

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership

Yearly Report

October 2022 - March 2024



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WORCESTERSHIRE

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP

1. Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Foreword | 3 |
| 2. Executive Summary | 4 |
| 3. Introduction | 10 |
| 4. Key Facts about Worcestershire | 12 |
| 5. Background | 14 |
| 6. The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive Group | 15 |
| 7. The Wider Partnership | 20 |
| 8. The GET SAFE Partnership Group | 21 |
| 9. The Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group | 28 |
| 10. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group | 39 |
| 11. Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews | 41 |
| 12. The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group | 42 |
| 13. Updates to Published Arrangements | 46 |
| 14. The Voice of the Child | 47 |
| 15. Independent Scrutiny | 48 |
| 16. Conclusion | 48 |
| Appendix A – WSCP – Budget Details (2023 - 2024) | 49 |

1. Foreword

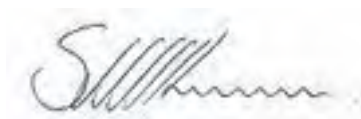
It is with great pleasure that I can again introduce our report for the period October 2022 to March 2024.

Readers will note that this report differs from previous years as it covers an eighteen-month period. This is to bring Worcestershire in line with the reporting requirements of the recently updated statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' which requires the reporting period to end on 31st March each year, and to be published by end of September. This is one of many changes to the statutory guidance that partners are currently working to deliver, both within their own organisations and across our multi-agency arrangements.

The report is set out in a way which highlights the areas identified in last year's report where additional focus was needed, the work of the partners to address those areas, the impact this had and where further activity is still required. Activity to identify learning, and how we then use that to improve the ways in which we keep children and young people safe within Worcestershire is a central theme running through the report.

This reporting period has brought challenges for all those working within the partnership at every level. Safeguarding children and young people is complex and often demanding, and the collective response to these challenges has once again highlighted both the professionalism of our practitioners within Worcestershire, and the strength and maturity of our partnership working arrangements.

On behalf of the Safeguarding Children Partnership, I would once again like to extend my thanks to our colleagues across all agencies who have shown and continue to show such commitment to supporting children and families within Worcestershire.



**Steve Eccleston,
Independent Chair
Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership**

2. Executive Summary

The publication of several key national documents has placed the management of change at the forefront of partnership activity. The main driver for change has been the publication of the previous government's vision to transform children's social care: **'Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation strategy'** <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childrens-social-care-stable-homes-built-on-love> (February 2023), which set out system-wide transformation of children's social care designed to address urgent issues facing children and families. There has followed a series of consultations on this strategy and related documents and the Worcestershire safeguarding partners' responses to these have been co-ordinated via the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) Executive.

In December 2023, the Government published the new statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' **Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance (publishing.service.gov.uk)**. This guidance has significant implications for both single agencies within safeguarding children's partnerships and for the partnerships, which require structural changes to partnership arrangements. In response to these the WSCP Executive has developed an implementation plan which will be delivered via the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group.

With the volume of reviews and briefing documents being produced nationally it is important that the partnership remains focused on those which are most relevant to Worcestershire and can best help improve our services to children and young people. This report highlights some examples of the specific work completed within Worcestershire in response to national reviews and briefings which includes audits, changes to local procedures and a review of the local partner responses to children and young people living with domestic abuse. WSCP Executive has also continued to monitor the local response to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report covering Safeguarding Children with Disabilities in Residential Settings. A comprehensive piece of work has been completed by Worcestershire Children First in response to the recommendations within this report.

In relation to funding, in January 2023 the WSCP Executive was able to agree a 2% rise in contributions to the partnership, which at the time was well below the rate of inflation. Within this budget the partnership has continued to provide business support at the agreed level and support both Operation Encompass and Family Front Door activity. In January 2024 the safeguarding partners were again able to agree the financial support each would provide to the partnership during 2024/25. Contributions will increase in line with what each of the individual safeguarding partners have agreed internally to cover inflationary rises.

Following a review of the safeguarding partnership governance arrangements, an update to those arrangements was published in January 2023. A further review will be required during the coming reporting period as a result of the changes made to the statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.

During the 2024/2025 reporting period the WSCP Executive will be focussed on ensuring the changes required by 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' are delivered across the partnership within the required timescales, the links between the work of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board strengthen the response to children and young people who are affected by Domestic Abuse, and through the safeguarding partners we work with other safeguarding partnerships within the West Mercia region to develop a viable long term solution to the issue of the volume of referrals to the Family Front Door not meeting threshold.

During this reporting period the GET SAFE Partnership Group undertook an exercise to test how effectively the data on child criminal exploitation collected both via the GET SAFE portal and by individual partner agencies was being brought together to then inform local multi-agency responses at a district level. This highlighted that there is no single framework and approach to multi-agency tasking and coordination of resources within the six Worcestershire districts to respond to identified exploitation concerns, and they are at differing levels of maturity. Where it was found there was a need to strengthen these arrangements, this has been taken forward within the district.

Members of the GET SAFE Partnership Group have worked with representatives from the Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB) to ensure that the GET THERE and GET SAFE processes are harmonised with the Complex Adult Risk Management (CARM) framework. This has ensured a pathway for the transition of the management of risk between child and adult safeguarding services, and a clear understanding of ownership and accountability for the safety of the young adult in need of help.

Representatives of the WSCP GET SAFE Partnership Group have also met with young people within Worcestershire to gain their views about online safety, particularly in relation to the information they currently receive and their understanding of where they can get help should they have concerns. In summary, they told us that most of them (76%) do not have any restrictions on their devices, and 50% of the young people told us that no-one checks what they are doing or who they are talking to on their devices. All but two of the young people spoken to said someone has spoken to them about online safety with the majority stating that this was done at school. Parents and other family members also featured highly, and encouragingly youth clubs, youth workers and police were also named, showing the engagement of a wide range of agencies in delivering this important message. Most young people said they would seek help if they thought they were in danger or were unsafe online, and generally knew where to go for that help, but it was concerning that 16% said they would do nothing. Some said they were worried they would get into trouble themselves; others were concerned their device would be taken from them, or it would 'make things worse'.

West Mercia Police has continued to promote the awareness and understanding of online risks amongst professionals. In June 2023 the West Mercia Police Cyber Crime and Online CSE Team held a conference for professionals from across partner agencies to update them on developments in this area. This is to be built on in the coming reporting period by a collaboration between the Central Regional Schools Trust, West Mercia Police and the University of Worcester to host a joint online safety conference for parents and carers to help them understand how they can keep their children, themselves, and their wider family/friends safe in an ever-evolving digital age. Parents/carers can attend the event in person, and it is also being streamed online to reach as wide an audience as possible, with the help of promotion by education settings.

In relation to the increasing concerns about online risks to children and young people initiatives driven by West Mercia Police have increased understanding of those risks among more than 2000 participants of events, including the Online Safety Conference (2023) and the Arrowvale Conference and Prevent/Protect Live events (6 since September 2023). These have included presentations to parents and carers to help them support their own families by recognising concerns early and staying safe online.

In other GET SAFE activity, the Operational Group led a data cleansing process to ensure that those children and young people identified via the GET SAFE portal as victims, or being at risk of exploitation were correctly 'flagged' on agencies' systems and that non-current flags were removed. The quality of data held on agency systems and particularly the avoidance of duplicate nominals was identified within the Solihull Joint Targeted Area Inspection as a key area for child protection. The data cleansing process identified that the information held on children and young people recorded within the GET SAFE portal as being at risk of county lines did not correlate with Police systems. This has now been addressed by the Operational Group. Partners have also responded to learning from a previous rapid review process in Worcestershire through an audit of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) submissions by first responder agencies to provide assurance as to the correct use of the process and quality of the submissions and addressed the gaps identified by that audit. GET SAFE data has been shared with schools to support their development of relevant messaging around this area within the curriculum; feedback from the CLIMB and Branch Project services has been used to support referrals, for example by promoting the services within both the care leavers service and higher education colleges and The Worcestershire Acute Hospital NHS Trust (WAHT) WREN report has continued to provide invaluable support in identifying potential victims and those at risk of child exploitation within Worcestershire.

The impact of the GET SAFE Partnership Group during this reporting period can be seen in the strengthening of the links between the processes to protect young people and adults. There is also now a greater understanding of the quality of the multi-agency responses to emerging risks at a District level and work in place to address areas for development.

In relation to the increasing concerns about online risks to children and young people, initiatives driven by West Mercia Police have significantly increased understanding of those risks among parents and carers to help them support their own families by recognising concerns early and staying safe online. We have a better understanding of young people's views on online safety and know that the work of schools to educate young people in the dangers is having a positive impact.

Through the work of the GET SAFE Operational Group there has been an improvement in the quality of the data held within agencies' systems relating to those at risk of exploitation, particularly county lines. In addition, the awareness and understanding of practitioners in relation to National Referral Mechanism referrals for those who may be victim of trafficking has been strengthened.

Work by the Worcestershire Acute Hospital NHS Trust and the follow up agencies such as Worcestershire Children First and West Mercia Police has led to victims and those at risk of child exploitation within Worcestershire being identified at point of presentation to hospitals and minor injuries units and information is being shared promptly with those professionals/agencies best placed to provide ongoing safeguarding and support, for example their social worker, key worker etc.

Finally, through their work with Worcestershire theatres the Worcestershire GET SAFE Team has reached over three thousand children and young people around the county to raise awareness of the risks of exploitation and how to stay safe when they are encountered.

During this reporting period agencies represented within the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group have continued to work together to assure the quality of multi-agency child protection work, and in doing so identify and address areas for improvement. There have been six multi-agency audits capturing the experience of 88 children and young people. These have covered the experiences of children where a strategy discussion had not led to a section 47 assessment and cases which had been subject of repeat strategy discussions. In response to the increased national focus on children and young people living with domestic abuse we have examined cases where children or young people had been made subject of a child protection plan due to domestic abuse in the home, and of children and young people receiving agency support at an early help level following domestic abuse concerns. Full details of the areas of both strong practice and learning can be found in the learning briefing which was produced and published following these audits ([Multi-Agency Audits: Domestic Abuse \(cloud.microsoft\)](#)).

An audit of cases where a child has undergone a child protection medical examination was completed by Children's Social Care and Health representatives in response to the learning identified within the National Panel's 'Child Protection in England' (May 2022) following the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes. The learning from the audit was published: <https://sway.office.com/gSijibMOQraGCVJd?ref=Link>. The auditing of referrals to the Family Front Door from education settings has continued, and in May 2023 the same audit approach was introduced for referrals from West Mercia Police, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, (WAHT) and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (HWHCT), using the same criteria to select cases.

A further strand of the WSCP work is to ensure the quality and accessibility of learning and development opportunities for the practitioners across the partnership. Three core training opportunities have been offered during this reporting period and during 2023/2024 a total of 377 practitioners attended these training events. The proposed Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) conference also went ahead on in March 2024, and was well attended by representatives from a range of partner agencies.

The QAPP Group has also undertaken a focused piece of work on the Neglect Toolkit and held a series of partnership task and finish groups to review and update the resources and pathway. This review was prompted by feedback provided by partner agencies at the wider Partnership event held in June 2023. To support this review we sought feedback from young people, parents and carers on how best to use the tools. This has helped us to develop resources that are more supportive and less 'challenging' and which allow for a more sensitive approach to what can be very difficult conversations for all involved. These updated resources have now been launched and are available at: [Resources and Publications - Worcestershire Safeguarding Boards \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](#).

Through the Family Front Door audit activity we have assurance on the quality of threshold decision making. Improvement has been seen in agencies receiving minutes and actions are now more multi agency. Further, the quality of the actions for agencies being identified within strategy discussions has continued to improve (previous audits had identified the need for them to be more 'SMART').

Within our safeguarding and child protection system we are seeing an increase in the volume of community based Early Help Assessments, most strategy discussions have the correct agency attendance, and there is evidence that through strong partnership working the right children and young people are progressing to child protection plans. Further, repeat child protection plans have reduced, indicating strong and sustainable change at the first opportunity.

The impact of a regular system of auditing at the Family Front Door is also clear to see in the data. Looking in depth at the 13 institutions we have audited three times or more during the year September 2021-August 2022 and comparing their conversion rate with September 2022-August 2023, we can see there is an improvement in 11 of these 13 [85%] institutions. We can also see there has been a 20% reduction in the overall number of contacts from these institutions, indicating greater use of early intervention routes and services.

WSCP has continued its work to implement learning from both national and local reviews. In July 2023 the partnership, working with Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, launched the 'Keep Me Safe' Strategy ([Keep me safe... :: Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care System \(icb.nhs.uk\)](#)). The strategy aims to provide consistent and co-ordinated messages to practitioners across Worcestershire and Herefordshire about a particular safeguarding theme to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries to children across the two counties. 'Keep Me Safe When I am Sleeping' was the first thematic guidance to be launched in support of the strategy which is focused on preventing Sudden Unexplained Death in Infancy (SUDI). The second of the Keep me Safe themes, 'Keep Me Safe When I am Crying' addressing non-accidental injuries to babies was due to be launched in May 2024 and as such will be covered in the next yearly report.

The partnership has completed two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews during this period.

In January 2024, WSCP published the report into the tragic death of Alfie Steele in February 2021. The review identified important learning for a number of agencies working with Alfie and those close to him. The full report can be read here:

[CSPR-Worcestershire-Alfie.pdf \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](#)

Although the independent reviewer was unable to complete this review until the criminal case had been concluded in mid-2023, WSCP and its partners used the learning from the rapid review process completed shortly after Alfie's death to strengthen their practices and that work continues with the partnership response being co-ordinated via the QAPP Group. This includes various briefing and training opportunities being made available to practitioners across Worcestershire in the coming reporting period based on the learning from this case, and these are being provided by both the partnership and individual agencies for their own workforces.

The second of these reviews took the form of an independently led review of cases where children or young people were having close and regular contact with family members who are registered sex offenders, and how effectively the risk was being managed. Although we were unable to publish the full report due to the potential risk of identifying the young person involved, all learning from this review was published and is [available here](#).

The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has continued to promote both the Worcestershire GET SAFE and GET THERE provision and raise awareness amongst staff in their settings about the risks of child criminal exploitation. The GET SAFE training package had been accessed by both the school Designated Safeguarding Lead and their deputy in 93% of schools, and nine out of ten Worcestershire schools have disseminated GET SAFE training to their staff and included GET SAFE within their curriculum.

Operation Encompass involves the reporting to schools, before the start of the next school day, of when a child or young person has been involved in or exposed to domestic abuse. The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has continued to support and promote this process and the extension of notifications to Early Years settings. Since Early Years Operation Encompass began, 277 settings have joined and a further 30 settings are in the process of joining (currently completing training) out of a total 455 Early Years settings across the county. Over 500 notifications of domestic abuse have been shared with Early Years settings in the last year and positive feedback has been received from Designated Safeguarding Leads regarding how the information has given them an insight into the child's life at home and how this impacts behaviour and needs whilst at the setting. Although much has been done and more settings are now actively signed up to Operation Encompass, we acknowledge that there is still room to improve the monitoring of timeliness and effectiveness of the Operation Encompass notifications and work will continue in respect of this.

The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has also undertaken work to promote and develop early help in education. The School Section 175/157 audit in January 2024 showed that 100% of Worcestershire schools had their own Early Help Offer, with 76% of schools taking time within that reporting period to improve their current offer for families. Within this audit schools also reported that during 2022-2023 they had supported nearly 13,000 children using their own school Early Help Offer, and in doing so had completed 2684 Early Help Assessments. These figures provide strong evidence of both the engagement of education settings in our local Early Help arrangements, and the extent to which those settings are providing support to children, young people and families at a point which is critical to preventing escalation of risk and therefore potential child protection interventions.

The Safeguarding Partners' published arrangements were reviewed in January 2023. Minor amendments were made, primarily to cover the NHS change from Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) to Integrated Care Boards (ICB's), and to clarify the decision making process as to when a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) should be commissioned. The full published arrangements can be found here: <https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WSCP-Published-Arrangements-updated-January-2023.docx>.

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership has continued to involve children, young people and families. During this reporting period we have sought the views of children, young people and families in the review of our neglect toolkit, the domestic abuse case audits and our GET SAFE work in relation to online safety.

Independent scrutiny of the child safeguarding partnership arrangements has been provided by the Independent Chair, and examples of how the work of the partnership is scrutinised are provided throughout this report. The new version of Working Together to Safeguard Children (December 2023) is clear on the need for safeguarding children's partnerships to remove the role of independent chair. It also states that safeguarding partners must ensure that there are arrangements for effective independent scrutiny in place for their local area and lists the functions of the independent scrutiny role. These changes need to be in place by December 2024 and are captured within the wider 'Working Together' implementation plan being led by the WSCP Executive.

3. Introduction

As required by HM Government guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children (December 2023), Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) has published the arrangements by which they fulfil their statutory responsibilities to child safeguarding. These arrangements can be read in full via the following link:

<https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Worcestershire-Safeguarding-Children-Partnership-Plan-Updated-January-2023.pdf>

The **safeguarding partners** in relation to a local authority area in England are defined under the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) as:

- (a) the local authority
- (b) an integrated care board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area
- (c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area.

Within Worcestershire these organisations have delegated responsibility for the arrangements to;

- The Director of Social Care and Safeguarding within Worcestershire Children First (Local Authority)
- Associate Director for Nursing and Quality (Safeguarding) NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- The South Worcestershire Local Policing Commander (West Mercia Police)

Chapter 2 of Working Together to Safeguarding Children (December 2023) requires the three safeguarding partners to jointly report on the activity they have undertaken in a 12-month period. The reporting should be transparent and easily accessible to families and professionals and must include what partnerships have done as a result of the arrangements, including on child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice. Reports must include:how effective the arrangements have been in practice. Reports must include:

- evidence of the impact of the work of the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies, including training, on outcomes for children and families from early help to looked-after children and care leavers
- an analysis of any areas where there has been little or no evidence of progress on agreed priorities
- a record of decisions and actions taken by the partners in the reporting period (or planned to be taken) to implement the recommendations of any local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, and the impact this has had
- ways in which the partners have sought and utilised feedback from children and families to inform their work and influence service provision
- the breakdown of costs in delivering the arrangements for that period, including the financial contributions of individual partners, any changes to funding and an assessment of the impact and value for money of this funding

- evidence of how safeguarding partners are ensuring the adequate representation and input of education at both the operational and strategic levels of the arrangements
- an overview of how data is being used to encourage learning within the arrangements and evidence of how information sharing has improved practice and outcomes
- a review of the impact and learning from independent scrutiny arrangements to ensure the leadership is strong and the arrangements are leading to the desired and necessary impact
- any updates to the published arrangements and the proposed timescale for implementation
- evidence that national reforms have been implemented, taking into account key decisions and actions taken by safeguarding partners in response to reforms, and any issues or concerns encountered within the yearly cycle.

This report details the progress of the Worcestershire safeguarding partners and relevant agencies as required by Working Together. Where appropriate, this has been set out within a summary of the activity of each of the partnership's subgroups to provide a more detailed understanding of delivery across the arrangements.

The last published Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership report covered the period 1st October 2021 to 30th September 2022 and can be found via the following link:

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2021 - 2022
(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk)

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020 - 2021
(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk)

4. Key Facts about Worcestershire

Context and Local Demographics

Worcestershire is a largely rural county in the West Midlands made up of the six districts of Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester, Wychavon and Wyre Forest. Wychavon district has the largest proportion of the total population in the county and Malvern Hills the smallest.

The 2021 Census showed Worcestershire's population to be 603,600, with 21.4% of the Worcestershire population being children and young people (0-19 age group). Worcestershire's younger population has not grown at the same rate as the general population. The 0-19 population has increased by about 1,300 persons (1.0%) since 2011, although the 0-4 population has decreased by almost 5% (around 1,500 persons)¹.

11.3% of the Worcestershire population is from a minority ethnic group, with the largest proportion (5.1%) being 'other' white population (not English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British) and the next largest (3.1%) people of an Asian heritage.

Worcestershire is a relatively affluent county with a growing economy and performs well on many measures of health and wellbeing compared with other areas of the country. That said, according to the Government's Indices of Deprivation which uses various measures including income, employment, education, health, barriers to housing and services, crime, and living environment, nearly 28,000 Worcestershire residents do still live in one of the top 10% of deprived areas of England.

The latest available figures (from 2022) show that in Worcestershire 17.8% of children live in low income families. The England average is 20%.

1 Population data source: Worcestershire County Council 2021 Census – Analysis of Initial (phase 1) Release: [2021 Census – Analysis of Initial \(phase 1\) \(worcestershire.gov.uk\)](#)

The current numbers of Worcestershire children and young people with levels of vulnerability are shown below. These figures are provided by Worcestershire Children First from their in-year monitoring as of 31st March 2024.



3452 Children in Need (National Definition) (1 in 34 children)
(Statistical neighbours 1 in 34) (West Midlands 1 in 27) (National 1 in 29)
Source: Internal Quarterly Reporting 31/03/2024



730 Children in Need (Local Definition) (1 in 162 children)
Source: Internal Monthly Reporting 31/03/2024



589 Subject of a Child Protection Plan (1 in 201 children)
(Statistical neighbours 1 in 267) (West Midlands 1 in 223) (National 1 in 234)
Source: Internal Monthly Reporting 31/03/2024



1051 Looked After Children (1 in 113 children)
(Statistical neighbours 1 in 181) (West Midlands 1 in 109) (National 1 in 141)
Source: Internal Monthly Reporting 31/03/2024



67 Children Looked After who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers
(1 in 1775 children) (Statistical neighbours 1 in 1292) (West Midlands 1 in 1616)
(National 1 in 1630) Source: Internal Monthly Reporting 31/03/2024



6087 Number of Children and Young People with an EHCP (1 in 27 children and young people) Source: Internal Monthly Reporting 31/03/2024



152 Children registered as Missing Education for the academic year
(1 in 593 school age children) Source: Internal Reporting 31/11/2023



14110 Children with a Special Educational Need or Disability
(1 in 6 school age children) Source: Internal Reporting 31/11/2023



380 Young People are Not in Education, Employment or Training (16-17 year olds) (1 in 36 children) Source: Internal Reporting 31/11/2023



511 Number of care leavers open for services (18-25) (1 in 79 children)
Source: Internal Monthly Reporting 31/03/2024



Total Worcestershire 0 - 18 Population - 119,353
Source: UK Mid-Year Population Estimate November 2023

Detailed comparative analysis on the above figures from the previous year and current trends in the data are available within the Worcestershire Children First reporting mechanisms.

5. Background

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership's last yearly report (2021 – 2022) highlighted the likelihood that this period would require both as a partnership and as individual agencies that we manage potentially significant change across our multi-agency child safeguarding systems. The publication of a number of key national documents means that managing change has been at the forefront of partnership activity and will continue to be so in the coming period.

The main driver for change has been the publication of the previous government's vision to transform children's social care: **'Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation strategy'** <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childrens-social-care-stable-homes-built-on-love> (February 2023). This strategy for reform set out proposals in response to recommendations from Josh MacAlister's Independent Review (Care Review) of Children's Social Care (2022), the Child Safeguarding Practice Panel's National Review into Child Protection in England (following the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson) (2022) and the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Children's Social Care Market Study (2022). A number of other related guidance documents have been published, these being:

- Working Together to Safeguard Children (December 2023)
- Children's Social Care National Framework and Dashboard (December 2023)
- Kinship Care Strategy (December 2023)
- Children's social care data and digital strategy (December 2023)

'Working Together' requires structural changes to the partnership arrangements and how those are to be managed is covered within the report.

The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel continues to publish both national child safeguarding practice reviews and briefing papers resulting from thematic reviews. Key publications that have influenced the work of the WSCP during this reporting period are the national review into the safeguarding of children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings, and multi-agency safeguarding and domestic abuse.

Finally, during this reporting period WSCP published a local child safeguarding practice review following the tragic death of Alfie Steele in Droitwich in February 2021. This review and the learning from it has informed a considerable amount of our partnership activity, and will continue to do so.

6. The Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive Group

Strategic decision making for the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) takes place within the Executive meeting. The Executive is a small group made up of the safeguarding partner representatives, and it meets regularly to ensure prompt responses to emerging themes. During this reporting period these meetings were independently chaired.

Areas of Focus for 2022/2023

The previous WSCP yearly report highlighted that within this reporting period the Executive would be focused on the following areas:

1. Ensure that any recommendations that result from the work of the cross-departmental Ministerial Group focussed on Child Protection, supported by the newly formed Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partner Performance Board (MASPP) are properly considered and implemented within Worcestershire.
2. Consider the various National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel reports, reviews and briefing papers and through clear decision making provide direction on those recommendations that will add most value to our current multi-agency child safeguarding systems within Worcestershire. In this way we can be sure we are using our partners' time and resources in the most targeted way, and where it can best help to improve how we keep children and young people safe in Worcestershire.
3. As agencies face increasing budgetary challenges through the coming year, the WSCP Executive must remain aware of the potential impact on, and contribution to the work of the Partnership, and provide support where possible to ensure there is no reduction in the effectiveness or quality of our current multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements.
4. Monitor the impact of the additional funded posts within the Family Front Door on the proportion of multi-agency referrals meeting threshold, and the timeliness of Operation Encompass referrals to schools and early years settings.

Progress, Achievements and Evidence of Impact

1. *Ensure that any recommendations that result from the work of the cross-departmental Ministerial Group focussed on Child Protection, supported by the newly formed Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partner Performance Board (MASPP) are properly considered and implemented within Worcestershire.*

This reporting period has seen significant change in the statutory guidance and frameworks which underpin child protection and safeguarding resulting from work at a national level. In February 2023 the Government published their plan to reform children's social care, 'Stable Homes, Built on Love', which set out system-wide transformation of children's social care designed to address urgent issues facing children and families. This strategy responded to key reviews published during 2022 which emphasised the need for whole system change to enable families to overcome challenges at the earliest stage, keep

children safe and ensure that those in care have stable and loving homes. There followed a series of consultations on this strategy and associated documents, the Worcestershire safeguarding partners' responses to which have been co-ordinated via the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) Executive.

In June 2023, the Government published for consultation a proposed update to the statutory guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguarding Children'. The draft guidance included substantial updates intended to strengthen multi-agency working across the whole system of help, support and protection for children and their families. Following the consultation process, the new Working Together guidance was published in December 2023 ([Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk)). This guidance has significant implications for both single agencies within safeguarding children's partnerships and for the partnerships and will require structural changes to partnership arrangements. In response to these, WSCP Executive has developed a comprehensive implementation plan which will be delivered via the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group. The development of this implementation plan has been supported by the completion of a 'Health Check' exercise with wider partnership representatives in April 2024, supported by a Department for Education representative. The WSCP Executive has also overseen the allocation of the additional funding provided to all safeguarding children's partnerships by the Department for Education to support the implementation of the 'Working Together' changes. All changes need to be in place by end of December 2024.

- 2. Consider the various National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel reports, reviews and briefing papers and through clear decision making provide direction on those recommendations that will add most value to our current multi-agency child safeguarding systems within Worcestershire. In this way we can be sure we are using our partners' time and resources in the most targeted way, and where it can best help to improve how we keep children and young people safe in Worcestershire.***

With the volume of reviews and briefing documents being produced it is important that the Partnership remains focused on those which are most relevant to Worcestershire, and can best help improve our services to children and young people. This report highlights below some examples of the specific work completed within Worcestershire in response to national reviews and briefings.

- In late 2022 West Mercia Police completed an audit of child concern reports marked as 'anonymous', many of which had been received via the NSPCC. This provided reassurance that all such reports are investigated as they would be had the person reporting been known.
- The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel briefing on bruising in non-mobile infants (published September 2022) highlighted certain learning which had already been identified within a recent Worcestershire rapid review process. This local process led to changes in the West Midlands regional procedure on non-accidental injuries to babies in relation to strengthening the advice to General Practitioners when faced with bruising on non-mobile babies.
- As result of the national focus on child on child abuse within educational settings, the WSCP Executive has continued to be updated on the multi-agency response within Worcestershire. These updates demonstrate the very proactive response to child on child abuse with strong engagement from schools.

- The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group briefing on multi-agency safeguarding and domestic abuse (September 2022) was considered by the WSCP Executive in December 2022. The partnership response to children and young people living with domestic abuse is covered in detail in the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group section of this report, but the WSCP Executive has recognised the importance of its response being complementary to that of the Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and this is an area for continued focus and development in the coming reporting period.
 - In February 2023 the WSCP Executive requested an audit be completed to review the quality of information provided to consultant paediatricians by agencies prior to any medical examination of a child where abuse was known or suspected. The aim of the audit was to provide assurance in an area that had been highlighted in a recent National Child Safeguarding Practice Review. The audit of six cases showed that on several occasions where children had been admitted the paediatrician completed a child protection medical before referring to children's social care and without having any historical information. The findings were acted upon by both Health and Worcestershire Children First representatives to ensure processes were strengthened in this area.
 - In February 2023 the WSCP Executive used the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's annual report (published December 2022) to inform the planning of the WSCP wider partnership event. Further details of this are provided within that section of this report.
 - WSCP Executive has continued to monitor the Worcestershire response to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Review report covering Safeguarding Children with Disabilities in Residential Settings. A comprehensive piece of work has been completed by Worcestershire Children First in response to the recommendations and was received at the May 2024 Executive Group meeting. Full details will therefore be provided within the next yearly report.
3. ***As agencies face increasing budgetary challenges through the coming year, the WSCP Executive must remain aware of the potential impact on, and contribution to the work of the Partnership, and provide support where possible to ensure there is no reduction in the effectiveness or quality of our current multi-agency child safeguarding arrangements.***

With regard to the continuing financial challenges faced by all three of the safeguarding partners, in January 2023 the WSCP Executive was able to agree a 2% rise in contributions to the partnership, which at the time was well below the rate of inflation. Within this budget the partnership has been able to continue to provide business support at the agreed level, and support both Operation Encompass and Family Front Door activity.

In January 2024 the safeguarding partners were again able to agree the financial support each would provide to the partnership during 2024/25. There will be uplifts to the contributions in line with what each of the individual safeguarding partners have agreed internally to cover increased costs as a result of inflation. Further detail on the current budget position is provided in Appendix A of this report.

4. *Monitor the impact of the additional funded posts within the Family Front Door on the proportion of multi-agency referrals meeting threshold, and the timeliness of Operation Encompass referrals to schools and early years settings*

In relation to Operation Encompass, progress and developments are fully covered within the Education Head Teachers Safeguarding Steering Group section of this report. The WSCP Executive has continued to provide support to resolve specific challenges within the Operation Encompass arrangements as they have arisen, for example ensuring a robust notification process in relation to children in the 0-5 year age group who are not in an Early Years setting via links with district health visiting teams. Partnership funding for the additional posts within the Family Front Door has continued, and this has helped in managing the volume of referrals which do not meet threshold for a children social care response. That said, the ratio of referrals which do not meet threshold remains too high, and it must be recognised that these posts cannot on their own provide the long-term solution to this ongoing issue. The WSCP Executive has therefore been exploring alternative solutions through various triage models that have been adopted within other areas to address this. Telford and Wrekin have a streamlined triage model which may offer a solution, and West Mercia Police are leading on a local trial in Shropshire of a nationally recognised model known as 'Pitstop' (Humberside). Worcestershire await the evaluation of that trial. The Executive recognises that any model will need to be scalable to be able to manage the higher volume of referrals within the County comparative to other West Mercia areas.

Other Activities and Areas Covered

The WSCP Executive has also provided the forum for other multi-agency child safeguarding matters to be addressed. Examples during this reporting period have been:

- Referral backlogs within the West Mercia Police Harm Assessment Unit, with regular updates and assurance being provided by the Police representative as to the position and actions being taken to prioritise referrals and address the causes.
- An update to the safeguarding partners governance arrangements in January 2023.
- In September 2023 the Executive discussed the attendance of Health representatives at 'out of hours' Strategy Discussions which had been escalated from the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group. The practicalities of the agreement in place from 2016/2017 that the on-call paediatrician would be invited to such meetings as the Health representative was being questioned both on the grounds of capacity and the lack of any information available to the paediatrician if the child is not in hospital at that time. A procedure which offers a solution is being developed within another West Mercia area, and the Executive has agreed to revisit this matter when it is available, with a view to adopting.
- Through the WSCP Executive Group the safeguarding partners ensured that the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review relating to the death of Alfie Steele in February 2021 was completed in a timely manner, that the independent reviewer had access to all information and practitioners as requested, and that all those affected received the necessary updates and support.

- In December 2023 the Executive sought assurance as to the extent to which the planned response to the Serious Violence Duty in Worcestershire (which sets a statutory duty on Police, Criminal Justice, Health, Local Authority, Fire and Rescue, Local Districts, and Public Health to reduce Serious Violence) includes activity focused on serious violence affecting children and young people. This has been incorporated into local planning using the Youth Endowment Fund principles most suited to Worcestershire, utilising the existing Respect program framework, and identifying who is at risk to provide targeted interventions such as mentoring and one to one sessions. Access can be via schools, partners such as the Youth Offending Service and local Youth Providers, similar to the Channel process which has been shown to be successful in diverting young people. Further, it is planned that there will be some funding for schools and youth groups to support initiatives focused on physical activity, mental health and crime prevention.

Areas for Future Focus

During the 2024/2025 reporting period, the WSCP Executive will be focussed on the following areas:

- Ensuring the changes required by Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 are delivered across the partnership within the required timescales.
- Ensuring continued links between the work of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to strengthen the response to children and young people who are affected by Domestic Abuse.
- Through the safeguarding partners, work with other safeguarding partnerships within the West Mercia region to develop a viable long term solution to the issue of the volume of referrals to the Family Front Door not meeting threshold.

7. The Wider Partnership

The annual wider safeguarding partnership event was held in June 2023 and was again well attended by representatives from a wide range of agencies. Updates were provided on the various workstreams of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership, and feedback was sought from attendees on areas where greater focus was needed. The reflective questions for partnerships provided within the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel annual report published in December 2022 were used to examine the effectiveness of our arrangements, and secure feedback. This feedback highlighted two particular areas for safeguarding partners to consider. The first was that of the awareness and use of the neglect assessment tools which had been developed by the previous Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board and are accessible to all agencies across the county. The second area was that of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership's involvement in, and response to the Serious Violence Duty. Although the local response to the requirements placed on areas by the Serious Violence Duty primarily sits with Community Safety Partnerships, it is recognised that serious violence also affects children and young people, and as such our partnership should be contributing to the development of our response within Worcestershire. Both these themes have been accepted by the WSCP Executive, and our responses are covered elsewhere in this report.

8. The GET SAFE Partnership Group

GET SAFE is the Worcestershire name for our multi-agency support and protection for children and young people at risk of exploitation. The GET SAFE Partnership Group is a subgroup of the WSCP and is chaired by Superintendent Gareth Morgan, South Worcestershire Local Policing Commander (West Mercia Police).

Areas of Focus for 2022/2023

The 2021 - 2022 yearly report identified the following areas of focus for the GET SAFE Partnership Group for this reporting year:

1. Working to understand how effectively the information received from individual agencies via the GET SAFE portal, crime recording and other single agency systems is used to influence local multi-agency responses to emerging themes and need.
2. Working with Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB) to ensure that the GET THERE and GET SAFE processes are harmonised with the CARM framework to ensure there is a smooth transition of the management of risk between child and adult safeguarding services.
3. Exploring the extent to which children and young people find information in relation to online safety both useful and accessible, and where needed how partners can make the help offered more relevant to their needs.
4. Ensuring that any learning from the recommendations within the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Telford (published July 2022) has been captured where relevant to Worcestershire.

Progress and Achievements

In relation to the areas of focus for this reporting period, the achievements of the GET SAFE Partnership Group are set out below.

1. *Working to understand how effectively the information received from individual agencies via the GET SAFE portal, crime recording and other single agency systems is used to influence local multi-agency responses to emerging themes and need.*

During this reporting period the GET SAFE Partnership Group undertook an exercise to test how effectively the data on child criminal exploitation collected both via the GET SAFE portal and by individual partner agencies was being brought together to then inform local multi-agency responses at a district level. This highlighted that there is no single framework and approach to multi-agency tasking and coordination of resources within the six Worcestershire districts to respond to identified exploitation concerns, and they are at differing levels of maturity. In a number of the districts very strong models are in place (for example the Worcester City Worcester City Multi-Agency Tactical Group (MAT-G), and where this was not the case work is now underway to re-establish these tasking processes, with 'Safer Wyre Forest' currently being reinvigorated to start in September and then meet on a bi-monthly basis to co-ordinate local multi-agency responses to emerging themes and needs.

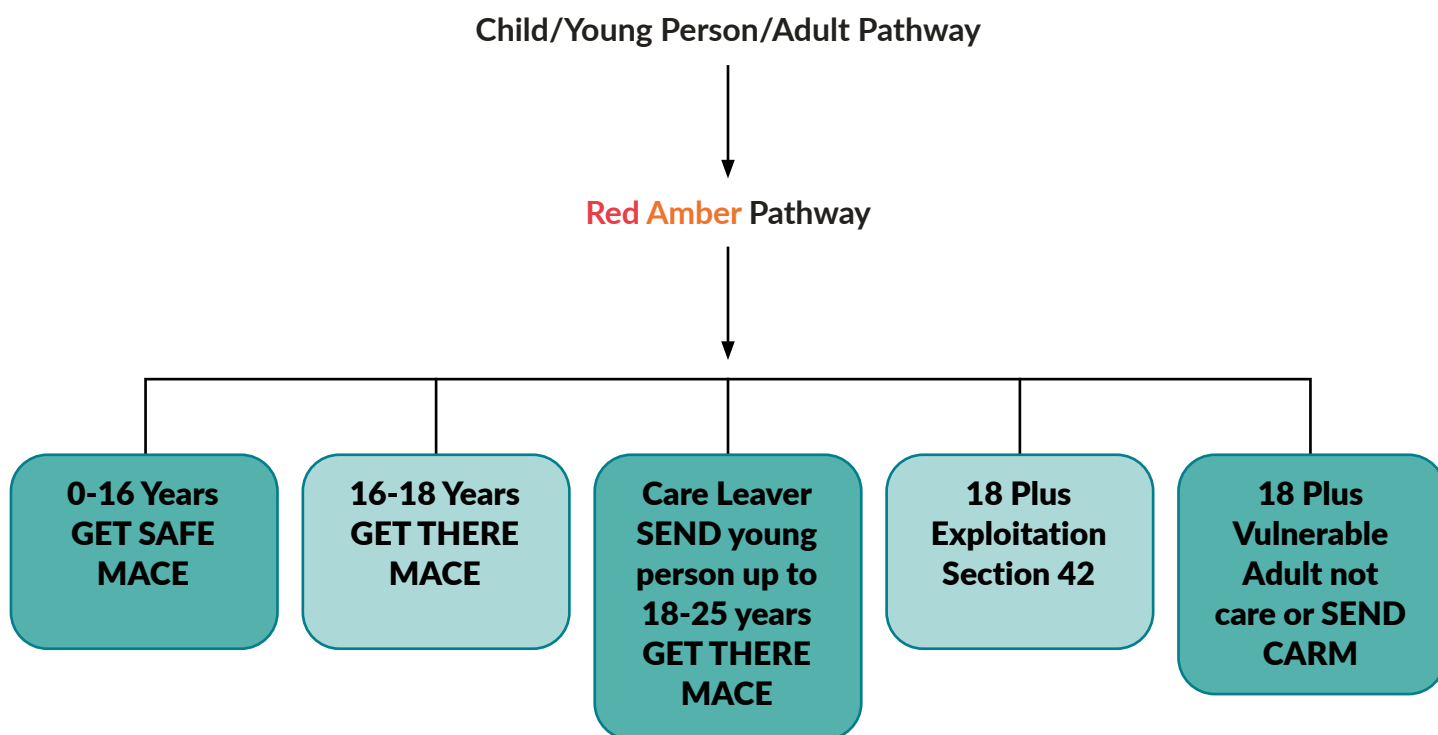
2. Working with Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB) to ensure that the GET THERE and GET SAFE processes are harmonised with the CARM framework to ensure there is a smooth transition of the management of risk between child and adult safeguarding services

Last year's report noted that Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB) had recently introduced a Complex Adult Risk Management (CARM) process which provides a framework to facilitate effective working with adults where certain criteria apply, for example where they are at risk of harm due to their complex needs but where the risks cannot effectively be managed via other processes or interventions, such as a section 9 care and support assessment or a section 42 safeguarding enquiry under the Care Act 2014.

We know that exploitation does not end when people reach 18 years, and some young adults will continue to experience exploitation or have vulnerabilities and need ongoing support from professionals as young adults. Further, previous national learning has shown us that the transition point for young people who are at risk of, or suffering, exploitation from child safeguarding processes to adult services can leave that young person at increased risk.

Members of the GET SAFE Partnership Group have therefore worked with representatives from the Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board (WSAB) to ensure that the GET THERE and GET SAFE processes are harmonised with the CARM framework. This has ensured a pathway for the transition of the management of risk between child and adult safeguarding services, and a clear understanding of ownership and accountability for the safety of the young adult in need of help.

The GET SAFE Process Flow Chart



*MACE – Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meeting

Information on the pathway has been circulated to all partners, and the full document is available within the WSCP website by following this link: [02 item 5 App 1 GET SAFE process with CARM_.pdf \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

3. *Exploring the extent to which children and young people find information in relation to online safety both useful and accessible, and where needed how partners can make the help offered more relevant to their needs.*

During this reporting period representatives of the WSCP GET SAFE Partnership Group met with young people within Worcestershire to gain their views on aspects of online safety, particularly in relation to the information they currently receive and their understanding of where they can get help should they have concerns because of online activity. A summary of what they told us is provided below.

- Most of the young people (76%) do not have any restrictions on their devices. Specific comments given in relation to this varied from “My mum doesn’t know how to use phone”, and “I have to teach my mum how to use a phone”, to “Give phone to parents at bedtime”, “not allowed TikTok, Snapchat or Instagram” and “3 hours a day, no phone at bedtime”.
- 50% of the young people said that no-one checks what they are doing or who they are talking to on their devices. For those who have their phone checked, comments included “Parents do random checks”, “My mum will go through my phone if it gets taken off me” and “Parents when they take it off me as punishment”.
- All but two of the young people spoken to said someone has spoken to them about online safety – with the majority stating that this was done at school. Parents and other family members also featured highly. Encouragingly, youth clubs, youth workers and police were also named, showing the engagement of a wide range of agencies in delivering this important message.
- 26% of the young people had never heard of/accessed NSPCC, Barnardo’s or Childline for support on online safety. 58% know of Childline, and 27% the NSPCC.
- The young people were asked what they would do if they thought they or a friend were in danger or felt unsafe whilst online. Talking to a friend, family member or school were all common answers. More concerningly 16% of the young people said they would do nothing.
- Young people who said they would do nothing were worried that they would get into trouble if they told someone that they were experiencing a problem online, others were concerned that their device would be taken from them. Two young people said it would “make things worse”.

The Partnership would like to thank both Pete Sugg and Cat Illingworth of Young Solutions for arranging access to the venues, to the staff at those venues for their support with visits, and to all the young people who took time to meet with us and share their views.

West Mercia Police has continued to promote the awareness and understanding of online risks amongst professionals. In June 2023 the West Mercia Police Cyber Crime and Online CSE Team held a conference for professionals from across partner agencies to update them on developments in this area. This is to be built on in the coming reporting period by a collaboration between the Central Regional Schools Trust, West Mercia Police and the University of Worcester to host a joint online safety conference for parents and carers to help them understand how they can keep their children, themselves, and their wider family/friends safe in an ever-evolving digital age. Parents/carers can attend the event in person, and it is also being streamed online to reach as wide an audience as possible, with the help of promotion by education settings.

4. *Ensuring that any learning from the recommendations within the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Telford (published July 2022) has been captured where relevant to Worcestershire.*

In September 2022 the GET SAFE Partnership Group considered the report of the Independent Inquiry on Child Sexual Exploitation in Telford. Although this report related specifically to events in the Telford area, it also provided an opportunity for the GET SAFE Partnership Group to consider whether there was any learning which could be used to improve our response within Worcestershire. This lengthy report contained over forty recommendations which were primarily focused on Police, Local Authority, Health and Education responses. The GET SAFE Partnership Group requested and received an update from West Mercia Police in relation to their response to the report which focused on their work to ensure the appropriate licensing of private hire drivers and restaurants within the county. Further information about our local response to these recommendations is covered within the Education Head Teacher's Safeguarding Steering Group section of this report.

Other Activities

During this reporting period a wide variety of other activities have supported the GET SAFE approach across Worcestershire. A number of these are summarised below.

- GET SAFE Partnership Group members provided online briefing events for local District Councillors to raise awareness of the nature and prevalence of child exploitation within Worcestershire, and local responses.
- The GET SAFE Operational Group led a data cleansing process to ensure that those children and young people identified via the GET SAFE portal as victims of, or being at risk of exploitation were correctly 'flagged' on agencies' systems, and that non-current flags were removed. The quality of data held on agency systems, and particularly the avoidance of duplicate nominals, was identified within the Solihull Joint Targeted Area Inspection as a key area for child protection. The data cleansing process identified that the information held on children and young people recorded within the GET SAFE portal as being at risk of county lines did not correlate with Police systems. This has now been addressed by the Operational Group.
- The GET SAFE Operational Group has also continued to promote the GET SAFE training for practitioners across partner agencies. Where, through the GET SAFE dataset, low referral rates have been identified within a particular area or agency, the Operational Group has completed targeted work to raise awareness and so encourage reporting by professionals. One example of this is low reporting levels from educational establishments in one particular area of Worcestershire being addressed through additional information and support being provided.
- In relation to Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, the GET SAFE Partnership and Operational Groups have continued to raise awareness of agency responsibilities to report concerns and promoted the Independent Modern Slavery Advocate Program at Victim Support with partner agencies.

- Based on the learning from a previous rapid review process in Worcestershire, the Operational Group has also led an audit of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) submissions by first responder agencies to provide assurance as to the correct use of the process and quality of the submissions. This highlighted that West Mercia Police needed to strengthen training in the NRM process for its staff. This is being addressed through the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into child sexual abuse in Telford in that a bespoke training package has been developed by the National Working Group (NWG) to be delivered to all front-line officers and investigators across West Mercia Police, which includes content on the NRM. It is estimated that roll out of this package is to commence in summer 2024. Further, Worcestershire Children First (WCF) identified inconsistent recording on young person's case files that an NRM referral had been completed, and where it had, of the outcome. WCF previously identified that they too had no NRM training in place. These concerns have now been addressed with the GETSAFE team running workshops for WCF staff. Improvements have also been made in the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting form creating a specific question that ensures that an NRM is considered in each case.
- The GET SAFE Partnership Group has continued to receive updates from Young Solutions on the provision of services in Worcestershire which contribute to keeping children and young people safe from exploitation. Young Solutions are the countywide infrastructure charity whose main purpose is to ensure the safety and involvement of young people. They are also commissioned to support the 'Youth Offer', a network of organisations contracted by Worcestershire County Council to deliver work with vulnerable young people, as well as the sector as whole. In addition, they manage their three year Lottery-funded project ('YouthScape') with a key partner focusing on youth work, including targeted and detached provision, in each district.
- Young Solutions monitor and are aware of issues arising in the county and assist in coordinating a response from relevant organisations and authorities. Examples during 2023 – 2024 include the setup of a new youth and community centre in Redditch in response to anti-social behaviour in the town, working with partners to report illegal vape sales in Bromsgrove, facilitating new detached work in Droitwich in response to issues in the town centre and enabling diversionary youth and work-focused activities for Asian males in Worcester City.
- Knife arches have been purchased and used across Worcestershire to raise awareness with young people about the dangers associated with carrying knives. In May 2023 the arches were used as part of a day of action on knife crime across Worcestershire and the wider West Midlands. These were deployed with a focus on train stations to target those potentially involved in 'county lines'.
- The CLIMB and Branch Project continue to be used to support victims and those at risk of exploitation within Worcestershire. Both projects are funded by the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner. CLIMB is an early prevention and intervention scheme aimed at stopping young people from being exploited by criminals. The Branch Project is run by the West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (WMRSASC) and provides education, intervention and support to children and young people who are at risk or have been a victim of CSE. Updates on these initiatives to the GET SAFE Partnership Group provide an important insight into the nature of exploitation across Worcestershire and the profile of those affected (for example 77% of all children and young people who were referred to the Branch Project identified as having additional mental health needs, and nearly a quarter of young people spoke of being involved in wider exploitation issues, in addition to CSE). It was also noted that although the Branch Project was able to work with young people aged 18-25 years with additional needs, there had been very few referrals for this group. Members of the GET SAFE Partnership Group therefore undertook to raise awareness of the CLIMB and Branch Project services within both the care leavers service and higher education colleges.

- The Education Safeguarding Team have completed safeguarding audits within schools. Within these audits GET SAFE data has been shared with the schools to support their development of relevant messaging around this area of the curriculum.
- The Worcestershire Acute Hospital NHS Trust (WAHT) WREN report has continued to provide invaluable support in identifying potential victims and those at risk of child exploitation within Worcestershire. This screening takes place at first point of contact with health services and is triggered by key words within the medical records. To give a snapshot of volumes, patterns and follow up processes generated by the WREN system, in October 2022 261 children and young people presented to Accident and Emergency departments in Worcestershire with one of the key words (such as 'gun', 'gang', 'weapon', 'knife', 'overdose' etc) which triggers a notification to the WAHT Safeguarding Team. The key words are not only focused on exploitation, but they will also identify other potential forms of safeguarding concern, so a wide range of possible concerns are reviewed by an experienced safeguarding professional. This system provides other very detailed information. We know for example that 83% of those 261 children and young people were White British, that the highest proportion (53%) were in the 10-18 age group, that a significant majority had no prior safeguarding alerts on the system, that 23 of those children presenting were identified as already having a social worker, so allowing for swift and direct information sharing. Three of the children had GET SAFE flags, meaning they were already known to be vulnerable to exploitation. Again, this meant that the appropriate referrals could quickly be made to the correct professionals for intervention.
- The Worcestershire GET SAFE Team have continued to raise awareness of the risks of exploitation by visiting schools and sixth forms across Worcestershire to deliver a play 'You In?', which is performed by Worcestershire Theatres. The play addressed a range of exploitation risks for children and young people such as online safety and gang culture, with performances being tailored to the age range of the audience.

Evidence of Impact

As a result of the work of the GET SAFE Partnership Group during this reporting period links between the processes to protect young people and adults have been strengthened. There is also now a greater understanding of the quality of the multi-agency responses to emerging risks at a District level and work in place to address areas for development.

In relation to the increasing concerns about online risks to children and young people, initiatives driven by West Mercia Police have increased understanding of those risks among more than 2000 participants of events including the Online Safety Conference (2023), the Arrowvale Conference and Prevent/Protect Live events (6 since September 2023). These have included presentations to parents and carers, to help them support their own families by recognising concerns early and staying safe online. It is always very difficult to quantify evidence of outcomes and impact with preventative initiatives such as this, however it should be recognised that in the context of what we know about the gaps which exist within the knowledge of parents and carers on this subject, awareness raising on this scale can only lead to a positive impact on the safety of children and young people in at least some of those families.

Through the work of the GET SAFE Operational Group there has been an improvement in the quality of the data held within agencies' systems relating to those at risk of exploitation, particularly county lines. In addition, the awareness and understanding of practitioners in relation to National Referral Mechanism referrals for those who may be victim of trafficking has been strengthened.

Through the work of the Worcestershire Acute Hospital NHS Trust and the follow up agencies such as Worcestershire Children First and West Mercia Police, victims and those at risk of child exploitation within Worcestershire are being identified at point of presentation to hospitals and minor injuries units and information is being shared promptly with those professionals/agencies best placed to provide ongoing safeguarding and support, for example their social worker, key worker etc.

Finally, through their work with Worcestershire theatres the Worcestershire GET SAFE Team have reached over three thousand children and young people around the county, to raise awareness of the risks of exploitation and how to stay safe when they are encountered.

Areas for Future Focus

During the forthcoming reporting period the GET SAFE Partnership Group will be:

1. Using the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) Serious Violence criteria to bench mark the quality of our own arrangements within Worcestershire.
2. Based on the feedback provided by children and young people, continue to develop our partnership help and support in relation to online safety.

Full information on the GET SAFE and GET THERE programmes can be found via the following links:

<https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/getsafe>

[Get There | Worcestershire County Council](#)

9. The Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group

The role of the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group (QAPP) is to support the improvement and development of services offered to children and young people in Worcestershire by delivering a multi-agency programme of Quality Assurance through focusing on three key areas, these being audits, service user feedback and key performance indicators.

The QAPP is currently chaired by Dan Gray who is the Principal Social Worker and Group Manager for Safeguarding Quality Assurance with Worcestershire Children First.

Areas of Focus for 2022/2023

The 2021 - 2022 yearly report identified the following areas of focus for this reporting year:

1. Continued quality assurance activity through auditing and feedback processes. The areas chosen for such activity will be selected based on emerging national and local reviews and guidance, for example the quality of our response to children affected by domestic abuse.
2. Continue our scrutiny and focus of multi-agency practice using our set of key performance indicators. The involvement of the right agencies at all stages of the child protection process and ensuring that children, young people and families receive the correct referral or support at the most appropriate level and at the earliest opportunity will remain a priority for the QAPP Group.
3. Complete the independent research into the effectiveness of Early Help by the University of Worcester.
4. Continue to offer learning and development opportunities for practitioners across the partnership, to include a Partnership Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Conference.

Progress and Achievements

1. *Continued quality assurance activity through auditing and feedback processes. The areas chosen for such activity will be selected based on emerging national and local reviews and guidance, for example the quality of our response to children affected by domestic abuse.*

During this reporting period agencies represented within the QAPP Group have continued to work together to assure the quality of multi-agency child protection work, and in doing so identify and address areas for improvement. There have been six multi-agency audits, capturing the experience of 88 children and young people. These activities, with examples of learning and follow up are summarised below.

Worcestershire Family Front Door Multi-Agency Audits

These audits were completed by representatives of the partner agencies to examine the quality of the multi-agency response in relation to two specific areas of work within the Family Front Door (FFD), with a focus on strategy discussions.

The first audit considered the experiences of children where the strategy discussion had not led to a section 47 assessment. Agencies identified strengths and learning that has been shared with QAPP Group members and the Family Front Door MASH Leadership Meeting. There was assurance on the threshold decision making within these children's experiences.

The second audit considered the experiences of ten children with a variety of different outcomes, including repeat strategy discussions and section 47 assessment with an outcome of no further action. This audit also selected cases involving young people engaged with the Youth Justice Service. These cases highlighted that the quality of the agency actions being identified within these strategy discussions had continued to improve, although some remained too generic (previous audits had identified the need for them to be more 'SMART'), minutes of the strategy discussions were being shared with partners, and overall, the information sharing between all agencies was good. Learning was identified in relation to the quality of the some of the minutes, with some examples of minute templates being difficult to follow and repetitive, but otherwise recording a clear rationale for the strategy discussion, detail of information shared, and decisions made.

Multi-Agency Audit on Safeguarding Children and Young People in Domestic Abuse Settings

During 2022 and 2023 there has been increasing national focus on children and young people affected by Domestic Abuse. In May 2022 the National Child Safeguarding Review Panel published its report 'Child Protection in England' (***Child Protection in England - May 2022 (publishing.service.gov.uk)**). This report, which was in response to the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, made eight recommendations. One of those recommendations was "Specific practice improvements in relation to domestic abuse" and contained the following paragraph:

"13.76. As our preceding recommendations outline, improvements must be made in developing the specialist skill and expertise of staff, and in information sharing between agencies. These two factors are relevant to all elements of child protection, but we believe the situation in relation to domestic abuse is so severe that these areas must be particularly strengthened for practitioners working with victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse."

The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel followed up with a further briefing published in September 2022: 'Multi-agency safeguarding and domestic abuse' (***Multi-agency safeguarding and domestic abuse (publishing.service.gov.uk)**). This briefing highlighted that in 2020, domestic abuse was a factor in over 40% of serious harm cases notified to the Panel, and its annual report highlighted this as a key area of work. The National Panel highlighted a consensus that the safeguarding system is not currently 'getting it right' in this area. The Panel also noted that it is not currently possible to say with confidence 'what works' in response to domestic abuse.

A third factor which has increased focus in this area is the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 which sets out that children are victims of domestic abuse that is perpetrated against their parent or carer. The National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel does acknowledge in their report however that we do not yet know what the criminal justice impacts of this change in legislation will be.

The National Panel briefing published in September 2022 also set out a number of recommendations for safeguarding partners which covered the need to:

- Involve specialist domestic abuse services and experts by experience (children, young people and adults) in the development of strategies and local responses, including commissioning, service design and delivery.
- Look at local safeguarding systems and responses as a whole, focusing not only on the 'front door'.
- Embed training across all safeguarding partners for all practitioners to ensure they provide a domestic abuse-informed response, and for this to be supported within supervision and reflective practice opportunities.
- Improve how safeguarding partners work with specialist domestic abuse services by establishing stronger working relationships and clear information sharing protocols.
- Ensure safeguarding partners are fully invested in the commissioning of domestic abuse services and ensure all staff have a robust understanding of what the domestic abuse support offer is in their area.

The first step in meeting these recommendations was to understand the quality of the multi-agency response to children and young people affected by domestic abuse, and particularly the strengths and areas for development. With such a broad subject matter, we ran two separate audit processes, the first focusing on seven cases where children or young people had been made subject of a child protection plan due to domestic abuse in the home, and the second five cases of children and young people receiving agency support at an early help level following domestic abuse concerns. Agencies involved in these audits were Worcestershire Children First, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Herefordshire & Worcestershire Health & Care NHS Trust, NHS Herefordshire & Worcestershire Integrated Care Board – GP Practices, West Mercia Police, Probation Service, West Mercia Youth Justice Service and Women's Aid.

Each agency was asked to audit their own involvement (using the JTAI - Joint Targeted Area Inspection Methodology) with the child, and provide evidence of their practice and reflection on the work they have undertaken, identifying both good practice and areas for learning and development. Each agency also graded the quality of their own service practice.

In relation to the audit of cases where children affected by domestic abuse were being supported through Early Help, across the services there were strong examples of good practice (82%), emerging outstanding practice (7%) and areas of focus and improvement (11%), no cases were judged to be inadequate by individual agencies.

The audit identified the following strengths in single and multi-agency practice:

- Strong partnership working across agencies working directly with families, for example key strengths were identified in working relationships with Women's Aid/Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs).
- Information sharing and referrals between agencies were appropriate and proportionate.
- When risk increased, the step-up procedure between Early Help and Social Care was being used.
- Assessment and Intervention was proportionate to need.

- Strong management oversight through decision making and supervision was noted by agencies.
- Women's Aid use of Domestic Abuse tools, such as DASH (Domestic Abuse, Stalking and 'Honour' based violence) to support assessments and plans, and also support to implement protective orders to safeguard victims and children.
- Youth Justice identified key strengths in practice around management oversight.

The following learning and areas for development were also identified:

- We need to ensure all agencies have copies of Safety Plans that have been put in place by other agencies.
- Ensure children are seen and spoken to as part of assessments.
- Police need to be seeing children alone when called to Domestic Abuse incidents, and the outcome captured within their record of the incident.
- Where information needs to be shared, it should be done so promptly.
- Practitioners need to consider when and how GP's are made aware of information when families are supported at an Early Help level.
- As with other areas of safeguarding, the importance of practitioners being professionally curious as to what is happening in the home, and the impact it is having on children and young people was once again evident.

As part of the audit, we also approached families to seek feedback, and four families agreed to contribute. This feedback evidenced a number of strengths in partnership practice, particularly in respect of being clear on worries, speaking and listening to children and being clear on what parents need to do within the plan. Areas for learning were on all agencies identifying strengths and each agency being clear with families on their role within the plan.

Full details of the areas of both strong practice and learning can be found in the learning briefing which was produced and published following these audits ([Multi-Agency Audits: Domestic Abuse \(cloud. microsoft\)](#)) and has been circulated widely within all agencies. This briefing also contains details of the learning from the audit of cases where children or young people had been made subject of a child protection plan due to domestic abuse in the home.

Individual agencies are responsible for disseminating learning and actions within their own agency, and this is tracked through reports to the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures Group. The audit outcomes have also been shared with the Worcestershire Domestic Abuse Partnership Board (DAPB) to support their work and to be incorporated into the DAPB 2023/24 action plan as required.

This workstream also links to one of the themes of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review report into the death of Alfie Steele, which relates to the importance of practitioners having a good professional understanding of domestic abuse and violence. This is covered in more detail within the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group section of this report.

Audit of Child Protection Medicals

This audit was completed by Children's Social Care and Health representatives in response to the learning identified within the National Panel's 'Child Protection in England' (May 2022) following the deaths of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes. Six Worcestershire children's experiences were considered.

The audit confirmed a number of strengths in practice which evidenced a service that acts to respond appropriately to child protection concerns. Child protection medicals were being held appropriately with proportionate outcomes to support the next steps of other agencies to safeguarding children. As with all audit activity, a number of areas for improvement were identified, and these were incorporated into a learning briefing, and shared with practitioners.

Child Protection Medicals: <https://sway.office.com/gSijibMOQraGCVJd?ref=Link>

Learning was also shared directly with the Paediatricians Service and to partner agencies via the QAPP Group.

Audit of Referrals to the Family Front Door

Since September 2021 a system has been in place to audit 10 cases each month from those education settings making the highest number of referrals to the Worcestershire Family Front Door where the outcome of that referral was that threshold for social care intervention had not been met. The focus is on the reasons why the referral was made, the quality of the referral and how needs could have been appropriately met at a lower level. By November 2023, 220 cases had been audited using this system.

Learning is shared with all settings each quarter, discussed at Worcestershire Heads Meetings and cascaded via various partnership forums such as the Education Designated Safeguarding Lead Network meetings. In addition, those schools audited most frequently are invited to a 'Learning and Reflection' session chaired by the Education Safeguarding Manager.

Findings are consistent each quarter. We see strengths in how thresholds at the Family Front Door are appropriately applied with outcomes proportionate to presenting needs, and in the variety of support offered to children and families within education settings.

The main learning theme identified for schools and nurseries is that making full use of support through the school's own early help offer would have been the right response in many of the cases audited. Coordinating this through a school led early help assessment where necessary or involving Team around the Family meetings would appropriately have met identified needs.

Other key learning for schools and nurseries includes to ensure the child's voice is evidenced in referral, referrers are specific about concerns and evidence clearly the risk of harm, considering siblings who may not be at the referrers setting as part of the referral, the importance of following procedures when indecent images of children are shared on mobile devices, and developing whole school approaches to issues such as child on child abuse and healthy relationships. The main learning identified for the Family Front Door was to ensure that feedback given to referrers following a referral is consistent and clear in terms of next steps.

In May 2023 the same audit approach was introduced for referrals from West Mercia Police, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, (WAHT) and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (HWHCT), using the same criteria to select cases. Key learning from these agencies was that the majority of referrals from Health were found to be appropriate and good practice was identified in terms of joint working. Most referrals from Police evidenced use of the Levels of Need Guidance and as was the case above, referrals were found to be appropriately dealt with at Family Front Door, with thresholds correctly applied and the response proportional to needs identified. Learning for the Police was identified in terms of making contact with other professionals already involved with the family before deciding on a referral at Level 4 and making sure referrals involving multiple children included clear rationale and Levels of Need assessment.

Learning for Health was identified in terms of evidencing use of Levels of Need guidance when considering and making a referral at Level 4, gaining informed consent from parents/carers, and ensuring details of the referral are added to the child's file, including evidence of the child's voice and existing early help support in referrals.

Once again, auditors felt more specific feedback from Family Front Door staff to the referrer was needed, and to who it was sent was important with the individual referrer not necessarily being the most appropriate person to receive this.

2. Continue our scrutiny and focus of multi-agency practice using our set of key performance indicators. The involvement of the right agencies at all stages of the child protection process and ensuring that children, young people and families receive the correct referral or support at the most appropriate level and at the earliest opportunity will remain a priority for the QAPP Group.

In addition to the audit work detailed above, our set of multi-agency key performance indicators tell the journey of the child through the safeguarding system from Early Help to Child Protection. These are regularly reviewed within the QAPP Group. Here are some of the key points which have emerged during this reporting period:

| Strengths | Areas of Focus |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Targeted Early Help have an increase in families they are working with at Level 3 – ensuring focused and targeted interventions with families that need it most. ■ We are seeing an increase in the volume of Community Based Early Help Assessments. ■ Social Work Assessments remain timely. ■ Most Strategy Discussions have the right agency attendance and are quorate with Social Care, Police and Health representation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ High levels of referrals from partner agencies that do not require a Social Work intervention. ■ High levels of Police requests for service to Early Help that do not require an Early Help intervention. ■ Although we have an increase in Early Help Assessments, not all agencies are evidencing this work, and this is an area of development and focus through the Early Help Partnership |

| Strengths | Areas of Focus |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Initial Child Protection Conferences are held in a timely manner, are quorate and we see a high conversion rate to Child Protection (CP) Plan. This evidences the right partnership contributions and the right children progressing to CP planning. ■ The majority of children's plans end due to no further concern, evidencing the impact of CP planning. ■ Repeat CP Plans have reduced from 15.3% to 12.3% over the year. ■ The majority of CP Plans end at the 9-month review, evidencing no delay in CP planning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Into Quarter 4 23/24 we have seen a rise in the number of children subject to CP planning and this is an area of focus as we move into 24/25. ■ We are seeing a rise in the volume of children subject to CP planning for emotional abuse, this is an area of focus to ensure the correct application of this CP category. ■ We have seen an increase in children's plans extending over 9-months; and this is an area of focus into 2024/2025. ■ Through review of the data provided by Police on criminal charges, this requires further work/drill down to ensure this is accurate for developed analysis. |

3. Complete the independent research into the effectiveness of Early Help by the University of Worcester

The University of Worcester was commissioned by the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) to undertake an investigation designed to capture user and professional views about the effectiveness of Worcestershire's Early Help offer. The intention was that learning from this would support the partnership's work to reduce the proportion of referrals to the Family Front Door which should have been dealt with via Early Help services.

The project, which began in February 2022, was designed to start with family and children's views but did not progress as planned, primarily due to a lack of uptake by service users. Various changes in research approach were offered during the project, including the research team offering online/ telephone or in-person interviews and also offering to do 'taster' sessions in Early Help settings as a way to encourage participation. Despite operational staff from partner organisations putting forward a total of 80 names as potential participants, only 12 came forward for online or telephone interviews and several of these had little they wished to contribute. There were mixed views from parents in terms of the helpfulness of the service they received, the most valued part of their and their children's experiences being attributed to the personal qualities of the assigned worker, rather than any aspect of the wider Early Help initiative/system.

The participants also had very different experiences ranging from teenagers being at risk of exploitation through to very young disabled children needing day care, and hence drawing any meaningful themes out of the data has been not possible, although there were some recurring issues:

- Only two parents recognised the term 'Early Help'; most associated the term with 'Early Years'.
- There were no reports of participants using the local websites in their search for help, most access to services being via trusted local professionals.
- Perspectives were generally that the help when accessed was not that 'early' but came after a crisis point had been reached.

- There was no evidence of any parent being asked to contribute to any planning/content of services.
- There was considerable praise for individual staff who were consistent, empathic and good communicators with both adults and children.
- Participants were not able to comment in any depth on the referral system, though none of the sample had been in contact with the Family Front Door, as far as they recalled.

In view of the difficulties in achieving a meaningful sample size despite the best efforts of both the researchers and partners, the decision was taken to end the project early.

The final report has been shared with the Worcestershire Early Help Partnership where the findings have been used to inform the work of the group in relation to their key priority 3: “Promoting engagement and collaboration”.

4. Continue to offer learning and development opportunities for practitioners across the partnership, to include a Partnership Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Conference.

A further important strand of QAPP Group work is to ensure the quality and accessibility of learning and development opportunities for the practitioners across the Partnership. Three core training opportunities have been offered during this reporting period.

The events in the below table took place across 2023/2024. These events are promoted across the Worcestershire safeguarding children partnership, and in total 377 practitioners have attended these training events:

| Course Title | Attended | Number of Sessions |
|---|----------|--------------------|
| Multi Agency Levels of Need and Threshold Guidance Workshop | 109 | 3 |
| Management of Allegations (MOA) | 51 | 5 |
| Signs of Safety Partnership Training | 131 | 5 |
| LADO Partnership Conference | 86 | 1 |

Feedback from attendee’s include: *“It was very good and enhanced my knowledge within this area”* (MOA), *“training was a really useful refresher today, especially having time to have an overview of case studies for reflection”* (Levels of Need) and *“The pace and discussions were great for me, but also how it was explained - made it seem simple and not so daunting”* (Signs of Safety).

We have also reviewed the attendance and impact of training through the QAPP Group and raised where agencies have not attended booked training.

The proposed Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) conference went ahead on Wednesday 13th March 2024, and as can be seen from the table above was well attended by representatives from a range of partner agencies. In support of promoting the work of the LADO service in Worcestershire, a survey was completed in late 2023 amongst safeguarding partners, Independent Fostering Agencies and Residential Settings across the county. 36 returns were received from professionals who had referred to or worked with the LADO Service through the Management of Allegations Process. The survey provided strong evidence that:

- Referrals were dealt with in a timely manner.
- Referrers were provided with written feedback following their referral.
- The written feedback helped them to understand the next steps being taken by either themselves or by the LADO.
- Referrers were content with the LADO's response, and they understood the rationale for the decisions being made.
- The Position of Trust Meeting was arranged in a timely way.
- They felt able to engage, participate and share their views in the meeting.
- The Chair managed the meeting well and provided clear outcomes.
- They felt that the minutes were an accurate reflection and outcome of the meeting.
- At either the referral or meeting stage, the LADO captured the risks in the case.
- At either the referral or meeting stage, there was a clear plan on how those risks were going to be managed.

The feedback survey is one element of the quality assurance approach, and this will be triangulated against Worcestershire Children First case-file audits of LADO work and key performance indicators.

Training opportunities for partners are promoted through the Partnership Newsletter and can be booked via the Website at: [WSCP Training and Events - Worcestershire Safeguarding Boards \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk).

Policies and Procedures

Another function of the QAPP Group is to work with the West Midlands Safeguarding Children Procedures Group to ensure practitioners have access to relevant and up to date multi-agency policies and procedures, and to ensure the Levels of Need (Thresholds) guidance is readily accessible and updated as necessary. These are available at: [Welcome | West Midlands Safeguarding Children Group \(procedures.org.uk\)](https://www.procedures.org.uk).

During this reporting period we undertook a focused piece of work on the Neglect Toolkit and held a series of partnership task and finish groups to review and update the resources and pathway. This review was prompted by feedback provided by partner agencies at the wider Partnership event held in June 2023. These updated resources have now been launched and are available at: [Resources and Publications - Worcestershire Safeguarding Boards \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk).

To inform this review we sought feedback from young people, parents and carers on how best to use the tools. Examples of feedback we received and used are:

- It is important to ask questions as openly as possible to gain as much information – use a conversational style, not a tick sheet.
- Do not talk in a formal way and make this part of a conversation to help answers flow.
- Do not use it all in one, do bite-size sections of the questions, so it is not overwhelming.
- Prepare before you come to use the tools, so you know the key sections to focus on – this will ensure it does not feel overly long for families.

Through the QAPP Group, partners have also contributed to updating a number of procedures including the local Suicide Prevention Guidance, Children Missing Education, disguised compliance, coercive control and families who are hostile or resistant to change, sexual activity in children and young people (including under-age sexual activity) and children who abuse others including child-on-child abuse and harmful sexual behaviour.

These procedures are available at: [Welcome | West Midlands Safeguarding Children Group \(procedures.org.uk\)](https://www.procedures.org.uk).

Evidence of Impact

Through the Family Front Door audit activity we have assurance on the quality of threshold decision making. Improvement has been seen in agencies receiving minutes and actions are all multi agency. Further, the quality of the actions for agencies being identified within these strategy discussions has continued to improve (previous audits had identified the need for them to be more 'SMART').

Within our safeguarding and child protection system we are seeing an increase in the volume of community based Early Help Assessments, most strategy discussions have the correct agency attendance, and there is evidence that through strong partnership working the right children and young people are progressing to child protection plans. Further, repeat child protection plans have reduced, indicating strong and sustainable change at the first opportunity.

Our examination of cases where children and young people have been affected by domestic abuse has provided a stronger understanding of the quality of the multi-agency responses on which we can continue to develop our local services, responses and practitioner understanding.

We have a greater understanding of the quality of the Child Protection medical process within Worcestershire, and the availability of learning to local professionals.

Through our work with young people and families to review the Neglect Toolkit we have resources that are more supportive and less 'challenging' which allows for a more sensitive approach to what can be very difficult conversations for all involved.

The impact of a regular system of auditing to the Family Front Door is also clear to see in the data. Looking in depth at the 13 institutions we have audited three times or more during the year September 2021-August 2022 and comparing their conversion rate with September 2022-August 2023, we can see there is an improvement in 11 of these 13 [85%] institutions. We can also see there has been a 20% reduction in the overall number of contacts from these institutions, indicating greater use of early intervention routes and services.

Areas for Future Focus

During the forthcoming reporting period the priorities for the QAPP Group will be:

1. Lead on the Worcestershire response to the recommendations made within the Child Safeguarding Practice Review relating to the death of Alfie Steele.
2. Continue to follow up on single agency responses to learning from previous audit activity.
3. Oversee the delivery of changes within both single and multi-agency procedures and working practices resulting from Working Together to Safeguard Children (December 2023).
4. We continue to see a high level of referrals from partner agencies that do not require a social work intervention, and we will continue to try and address that.

10. The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Group oversees the management of rapid review processes and the commissioning of child safeguarding practice reviews within Worcestershire. The CSPR Group is also responsible for ensuring that child safeguarding practice reviews are completed to a high standard and within agreed timescales, that the recommendations and learning resulting from these reviews are fully implemented, and evidence of their impact obtained. During this reporting period the CSPR Group has been chaired by Heather Manning who is Head of Safeguarding and Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Adults, Children and Children Looked After with NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The purpose of a review is to identify any learning from these cases and then use that learning to improve both individual agency and multi-agency working to safeguard children more effectively, for example through policy development and the commissioning of multi-agency training. There are clear criteria for when rapid reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews should be completed, and these are set out in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (December 2023). These reviews are undertaken when a child has died or been seriously harmed, and abuse or neglect is known or suspected. Child safeguarding practice reviews are not inquiries into how a child died or was seriously harmed or about who is culpable, the emphasis being on extracting the opportunities for learning and improvement.

Progress, Achievements and Evidence of Impact

This year the CSPR Group has completed eight rapid reviews resulting in the commissioning of one joint child safeguarding practice review and domestic homicide review. This review is ongoing. In each case the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has been notified of the outcome of the rapid review and in all cases has agreed with the decision of the WSCP Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group. Further, in all cases where a rapid review has been completed, any learning identified has been recorded and is followed up.

Examples of such follow up from rapid review learning includes:

- The development of a 'Think Family' newsletter to raise awareness among practitioners of how to recognise and consider what is going on in the wider family, and 'think family' as a whole concept.
- The completion of a dip sample audit to provide reassurance that all health agencies involved with the child/family are receiving minutes from multi-agency safeguarding meetings when the representative from a different health agency has attended the meeting.
- The update and relaunch of the Neglect Toolkit. The neglect toolkit and related documents have been reviewed and updated as a result of a recommendation from a rapid review process. This work was progressed through the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group, and full details are within that section of this report.

The CSPR Group has also continued its work to implement learning from both national and local reviews.

In July 2023 the partnership, working with Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, launched the 'Keep Me Safe' Strategy. The strategy aims to provide consistent and co-ordinated messages to practitioners across Worcestershire and Herefordshire about a particular safeguarding theme to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries to children across the two counties.

'Keep Me Safe When I am Sleeping' was the first thematic guidance to be launched in support of the strategy. Although Sudden Unexplained Death in Infancy (SUDI) is now very rare, nationally approximately 200 babies still die every year. The risk of babies dying is reduced if the clear messages developed from research are followed. It is important that all practitioners and professionals are delivering the same clear and consistent messages to support families to understand how to avoid the specific risks to their baby. The NHS Integrated Care Board team offered online briefings prior to and at the time of the Keep Me Safe launch, which were advertised through the Safeguarding Partnership. These were well attended by a variety of professionals from different agencies.

The second of the Keep me Safe themes, 'Keep Me Safe When I am Crying', addressing non-accidental injuries to babies, was due to be launched in May 2024 and as such will be covered in the next yearly report.

Our response to the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's recommendations and briefing paper in relation to children and young people living with domestic abuse is covered within the QAPP Group section of the report.

Areas for Future Focus

During the forthcoming reporting period the CSPR Group will be focused on the following areas:

- Continue to support the local response to learning from national and local reviews.
- Complete and publish the two ongoing Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and embed any multi-agency learning resulting from them.

11. Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) currently has two child safeguarding practice reviews (CSPR's) in progress, one of which is a joint CSPR/Domestic Homicide Review. These reviews are being overseen by the Worcestershire Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group on behalf of the WSCP.

The partnership has also completed two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews during this period.

In January 2024, WSCP published the report into the tragic death of Alfie Steele in February 2021. Dirk Howell, the partner of Alfie's mother Carla Scott, has been convicted of murder and child cruelty and received a lengthy custodial sentence; Carla Scott was convicted of manslaughter and child cruelty and has also received a significant custodial sentence. The review identified important learning for a number of agencies working with Alfie and those close to him, and can be read here:

[CSPR-Worcestershire-Alfie.pdf \(safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk\)](#)

Although the independent reviewer was unable to complete this review until the criminal case had been concluded in mid-2023, WSCP and its partners used the learning from the rapid review process completed shortly after Alfie's death to strengthen their own practices, and that work continues with the partnership response being co-ordinated via the QAPP Group. This includes various briefing and training opportunities being made available to practitioners across Worcestershire in the coming reporting period based on the learning from this case, provided by both the partnership and individual agencies for their own workforces.

The second of these reviews took the form of an independently led review of cases where children or young people were having close and regular contact with family members who are registered sex offenders, and how effectively the risk was being managed. Although we were unable to publish the full report due to the potential risk of identifying the young person involved, all learning from this review was published and is available here. <https://sway.office.com/VYYIKz62yca3PXD4?ref=Link>.

There were four recommendations from this review, and agency responses to these are being followed up by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group.

12. The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group

The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group consists of representatives of the Worcestershire phases of education settings. The group quality assures the safeguarding work of the education sector across Worcestershire and provides a direct link for that work into the wider safeguarding partnership. The group uses key performance indicators, the Section 175 safeguarding audit returns and direct feedback from schools to understand both the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and the resulting outcomes for children. This group is chaired by the Director for Education, Early Years, Inclusion and Education Place Planning.

Membership includes representatives from the following schools' areas:

- Early Years
- First Schools
- Independent Schools
- Primary Schools
- Middle Schools
- Secondary Schools
- Further Education
- Special Schools
- Alternative Provision

Areas of Focus for 2022/2023

The 2021 - 2022 report identified the following areas of focus for this reporting year:

1. Consider the recommendations within the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Telford (published July 2022) which relate directly to education settings and implement any relevant learning within Worcestershire schools and colleges.
2. Monitor the timeliness and quality of Operation Encompass notifications following the expansion to include Early Years settings and the increased partnership investment to support this (going live in February 2023).
3. It has been recommended that future Section 175 audits should build on the above progress by gathering information on how education settings are recording child-on-child abuse incidents, and the ways in which they are then responding to those reports.

Progress and Achievements

The work of the Group within these areas of focus is set out below.

- 1. Consider the recommendations within the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Telford (published July 2022) which relate directly to education settings and implement any relevant learning within Worcestershire schools and colleges.**

The Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has continued to promote both the Worcestershire GET SAFE and GET THERE provision and raise awareness amongst staff in their settings about the risks of child criminal exploitation, which was a key recommendation within the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Telford. For all Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL's) and Deputy DSL's, it is a mandatory requirement that they complete GET SAFE training every three years, which includes training on child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child sexual abuse.

The Section 175 audit returns showed that the GET SAFE training package had been accessed by both the school Designated Safeguarding Lead and their Deputy in 93% of schools, and nine out of ten Worcestershire schools have disseminated GET SAFE training to their staff and included GET SAFE within their curriculum. The Telford report also recommended that all schools should have a CSE lead, and it has been confirmed that this is included within all DSL's job description and role profile.

- 2. Monitor the timeliness and quality of Operation Encompass notifications following the expansion to include Early Years settings and the increased partnership investment to support this (going live in February 2023).**

Operation Encompass involves the reporting to schools, before the start of the next school day, when a child or young person has been involved in or exposed to domestic abuse. The information is given in strict confidence to a school's DSL to enable support to be given dependent on the needs and wishes of the child. Operation Encompass initially covered public and local authority primary and secondary schools and nurseries attached to a primary school but in February 2022, this extended to all Early Year's provisions within Worcestershire. The volume of work involved is still significant in Worcestershire, with a high number of notifications being received each month, and the WSCP funded posts for additional support have therefore remained in place. The Head Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has also provided the forum to discuss the quality of the information provided within some Operation Encompass notifications to ensure the integrity of the information sharing, and to address challenges within the system as they arise.

Operation Encompass has been embedded within Worcestershire for some time and following the expansion into Early Year's settings across the county, it has been crucial that the timeliness, quality, and effectiveness is closely monitored to ensure the resource invested in this programme is having a positive impact. Since Early Years Operation Encompass began, 277 settings have joined and a further 30 settings are in the process of joining (currently completing training) out of a total 455 Early Years settings across the County. A welcome pack has been designed and sent out to settings, to give information on Operation Encompass in Early Years, which includes background information, relevant data, and links to training opportunities. This has also been disseminated through the DSL network newsletter and through the Education Head Teachers Safeguarding Steering Group. Designated Safeguarding Leads have welcomed the service as an opportunity to improve safeguarding within their settings. Over 500 notifications of domestic abuse have been shared in the last year with Early Years settings and positive feedback has been received from DSL's regarding how the information has given them an insight into the child's life at home and how this impacts behaviour and needs whilst at the Early Years setting.

The Education Safeguarding Team is currently working with the Communications Team at Worcestershire Children First and linking with the Police Communications team to promote 'Operation Encompass – One Year On' on social media platforms, to raise awareness of the importance of the notifications to encourage other settings to sign up and to raise awareness for newly registered practitioners.

There is a strong working relationship between Education Safeguarding and the Operation Encompass Lead within the Police which allows Early Years settings to feedback on possible improvements to the system. An example of this is feedback on the need for information being provided by the Harm Assessment Unit to have an increased focus on the child as well as the incident that took place. As a result, Police have committed to work with staff to develop how they assess the environment and demeanour of the child at the incident with the aim of providing more child centred notifications.

The Education Safeguarding Team has provided DSL's at Early Years settings with online meeting spaces where they can meet, ask questions, and gain further knowledge on Operation Encompass. They have also hosted an event where the co-creators of Operation Encompass were introduced to DSL's in Worcestershire, so giving DSL's deeper insight into why Operation Encompass is important and the value it brings to children and families in Worcestershire.

Although much has been done and more settings are now actively signed up to Operation Encompass, we acknowledge that there is still room to improve the monitoring of timeliness and effectiveness of the Operation Encompass notifications and work will continue in this area.

- 3. It has been recommended that future Section 175 audits should build on the above progress by gathering information on how education settings are recording child-on-child abuse incidents, and the ways in which they are then responding to those reports.***

The vast majority of schools in Worcestershire have adopted the Worcestershire Children First Child-on-Child Abuse Policy, including the risk assessment. The recent Section 175 audit results showed that across the 271 schools in Worcestershire, only four were without a Child-on-Child Abuse Policy or risk assessment, and as a result these schools have received a follow up from the Education Safeguarding Team.

Early Help

In addition to the above, the Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has undertaken work to promote and develop early help in education. The provision of early help to children, young people and their families by education settings is a key part of our wider multi-agency safeguarding system, and the expectation is that education settings will, where possible, provide early help directly to families prior to asking for additional support from other agencies.

The Section 175 audit report completed in January 2024 showed that at that time 100% of Worcestershire schools had their own Early Help Offer, with 76% of schools taking time within that reporting period to improve their current offer for families. Within this audit schools also reported that during 2022-2023 they had supported nearly 13,000 children using their own school Early Help Offer, and in doing so had completed 2,684 Early Help Assessments.

These figures provide strong evidence of both the engagement of education settings in our local Early Help arrangements, and the extent to which those settings are providing support to children, young people and families at a point which is critical to preventing escalation of risk and therefore potential child protection interventions.

The Worcestershire Early Help Partnership oversees the effectiveness of early help provision across the county, and representatives from both schools and Early Years are supporting the work of that group. Local resources such as the Here 2 Help Directory, and Family Hub website are also promoted within the Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group.

Evidence of Impact

The impact of the work of the WCF Education Safeguarding Team supported by the Education Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group has led directly to the following:

- Thousands of children, young people and families across Worcestershire are receiving early help and support through an education setting.
- A strong understanding of both child exploitation and child on child abuse amongst staff in education settings, with those settings also having robust reporting and response processes in place.
- Worcestershire being able to evidence that education settings are clear on their role and contribution to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and actively involved in them, as required by Working Together to Safeguard Children (December 2023).
- A specific independent school network has been established that ensures that the appropriate regulatory standards for independent schools can be examined and specific topics impacting on this sector are understood in a Worcestershire context. This group is coordinated by the Education Safeguarding Adviser.

Areas for Future Focus

During the forthcoming reporting period the Head Teacher Safeguarding Steering Group will be focused on the following areas:

1. Ensuring that they continue to support the relationship between education settings and the Worcestershire Family Front Door and promote the knowledge and understanding of the Levels of Need Guidance through regular joint audit activity and clear guidance and dissemination of learning.
2. System learning from Ofsted complaints is a further area of development on which the group will be focused. We need to build on how learning from these complaints, which includes identified best practice, is used to strengthen practice in our education settings.
3. The group will continue to support education providers to encourage those who are victims of online abuse via social media to report those incidents and provide training opportunities for Designated Safeguarding Leads in support of this.
4. Contribute to the delivery of Learning Briefings and Practice Review outcomes to support system development in education settings, make recommendations to WSCP Executive Group and promote good practice sharing across the networks that are represented.

13. Updates to Published Arrangements

The Safeguarding Partners' published arrangements were reviewed in January 2023. Minor amendments were made, primarily to cover the NHS change from Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) to Integrated Care Boards (ICB's), and to clarify the decision making process in relation to when a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) should be commissioned. The previous version of the arrangements identified the Independent Chair as the decision maker for a CSPR, however the new arrangements now make it clear that a recommendation on whether to undertake reviews will be made by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Group, and the decision as to whether to undertake a review will be made by the safeguarding partners, but with appropriate scrutiny and challenge from the Independent Chair.

The full published arrangements can be found here: <https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WSCP-Published-Arrangements-updated-January-2023.docx>.

14. The Voice of the Child

Within our case audits focused on children and young people affected by domestic abuse (full details of which are provided in the Quality Assurance Practice and Procedures (QAPP) Group section of this report), we approached families directly to seek feedback. Four out of the seven families where the child was on a Child Protection Plan because of domestic abuse in the home gave feedback; they told us...



Feedback from families evidence several strengths in partnership practice, particularly in respect of being clear on worries, speaking and listening to children and being clear on what parents need to do within the plan. Areas of focus are on all agencies identifying strengths and each agency being clear with families on their role within the plan. Families said:

“Yes - 110% everyone went above and beyond my expectations”

“Definitely. Social Worker arranged police patrols and welfare checks”

“Helping me to understand by explaining clearly”

“Better communication from Social Worker - response time of my concerns can take up to two days”

The review of the Neglect Toolkit also involved the engagement of young people, parents and carers, and details of what they told us is again contained within the QAPP Group section of this report.

Finally, as described in the GET SAFE section of this report, during this reporting period representatives of the WSCP GET SAFE Partnership Group met with young people within Worcestershire to gain their views on aspects of online safety, particularly in relation to the information they currently receive and their understanding of where they can get help should they have concerns because of online activity.

15. Independent Scrutiny

Independent scrutiny of the child safeguarding partnership arrangements has been provided by the Independent Chair, and examples of how the work of the partnership is scrutinised are provided throughout this report. The Independent Chair has continued throughout this reporting period to attend and be directly involved in all groups within the partnership and so has a detailed knowledge of the contribution of the various partners, and the effectiveness and progress of ongoing workstreams. Further, the Independent Chair provides direct scrutiny of the safeguarding partners' representatives contributions within the Executive Group, reviews all Rapid Review decisions made by partners, and has a direct involvement in selecting the areas of focus for multi-agency audit.

The new version of Working Together to Safeguard Children (December 2023) is clear on the need for safeguarding children's partnerships to remove the role of independent chair. It also states that safeguarding partners must ensure that there are arrangements for effective independent scrutiny in place for their local area and lists the functions of the independent scrutiny role. These changes need to be in place by December 2024 and are captured within the wider 'Working Together' implementation plan being led by the WSCP Executive.

16. Conclusion

During this reporting period WSCP has continued to test the effectiveness of the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements through the work of its subgroups. This has included the extensive use of audits and reviews of cases where children have been seriously harmed. Where such reviews have been completed the partners have approached these with an openness and transparency which has meant that learning can be effectively identified and used to improve both our individual and collective delivery of child safeguarding within Worcestershire.

The safeguarding partners do recognise however that there is still significant work to be done to assure ourselves that all the learning from these various activities has been embedded within both single and multi-agency processes, and to be able to assure ourselves of the impact of that for children and young people. We will therefore be prioritising this area of work during the forthcoming reporting period, together with the delivery of the changes required to our child safeguarding systems resulting from the recent national guidance.

Appendix A – WSCP – Budget Details (2023 - 2024)

Table: Income and Expenditure of WSCP for period 01/04/23 – 31/03/2024

The below table sets out the income and expenditure of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. The following points should be noted in relation to the figures.

- WSCP ended with a surplus of £28,309 for 2023/24 financial year, and therefore now has overall reserves of £145,879.
- This surplus was only possible because of the one-off Department for Education grant of £47,300. Without that the Safeguarding Partner contributions would have shown a deficit of £18,991 for this financial year.
- This was however an accepted position by the three Safeguarding Partners when setting the budget at the beginning of 2023, in order to support the Operation Encompass initiative, and in view of the available reserves.

| Income and Expenditure Account for the period: 01/04/2023-31/03/24 | Partnership Budget | Training Delivery | SCR Fund | Partnership Fund | Total |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|----------|------------------|----------------|
| Holding account as at 31st March 2024 | 23,085 | 97,233 | 18,085 | 7,476 | 145,879 |
| Income £ | | | | | |
| Worcestershire Children First | 94,700 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 94,700 |
| Integrated Care Board (ICB) | 72,908 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 72,908 |
| West Mercia Police | 21,872 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 21,872 |
| Department for Education Funding* | 47,300 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 47,300* |
| Total Income | 236,780 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 236,780 |
| *One off grant provided by the Department for Education to all Safeguarding Children Partnerships to support the implementation of 'Working Together' 2023 | | | | | |
| Expenditure £ | | | | | |
| Salaries | 72,311 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 72,311 |
| Data Analyst | 13,500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 13,500 |
| Administration and business costs | 9,085 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9,085 |
| Recharges | 24,500 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 24,500 |
| GET SAFE Promotion Initiative | 5,000 | | | | 5,000 |
| Operation Encompass Posts | 84,015 | | | | 84,015 |
| Training Expenditure | 0 | 60 | 0 | 0 | 60 |
| Total Expenditure | 208,411 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 208,471 |
| Net Position for 2023/2024 | 28,369 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 28,309 |



Get Safe
Connecting Services to Keep People Safe