

Child Protection Conference Service Annual Report 2024-2025



June 2025

Forward

This is the annual report for 2024/2025 for Child Protection and Review.

We gave advance notice in the previous annual report of proposed social care reforms. In November 2024, the Government set out detailed plans in Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive. As part of the children's social care reforms, the Department of Education (DfE) has published its Families First (FFP) programme (March 2025); this is a guide for safeguarding partners who are implementing reforms around family help, multi-agency child protection and family group decision making. This guide sets out how local authority children's services should implement-:

- Seamless family help, including family help lead practitioner role and multi-disciplinary family help teams.
- Multi agency child protection teams (MACPTs)
- Engagement with family networks including family group decision making.

Birmingham Children's Trust transformation programme is making good progress developing Family Help/ Child in Need Teams in 10 local districts to be fully implemented by end of 2025. This will provide us with a foundation to implement these proposed changes.

It is important to highlight that the proposed introduction of MACPT will change how we respond to child protection. We are in the information sharing and initial discussion stages with strategic partners about MACPTs and have not entered the design and implementation stage. What we do know is that the principal officers for Child Protection and Review will be incorporated into the new MACPTs when they are implemented and will take on the new Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) role. Working Together currently requires child protection conferences to be chaired by a social worker independent from the line management for the lead practitioner. The new Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) role will fulfil this function.

The proposed changes provide us with an exciting opportunity to work more effectively in this multi-agency child protection space.

Section 1 – Child Protection Service

We are a city-wide service that is in the Quality Assurance Directorate; with one Head of Service and two Assistant Head of Service and 14 permanent equivalent Principal Officer (PO) Child Protection positions. We have been fortunate to be able to recruit to two additional principal officer posts to the service for 2025 taking our staffing establishment to 16; these new principal officers will join the service by August 2025. The team has remained stable during the period, but we have had some challenging periods due to staff sickness and vacancies.

The child protection and review service have the responsibility for organising and facilitating child protection conference for children considered to be a risk of significant harm who live in Birmingham. The principal officers are independent of the family help and child protections teams.

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. Our main model for conducting child protection conferences is based on being balanced recognising strengths as well as areas of concern. We work hard to be relational and treat people with kindness and respect informed by the Trust wide practice model. We are having some bespoke training for the principal officers on trauma informed practice.

Area for development for the child protection review service-: On reflection, as a service, our use of formal escalations needs to be utilised consistently. In our opinion, some of our team would benefit from having training on having difficult conversations. Our audits indicate that we could improve the consistency and quality of our mid-point checks; so, they have more impact. We have recognised the need to introduce group supervisions to prompt shared reflection and challenge on practice. We are consistent in developing the child protection plan in the meeting, but we feel we can improve on the development of contingency planning within child protection conferences.

Our Principal Officers are experienced social work practitioners, who can demonstrate extensive experience in child protection. Many of the Principal Officers have been team or service managers, but we do have some that do have less management experience. There is a need for some of the Principal Officers to gain some first-hand experience of the child protection processes prior to conference; for instance, by observing strategy discussions. We must consider whether some of the Team Manager training is extended to Principal Officers.

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

As was the case last year, it is not always appropriate for children to be present at a child protection conference. Nevertheless, we prioritize their perspectives and ensure their experiences and views are represented. However, we feel that we can improve in incorporating children's views within child protection conferences. We recognise that more needs to be done to gain feedback from children and young people subject to child protection plans. More children participate virtually with the support of a trusted adult, such as a teacher, rather than attending in person.

We seek feedback from families in various ways, including through detailed consultation conversations throughout the year. Families are consistently provided with the opportunity to express their views at any point, either directly with the assigned Principal Officer (PO) or via an online survey. This survey can be accessed through a link and QR code provided both at the time of the conference invitation and upon receiving the outcome information after each conference. The feedback this year has told us that the principal officers are working in a relational manner and are treating parents with respect. However, the feedback we have received from FAB and from feedback from parents after conference has

indicated that there is more to be done to help prepare parents for conference and involve wider family to start thinking about starting the development of own safety plans before conference by both social workers and principal officers. We use interpreters for conferences, but we need to make it simpler for Principal Officers to access interpreters to speak with parents before conferences. During one-on-one consultations, POs seek permission from parents and family members to speak to them directly following conferences, and most parents are receptive to this.

The feedback regarding the social worker (SW) report was varied. While most parents received the report in a timely manner (between two days to a week in advance), many indicated that they had not been adequately prepared by the social worker for the conference, leading to feelings of worry and anxiety. One couple, for instance, mentioned their inability to read or write and expressed that they had not received assistance in understanding the report. This highlights the necessity for our colleagues to better support parents in comprehending concerns and preparing for the conference to reduce anxiety and enhance participation.

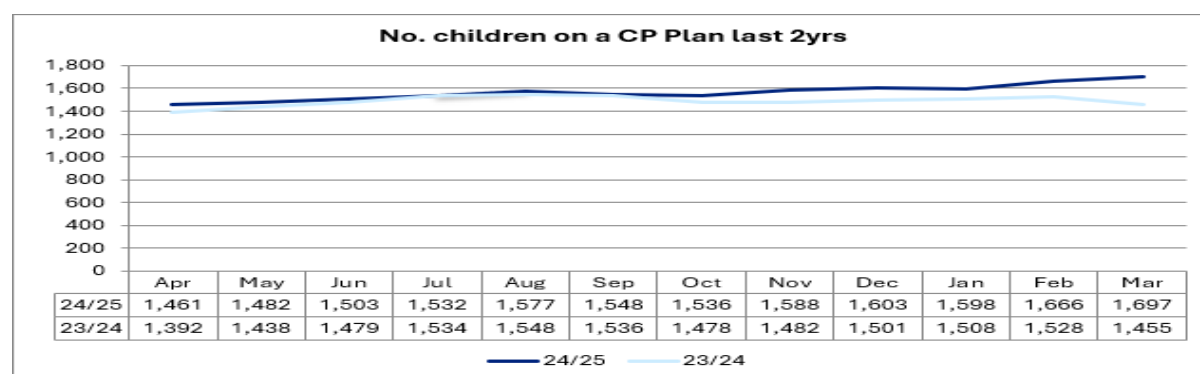
Although we aim to contact parents before the day of the conference, there is a need for greater consistency in this practice. It is crucial to ensure that all parents are contacted by the principal officer prior to Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) to verify they are receiving support before the conference, have had adequate explanations regarding the reports, and that all access needs have been addressed. Most parents reported feeling supported during the conference and appreciated that their strengths, as well as the concerns, were identified.

We consistently receive feedback from professionals, and it remains positive about the Principal Officers. There is a strong sense of trust and confidence in the process, with professionals feeling that their concerns are acknowledged and addressed seriously.

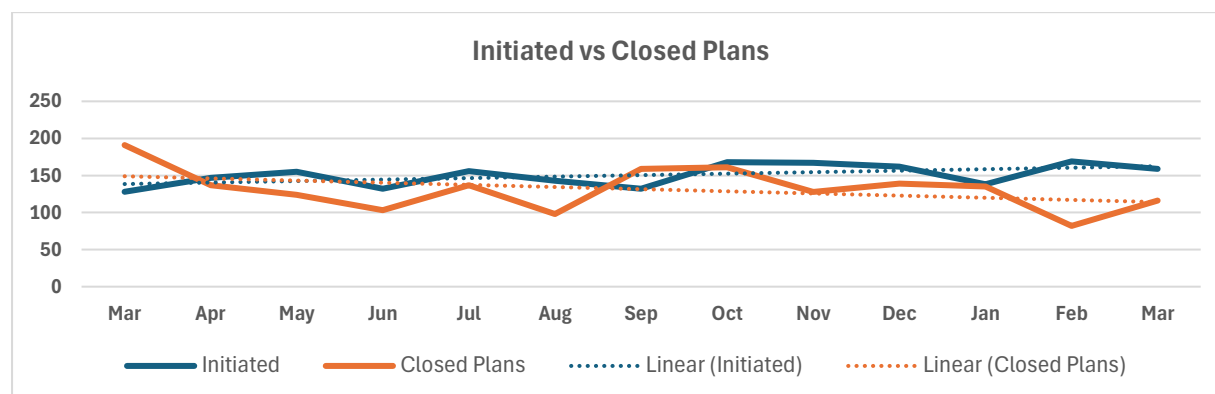
Section 3 – Child Protection Conferences

Performance 2024/2025

The rate of children subject to a child protection plan per 10K has increased during 2024/2025; we have seen an increase to 59 per 10K from our previous average of 55 per 10K. There are some important caveats to consider when comparing our performance in this area to other local authorities including the high number of large family groups and levels of deprivation within parts of the city. Nonetheless, we do feel that our current rate per 10k is temporarily inflated, and we anticipate that it will return to our previous average of 55 per 10k. The number of children on a child protection plan has increased by **18%**.



However, the primary factor contributing to the rise in our rate of children subject to plans per 10K has been the **26%** reduction in the ending of child protection plans compared to 2023/2024. There is no single reason for this decrease in the ending of child protection plans, but it is important to recognize that it is partly due to the challenges the Child Protection and Review service has faced this year with staff availability and difficulties in recruiting for vacancies.



During the fourth quarter, we experienced a prolonged period of short-term sickness, which affected our ability to hold some child protection conferences in a timely manner and hindered our capability to advance a small number of conferences when the child plan was no longer needed. In part due to the uncertainty surrounding the future role of the Principal Officers, at a national level, we have encountered greater challenges in recruitment than anticipated. Nevertheless, we have successfully filled the two additional positions allocated to manage the increased demand. We can provide reassurance that our staffing situation is stabilising and improving.

Threshold

We have undertaken some audits on the application of threshold within the Trust but also with partner agencies. The consensus that more emphasis is needed prior to an initial child protection conference on we can support more children and families earlier and more effectively outside of the child protection pathway, in line with our aspirations for Trust 25 and the social care reforms. There is also a view that there is merit on the threshold discussion being given more explicit within the actual child protection conference. The percentage of ICPC that result in a child protection plan is 91% and this is within an acceptable range but is marginally higher than statistical neighbours at 87%. Overall, it is felt that the threshold is applied fairly and appropriately, but in some situations, we could take a little longer to gather information and work with children and their families before making the decision to proceed to a child protection conference. The proposed changes to how BCT is organised and will work with families is intended to provide the conditions to allow this to occur more easily.

We have taken the decision to introduce a new duty rota for our service; ensuring that a principal officer is based at One Avenue and Lifford House alongside family help and child protection teams to increase availability for our colleagues to have earlier conversations with a principal officer prior to requesting an ICPC. The duty principal officer will be on duty for a full week rather than for the odd day. From the audits we have undertaken, we feel there is some merit in us using a risk analysis framework (RAF) across the partnership to provide us with a shared language when we assess, analyse and manage risk; this would be compatible with strengthening families conference model.

ICPC Timeliness

It is a credit to our social work colleagues notifying us early enough and to our business support colleagues who convene ICPC, that we have seen a 3% improvement average to 88% compared to 23/24. We have maintained good performance in this area and are performing better than statistical neighbours.

RCPC Timeliness

We have been more consistent holding RCPC within a timely manner during 2024/2025 during at an average of 88% per month which is within tolerance, which is an 11% improvement on 2023/2024.

Re-arranged conferences

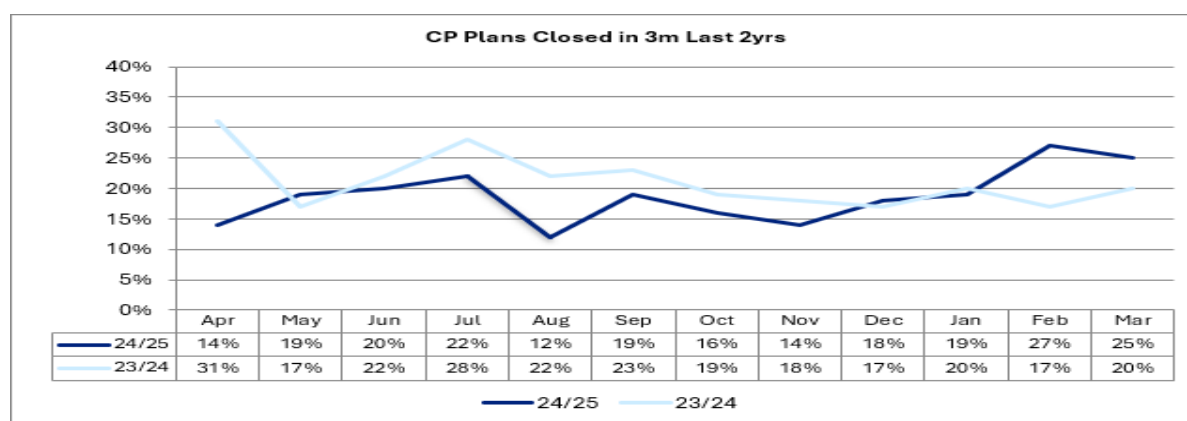
There will always be a need for child protection conferences to be re-arranged; however, we feel that we need to reduce the percentage of conferences re-arranged especially those cancelled at short notice to reduce the inconvenience to all parties. The most common reason for conferences is parent availability and the quoracy. There are a small number of RCPC re-arranged to create space to hold ICPC in a timely manner. Unusually, we have had some re-arranged RCPC due to carrying a vacancy and some challenges with staff availability, which is normally covered by duty, but our duty system has been overwhelmed on occasions this year.

Repeat Child Protection Plans with 2 years

Repeat child protection plans have remained consistent over the past two annual reports at 11% this with tolerance.

Closed within 3 months

This percentage of child protection plans closed within 3 months is made up of children who no longer need a plan due to being cared by extended family or by the Trust. However, there are felt that some child protection plans that end early once more information has been gathered that informs the risk analysis and this could be avoided if we gathered this information before the ICPC.



Categories of abuse

The most common category of abuse in Birmingham is emotional at **50%** and this in part relates to the high awareness of the impact of domestic abuse on children within the Trust. Domestic abuse is considered a key factor for **75%** of children, subject to a plan under this category of emotional abuse. Parental mental health is a factor for **49%** of this cohort. The percentage of children subject to the category of neglect is relatively high at **38%**, but this is lower than that of our statistical neighbours of **51%**.

Long listings

We monitor children who have been on a child protection plan for over two years, utilizing our long listing review process. This process does not include children in pre-proceedings. The percentage of children on a child protection plan for more than two years has remained below 2%.

Quoracy

Attendance by professionals at child protection conferences is generally within accepted parameters to ensure conferences are quorate. The minimum representation required for a conference to be consider quorate typically includes the Children's Trust, and at least two other agencies. Quoracy ensures that a child protection conference has enough participants to provide a comprehensive perspective on the child's situation. There is a good rate of attendance for Initial Child Protection Conferences from key agencies such as Education, and Health whether virtual or actual attendance. There is an area of curiosity about the number of 1st RCPC being reconvened due to issues with quoracy that we need to give some further consideration; we suspect that this relates to professionals changing after the ICPC.

There is an increase in requests for agencies to attend child protection conference virtually; with specific requests from Police, School Nurses to attend all conferences virtually. We are getting more requests to attend virtually for child protection conferences particularly from Schools. Hybrid child protection conferences are a challenge to facilitate. We think that it is better for agencies to attend conferences in person from a relational perspective for the parents but recognise the challenges for our partner agencies to attend in person for all meeting. It has been raised by the agencies who are based in East Birmingham about the challenges of travelling to either Lifford House or One Avenue Road from some parts of East Birmingham to these venues due to distance and traffic congestion on route.

We strive to invite GP to attend Initial Child Protection Conferences and request a report, but we currently do not have a sufficient response rate.

Escalations

It is noteworthy that most issues are resolved informally rather than through formal escalations. On average, we encounter 2-4 escalations per month, which are typically addressed and resolved promptly. However, there are a few cases that experience prolonged resolution times. We believe that discussing these persistent cases in a meeting with the responsible assistant director could significantly expedite their resolution, we are hoping to agree this process shortly.

A reflective analysis reveals that the primary themes of these escalations often revolve around:

- immediate safety concerns for the children, case management inefficacies, and delays in planning.
- issues raised include drift and delay in planning, which directly impact children's safety, as well as delays in issuing care proceedings and the premature termination of pre-proceedings despite negative assessments.

By improving our handling and tracking of these escalations, we aim to address these critical areas more effectively.

Section 5 - Planned Developments for 2025-26

Our planned priorities for development include:

1. Introduce a duty rota that means there is a principal officer available at both One Avenue Road and Lifford House for earlier conversations with social workers and to aid better planning of child protection conferences when needed: in line with Trust 25 **By August 2025.**
2. Provide an updated video and guidance on how to request a child protection conference and how to better prepare parents for the conference. **By July 2025**
3. Place more emphasis on exploring different ways we can support children and their families safely with core professionals and more focus threshold before and at child protection conferences in line with aspirations from social care reforms and Trust 25. **By June 2025.**
4. Organise webinars for professionals on attending child protection conferences with BSCB, as part of the work conducted by the Child Protection Development Group. **By July 2025.**



Conclusion

In conclusion, our performance has largely remained consistent with that of 2023/2024. Notably, the average timeliness of ICPC has improved to 88%, which is 8% better than our statistical neighbours. This achievement is a testament to the dedication of our principal officers and business support colleagues who have sustained this level of performance amidst a challenging year.

Nevertheless, we must recognize certain outliers in our key performance indicators; specifically, the child protection plan per 10K has increased during 2024/2025. This trend is likely attributable to the rising demand for ICPC and the decreased average number of plans ending per month. We anticipate that as our staffing stabilizes and additional personnel are onboarded, the number of plans ending will rise to match the number of plans initiated.

Audits conducted reveal an opportunity to enhance our focus on threshold and risk analysis prior to and during ICPC. The changes being implemented to support families will also allow us to allocate the necessary time to gain a comprehensive understanding before deciding whether progression to child protection is warranted. We are optimistic that the changes to how we work with families being developed by Trust 25 and social care reforms will see more children supported earlier and where possible reduce how many children require a child protection plan.

The next 12 months will be exciting as we develop and implement better ways of supporting children and their families working, through Trust 25 and the social care reforms.

Andrew Tombs

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