and opinions help to shape change now and for the future.
- **FACES** through their holistic family support such as **Dads@FACES** for fathers, **BabyFACES** prenatal project, **Together@FACES** Early Help project and a domestic abuse project have seen improved relationships with parents leading to stronger relationships between parent and children. For example, - 89% of dads feel less isolated - 94% of dads have increased awareness of parenting - 100% of dads felt their mental health had improved - 100% of dads felt listened to.
- **Family Hubs**
 - Reduction in waiting times for speech and language initial appts from approx. 52 to 18 weeks
 - Increased positive feedback around access to service from families and key partners
 - Approx. 50 families and 53 Early Years staff members trained to use Makaton
 - Addressing health inequalities and access to service via **Peep Ready Together**.

8.3 Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Partners offer a range of educational and mental health support services for children and young people in Bedford Borough. These include school-based initiatives, local authority resources, and charities that focus on emotional well-being and mental health. The services aim to improve mental health literacy, provide early intervention, and offer specialized support when needed. For schools the following

Wellbeing Ambassadors: A pilot program at [Bedford Academy](#) and [St Thomas More Secondary Schools](#) trains older students to support younger students' mental health.

Mental Health Support Teams: Bedfordshire CAMHS has launched teams within schools to provide direct mental health support.

Discovery College: An educational project focused on improving young people's wellbeing.

The Bedford College Group: Offers mental health and illness support for students.

PSHE Education: Promotes social, emotional, and behavioural skills through the curriculum.

East London Foundation Trust (ELFT) made 348 referrals to Children's Social Care in 2024–25, a 17% reduction from 420 in 2023–24. Issues of under-recording due to multiple electronic systems. New process from April 2025 with mandatory InPhase incident report form alongside these referrals will mean better oversight, accuracy, and intervention. Their holistic risk assessments include voice of the child and contextual risks. ELFT challenge decisions if not in child's best interest. They have a strong stakeholder relationship via CAMHS and Community Access Pathway. New multi-agency cooperation and escalation protocol has been developed to improve joint working across Bedford Borough.



Early Help Case Study

Tilly was referred for a CWP (Child Wellbeing Practitioner) assessment due to concerns around her emotional wellbeing, mental health, and school attendance. She had a history of low mood, anxiety, and a previous overdose linked to past bullying. At the point of referral, Tilly struggled to express her emotions, showed signs of peer vulnerability (including vaping and potential substance use), and had inconsistent attendance and punctuality. While she was physically healthy and supported by her mother and stepfather, her emotional and behavioural presentation varied significantly between school and online settings. She was socially influenced and had been involved in verbal altercations. Her best hopes focused on feeling happy and safe at school, with a planned transition to a new setting for improved support. Support was provided in the form of an initial CWP assessment followed by 9 sessions of CBT-informed intervention. By the end of the 9 sessions, Tilly demonstrated improved emotional awareness and coping strategies. She was more able to identify and express her feelings, and her anxiety symptoms had reduced. There were notable improvements in her motivation and engagement, both at home and in school. She also reported feeling more confident in managing peer pressures and showed signs of better decision-making around her social interactions. Tilly made meaningful progress toward her initial goals of feeling safer and more settled at school.

What worked well.

Tilly attended all 9 sessions and gradually built trust with the practitioner. She responded well to structured support, showing increased emotional awareness and willingness to participate. Tilly developed practical strategies to manage anxiety and low mood. She began expressing her feelings more clearly, reducing emotional outbursts and helping adults better support her. There was a noticeable improvement in Tilly's attitude towards school and future planning. She became more hopeful and goal-focused, particularly around feeling safer and happier in school. There was consistent support from her mother and stepfather which provided a stable foundation. They were actively involved, reinforcing strategies at home and maintaining open communication with professionals. Sessions emphasised what Tilly wanted to change, empowering her and giving her a sense of control. Discussions around school transition and peer pressure led to clearer boundaries and decision-making. The school and Early Help maintained a shared understanding of Tilly's needs, promoting a joined-up approach.

What difference has the work made for Tilly.

Improved Emotional Wellbeing: Tilly now has a better understanding of her feelings and can identify triggers for her low mood and anxiety. She uses strategies to manage her emotions more effectively, reducing the intensity and frequency of emotional distress.

Greater Confidence and Self-Awareness: Tilly has shown increased confidence in expressing her thoughts and needs, both at home and in school settings. She is more reflective and shows improved decision-making, particularly around friendships and peer pressure.

Better School Engagement: Although challenges with attendance and punctuality remain, Tilly is more motivated to attend school and participate. Her attitude towards learning and her future has become more hopeful, and goal orientated.

Strengthened Home Support: Parents have a better understanding of Tilly's mental health needs and feel more equipped to support her. Home life has remained stable, with consistent routines and boundaries that reinforce progress made in sessions.

Reduction in Risky Behaviour: Tilly has become more aware of the influence peers have on her behaviour and has begun to make safer choices, particularly around vaping and verbal altercations. She is more mindful of her actions and their consequences.

Positive Shift Towards the Future: Tilly has begun preparing for a school transition that better supports her needs. She is focused on her goal of feeling safe and happy in school, with a clearer sense of what support works for her.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

[Cambridgeshire Community Services](#) annual audits are in place to monitor mental health assessment tool usage and impact and effective early identification and referral to support services including [CHUMS](#) and [Mental Health Support Teams](#).

[Bedfordshire Open Door](#) provided services to 1039 Young People. 100% of clinical assessments have been carried out within 14 days of registration. 100% of young people registered with Bedfordshire Open Door have received a clinical assessment. Young people are signposted into other services where appropriate. Where an individual does not meet the threshold for CAMHs, parents and young people have a positive experience of being referred directly on to an appropriate service that meets their clinically assessed needs.

8.4 Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

The [NSPCC](#) conducted a Snapshot of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in late 2024 to support Pan Bedfordshire in understanding the gaps and opportunities across the breadth of the local CSA offer, facilitated multi-agency discussions and input on key aspects of local CSA responses and wider service provision. The outcome of the CSA Snapshot evidenced some examples of good practice and good multi-agency working, but a lack of shared understanding, focus and support means there is inconsistency. There has been some focus on Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Pan Bedfordshire, and Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB) which is consistently highlighted as an area that is increasing in referrals/incidents but a significant lack of shared understanding, joint approach prevention and support activity. Areas for improvement and gaps in provision were identified. The Snapshot found some evidence of specialist expertise, positive multi-agency working and a real desire to improve the system overall. With the publication of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's national review ["I wanted them all to notice."](#) The Pan Bedfordshire CSA strategy will also address the 6 recommendations in that report.

The strategy will help the three Partnerships to gain a better understanding of what works from the perspective of children, young people and their families and consider how best to support those in need. This strategy and accompanying multi-agency action plan will be monitored by the Pan Beds Assurance and Improvement Group and Pan Bedfordshire CSA Steering group, reported on to the three Partnerships and the Pan Beds Strategic Leaders for Children's Services group and any appropriate Partnerships. This Strategy will consider the [Bedfordshire Serious Violence & Exploitation Strategy](#) and the [National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) due out in June 2025 (Baroness Casey).

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- Further guidance on Child Sexual Abuse was developed and is available at this [link](#).
- Development of a Pan Bedfordshire CSA Steering group to take forward recommendations for the NSPCC CSA Snapshot and ["I wanted them all to notice"](#) report.

8.5 Contextual Safeguarding, Exploitation and Missing

The [Bedfordshire Serious Violence and Exploitation Strategy 2025-2027](#) has been published, marking a significant step forward in tackling violence and exploitation. Alongside the publication of the strategy, the Bedfordshire Violence and Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU) become the [Violence and Exploitation Prevention Partnership \(VEPP\)](#). The change to VEPP represents more than a new name. It is a strategic realignment that will look to:

- Better communicate their purpose and priorities – moving from a unit to a collaborative partnership model.
- Emphasise prevention as a central pillar in tackling the root cause of violence and exploitation.
- Reinforce their role in coordinating partnership activity, enabling a consistent and integrated approach across agencies.

Over the past year, this strategy has been developed through close collaboration with partners, including workshops, interviews, and joint planning.

The new VEPP will coordinate three core workstreams:

- Serious Violence Duty: Supporting partners to meet statutory requirements.
- Prevention Partnerships: A newly formed government initiative, focused on targeted early intervention, being piloted via the areas delivered the following programme.
- Violence Reduction Unit Programme: Continuing to deliver this programme within Bedfordshire embedding a public health approach to serious violence and exploitation.

[Bedfordshire Against Violence and Exploitation \(BAVEX\)](#) Pan Beds Exploitation Communication Group continues to meet on an 8-week basis, this group has evolved to include violence and exploitation; the group is to coordinate and deliver Pan Beds Multi Agency communications across the Partnership regarding violence and exploitation. This group is overseen by the Pan Beds Exploitation & Missing Strategic Group and the Serious Harm Partnership Board.

A Pan Beds Partnership Response was coordinated in 2024 regarding the recommendations from the Criminal Exploitation needs Assessment and presented to the Pan Beds Exploitation & Missing Strategic Group. However, this group have not meet since January 2025 due to changes in the role of the Pan Bedfordshire Exploitation and Missing Coordinator. Recruitment is underway and once in post the strategic work of this group will resume.

[Link to Change](#) is the only voluntary organisation working across Bedford Borough, who exclusively support this highly vulnerable and at-risk group of young people. Using a trauma-informed and strengths-based approach, they build trusting relationships, showing care and respect to help children and young people rebuild their sense of self and heal. At Link to Change they are committed to being the experts in child exploitation, using direct experience to advocate and support change.

Link to Change Case Study

Jack was 12 years old and had been the victim of online grooming and exploitation. The exploitation had been occurring for 2 years and was discovered by his older sibling. Jack was referred to Link to Change by his social worker and the police. Jack engaged in conversations via private messaging, with female that he believed to be a year older than him. The relationship initially developed through Jack's struggles with his mental health, which he had written about in his biography and posted various quotes about. As a result of the grooming, Jack had been livestreaming on a range of different platforms. The live streaming involved Jack performing a wide variety of sexual acts based upon the demands of those watching the live streams. Jack had also created naked images in different positions, as requested initially by the perpetrator and then by various others that had also made contact. Jack's older sister had been contacted via snapchat by an unknown other, to blackmail her with the images of herself and her younger brother. Jack had also taken images of his sister getting changed, when she was unaware. On the initial outset, Jack was reluctant to engage with their Specialist Exploitation Worker, due to embarrassment and lack of understanding of the grooming processes. The first month of the support was spent with the worker building a relationship and rapport with the young person. During this time a few key terms were introduced to Jack around grooming, healthy relationships and exploitation. For some time, Jack still believed that he was talking with a peer and continued to have concerns about the female and the mental health concerns she had 'shared' about herself. Jack felt a loyalty to ensure that she was ok and not in any harm. Jack struggled to identify himself as someone that had been exploited, as there had never been any direct and physical contact with any perpetrators and the perpetrator was seen to be someone of a similar age to him. Through the work, over the next year, with Link to Change Jack began to understand what had happened to him, the trauma he had experienced and the steps he needed to make to keep himself safe, especially within the online world.

Here are some comments from those children and young people they have worked with and the impact they have made to their lives

"When I came to Link to Change, I didn't think I could ever have a normal life again. The abuse had taken everything from me. But they helped me see that I could start over—that I could take control of my story. With their support, I've started to believe in myself again. My life is changing, and for the first time, I'm excited about what comes next."

"I felt trapped for so long, like nobody could help me. At Link to Change, I found people who didn't just listen—they understood. They helped me rebuild myself from the inside out and gave me the strength to face the pain I thought would never go away. I'm not who I was before, and I know now that I have the power to heal, grow, and create a future I never thought was possible."

"I didn't think anyone would ever really listen to me. But with Link to Change, it was different — they made me feel like my voice mattered. They didn't judge me, they helped me believe in myself again."

“They helped me feel safe again. I was really scared before, but now I have someone I can talk to who understands me. They make me feel like I’m not alone.”

“I was in a really dark place and didn’t trust anyone. But they never gave up on me and helped me see that my past doesn’t define me — I can still have a future.”

Hospital Navigators provided by **St Giles Trust** are based in Bedfordshire A&E departments, supporting under-25s affected by violence and exploitation. They provide risk assessments, discharge/safety planning, and referrals to community services. Now commissioned for a second year following positive outcomes.

Bedfordshire Police launched “Lost Boys” VR campaign on Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE). New CSE Silver Group adds extra scrutiny and daily analysis of risk, victims, and perpetrators. Implemented Philomena Protocol for looked-after children at risk of going missing, ensuring faster, more informed responses.

The **Violence & Exploitation Reduction Unit (VERU)** have a network of Youth Voices. They have embedded trauma-informed practice into their strategy. Commissioned services that have reached 8,000 young people facing disadvantage. Delivered prevention campaigns (e.g. Just Drop It) linked to reduction in knife crime and increased weapons surrendered and awareness campaigns reaching 600,000 plus people across Bedfordshire. Commissioned services like Bedfordshire Open Door to provide specialist counselling service for victims of crime and exploitation.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- Increase in Pan Beds Multi Agency Information Submission Forms when campaigns & training have been delivered.
- Professional challenge during exploitation cases improved outcomes for young people.
- Practitioners have reported increased confidence in safeguarding processes and escalation around exploitation cases.
- Bedfordshire Open Door have reported that 57 Young people who have been victims of crime and or exploitation registered and receiving weekly one to one counselling April 2024 to Dec 2024.
- Through a collaborative, community-led approach, the VERU (now the VEPP) has supported those at-risk of harm, empowered young people to be part of the solution to tackling issues that affect them and worked with partners to educate young people on dangers of things like knife crime and county lines. Over the last 12 months, their impact has been felt through early intervention programs, targeted outreach initiatives and the strengthening of crucial partnership between Bedfordshire Police, Bedford Borough Council and other statutory and community services.

8.6 Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

SEND Inspection carried out Nov 2024 – Feb 2025 found.....

- Bedford Borough SEND arrangements generally lead to positive experiences and outcomes.
- Children's voices are heard effectively.
- **Bedford Borough Parent Carers Forum** (BBPCF) plays a strong role.
- EHC plans completed on time; most needs identified early and supported without long delays.
- Some challenges: long waits on neurodevelopmental assessments and lower academic outcomes than expected.

Strengths

- Strong multi-agency culture (education, health, social care work well together).
- High-quality health services, such as speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, mobility support.
- School adaptations and staff training usually effective and exclusions have recently fallen after new interventions.
- Effective transitions into adulthood – work placements, supported internships, employability focus.
- Low NEET rates among young people with SEND.
- SEND children well integrated into community life (e.g. Summer of SEND, Inclusive Park).

Areas for improvement included academic outcomes remain below potential with some children still missing timely identification of their needs which can lead to crisis and exclusion from education. Limited local SEND-specific activities.

The SEND Improvement Action Plan was updated in March 2025 and will be monitored by the SEND Improvement Board. There is a strong input from Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum into commissioning and strategic needs assessments. The workforce is stable providing sustained impact, notably EHC timeliness. Some examples of additional initiatives provided in Bedford Borough.

- Bedford Inclusive Town: developing safe haven shops for vulnerable/ SEND individuals.
- Bedfordshire Hospitals: SEND/Transitions Nurse supports move from children to adult healthcare.
- Carers in Bedfordshire: young carers network, wellbeing support, safety sessions.
- FACES: early intervention programmes (Emotion Detectives, SendiTots, Spectrum Support).



Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- Team Around Schools Pilot is starting to lead more triangulated discussions with schools and multi-agency input and risk identification, intervention and prevention for some children and young people
- Central Hub will provide children and young people, and those with vulnerabilities spaces to go to seek support if out and about in the town centre as and when needed.
- Work undertaken by EMBRACE means that for young people with complex disabilities they can access their community in a way that protects them from criminal and sexual exploitation. They can also access the community without their parents but are with others trusted adults who can meet their health and care needs.
- Outcomes of Carers in Bedfordshire work has meant that
 - 671 young carers attended a group over a period of 12 months.
 - 68 sessions were offered over a period of 12 months and provided young carers with opportunities to have access to social activities.
 - 371 unique young carers were supported to an outcome over a 12-month period. through group/club activity.
 - 81 Young carers received Wellbeing sessions since July 2024
- The Sensory Garden and inclusive play park at the Child Development Centre support well-being and developmental needs and community value.
- Through the delivery of Inclusive Island at River Festival; Summer of SEND Activities and ongoing activities commissioned children and young people, regardless of need, have an increased range of activities to take part in within the local community. There has been broadly positive feedback, though this continues to be requested, particularly for older age groups
- Through SEND work children and young people are better able to engage in appropriate courses and pathways to adulthood leading to more engagement and sustained success into adulthood for many young people.
- With the launch of the Carers in Bedfordshire's Young carers Schools network, provided quality training and opportunities for volunteers
 - 32 School assemblies delivered in Bedford Borough
 - 83 Young carers supported in school through young carer story time initiative
 - 1,557 registered young carers now have access to support in their caring role.
 - Schools can easily refer into the service
 - 11 schools are now members and attending termly meetings
 - 214 Statutory Young carer assessments took place in schools
- FACES Spectrum Support project is supporting families with children with additional needs. Families are provided with interventions and support that prevent them from hitting crisis point. They have seen an increase in positive wellbeing and improve mental health plus confidence for parents to advocate for their child and parental knowledge of where to go for help. Improvements in parents' ability to parent and support with their child's behaviours. Improved emotional outcomes for children

Young people's voices and feedback is shaping the work streams in the new SEND Action Plan to address the issues the Inspection raised and help the Local Are Partnership to work on the things that matter most to them and will make a difference to their lived experiences

8.7 Policy and Procedures Group

This has been another busy year with the group providing 93 new and/or revised procedures and guidance which can be accessed at this link. There has been a number of one-page briefing documents developed on issues arising from Reviews that practitioners have feedback have been helpful in raising awareness of safeguarding issues, for example.

[The importance of history to safeguard children and young people,](#)

[Working with large sibling group families](#)

[Impact of poverty on children.](#)

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- The development of a suite of briefings has provided practitioners with quick, concise, awareness raising opportunities on a number of subjects for example see above with positive feedback from partners that practitioners are using the documents in daily practice and finding them user friendly, easy to digest critical safeguarding information that influence their practice.
- Pathways and protocols support the multi-agency partnership to make appropriate safeguarding arrangements to support the welfare of all children living in the borough.

8.8 Engaging with families

Working with families and carers is crucial for providing effective care and support. It involves building strong partnerships based on trust, open communication, and mutual respect. This collaborative approach ensures that the individual's needs are met holistically, considering their background, culture, and existing support network. Working together with families and carers is a cornerstone of safeguarding children, ensuring their safety and well-being by involving those closest to them in the process. It is vital for practitioners to work with families in partnership. For them to be clear on what is happening, how and when and what they can expect from those they are working with, and in turn what is expected of them. The principles make clear the importance of building trusting relationships and ensuring the child and young person's voice and what is best for them is central to any decisions made. As a result of the Working Together 2023 guidance families can expect that practitioners should identify and build on their strengths and will consider their life experiences and how they may impact how they may think, feel and behave in relation to working with others. Families will be communicated to clearly and consistently and should receive information with language being inclusive and accessible, respectful, concise and jargon free to suit each family's individual needs. Workers should seek regular feedback from family networks, and children, to improve their ways of working and consistently review their own practice.

Bedfordshire Hospital Trust has seen evidence in the last year that their continued collaboration between the Adult Safeguarding team, Safeguarding Children and Safeguarding Midwifery teams is supportive of a 'Think Family' ethos. As a result, the link between adults presenting with adult safeguarding concerns is regularly identified, whereby as a child there may have been previous safeguarding involvement in childhood. This structure supports and improves the level of communicated handovers of care into the various services.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

Link to Change shared these comments from families they have worked with and the impact they have made to their lives

“When my child first came to Link to Change, they were broken. But now, they have hope again. The staff didn't just help them heal; they gave them back their confidence and sense of purpose.”

“Before Link to Change got involved, we felt completely alone. My child was lost in a system that didn't understand them. The support we received was life-changing —they didn't just see the behaviour; they saw the trauma behind it. For the first time, we felt heard, understood, and supported.”

“When everything felt like it was falling apart, Link to Change was the one place that held us together. They didn't just support my child — they supported me too. They gave us hope when we had none.”

8.9 Thresholds

The current [Thresholds of Need Guide Effective Support for Children and Families](#) in Bedford Borough have been in place since February 2023. Partners have shared positive comments and understand the thresholds and level of need well, no further amendments were needed to be made to the guidance this year.

8.10 Information Sharing

Information sharing has also continued to be noted as a theme in reviews and audits. The [Safeguarding Bedfordshire website](#) has a dedicated page regarding information sharing. The Pann Bedfordshire Child Protection Procedures also has information sharing to safeguard children' factsheet which provides practical considerations for professionals.

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board have promoted and helped to develop the Child Protection Information Sharing Service (CPIS). This system enables health and social care to share information securely to proactively protect Children and Young People. All Children who are on a Child Protection Plan and Children in Care are now flagged in 7 health care settings including: A/E departments, walk in centres, maternity services, ambulance trusts and out of hours services. Work is underway for CPIS to be expanded to cover all health care settings.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- Alignment to other strategic partnerships/boards has assisted appropriate sharing of information and intelligence.
- An agreed Pan Bedfordshire joint information sharing protocol supports information sharing.
- Through local audits and reviews there is evidence that information is sought, analysed, shared, and broken down by protected characteristics to facilitate more accurate and timely decision-making for children and families, and to understand outcomes for different communities of children but is not consistent in all cases.

9. Learning and Improvement Work

9.1 Section 11 Self Assessments

Section 11(4) of the Children Act 2004 requires each person or organisation to which the Section 11 duty applies to have regard to any guidance given to them by the Secretary of State, for more information about this guidance click [here](#). The self-assessment forms part of the independent scrutiny arrangements and feeds into the reporting requirements as set out in [Chapter 4 - Working Together 2023](#). The three Safeguarding Children Partnerships have a statutory duty to assess whether agencies in their areas are fulfilling their statutory obligation to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, as described in Section 11 of the Children's Act 2004.

An annual assessment of all member agencies in relation to their duties under Section 11 Children Act 2004 is undertaken by the Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton Safeguarding Children Partnerships. This is a self-assessment exercise that aims to assess the effectiveness of the arrangements for safeguarding children and young people at a strategic level. Each agency must ensure that any statements made within the assessment are backed by evidence. It is anticipated that assessment of compliance with arrangements at operational service level will have been undertaken to support statements in this self-assessment. Wherever possible, evidence of **impact on improving outcomes for children** should be identified. The tool assesses each agency against the following 8 standards based on the requirements of Section 11 Children Act 2024 as set down in the [‘Statutory Guidance on Making Arrangements to Safeguard & Promote the Welfare of Children under Sec 11 Children Act 2004’ \(pages 13-17\)](#). Throughout the self-assessment, consideration must be given to **evidencing improved outcomes for children young people and their families** as a result of the arrangements.

The Pan Bedfordshire Assurance and Improvement Group have monitored the action plans from the 2023-2024 Section 11 which focussed on Neglect). In 2025 – 2026 it was agreed that the relevant partners would consider all the following 8 standards, last assessed in full in 2017.

1. Senior management have commitment to the importance of safeguarding and promoting children's welfare
2. There is a clear statement of the agency's responsibility towards children, and this is available to all staff
3. There is a clear line of accountability within the organisation for work on safeguarding and promoting welfare
4. Service development takes into account the need to safeguard and promote welfare and is informed, where appropriate, by the views of children & families
5. There is effective training on safeguarding & promoting the welfare of children for all staff working with or, depending on the agency's primary functions, in contact with children & families
6. Safer recruitment procedures including vetting procedures and those for managing allegations are in place
7. There is effective inter-agency working to safeguard & promote the welfare of children
8. There is effective Information Sharing.

Timetable for 2025/2026 Section 11's

- March 2026 - All agencies to submit their Section 11 Self Assessments by the 31.03.2026
- April 2026 - submissions are scrutinised by the three Independent Scrutineers
- May 2026 – A Pan Beds event is proposed to discuss the findings and agree workstreams required.

9.2 Learning from Reviews

Undertaking Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR's) for cases where a child has died or been seriously harmed, and abuse or neglect is known or suspected, is a statutory responsibility of the BBSCP. During the period of this report the BBSCP did not commission any Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. During this last year 12 months there were 3 notifications of Serious Incidents to the Case Review Group to consider involving 3 children. From these notifications, 1 Rapid Review was completed and submitted to the National Panel who confirmed that they agreed with the Case Review Group decision not to initiate a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. One of the Notifications regarding 1 child and sexual abuse was looked at in depth by the Case Review Group and a Learning Review was completed. The third notification resulted in the case also be looked into in depth and agreed that the learning reflected work already embedded and progressing re suicide, so a decision was taken not to review the case further. Learning briefs on these cases can be found [here](#).

The 3 notifications were received from the Cambridgeshire Community Services and Bedford Borough Council which demonstrates a commitment to learning and safeguarding effectiveness by partners. The categories of these notifications were sexual abuse, murder and suicide. Learning from these notifications and past multi-agency reviews are scrutinised at the Case Review Group. Agencies are held to account for their actions and asked to provide assurances to explain how their actions and the learning have been shared, embedded, provide evidence of impact for children and young people and practice.

The BBSCP considers and learns lessons from individual local and national cases to enable the partnership to think proactively about how to help practitioners work differently so that serious incidents do not happen. In response to the learning from the above notifications and reviews

resources have been developed to support practitioners and their practice and can be accessed [here](#).

Bedfordshire Youth Justice Services (BYJS) presented three notifications to the Case Review Group that they were obliged to make to the Youth Justice Board. The notifications led to multi-agency in depth discussions and development of integrated chronologies.

Emerging learning across cases reviewed by the Case Review Group in the last year.

1. Gaps in Early Identification & Intervention

- Delayed recognition of Special Educational Needs, neurodiversity, learning delays.
- Missed early signs of serious youth violence or exploitation due to lack of local profile and data mapping.
- Limited early school-based interventions; unclear strategies to keep vulnerable children in mainstream education.

2. Weak Multi-Agency Coordination & Information Sharing.

- Inconsistent history-sharing when families move between areas.
- Missed opportunities for integrated chronologies at the start of high-risk cases.
- Drift and acclimatisation to chronic neglect over years.
- Professional disagreements not escalated, leading to inaction.

3. Insufficient Focus on Lived Experience of Children.

- National Panel noted some reviews lacked depth on children's voices, ethnicity, daily lives.
- Overemphasis on behaviour/diagnosis rather than parenting capacity and home environment.
- Limited understanding of wider family/extended network role.

4. Non-Engagement and Resistance from Families.

- Prolonged safeguarding risk due to parental non-compliance and refusal to cooperate.
- Lack of clear processes to respond when families obstruct investigations or refuse essential health testing.

5. Gaps in Addressing Complex Youth Risks.

- Young people with multiple risk factors not systematically identified or tracked in some cases reviewed.
- No strong local strategy for those transitioning from childhood into adulthood at high risk of violence.
- Limited ability to “know what we don’t know” — gaps in visibility for young people not already in services.

6. Need for Stronger Strategic Links.

- Current workstreams around exploitation exist but not fully integrated with safeguarding partnerships.
- Multiple reviews call for cross-agency task groups and contextual safeguarding approaches.

9.3 Multi Agency Audits

A Pan Bedfordshire Multi-Agency Audit of Child to Parent Violence was undertaken in October 2024 with 9 cases identified (3 from each local authority area) from the last 12 months. Aim of the audits was to consider the impact of child to parent violence on children, young people and their families and seek assurances that partner agencies are appropriately identifying and responding to the needs of these children, young people and their families. There were some great examples of partnership working and positive interventions being put in place with children and families, particularly some intensive work from within Children’s Services, which led to the family’s situation improving to the extent that families

could be stepped down from services. Here are some examples of learning and areas for improvement from the audit based on the case information provided.

- A Think Family approach was missing.
- Limited info regarding sibling-to-sibling violence.
- Parents not being viewed as victims or seeing themselves as victims.
- Communication between children/adult services could be improved.
- Terminology/abbreviations used by children/adult services have different meanings and potential different consequences in terms of next steps and interventions for the child/young person/family.
- Aggressive behaviour started at a young age for some of these young people but again limited exploration/curiosity as to why they were behaving in this way and seen as low-level concerns. In some cases, the aggression/violence had escalated from the home to school.
- Missed opportunities to explore past experiences, trauma, learned behaviours.
- Case closure sometimes premature - assessments not fully completed, support in place but no evidence it has made a difference, or the family have made changes, and no further incidents reported.
- Lots of themes featured in these cases have already been seen in historical SARs for young adults/adults with similar background/history.

Questions were raised for partners agencies to respond to because of this audit and the Pan Beds Assurance and Improvement Group are in the process of addressing these and seeking assurances.

Facilitated by Bedford Borough Council Childrens Social Care monthly multi-agency audits have been conducted to review and rate contacts progressing at the front door (IFD) and the IFD response in terms of timeliness and appropriateness. Quality Assurance of safeguarding

responses is a joint responsibility and needs to consider how well agencies are engaging with families, understand their needs and provide support. A collaborative learning approach will support the organisations to improve outcomes for children and young people, together, allowing a space to learn together through discussion, critical thinking and constructive challenge across agencies. The multi-agency audit team made up of representatives from the IFD, health, education and the Police look at each child and determine if: The action taken was appropriate and timely ; Consider the quality of the referral; The reasons for a decision and the next steps are clear. Cases are randomly selected to audit including a mix of Red, Amber and Green RAG rated contacts.

Some examples of key learning points

- Decisions on all contacts were safe and largely in line with the Threshold Document
- Ethnicity is too often missing on contacts from partners who know families well
- IFD needs to ensure timescales (1 working day) are adhered to for Amber rated contacts to be completed including the MASH episode
- Contacts sent in by professionals with no consent and no need to over-ride consent, should be returned to the referrer within 1 working day for further action in line with the Threshold document.
- DSL's and partners to highlight in making referrals if the family have been known to be CiN in another authority. IFD to undertake checks if the outcome of the previous CiN plan is not known.
- Learning in relation to a child reporting sexual assault/ rape the need for a more robust response/remedial action to be taken.
- Positive impact of heightened use of the threshold document in contact review, it would be even better if this were also used in MASH episode outcomes.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this work.

- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel provided feedback to the BBSCP that our Rapid Review report was of a good quality.
- Duplication of learning in multiple Rapid/Learning Reviews has led to time and capacity being spent on addressing the learning rather than undertaking a LSCPR.
- The BBSCP continued to seek from the Safeguarding Partners their responses and evidence of impact to the recommendations from previous reviews into measurable actions.
- Continued parity between the Safeguarding Partners and a more shared responsibility for learning and practice improvement.
- An avenue for the Bedfordshire Youth Offending Service to share with the BBSCP serious incident notifications that they have made to the Youth Justice Board and the learning from the cases.

9.4 Safeguarding Training

Safeguarding Bedfordshire is the multi-agency training provider for the Safeguarding Children Partnerships in Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire and Luton. Training is aimed at those working or volunteering with children and young people. Our multi-agency approach ensures a shared understanding of the priorities held by each of the Partnerships and promotes partnership working to safeguard children and young people with the ambition that they will lead safe, happy and healthy lives, with opportunities to learn, develop and fulfil their potential.

- Safeguarding Bedfordshire delivered **67 learning events** in 2024/25: with an **82% increase in attendance**. This rise is attributed to a wider offer of free events, and the recent introduction (January 2025) of Designated Safeguarding Lead training.
- **eLearning** registrations/ completions **reduced by 18%** in 2024/25; this is in line with our work to cleanse the system, ensuring those accessing funded eLearning are working with children/ young people in Bedfordshire, and our regular monitoring of claimed but unused licences. Although registrations are down, **overall completion rates are up to 89%**.
- Our 2024/25 **training programme was enhanced by colleagues from our Partner Agencies joining training pools** to co-deliver 'Understanding Neglect', 'Domestic Abuse' and 'Multi-Agency Information Submission Form' sessions, alongside awareness raising webinars following local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and 'Risk Assessments and Thresholds' and launching the Pan Bedfordshire Neglect Campaign.
- **Satisfaction rates increased** year on year, to 99% for paid learning content, 100% for free Continuing Professional Development events and 91% for eLearning.

- **Impact of training;** as a result of attending Safeguarding Bedfordshire events, participants identify increased knowledge, skills and confidence in recognising and responding to safeguarding concerns, increased understanding of local procedures/ thresholds and improved referrals. They appreciate the opportunity to learn in a multi-agency environment, praise the trainer/ facilitators subject knowledge and have taken action including disseminating learning within their organisation, updating policies and procedures, introducing child friendly policies, initiating audits, improving record keeping (particularly around voice/ lived experience of the child) and using escalation procedures.
- Late **cancellations/ non-attendance of learning events decreased** by 3% for paid learning events. Reasons for non-attendance include staff shortages/ capacity issues, medical appointments and attendance of safeguarding meetings/ court.
- The Pan Bedfordshire **Safeguarding Partnership website had 288,404 visits**, with 16,837 interactions with the training pages.
- Safeguarding Bedfordshire **worked with Bedfordshire Against Violence & Exploitation** (BAVEX), supporting a series of exploitation themed events including 'Mind your Language: Exploitation and Victim Blaming' and 'Child Exploitation & Home Office Toolkit' webinars and a Pan
- Bedfordshire conference (all funded by BAVEX). We also **worked with YGAM** to deliver free 'Online Gaming and Gambling Harms' webinars.

Partner agencies have provided some assurances this year of their single agency and here are a few examples

Bedfordshire Youth Justice Services have enhanced the effectiveness of interventions and ensured a child-centred approach in their service through the following comprehensive programme of staff training; here are some highlights.

- Graded Care Profile 2 (GCP2) delivered in response to findings from last year's Section 11 audit, enabling staff to better assess neglect.
- Unconscious Bias and Allyship Training equips staff in recognising and challenging bias and promoting equity for all children, particularly in relation to race and policing experiences shared by children (including white children).
- AIM Training – Focused on the Assessment and Intervention for children displaying sexually harmful behaviour, helping practitioners distinguish between typical and concerning sexual behaviours and ensuring appropriate responses.

Impact has been the

- Reduction in First-Time Entrants (FTEs): Through applying training knowledge, staff provide tailored, child-focused interventions. This “no one-size-fits-all” approach has effectively reduced the number of young people entering the YJS.
- Reoffending Rates Decreased: Their reoffending tracker shows a drop, placing Bedford YJS in the top performing percentile nationally.
- Data-Informed Practice: Deep dive analyses of FTE cohorts help identify early patterns and support timely intervention.

Bedfordshire Fire Service have reported seeing improvements to staff awareness and training which has directly impacted referral numbers for themselves and has also ensured that all staff are aware of the importance of sharing information in a timely manner with sufficient detail. This improves outcomes for children, young people, their families, and safeguarding practice, as it ensures that they work as efficiently as possible within the local safeguarding partnerships.

Some examples of what the impact has been of this training.

The following are comments made by practitioners on the impact of the following training courses.

Working Together to Safeguard Children

‘It was good to get an insight into how different agencies come together around a child in need and to be signposted to statutory/ guidance documents. This will help me as a DSL and help me help families in need will be priceless. Outlining of good practice is also going to be invaluable.’

DSL, Education, Bedford

“The most useful aspect of this session was the trainer knowledge and ability to link discussions to practice, and answer questions in depth. I will take all the information and review our organisations safeguarding policy and procedure to ensure it includes all recent safeguarding updates.”

Clinical Manager, Vol Sector, Pan Beds

“I really found it useful to identify, discuss and hear best practice around avoiding professional barriers. Being empowered to address this, in order that the needs of the young person can come first, was also helpful. I did not fully understand the difference between EH, CIN and CP - I feel that I can now speak about them with competence. This was such useful training to my role and Jenny had such a wealth of knowledge and experience which made it an excellent course.”

Drug & Alcohol Practitioner, Pan Beds

I have more knowledge of how multi-agency safeguarding procedures work, how multiagency working is crucial to the overall protection of a child. I also understand barriers of multiagency working and how to mainly through building trusting professional relationships, sticking to policy and keeping in mind the child's safety and wellbeing at all times."

Community Nursery Nurse, CCS, Pan Beds

This course has made it clear for me on reporting safeguarding concerns and the relevant people I can go to, not just for the safeguarding of children but for the wellbeing of myself and my team when having to deal with these difficult situations."

Childminder, Bedford Borough

Designated Safeguarding Leads: Roles & Responsibilities and Update course 'I am new to the role of deputy DSL, so this course was informative and gave me a good grounding. I like the resources because it suggested what else I need to do to inform my knowledge further.'

Education, Bedford Borough

'Already spoken to both deputy DSL on site and shared up to date information. Staff meeting - looking to discuss barriers to recording (and gain) Policy feedback - procedures are being re-written to have shorter bullets in place.'

Education, Bedford Borough

Contextual Safeguarding 'I enjoyed learning about Peer, Family and Neighbourhood Mapping. I attended with colleagues, and we are now using in practice.'

Independent Organisation, Bedfordshire

Voice of the Child 'There was so much to unpack here. I plan to action immediately by ensuring that staff are capturing the voice of the child when recording concerns. I will also ensure that communication passports are put into place for our non-verbal children.

Headteacher, Education, Bedford

Safeguarding Children with Disabilities 'As I work for a special need's charity, this training will impact how we carry out our safeguarding duties.'

Vol Sector, Bedfordshire

Safeguarding Young People into Adulthood "For me it was the lightbulb moment of just how different Adult and Child services are which is what impacts on transitions. It's a really simple thing which I feel is not really thought of by professionals. This had made me think how we could adapt our support to learners to help prepare them for this."

Residential Home, Bedfordshire

Safeguarding Supervision. 'As I am new to running Safeguarding Supervision, I found the whole course really interesting and informative. It gave me so much information to be able to implement the Supervision within our organisation.'

Business Support Co-ordinator, Independent Sector, Bedfordshire

'Brilliant training with great content. I particularly liked the section around learning styles and the supervision cycle. I will definitely encourage more reflection time in supervision.'

Drug and Alcohol Practitioner, Bedfordshire

'I found that all aspects of the session were really useful, but I think the parts that stood out most and will be most helpful when setting up supervision will be the 4 stage reflective process of experiencing/ reflecting/ conceptualising/ actively experimenting as this will really help in structuring the supervision sessions. I think that the questions on the handout for the four sections of the supervision cycle will also be hugely helpful in keeping the supervision sessions focused.'

DSL, Education, Bedford

Risk Assessment & Thresholds Webinar "Having all 3 (Safeguarding Partners presenting) enable new staff to better understand the collaborative approach to safeguarding children. If this could be done 6 monthly, there would improve communication between agencies. Sharing information is key to safeguarding."

Probation Service, Bedfordshire

"Really interesting to listen to how probation risk assesses their work. I was not aware of the 'serious harm' risk assessment they use." Bedfordshire Police.

Please see the Strategic Plan at Appendix 2 page 45

10. Priorities for 2025 – 2026

The Partnership will continue to work on the following

- Neglect with a focus on chronic neglect.
- Performance Management & Quality Assurance.
- Embedding learning from audit and reviews into practice.
- Child Sexual Abuse.
- Voice of the child, young people and their families.



11. Conclusion

The next year will be another busy one for the Partnership with work already planned. With Sally Rowe as the Independent Scrutineer there are opportunities for the role to enrich and improve the scrutiny overview of the Partnership. There has been good progress made in engaging education and the BBSCP will continue to engage and embed education as our fourth safeguarding partner across the BBSCP structure to ensure that education has an equitable and meaningful voice at the various safeguarding tables

This report evidences a significant level of activity to safeguard children and young people and the appetite to learn and improve. The Partnership needs to continue to build on capturing impact of its activities. Some significant pieces of work, such as the Stop Think Neglect campaign and work to address Child sexual abuse for example will continue in 2025/2026, alongside the priorities for the Partnership. The Partnership will continue to consider the impact it expects these to have and how they are able to be measured.

The next year will see significant work to plan and transform the way partners work together to safeguard children, the development of Multi Agency Child Protection Teams, learning from Luton [Families First for Children Pathfinder programme](#) which represents a vital opportunity to strengthen early intervention and support for families. It is imperative that partners work together to deliver against a vision for one connected system for children and families, especially given other broader reform and change in all their sectors. With the ongoing uncertainty around the [Local Government Reorganisation \(LGR\)](#), the changes to the ICB and the demise of NHS England, whatever partners future structures or governance models are like the BBSCP will continue to work with all Partners and apply a vigilant and proactive safeguarding lens to ensure the safety, wellbeing, and rights of all children and young people remain at the forefront of its work.



Appendix 1 – Glossary

A&E - Accident and Emergency Department	ELFT - East London Foundation Trust
BAVEX - Bedfordshire Against Violence & Exploitation	GCP2 - Graded Care Profile 2
BBSCP - Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Partnership	ICB - Integrated Care Board
BLMK ICB - Bedfordshire, Luton, and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board	ICPC - Initial Child Protection Conference
BYJS - Bedfordshire Youth Justice Service	IFD - Integrated Front Door
CAMHs - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	MASA - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements
CCS - Cambridgeshire Community Services	MASH - Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub
CIN - Child in Need	MARAC - Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference
CP - Child Protection	NEET -
CPIS - Child Protection Information Sharing Service	NSPCC - National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
CPP - Child Protection Plan	RHI - Return Home Interviews
CCE - Child Criminal Exploitation	SAR - Safeguarding Adults Reviews
CSE - Child Sexual Exploitation	SEND - Special Educational Needs and Disability
CSP - Community Safety Partnership	TAF - Team Around Family
CSPR - Child Safeguarding Practice Review	VERU - Violence Exploitation Reduction Unit
DSL - Designated Safeguarding Lead	VEPP - Violence and Exploitation Prevention Partnership
EHC - Education Health Care	VOC - Voice of the Child Group
EHCP - Education Health Care Plan	

Appendix 2 – BBSCP Strategic Plan 2025 – 2027

Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Partnership (BBSCP) Strategic Plan 2025 – 2027

This Strategic Plan sets out the BBSCP shared vision and themes that will help keep children, young people and their families at risk safe and protected from abuse and neglect. Excellent practice is the norm. Partners work collaboratively to achieve the same end goals. Partner agencies hold one another to account effectively. There is early identification of 'new' safeguarding issues. Learning is promoted and embedded. Information is shared effectively. Communities in Bedford Borough feel confident that children, young people and their families are protected from harm. BBSCP has agreed the following priorities and focus to direct its work for 2024 – 2026:

Safeguarding children and young people via **our priorities** of strong leadership with our Partners, effective learning from our Case Reviews, back to basic training and effective assessments.

Key Areas of Focus: Neglect - Child Sexual Abuse – Child Exploitation - Mental Health and Wellbeing

Priorities' and focus areas will be addressed via the following

Neglect – Pan Beds Neglect Group and theme for the Strategic Board October 2025

Cost of Living – Golden thread

Early Help – BBSCP/Pan Beds work streams /assurance reports.

Children impacted by domestic abuse - Pan Beds Strategic Leaders for DA, Bedford Borough Community Safety Partnership and Local DA Board and assurance reports.

Information sharing – Golden thread

Contextual Safeguarding, Child Exploitation and Missing – Pan Beds Exploitation and Missing Strategic Group and assurance reports. theme for the BBSCP Strategic Board July 2025

Disproportionality - Golden thread.

Mutuality of partnership with families - Golden thread

Co production with children, young people and their families - Golden thread

The voice & engagement of frontline practitioners - Golden thread

Safeguarding Education - Pan Beds Safeguarding Education Group and theme for the BBSCP Strategic Board April 2025

Male Violence Against Women and Girls – assurance reports.

Transitional Safeguarding – Golden thread

Policy and procedures – Pan Beds Policy and Procedures Group

Emotional wellbeing& mental health – Bedfordshire children and young people MH & EWB Network, assurance reports and golden thread

Audit, Reviews, Learning, Development & Training - BBSCP Case Review Group, Pan Beds Assurance and Development Group, assurance reports and golden thread

SEND – theme for the BBSCP Strategic Board January 2025 .

Independent scrutiny – Throughout this plan, structures, BBSCP Yearly Impact Report and golden thread

Workforce capacity – Golden thread

Links to other Partnerships, their action plans & strategies which are developed, in place & monitored - Golden thread

Appendix 2 – BBSCP Strategic Plan 2025 – 2027

Key Focus	Actions to be agreed	Evidence of Impact
Neglect: The risks around neglect will be well understood and practice guidance will support best practice to ensure better outcomes for children. To increase the use of the Graded Care Profile 2 and other neglect tools.	Multi agency and/or individual agency audits On-going development of a Neglect Dataset Training, Briefings, workshops, webinars Work to raise awareness and increase the number of GCP2's. Raising Awareness of neglect Neglect Campaigns Assurance reports Voice/lived experiences of children/young people.	Performance Dashboard Increased number of GCP2's Increased number of GCP2 Trainers Multi agency and/or individual agency audit findings Evaluations of training and learning events Feedback from awareness raising activities and communications
Child Sexual Abuse: Increase awareness of CSA, ensure appropriate training is available, appropriate guidance is in place and staff feel more confident to work with young people and families affected by CSA.	Multi agency and/or individual agency audits Review of procedures and guidance Training, briefings, workshops and webinars Assurance Reports Implementation of the NSPCC Child Sexual Abuse snapshot project. Voice/lived experiences of children/young people.	Performance Dashboard Multi agency and/or individual agency audit findings Evaluations - training and learning events Feedback from awareness raising activities and communications Child Sexual Abuse snapshot evaluation
Child Exploitation: Children, young people, practitioners, parents, carers, and the public are aware of different types of exploitation. Children and young people at risk of exploitation are identified, assessed and effectively supported. Perpetrators of exploitation are pursued, their activity disrupted.	Multi agency and/or individual agency audits Review of procedures and guidance Training, briefings, workshops and webinars Assurance Reports Voice/lived experiences of children/young people. Communication strategy and activity	Performance Dashboard Multi agency and/or individual agency audit findings Evaluations of training and learning events Feedback from awareness raising activities and communications.
Mental Health, Emotional Wellbeing: Increased understanding of the risks to children and young people in relation to mental health and identify any gaps in service provision.	Multi agency and/or individual agency audits Performance Monitoring Assurance reports Training & Briefings, workshops and webinars Voice/lived experiences of children/young people.	Performance Dashboard Public Health school survey & action plan Multi-agency and/or individual agency audit findings Feedback - training/learning events
All of the above supported via the Safeguarding Bedfordshire website		

Appendix 3 - BBSCP Structure 2025 – 2026

Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership's Structure 2025/2026

Pan Bedfordshire Strategic Leaders of Children's Services Group (4 x year)

chaired by Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs)

The Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) attend twice year to agree priorities and funding, sign off Annual Reports

**Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Partnership.
MASA meeting (x4) & Strategic Board (x4) chaired by DSPs.
Case Review Group (x 6), Performance (x4) chaired by Scrutineer.**

Pan Bedfordshire Children's Assurance & Improvement Group (4 x year)

Chaired by Independent Scrutineer and responsible for scrutinising safeguarding effectiveness and the coordination of improvement activities.

Pan Bedfordshire webinars to share the learning from Reviews and audits.

(Frequency to be agreed)

Pan Bedfordshire Neglect Group (4 x year)

Chaired by Andrew Skea (NSPCC). Themes: Physical neglect - Educational neglect - Emotional neglect - Medical neglect - Supervisory neglect - Environmental Neglect. There may also be some task and finish groups to address themes and work streams.

Pan Beds Safeguarding Education Group (4 x year)

Chaired by LA Chief Officer Education. Themes: (TBC) S175, Safeguarding Boards in Schools, Safeguarding/Exclusions, Child on Child Abuse, Radicalisation. There may also be some task and finish groups to address themes and work streams.

Pan Bedfordshire Policy and Procedures Group (2 x year)

Chaired by Sally Stocker. Task and Finish Groups will undertake the work as appropriate.

Pan Bedfordshire Exploitation and Missing Group (4 x year)

Chaired by Jonathan Churchill. The purpose of the Group is to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategic and operational multi-agency response to Exploitation and Missing across Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, and Luton. There may also be some task and finish groups to address themes and work streams.

Pan Bedfordshire Voice of the Child Group (4 x year)

Chaired by Sarah Mortimer. The voice of children and young people is a golden thread throughout our work,. The Group actively seeks to ensure that our partner agencies are seeking the voice and lived experiences of children and young people when they are developing their services through a range of approaches including an annual conference. There may also be some task and finish groups to address themes and work streams.

Appendix 3 - BBSCP Structure 2025 – 2026

Golden threads throughout the individual Partnership's and Pan Bedfordshire Groups:

- Voice & engagement of children young people and their families**
- Child Exploitation and Missing**
- Cultural Competency**
- Data monitoring and analysis**
- Effective application of thresholds and alignment of place-based MASH/IFD interface**
- Impact of Domestic Abuse on children and young people**
- Impact of emotional wellbeing and mental health on young people**
- Impact of Neglect on children and young people**
- Learning from practice reviews**
- Legal Literacy**
- Links to other Partnerships action plans & strategies**
- Multi-agency & single agency audits**
- Preparing for Adulthood**
- Safeguarding aspect of attendance and exclusions**
- Stable Homes Built on Love and the Family Help model**
- Voice & engagement of frontline practitioners including the voluntary, community or social enterprise organisations.**

More information can be found on the following.

[Safeguarding Bedfordshire website](#)

[Pan Bedfordshire Procedures](#)

For more information on Education please visit the [Bedford Borough Council Education Strategy 2024 – 2034](#) and [Bedford Borough Education Strategy Action Plan 2024 - 2034](#)

A suite of documents can be found at this [link](#) to support practitioners to share information

For more information on neglect please visit our [Safeguarding Bedfordshire, Pan Bedfordshire Procedures](#) and [NSPCC](#) websites.

For more information please access [Early Help for Families](#) and [Best Start Bedford](#) and [Early Help Strategy 2022 – 2027](#).

For more information on SEND please go to these links [Bedford Borough Council](#) and [BBPCF](#)

Finding out more



This report is available online on the [Safeguarding Bedfordshire website](#)

Copies can also be requested by emailing the BBSCP Business Support team at



LSCB@bedford.gov.uk

Or alternatively telephone



01234 276346