

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**Child Protection Conferencing Service
Annual Report**



April 2016 – March 2017



Executive Summary

This has been a year of considerable change in the Conferencing Service in relation to the model of conferencing and staffing. Our aim is to ensure that the children and young people that we work with get the best possible service. Some of the key issues explored in 2016-2017 were:

- Conference Model
- Child Protection Plans
- Conference Attendance
- Quality Assurance
- Performance
- Staffing

Conference Model: The Strengthening Families model was introduced on 4th April 2016 including a role out of multi-agency training. Since the initial six months of staff and partners adapting to this change, we have now been embedding this model. The model is focused on the greater involvement of parents in the process, leading to more effective Child Protection Plans.

Child Protection Plans: The quality of Child Protection Plans has been strengthened. Considerable work with the Conference Chairs has led to plans written in family-friendly language, SMART outcomes, clear measures of reduced risk and time-limited contingency plans.

Conference Attendance: In August 2016 Ofsted saw evidence that the 'attendance by

partners at child protection conferences ... has significantly improved'. The Conferencing Service conducted a review of this in November and found 89% professionals invited to conference attended or sent someone of their behalf.

Quality Assurance: Children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan now have their social care files audited by their Conference Chair bi-monthly. Audits focus on compliance with statutory visits, children's wishes and feelings being clear, Core Group multi-agency attendance, quality and the progress of the Child Protection Plan. This is leading to earlier identification of drift and delay for children with an agreed escalation process to support the social workers to address the identified concerns.

Performance: Adherence to statutory timescales around the conference process are monitored monthly, fed back to the Conference Chairs and reviewed by senior managers. Performance data is used to ensure practice and capacity issues are addressed.

Staffing: The service felt the benefits of having permanent Conference Chairs joining the service. The introduction of Peer Development Sessions supports practice development and consistency, enabling the service to continually consider policy and process improvements.

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Introduction

The Child Protection Conferencing Service organises and chairs Initial Child Protection Conferences and Child Protection Reviews. The service has a full time establishment of 5.8 Conference Chairs. There were 564 children who were subject to a Child Protection Plan on 31st March 2017.

More children in the UK are in need of help or protection and Buckinghamshire has seen considerable increases in recent years to the number of children who are considered to be at risk of significant harm, and therefore requiring the support of a Child Protection Plan. There have been various hypothesis and discussions analysing this increase. The National Audit Office produced “Children in need of help or protection” in October 2016 and stated:

1.16 More children need help or protection for several reasons. High profile cases, such as Baby P and Daniel Pelka, can lead to more people reporting concerns to local authorities. There are also more children. Between 2010 and 2014, the number of children aged 0 to 17-years-old in England increased by 5% or 550,000.

1.17 In 2014-15, the most common risk to a child’s welfare was domestic violence (flagged in 48% of assessments) and mental health concerns (about the child or other family members – 33% of assessments). Published statistics show that the number of domestic abuse cases and mental health problems are growing.¹²

1.18 The government and local authorities are becoming more aware of threats to children’s welfare including radicalisation, child sexual exploitation or gang culture. These threats are still relatively rare. For example, child sexual exploitation was identified in just 3% of assessments. Local authorities told us, however, that they expect to see more cases in future as their awareness of child sexual exploitation and other risks grow.

These trends can be seen in the data in this report.

Throughout this report there are references to national data. The source of this data is from the National Statistics office and the Characteristics of children in need reports. National data refers to trends across England.

Staffing & Resources

Conference Chairs

During the period between April 2016 and March 2017 the Conferencing Service increased the number of Conference Chairs to a full time establishment of 5.8 and a Conferencing Manager. Experienced interim staff were used to fill vacancies whilst permanent staff were recruited. The service now consists of 5 full time permanent Conference Chairs, 1 part time permanent Conference Chair, with the remaining part time hours filled by an interim Conference Chair. A full time permanent Conferencing Manager is now in post and provides management oversight for the Conferencing Service, Local Authority Designated Officer Service and Education Safeguarding Advisory Service.

All Conference Chairs are qualified social workers, with many years post qualifying children's social work and management experience. The majority of the Conference Chairs have been in this role for a number of years and have brought their breadth of knowledge and experience to the service. Conference Chairs are provided with monthly 1:1 supervisions by the Conferencing Manager, bi-monthly Peer Development Sessions to improve practice and service delivery, bi-monthly Team Meetings and annual Delivering Successful Performance meetings. The Conference Manager provides effective management support, monthly performance monitoring and service development.

Business Support Staff

Conference Chairs are supported in their work by 10 full time and 2 part time business support staff. 2 Business Support Assistants arrange Initial Child Protection Conferences and 10 Business Support Specialists take and circulate the records of conference. 1 full time permanent Business Support Coordinator manages the business support staff. Business Support Specialists embraced improvements by typing minutes, which allows for greater efficiency and management oversight.

Conference Chair Caseloads

As of 31st March 2017 564 children were subject to Child Protection Plans in Buckinghamshire. The average number of children allocated to a full time Conference Chair was 97. In autumn 2016 Conference Chair allocations stabilised at the target figure of 85 children following agreement to increase the full time establishment to 5.8. However the considerable increase in children subject to Child Protection Plans through the rest of the financial year resulted in the current high number of allocations. It is likely that allocations will remain at this level for most of the next financial year whilst the risk of significant harm is reduced for these children.

Child Protection Data

The number of children referred to the Child Protection Conferencing Service due to concerns that they were at risk of significant harm has increased over 2016-2017.

Children allocated per Conference Chair



Activity

The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans

On 31st March 2017 the total number of children who were subject to a Child Protection Plan in Buckinghamshire was 564. This is a 42% increase in two years.

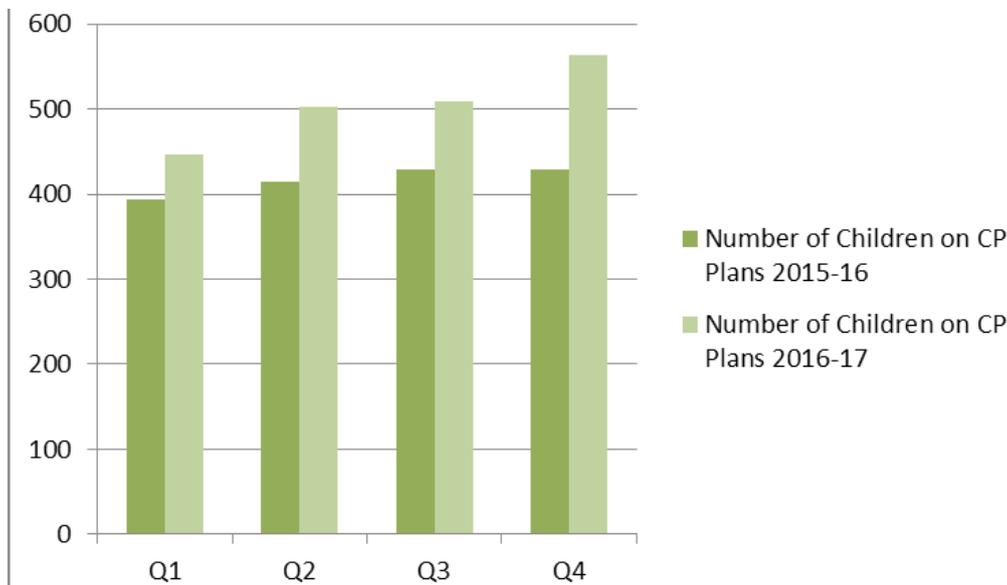
The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans rose by 117 children between 2015-2016. This was a local authority increase of 35%, compared to a national increase over the same period of 1.2%.

This trend of increasing numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans continued with another rise again by 114 children in 2016-2017. A 25% increase. National and regional comparison data is not yet available.

31st March 2015 = 333 31st March 2016 = 450
 31st March 2017 = 564

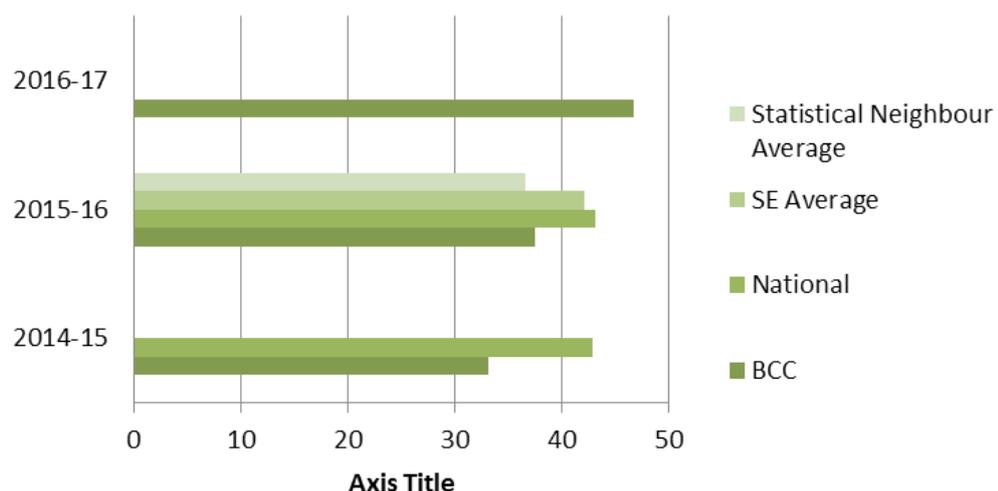
2015-2016 Total increase = 35%

2016-2017 Total increase = 25%



The rate per 10,000 children subject to a Child Protection Plan has consistently been below the national average. In 2015-2016 Buckinghamshire's rate per 10,000 children subject to a Child Protection Plan was at 37.5 (compared to a national average of 43.1 and a South East average of 42.1). In 2016-2017 46.7 Buckinghamshire children per 10,000 were subject to a Child Protection Plan, an increase of 9.2. Comparator figures are not yet available.

Rate per 10,000 children subject to a Child Protection Plan



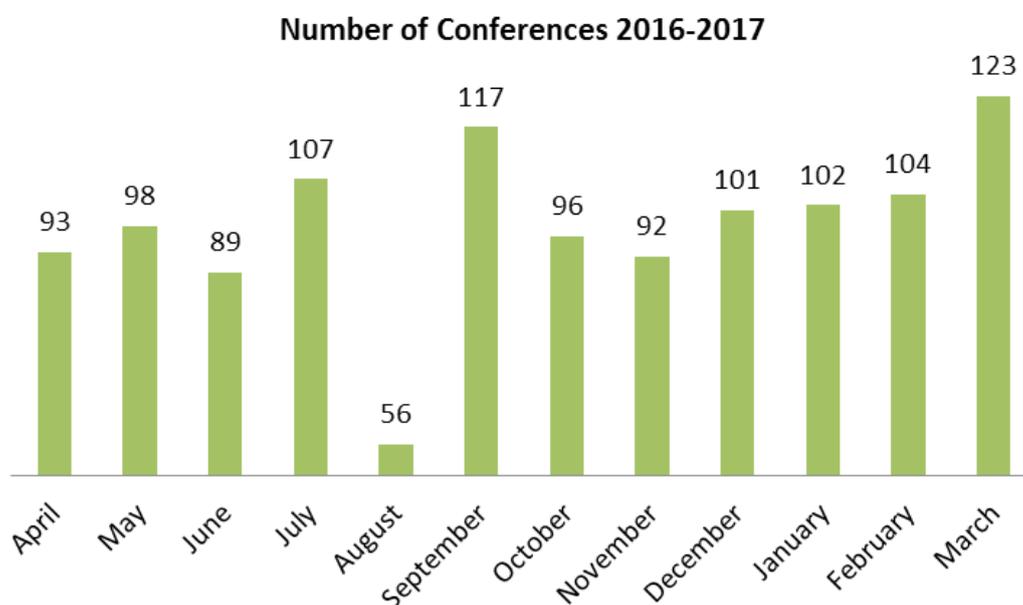
Numbers of Child Protection Conference Meetings

In response to the increase in the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan, the Child Protection Conferencing Service has seen a 32% increase in the number of Child Protection Conferences (initial and Review).

Although our priority is to ensure that children at risk of significant harm are safeguarded in a timely manner, all possible efforts are made to hold conferences within school term time, to support the easier attendance of our education colleagues. However, given the rise

in the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan and the subsequent increase in conference demand this is becoming more difficult. The table below shows lesser conferences taking place in months where there are school holidays, but also shows the increase in the number of conferences in Q3 and Q4.

In 2016-2017 the number of conferences held rose by 32%.



Initial Child Protection Conferences, in relation to Referrals and s47 enquiries

A referral is defined as a request for services to be provided by children's social care and is in respect of a child who is not currently in need. In 2015-2016 there was a national 2.2% decrease in the number of referrals made, however there was an increase in the numbers in Buckinghamshire. In 2016-2017 there were 9147 referrals (compared to 6933 in 2015-2016) an increase of 32%.

If the local authority identified there is reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer significant harm, it will carry out an assessment under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to determine if it needs to take steps to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children. Nationally there was a

7.6% increase in s47 enquiries over 2015-2016, and this increase was also seen locally. In Buckinghamshire we have experienced a surge of children who require s47 enquiries in Q1 and Q4 of 2016-2017.

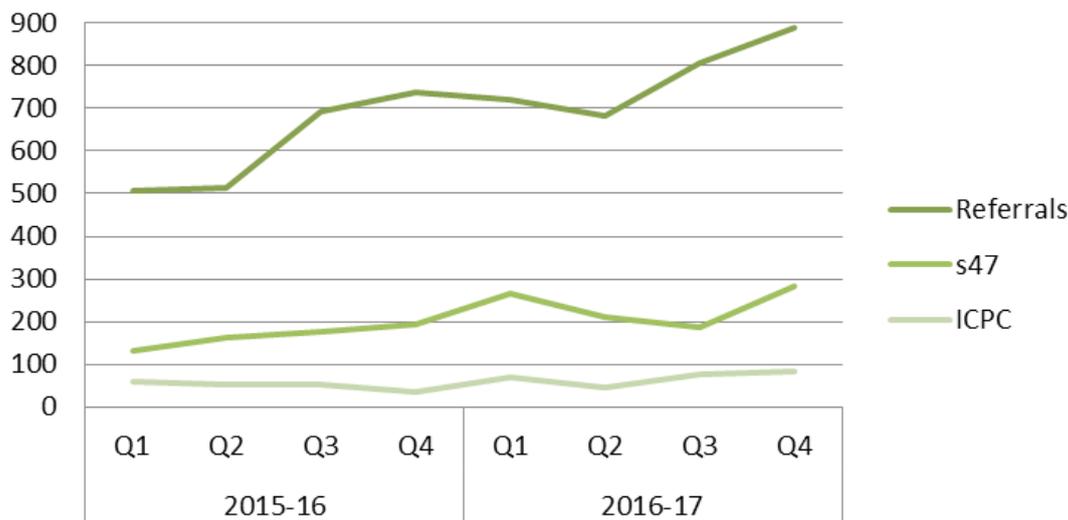
If concerns are substantiated and the child is judged to be at continuing risk of harm then an Initial Child Protection Conference should be convened within 15 working days. Nationally this increase was 2.3% in 2015-2016. In Buckinghamshire we experienced a 17% increase in 2016-2017.

The table below shows the last two years of figures at the end of each quarter for Buckinghamshire. There is predominantly

a correlation in the peaks and falls of the Referrals and s47 enquiries. These can also be seen in the numbers of children considered at an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) but the difference is less stark. Given the trend of increasing Referrals and s47 enquiries

during Q4 of 2016-2017, it is therefore likely that the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans will continue to increase in Q1 of 2017-2018.

Number Children considered at ICPC, compared to Contacts, Referrals and S47 enquiries



Rate per 10,000 Children considered at an Initial Child Protection Conference

The rate per 10,000 of children considered at an Initial Child Protection Conference in Buckinghamshire has increased by 36% in the last two years, and 17% in the last year. This is based on the 2015 mid-year estimate of Buckinghamshire under 18 Population being 120,643. Comparator data is not available.

2015-2017 Total increase = 36%

2016-2017 Total increase = 17%

Rate per 10,000 of children considered at an Initial Child Protection Conference



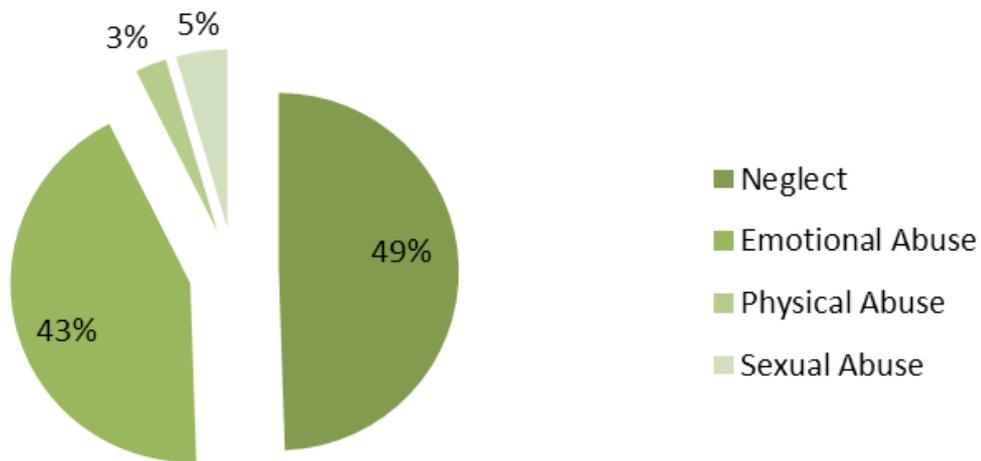
Abuse Categories of children subject to a Child Protection Plan

Neglect = 279
Emotional Abuse = 243
Sexual Abuse = 26
Physical Abuse = 16
Multiple = 0

The numbers of children subject to the different abuse categories are similar to last year and national figures. Although in Buckinghamshire the category of Emotional Abuse was slightly higher than neglect last year, we are now in

line with the national trend of Neglect being the most common category for a Child Protection Plan. The Emotional Abuse category is often used for cases of Domestic Abuse (due to 'seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another') and managing these cases in a different way could lead to a reduction in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans. Across England, in March 2016 49.6% children assessed had Domestic Abuse identified as a factor.

2016-2017 Category of Abuse



Profile of Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan

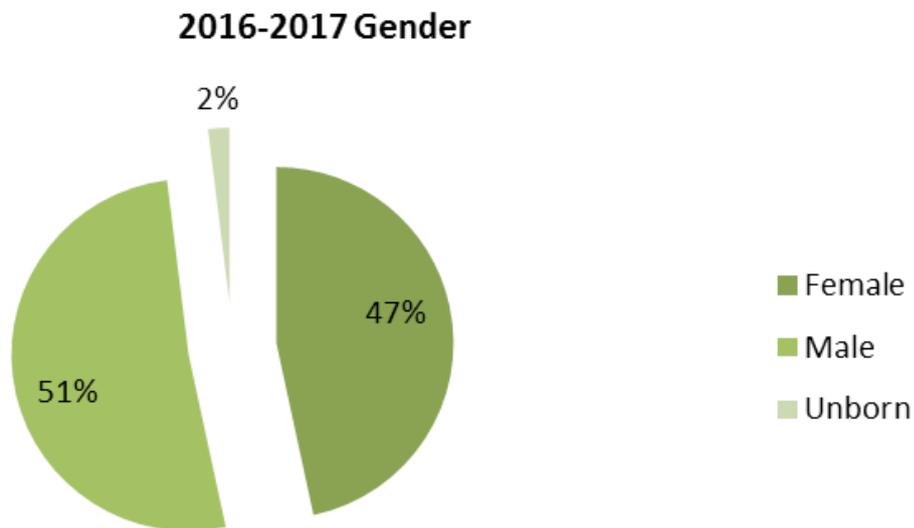
In Buckinghamshire on 31st March 2017, 6% children subject to Child Protection Plans were disabled. This is very low as we know that

disabled children are at greater likelihood of experiencing significant harm than non-disabled children.

Gender of children subject to a Child Protection Plan

Male = 290 Female = 263 Unborn = 11

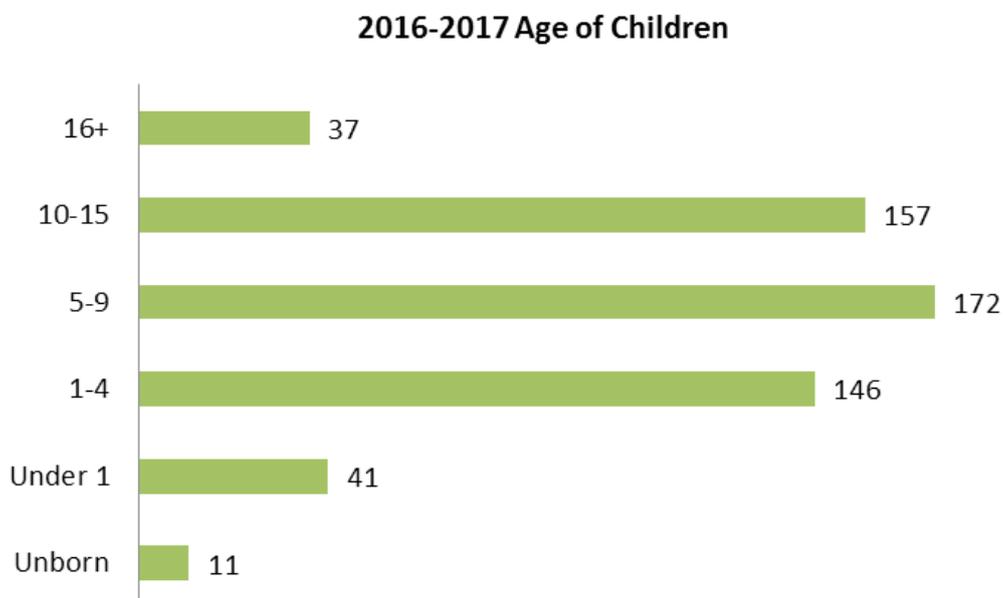
This data is representative of the rest of England.



Age of children subject to Child Protection Plans by year

Unborn = 11 Under 1 year = 41 1-4 = 146 5-9 = 172 10-15 = 157 16+ = 37

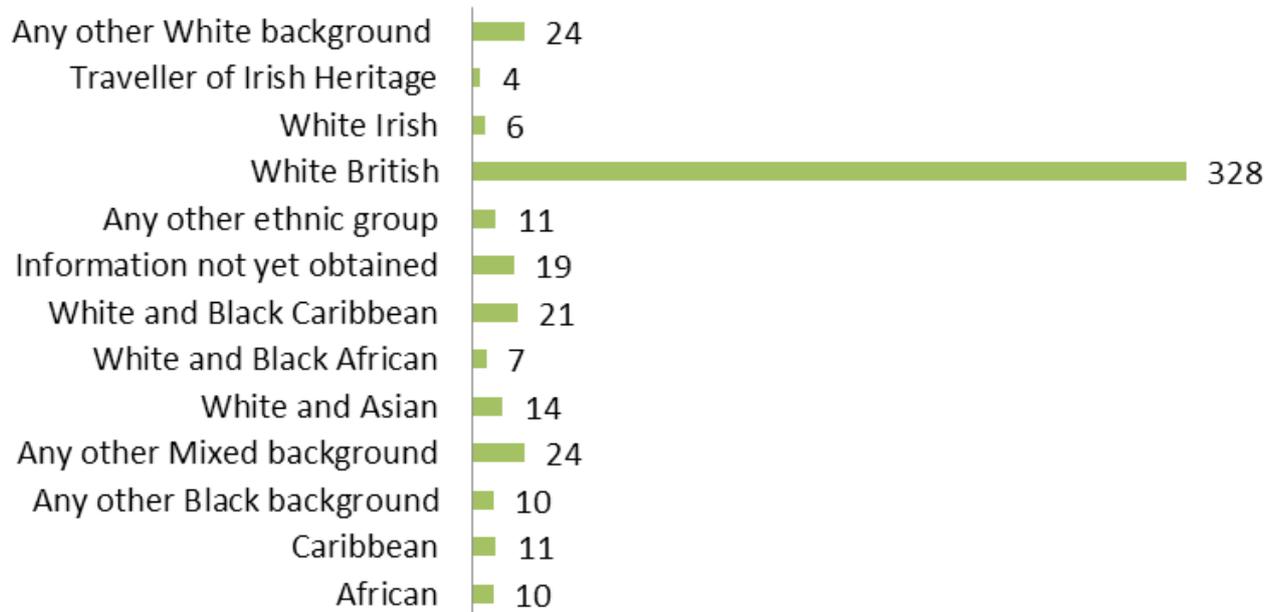
The data categories for the age of children changed partway through this period so comparison is not possible.



Ethnicity of children subject to Child Protection Plans

58% children subject to Child Protection Plans in Buckinghamshire are White British. In the coming year the Conferencing Service will further analyse this area of data, looking at national trends and comparing these figures to those of Buckinghamshire's overall child population.

2016-2017 Ethnicity of Children



Performance

The Child Protection Conferencing Service has worked hard to maintain the performance targets set within the National Framework over the last twelve months. It has maintained the electronic diary system for initial and review conferences.

The first half of this financial year saw a number of staff pressures in the service including staff members moving on, interim cover, changing interim Conferencing Managers and a drive to permanent recruitment. An Ofsted Monitoring Visit in August 2016 identified that: "Considerable work is still required to strengthen the quality of ... child protection

plans." By 31st March 2017, 5.4 FTE of Conference Chairs are permanent and there is a permanent Conferencing Manager and Head of Service in place.

This stability in the workforce coincided with a surge in ICPC requests, increasing numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans, the temporary closure of the Amersham conference room for refurbishment and the restructure of Children's Social care. In Q4 there has been considerable difficulty in booking ICPCs within timescales in Wycombe due to room availability and chair capacity.

Child Protection cases reviewed within timescales

The percentage of children who were the subject of a Child Protection Plan over the last year who had reviews carried out within the required timescales was 96%, this is better than the national average of 2015-16 of 93.7% (this is the most recent comparator data).

Review Conferences are always booked within timescales. The 4% that could not proceed in timescales are conferences that were rescheduled, this happens due to an urgent family issues, lack of professional reports or inqurate conferences. The service always attempt to reschedule within timescales but on occasion this is not possible.

January 2017 was a noticeably poorer performing month and coincided with the restructure of the Children's Social Care teams. The Child Protection Conference Chairs proceed with conferences if they feel there is sufficient information available to make safe decisions, including there being a social work report for conference and a social worker in attendance who has worked with the family. Therefore, in some cases the decision was made to reschedule the conference to ensure these standards were met.

2015-2017 % Review Conferences held within timescales



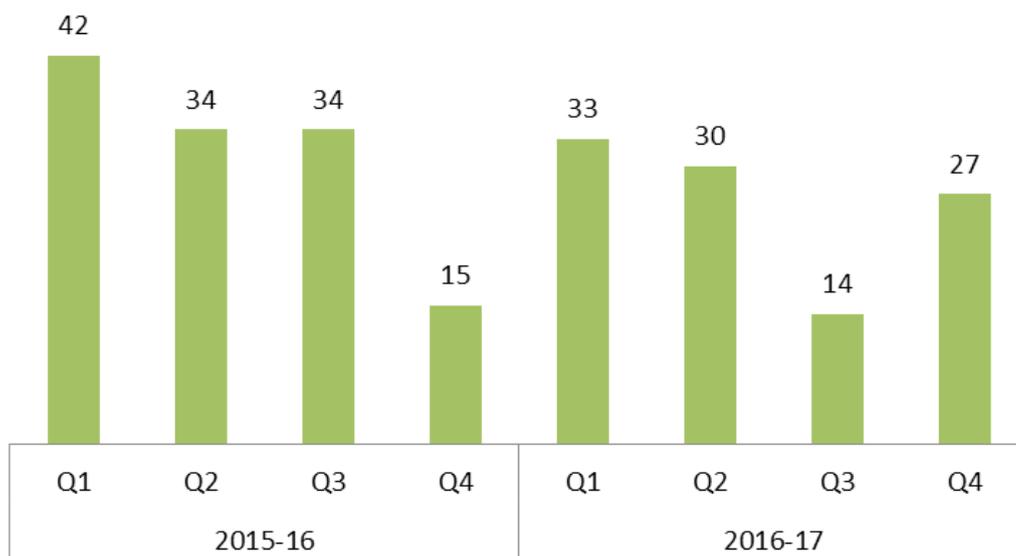
Children subject to a Child Protection Plan for 2 years or more has remained consistently at 1% throughout 2016-2017. This is better than national performance.

Children becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time

The number of children with a repeat Child Protection Plan has been steadily reducing over the last 12 months, despite an increase in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans, however it continues to be too high. The Conferencing Service audited 50 children who were subject to a repeat Child Protection Plan between November 2016 – January 2017. There was a common theme after the Child Protection Plan had concluded of limited social care support and then early closure of the Child

In Need Plan. The restructure of the CP/Court Teams and Child In Need Teams at the end of January 2017 should address this. However, it will take time for the repeat Child Protection Plan numbers to reduce further, as the service continues to take cases where historically Child In Need support was limited. The Conferencing Service will complete another audit of the children subject to repeat Child Protection Plans in August 2017 to monitor improvements.

Number children subject to repeat plans

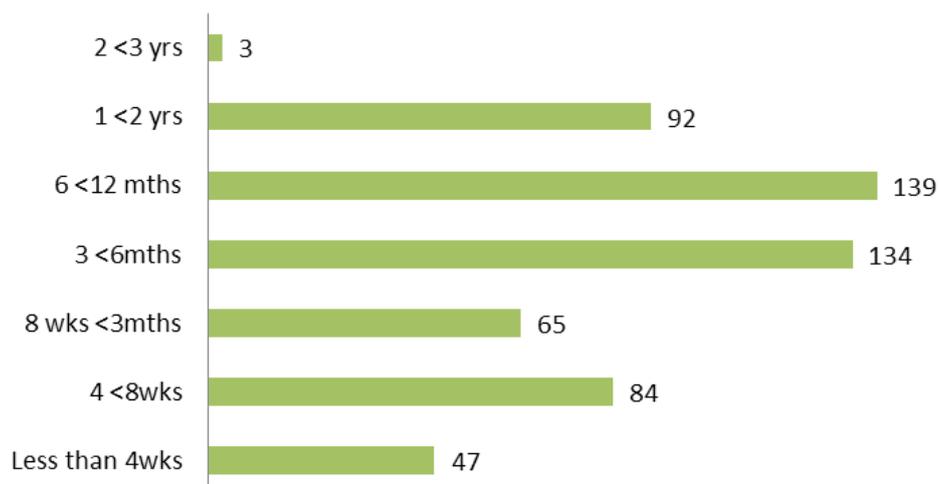


Duration of a Child Protection Plan

25% of children's Child Protection Plans concluded between 6 and 12 months, which is the expected time for the majority of Child Protection Plans to reach conclusion. However, 24% concluded after being on a Child

Protection Plan between 3 and 6 months. This figure is high and the Conferencing Service is working with colleagues to monitor and improve this.

Duration child remains on a Child Protection Plan



Feedback from Conference Participants

An electronic feedback process was established in April 2016 to compile the views of the conference from all those who attended. Participants were invited to complete an online form via Survey Monkey. Unfortunately, this has not been popular and there is little feedback to report on.

In April 2017, a new evaluation template was introduced. One page paper feedback forms are

placed in front of all conference participants for every conference in one week each month. The questions are based on the patterns seen in complaints over the last 12 months, with scaling and comments. The feedback is collected at the end of each conference and input by business support onto Survey Monkey to enable quarterly analysis and scrutiny. The first quarterly report will be available in early July 2017.

Review of the Strengthening Families Model

On 4 April 2016 Buckinghamshire introduced the Strengthening Families Model to Child Protection Conferences.

A report submitted to Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board in August 2016 evaluated the initial impact of the model. After 12 months it is important to consider measures of success. The two performance indicators listed below suggest that there may be improvements in the overall performance of the Conferencing Service and more importantly improvements in services for children. It is anticipated that as the Strengthening Families Model is further embedded there will be ongoing improvement in performance and outcomes for children.

Percentage of children becoming subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time - The adoption of Strengthening Families and a more robust approach towards Child Protection Plans should lead to better outcomes for children.

Child Protections Plans lasting 2 years or more. Buckinghamshire is out performing most local authorities with 1% performance throughout 2016-2017.

The Strengthening Families approach highlights cases which need to be progressed to Public Law Outline due to lack of improved outcomes. Cases with a sufficient reduction in risks move forward to Child in Need arrangements. These approaches should lead to children and families receiving the right services at the right time.

There was some concern that the length of conferences when using Strengthening Families would impact on the success of the model. In November 2016 the average length of time spent in the 87 Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences was 1 hour and 43 minutes; 58 minutes was spent on information sharing and 45 minutes spent developing the Child Protection Plan and decision making. If reports were provided by all professionals invited to conference and they were shared in timescales with families, the time spent in conference would reduce.

Quality assurance in child protection

A critical element of the Child Protection Conference Chair role is monitoring individual cases to identify and challenge issues of drift, delay or poor practice. On behalf of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board the Conference Chairs do this for all the partner agencies who contribute to Child Protection Conferences.

In November 2016 the Conferencing Service monitored multi-agency attendance and report provision for 87 conferences. Positively the audit confirmed Ofsted's views in their August monitoring visit with 89% professionals who were invited to conference attending or sending someone of their behalf. All professionals invited to conference are expected to provide a written report, and this was the case for 55%

of conferences, unfortunately parents did not see 80% of the reports that should have been produced and they had the right to see in advance, leaving them unable to adequately prepare for and therefore subsequently participate in the conference.

Conference Chairs will begin write to multi-agency conference attendees who do not adhere to Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board Child Protection Procedures; attending conference / sending someone in their place, and producing a report for conference that was shared in timescales with parents. This will commence in September 2017 and the impact of this approach reported on in next year's annual report.

Auditing

Key to the Conference Chair role is monitoring individual cases and to identify, challenge and report any poor practice / professional issues with the delivery of child protection services. A range of additional quality and performance management data systems have been developed including Conference Chairs auditing the cases allocated to them bi-monthly. This started in January 2017 and will be fully implemented by September 2017. Audits focus on compliance with statutory visits, children's wishes and feelings being clear, Core Group multi-agency attendance, and the quality and progress of the Child Protection Plan. This is leading to earlier identification of drift and delay for children with an agreed escalation process to support the social workers to address any identified concerns.

Examples of work undertaken by Conference Chairs in the past year include:

- Robust challenge has been exercised by Conference Chairs in Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences to ensure Child Protection Plans are appropriate and workable.
- The service audited 50 children who were the subject to Child Protection Plans for a second or subsequent time and monitoring these cases by engaging in discussions with social workers and team managers.
- Investigations began into the number of children considered at Initial Child Protection Conference where the outcome was not a Child Protection Plan or the Child Protection Plan ended at the first Review Conference. Consideration was given as to whether these children met the threshold for an Initial Child Protection Conference alongside the quality of the risk analysis. This work is ongoing.
- The number of working days from a strategy discussion to the date of the Initial Child Protection Conference should be 15 days or less. Monthly data is sent to Practice Improvement Managers with a case breakdown and explanation where this target was not met. This is predominantly due to social workers not submitting the conference request within timescales.
- Frequency of conferences rescheduled increased. This is being monitored.

Other performance issues

Weekly data reports are used to track multiple data, including the duration of plans for every child, Conference Chair allocations and the numbers of children on Child Protection Plans. This regular monitoring of cases plus discussions in supervision means that the Conferencing Service is taking an active role in driving forward improvements in child protection.

Budget

The Child Protection Conferencing Service budget has shown an over spend during 2015-2016. This has been entirely due to the need to use agency staff to fill vacancies. Budget predictions for the next year show that the service should be in line with the forecast budget.

Staff Training

The role of the Conference Chair is very specialist and wide-ranging, as such it is important that the Conference Chairs can access national training and events. Now that the service has permanent staff, budget has been put aside to enable each Conference Chair to attend approximately two external courses over the next year. The Conference Chairs have accessed in-house service training including Radicalisation, Child Sexual Abuse, Data Protection, Neglect and the Graded Care Profile and clarity around regulation 24 placements.

Peer Development Sessions are held bi-monthly. The Conference Chairs address issues and consider practice improvements. Areas considered in 2016-2017 include defining quoracy, consistency in running conferences, improving Child Protection Plans, improving the half hour pre meet time for families and professionals, increasing family involvement in decisions whether to proceed with conferences, increased focus on the multi-agency contribution and reports, and escalation following quality assurance work.

Key Plans for 2017 - 2018

Objectives	Achieved by who	Achieved by when
Conferencing Service better addresses the risks to teenagers	Conferencing Manager Conference Chairs	01 05 2017
Successful introduction of Pre Birth Process	Conference Chairs	01 06 2017
CP-IS system fully working with no additional data required	Bucks Healthcare NHS Trust	01 06 2017
Reduction in rescheduled conferences	All conference attendees Conferencing Chairs	01 06 2017
Conference Chairs will deliver training to partner agencies	Conference Chairs	01 06 2017
Training on analysing risk and presenting evidence to conference delivered to all First Response Team social workers	Conference Chairs	01 06 2017
FGC outcomes are fed into review conferences and inform plans	Conferencing Chairs FGC Coordinators	01 06 2017
Reduction in numbers of children where ICPC does not result in a CP Plan	Conferencing Manager Practice Improvement Managers Conference Chairs	01 07 2017
MoMo used to share children's views to conference	Social Workers	01 07 2017
GP report template for section 47 enquiries and CP Conferences	Conferencing Manager First Response PIM Safeguarding Lead CCG	01 08 2017
Amersham Conference Room open	Facilities Management	01 08 2017
Improved timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences	Social Workers Facilities Management Conferencing Manager	01 08 2017
Transfer in and out process	Conferencing Manager	01 08 2017
Recruit fixed-term contract Conference Chair to remaining hours	Conferencing Manager	01 08 2017
All children on a CP Plan for 2 months will have an audit	Conference Chairs	01 09 2017
Review of child advocacy services	Conferencing Manager	01 09 2017
Reduction in numbers of children removed from CP Plan at 1st Review	Conferencing Manager Practice Improvement Managers Conference Chairs	01 09 2017
Analyse ethnicity data	Conferencing Manager	01 11 2017
All partners providing reports for conference that have been shared in timescales with families	All conference attendees Conferencing Manager Conference Chairs	01 01 2018 Audits of progress completed in June 2017, September 2017 and January 2018
Reduction in the average length of Conference meetings	Conference Chairs All conference attendees	01 01 2018
Core Group activity to be considered for 2017-2018 Annual Report	Conferencing Manager	01 04 2018