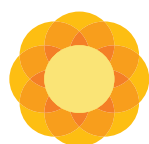


CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE SERVICE

Annual Report
2022-2023



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST

Foreword

At the heart of the work of Birmingham Children's Trust is a commitment to working in partnership with families and other agencies to enable vulnerable children to remain living with their families where this is safe to do so. Listening to their wishes and feelings, understanding the trauma that families face and acting in their best interests through relationship-based practice is central to our work.

These principles strongly underpin the work of the Child Protection service and how we seek to conduct child protection conferences. Involving families throughout the conference process and seeking their feedback as to their experience enables us to continually improve the way we conduct child protection conferences, which are by their nature difficult and emotive experiences for children and families to engage with.

During the last 12 months we have begun to build on the development work undertaken with the Institute of Public Care based at Oxford Brookes University to strengthen partnership arrangements, the participation of children and their parents and the use of technology in the way we conduct child protection conferences. The service has been actively engaged in the Trust's Child's Journey work and proactively worked with other services across the Trust to, where possible, divert some children from entering the child protection planning system. We will continue to strive to keep children off child protection plans, but where this is necessary, ensure that safety planning is timely and effective and leads to better outcomes for the child and their family.



Graham Tilby - Assistant Director, Safeguarding & Partnerships



Section 1 – Child Protection Service

We are a small service with one Head of Service and two Assistant Head of Service and twelve and half full time equivalent Principal Officer (PO) Child Protection positions. With the increase in demand for child protection conferences during quarter 3 and 4, we recognised and responded to the need to recruit two additional interim Principal Officers.

We have continued to engage three experienced agency members of staff to cover for maternity leave, a member staff on secondment and a vacancy. We have been successful recruiting to permanent posts.

Our ability to organise and facilitate child protection conferences in timescales is inextricably linked to the amount of notice we receive that a conference is required and the number of requests per month. The limited availability of conference slots can be adversely impacted by staff sickness or staff turnover.

We hold monthly study sessions for half a day for the Child Protection and LADO service and a full study day once a quarter. These sessions are an opportunity to promote learning and continual development of our practice.

Section 2 - Section Engaging children, parents, and professionals in Child Protection Conferences

It is not always suitable for children to attend a child protection conference, but we do keep them at the centre of our discussions and ensure that their views and lived experiences are shared. We are seeing an increase in children participating virtually with support from a trusted adult, for example a teacher.

We invite parents to provide feedback to either the Principal Officer or via the survey after the conference. Feedback from parents remains positive about how the meetings are facilitated and the support offered to them by the Principal Officer. However, we have recognised that we need to offer different ways of seeking parental feedback.

We are also taking the opportunity to meet with parents to have conversations about their experience of child protection planning to get enhanced feedback.

In addition, one of the Principal Officers is undertaking some research on peer advocacy and parent groups as part of the development of the Trust's participation strategy.

We receive more feedback from professionals and overall, the feedback remains positive about the Principal Officers and there appears to be a high degree of confidence with the process and that concerns are taken seriously.

Section 3 – Child Protection Conferences

Increase in number of children subject to child protection plans

There are now over 1500 children subject to child protection plans, that is an increase of 19% since July 2022 (See Chart 1 below)

Birmingham is not alone in seeing an increase in the demand for support and child protection planning. This appears to be the picture regionally and, indeed, nationally. However, we do need to better understand the underlying and multi-faceted reasons for the increase and are working closely with the Practice Hub and Social Work Services to explore these.

There has been a steady increase in the number of contacts and referrals to CASS/MASH which has translated into a gradual rise in the number of Strategy Discussions and Section 47 child protection investigations per month, and in turn therefore a rise in initial child protection conferences.

The service has worked hard to provide challenge and guidance at the point of pre-Conference screening and currently diverts an average of 2 families per week not proceeding to an ICPC.

The system needs to be consistently more effective in enabling children to safely remain at home or with their wider families without the need for a child protection plan. The services that support our Stronger Families approach, such as Family Group Conferences, remain key to achieving this.

The other contributory factor in terms of increased numbers of children subject to a child protection plan is the reduction in the proportion of plans ending per month, which means that children are remaining on average on plans for longer (see Table 2 below).

CHART 1: *Number of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan*

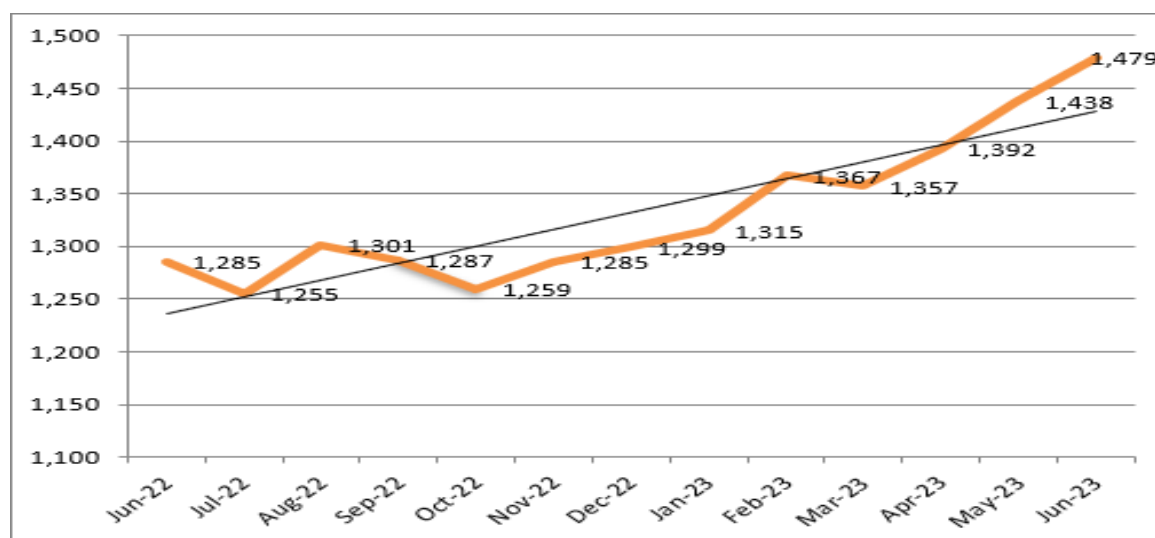
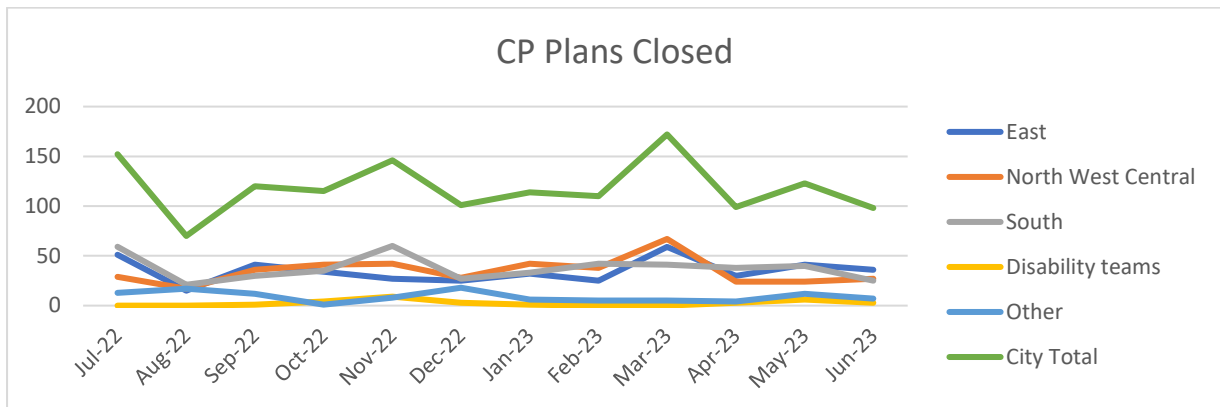


CHART 2: *Number of Children whose CP Plan has ended per month*



The timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC)

We have managed consistently to remain within tolerance, but during quarter 4 we struggled to meet the target of 85% during this period of high demand.

The two additional Principal Officers we temporarily recruited in September 2023 have given us the required capacity to accommodate requests for ICPC in a timelier manner.

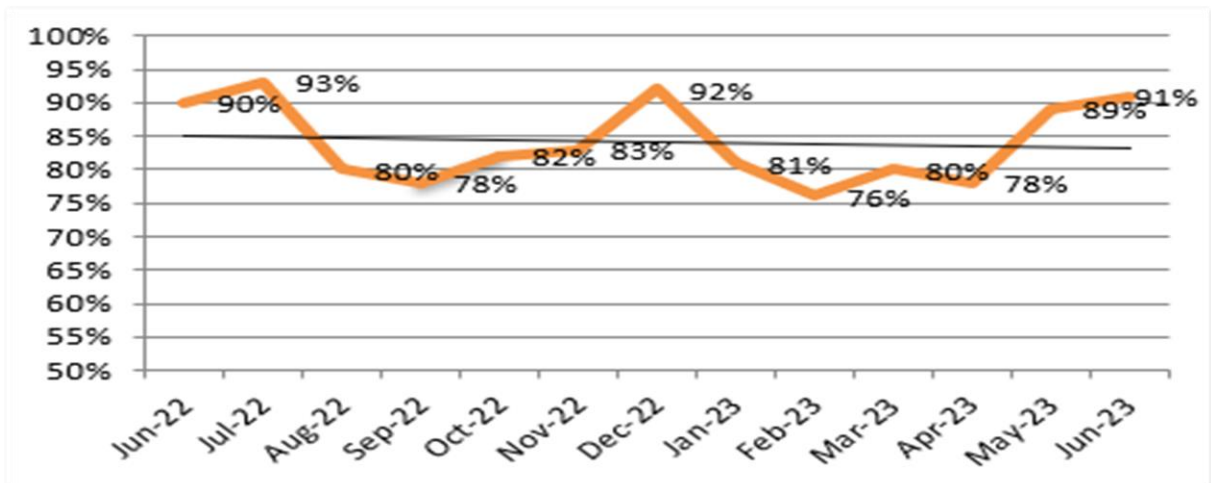


CHART 3: *Timeliness of ICPCs per month*

Child Protection Review Conferences

It has been a challenge to meet the target of 90% for Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPC), but we have managed to consistently remain within tolerance on average 85%. The main impact on the timeliness of RCPC is due to the need each month to re-arrange several review child protection

conferences to create an available slot for initial child protection conferences.

The effective work in reducing the number of plans over 18 months has been maintained this year. This approach is being extended to children who are subject to a plan for 15 months or more.

A meeting is convened on each long-listing case involving Principal Officer, Area Head of Service and Team Manager to identify the reasons the plan has lasted so long along with the actions needed to facilitate safe ending

of the plan. In doing so, family Support, FGC services and sometimes the Domestic Abuse Manager attend to help identify alternative ways of meeting the family's needs.

Section 4 - Conference Facilities and Practice

Venue and conference management

In October 2022, we were pleased to open the bespoke meeting rooms at Lifford House where we have 6 meetings rooms that we can use for child protection conferences. Each of these rooms is equipped with advanced technology to enable professional level hybrid meetings.

In addition, we currently have 3 meeting rooms available to hold child protections at New Aston House and 2 rooms at the Willows. However, we will be opening a bespoke meeting rooms space at the Avenue in Aston, from October 2023 which will replace both older venues. This venue will have 5 meetings rooms that we can utilise. In total we will have 11 meeting rooms across the two hubs.

There has been some representations from professionals, who work in the east of the city, about the challenges that some families may encounter if they must travel to Aston on public transport.

It is important to acknowledge the hard work of our colleagues from Property Facilities, Business Support, and IT in helping facilitate the moves to these two bespoke and modern meeting rooms hubs.

Holding our meetings face to face is now business as usual. We continue to provide the option for some people to join virtually, in certain circumstances.

Strengthening Families Model

Birmingham Children's Trust have been using the Strengthening Families model since 2014 with support from Essex Children's Services. We have established strong foundations in working in a strengths-based way with children and families.

From our own observations and feedback from key stakeholders we recognise a need to plan how we can evolve our model of practice. We are

working with the multi-agency Child Protection Development Partnership Group to look at how we can develop our model to be simpler for those participating in the meetings and reduce the duration of some of the review conferences.

This work is taking place in conjunction the roll-out of the Trust's refreshed practice model ('Connections Count'), to which there is strong

synergy as a relationship, strengths-based model which is underpinned by a trauma informed and restorative approach, which are central to our approach to child protection.

We are also in discussions with other local authorities as part of the Regional Safeguarding Network to consider opportunities to better align our standards and approaches to

Conference Screening

We had piloted having a dedicated Principal Officer to undertake pre-conference safety screening, and although with some success the greater need has been for us to have more staffing capacity to chair child protection conferences. From September 2023, pre- conference

Production of Minutes and Plans

Most plans go out within 48 hours of the conference taking place. We have recognised the format of the child protection plan was not user friendly and the improved format for the outlines plan has been approved and is due to be implemented.

We are working on ensuring that participants in ICPC's are able to take an outline plan with them from the conference; this can then be developed at the first core group held within 10 days of conference. Amendments are now being made to relevant forms and worklists to enable us to produce an outline line plan that informs core group planning and is more user friendly.

facilitating child protection conferences, given the commonality of restorative approaches.

The consistency in the application of the Strengthening Families Framework in conferences is improving, according to feedback from attendees, audit activity and practice observations from managers.

safety screening will be undertaken by the duty principal officer or one of the Assistant Heads of Service. There remains an emphasis on raising awareness of family group conferences and other services that can support children and families.

We are hopeful that we shortly we will be able to print a copy of the outline plan for participants at ICPC, but we are waiting for the new upgraded printers to be delivered and connected.

We are in the process of introducing a shorter and more concise record of child protection conferences with more emphasis on referring to reports submitted and a summary of risks and protective factors. We anticipate that this will also lead to a timelier production of a more accessible and concise record of the child protection meeting for families and professionals.

Quality assurance and escalation

We have noted an increase in formal escalations due to the delay in implementing child protection plans due to staffing pressures within some social work teams and the increase in demand for services.

We currently use a word template to record escalations which is then uploaded to a case note. This does not lend itself to producing performance reports regarding escalations. Therefore, we have decided to progress the development of a form incorporated within eclipse, which will

be made easier to report on themes and escalations by area. This will also help evidence the work undertaken by Principal Officers to support the progression of children's plans.

We are working to be more consistent in the use of escalations, recognising that Principal Officers who work in the north of the city tend to raise fewer formal escalations than the south of the city. We are working to improve our data capture of the use and reasons for informal escalations.

Midpoint checks

We are currently working to strengthen the consistency of our practice in respect of undertaking midpoint checks in between child protection conferences. Our capacity to do so has been recently impacted by the redesign of business support which has led to a reduction in

minuting capacity and the increase in demand for child protection conferences. We now have a dedicated sub heading on case notes for midpoint checks, which means we will be able to report more accurately on our performance undertaking midpoint checks.

Conference support

Our colleagues in business support continue to provide flexible support where possible. However, the redesign of the business support combined with the increase in demand for child protection conferences has had a direct impact on the capacity of the Principal Officers to undertake other tasks outside of preparing for, chairing conferences, and completing child protection review records. For example, we have not been able to fulfil our ambition to extend their role to chairing some Child in Need

meetings following the ending of a Child Protection Plan.

The challenges of the recruitment and retention of business support staff has resulted in many weeks with 70% of meetings being minuted. We are working collaboratively with our colleagues in business support to resolve some of the challenges we are jointly encountering.

The proposed changes to the review record and outline plan should contribute to some efficiencies and time savings.

Section 5 - Planned Developments for 2023-24

The main drive of planned development for the year is to continue implementing the recommendations made by Oxford Brookes University in November 2021.



Our Key Plans include:

- Complete review of the practice standards for child protection conferences by - *September 2023*
- Introduce shorter, summary style record of ICPC and RCPC – *September 2023*
- Introduce a simpler outline child protection plan in the meeting which can be given to parents and professionals at the end of the meeting and plan which is then further developed within core groups - *October 2023*
- Improve the oversight and reporting of formal escalations - *October 2023*
- Work with key Trust services and partners towards reducing the number of children subject to child protection plans - *November 2023*
- Manage the move to the Avenue and the new shared meeting rooms - *October 2023*
- Continue to work with EmpowerU to ensure a joined-up approach to children at risk of significant harm as a result of criminal and/or sexual exploitation – *March 2024*

Conclusion

We have seen a relatively significant increase in children becoming subject to child protection plans during the last 12 months, which is also mirrored in other parts of the wider system. As a service, with our business support colleagues, we have adapted to the challenges well in order to maintain good performance and deliver an effective child protection conference system. We remain committed to developing and improving our service offer and to ensuring that it is fully underpinned by a strengths-based,

trauma informed and restorative approach.

Alongside our colleagues in BCT and partner agencies, we are keen to safely reduce the number of children subject to child protection plans and increase the number who are supported to remain living safely within their families.

We will strive to be more consistent in offering additional quality assurance through midpoints checks and escalations, where necessary.

Andrew Tombs - Head of Service for Child Protection and LADO

July 2023