

Child Protection Annual Report 2021-22

A summary of child protection conference and consultation activity 2021/22

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INTRODUCTION

This report will provide an overview of the activity and effectiveness of Child Protection activity between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022.

In the often stressful and high-risk environment of Childrens Social Care, it is easy to lose sight of our purpose and our values and to behave in punitive, risk averse ways towards the families of vulnerable children. The Milton Keynes approach aims to work with families in a way which enables us to stop, listen and reflect on what has been said and consider the impact on the child's welfare. The family support approach promotes family centred solutions, ensuring a more proactive, child centred role for our workers with a clear focus on the safety of the child. This means that, wherever possible, child protection concerns are safely and effectively managed without entering formal child protection processes.

The past year has seen a relaxation in the restrictions in relation to Covid 19 and this has meant that we have been able to return to meetings which take place in person. Initially we encouraged families to attend alongside the chair and the Social Worker and professionals were present virtually. Gradually we have been able to see more professionals attend and this has been well received. The facility to dial in remotely using Teams, remains an option and is regularly used for Review Child Protection Conferences where deemed appropriate. It remains important for all attendees to be present for the duration of the meeting so as to be part of joint decision making and risk management.

Chairs have continued to try and liaise with families in advance of conference to help prepare them for the meeting. This has usually been by telephone and has enabled the safeguarding service to be confident that families know what to expect from a conference.

Chairs continue to provide a valuable service in offering objective, expert consultations to Social Workers and other professionals in relation to identifying and managing risk appropriately with children on Child in Need Plans to ensure that the right children are being managed effectively within both Children in Need and Child Protection Processes.

Independent Chairs are pivotal in the overview of the service in a scrutiny role to ensure the quality, safety and effectiveness of safeguarding practice and policy. Challenge is provided where appropriate and identified themes and trends reported to senior management in several ways, including regular formal reporting to Performance Management Meetings.

THE SAFEGUARDING SERVICE

Sitting within the wider Safeguarding Service, Child Protection Conferences are chaired by 7.5 permanent Independent Chairs supported by Business Support. We have seen some staff sickness which has impacted on allocation.

During the period we have had five Business Support posts, two of which are senior roles. Staff vacancies during this time has meant that the service has not been able to operate at full capacity. Despite this child protection conferences have continued to be minuted to a high standard.

The dual role of the Independent Chairs who chair Child Protection Conferences and Childcare Reviews, is fully embedded in Milton Keynes. In addition to these, chairs will also be asked to chair Disruption Meetings and Managing Allegations Meetings where required. They may take a role in Secure Accommodation Reviews by being part of the panel, making decisions in respect of these children. It is an enormously experienced and settled team of professionals, some of whom have previous management experience and most of whom have been working with children and families in Milton Keynes for many years.

The LADO service recruited an additional LADO who joined in May 2021 to respond to additional demand. Independent Chairs may still be expected to support the LADO on occasion. They continue to lead in relation to quality assurance activity, producing high quality reports for senior management. They represent the service at a variety of meetings and forums and occasionally undertake investigations. Chairs are linked to individual Social Work teams to ensure good communication and strengthen working relationships.

CHILD PROTECTION CONSULTATIONS

Child Protection Consultations are routinely offered by Independent Chairs who are available on a duty basis. Prior to the strategy meeting being convened, the social Worker is expected to complete a referral on the LCS system, outlining the concerns using a Signs of Safety approach. This should concisely explain the plan of work agreed with the line manager and forms the basis for discussion.

The purpose of a consultation is to ensure that full consideration is given to all cases where a child protection concern is raised. The emphasis is on working collaboratively with the Social Worker to make a joint decision about how best to work with the family. In the event that an Initial Child Protection Conference is agreed, a Strategy Meeting will be convened, if not already arranged, to trigger the S.47 enquiries. This requires a conference to be held within 15 working days.

Number of CP consultations each year

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of children	321	420	505	567
Outcome ICPC	39.6%	38.3%	39.7%	40.4%

The number of consultations has risen once again from 505 in 2020-21 to 567, a rise of 13%. The total rise since 2018/19 is almost 77%.

There is a very slight rise in the percentage of cases progressing to conference but overall this figure remains very consistent over time.

2021/22 CP consultation category

Neglect	58.4%
Emotional Abuse	28%
Physical Abuse	19.9%
Sexual Abuse	0.7%

*figures will be over 100% total because cases may have multiple prevalent issues this measures a proportion for the total cases.

2021/22 CP consultation prevalent issues

Domestic abuse	43.6%
Parental mental health	36.5%
Parental drug misuse	12.7%
Parental alcohol misuse	11.8%
Person posing a risk to children	11.8%
Parental learning disability	2.8%
Parental physical disability	0.7%
Parental ill health	1.4%
Child Sexual Exploitation / Child Criminal Exploitation	2.6%
No issues identified	3.5%

*figures will be over 100% total because cases may have multiple prevalent issues this measures a proportion for the total cases.

Domestic abuse remains the most prevalent issue in relation to child protection consultations followed closely by parental mental health with parental drug and alcohol use and person posing a risk to children following behind. The percentages are very similar to the previous year.

Outcomes of Consultations

2021/22 Outcome of CP Consultations

Initial Child Protection Conference	40.4%
Continue with child in Need plan	42.0%
Strategy meeting to be held	18.0%
Legal advice/PLO	5.1%

Review following further information gathering	8.5%
Mapping to be completed	0.9%
Other	4.1%

In 2021-22 the data indicates that 40.4% of consultations progress straight to an initial child protection conference (as compared with 39.7% in 2020-21). In 42% of cases the decision is made to continue with a child in need plan. This compares with 28.1% which is a significant rise. This may, in part be because options that were previously available such as suggesting a mapping, should no longer be used. This is because this is embedded in the Signs of Safety approach to working with families.

Where a strategy meeting is recommended, a significant number of these will also progress to conference. It is important to note that a strategy meeting is always required to trigger a S.47 and a conference. In this period 18% of cases proceeded to a strategy meeting.

A very small number of cases were signposted to mapping during the period 2021-22. This is no longer a separate activity as it is embedded in the work Social Workers will be doing with families and should not be seen in the figures for 2022-23.

The challenge remains ensuring that cases are brought to consultation in a timely manner. The Social worker will demonstrate the work that has already been undertaken with a family to effect change and will present the plan for intervention going forward. It is important to ensure that families have been given an opportunity to respond positively to a Child Protection Plan before any legal route is pursued, if at all possible. The Safeguarding Manager routinely attends the PLO panel to ensure that all cases where PLO is proposed have been reviewed by the safeguarding service. In exceptional circumstances it is necessary to progress to proceedings very quickly in response to serious safeguarding concerns as this is the only safe course of action to protect children.

CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plans at 31 March 2022 was 181 as compared to 185 the previous year.

This represents 27.3 children per 10,000 of the 0-17 year old population. A slight increase in the number of plans as compared with the previous year. This remains significantly below the national figures and those of our statistical neighbours.

Conferences and plans

CPPs at year end

Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
MKC	136	131	185	181

MKC rate per 10k	19.9	19.2	26.4	27.3
SE rate per 10K	41.4	41.2	40.2	
Eng rate per 10k	43.7	42.8	41.4	

Milton Keynes consistently has lower CP figures as a percentage of the total population due to our family support approach which is fully embedded in our practice. This approach has been subject to independent scrutiny over the years and the strength of the family support has been recognised.

Rate of ICPC's and children who became subject to child protection plans in 2021-22 (N13)

A total of 838 conferences were held in 2021-22. This is another significant rise from the previous year where there were 769 conferences. A break down of the type of conference is as follows:

ICPC's – 290

RCPC's – 505

RCPC/ICCR – 35

RI-CPC – 10 (24 Children)

Category of initial Child Protection plans for each child

Emotional	19%
Neglect	78%
Physical	3%
Sexual	0%

The main category under which children were made subject to Child Protection Plans during 2021-22 was neglect which accounts for 78% of the total which is the same figure for the previous year. The figure for Emotional harm has dropped slightly from 22% to 19% and physical abuse stands at 3%.

Initial Child Protection Conferences which were reviewed within timescales (N15)

During 2021-22, 77.2% of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held within 15 days of the S.47 being triggered.

This is a reduction from the previous year and reflects a number of issues. The first is the sheer volume of meetings to be accommodated. This has an impact on the physical space as well as the ability to allocate to a chair and a note taker. There have, on occasion, been issues with quoracy and instances where families have had commitments which needed to be accommodated.

A record is kept where conferences have been held out of timescale and this has been incorporated in performance management reports so that a narrative can be understood around the data.

Outcomes of CP Conferences

Outcome	Percentage
CPP transferred to another Local Authority	0%
CPP to CIN	69%
CPP to CLA	31%

It is positive that the majority of cases successfully step down to CIN following a period of time subject to a Child Protection Plan. This reflects the good and collaborative work which takes place in Milton Keynes.

% CPPs starting for a second or subsequent time (N18)

Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
MKC	13.9%	11.2%	13.6%	12%
SE	21.1%	23.4%	23.5%	
National	20.8%	21.9%	22.1%	

The number of children returning to a Child Protection Plan within 2 years remains very stable over time.

Duration of Plans

Duration of CPP	Count
0-3 Months	23.0%
3-6 Months	11.3%
6-12 Months	39.7%
Over 1 year	25.7%
Over 2 years	0.4%

A number of children remain subject to a Child Protection Plan for more than a year. It is important that this figure is scrutinised, so the reasons are fully understood and that any potential drift and delay is challenged. The Team Manager for Safeguarding meets monthly with the Head of Family Support Services to specifically discuss this cohort.

While there are instances in which families have responded slowly to intervention or where progress has been slowed by changes of Social Worker or other professional, there are also a number of instances in which proceedings have been instigated and children have been placed on Interim Supervision Orders. To date we have taken the view that the Child Protection Plan will remain in place until the end of proceedings. However there is an opportunity to discuss each case according to its individual circumstances over the year ahead.

Percentage of CPP's lasting 2 years or more at 31 March 2021

CPP ended in year where CPP lasted 2+ years

Year	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
MKC	0.0%	2.1%	1%	0.4%
SE	4.7%	5.0%	4.2%	
National	3.3%	3.6%	3.7%	

Very few children remain subject to a Child Protection Plan for two years or more. The figure for 2021-22 is below either of the previous two years and well below the national average. All of these cases are subject to regular scrutiny.

% CPP types at 31st March

Year	MKC Count 2021-22	MKC % 2021-22
Neglect	145	76.7%
Physical Abuse	7	3.7%
Sexual Abuse	0	0%
Emotional	37	19.6%
Total	185	

Once again, the main category under which children were made subject to Child Protection Plans during 2021-22 was neglect which accounts for 76.7% of the total (the figure was 78% for the previous year).

As in previous years, Milton Keynes has a higher than average proportion of children subject to plans where the category is neglect. It is noted that there are significant variations between Local Authorities. Research (NSPCC) suggests that neglect is prevalent in serious case reviews and affects approximately 10% of all children across all age groups. We know that neglect can be life threatening and must be treated very seriously.

There is always an element of subjectivity in deciding upon a category for a Child Protection Plan and clear definitions are provided to attendees. It is the responsibility of all those in attendance to carefully consider the categories and make recommendations where there is no clear evidence of physical or sexual abuse while acknowledging that these issues may be present. We know that the issues impacting on children are domestic violence, parental poor mental health and drug and alcohol difficulties. The Independent Chair must make the final decision about the category in this respect.

PARTICIPATION

It is fundamentally important to ensure that families participate fully in Child Protection Conferences. In the case of children and young people, it is the role of the chair to ensure that their wishes and feelings remain central to the process and that they fully understand the decision making process and their contribution to it.

Consideration should be given to children and young people attending the conference if it is appropriate for them to do so and as long as it can be managed effectively and safely. All children of secondary school age are automatically referred to an independent advocacy service who will liaise with them and help represent their views.

There is an expectation that the Social Worker will work effectively with families so that they understand the reasons for conference and ensure that all relevant paperwork is shared with

them. They are required to prepare a C&F assessment which should be done alongside the family and shared with them not less than 24 hours before the conference. Regular Core Groups should ensure that families are clear about what is expected of them, how this is measured and how they can demonstrate that the risks have reduced within a reasonable timescale.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Children's Attendance	9%	11%	16%	10%	12%
Children's Participation	92%	85%	69%	62%	74%

Figures for children's attendance and participation has varied slightly over the period but has remained consistent in relation to last years figures. While it may not be appropriate for children to attend conferences in the majority of cases, the overall figure of 74% for participation is disappointing. It is for the safeguarding service and the independent chairs to consider how to improve this. Chairs have met with the advocacy service on several occasions and

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Mothers attendance	85%	87%	94%	91%	89%
Mothers Participation	97%	91%	97%	94%	95%
Fathers attendance	59%	48%	52%	43%	49%
Fathers Participation	76%	65%	61%	58%	63%

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Monitoring

It is the responsibility of the Independent Chair to complete a monitoring form following all conferences. This captures qualitative information which is reported to Performance Management Meetings on a quarterly basis. Chairs will take it in turns to complete quarterly reports, analyse the data and share findings with colleagues.

Service User Feedback

Feedback is requested from families and professionals after each conference. A link is sent to each of them which allows them to score and comment.

Below is a selection of comments from 2021-22

"Very good conference chair who made everything clear and comprehensive for professionals and the family".

"Good clear plan".

"She gave time to family when they required and was conscious of the room getting hot for them and opened windows etc and took care of their needs accordingly".

"I was covering and had never met the family, so I had not shared my report".

"Young person was made to feel relaxed, welcome and in control of their meeting".

"The social worker we have been working with on in this case with has been brilliant. She is so efficient and always responds to email concerns or queries. The core group has been invaluable for keeping school up to date and because of this we have been able to support the children much better as we are armed with all of the information about how home life has been".

"The meeting was clear and well structured, and the addition of BSL interpreters meant everyone was included despite it being on Teams".

"I wasn't asked for an update by the chair or referenced at all in the meeting. I also wasn't invited to give a score on the danger statement. I had to make the chair aware of this".

"I feel that this is a difficult case as it is being managed by two different social workers due to the children".

"The Family have worked well throughout and I'm pleased that this has now shown to all professionals".

"Everyone in the meeting had opportunity to share their views and scale the risks".

"The CP Plan fully reflect all siblings' current needs".

"Thanks to the chair for the great work"!

"We liked the focus on the parents and their views at the start of the meeting. They are the most crucial people".

"It was difficult to hear clearly at times".

"A much better system than the bridging conference calls previously used, thank you".

SUMMARY

What has worked well?

- Conferences have continued to take place on Teams with a move to hybrid conferences towards the end of the period.
- A permanent location for conferences with a waiting area and tea and coffee facilities has been established and this will allow us to take care of families and offer reassurance.
- This is a generally stable team. During the period two colleagues have joined the team, bringing with them a wealth of experience from other parts of the service which has been very positive.
- Chairs have continued to try and liaise with families in advance of conference to help prepare them for the meeting.
- Chairs continue to provide a valuable service in offering objective, expert consultations to Social Workers and other professionals in relation to identifying and managing risk.
- Independent Chairs are pivotal in the overview of the service in a scrutiny role to ensure the quality, safety and effectiveness of safeguarding practice and policy.
- Chairs continue to use Signs of Safety to good effect. This includes 'mappings' in conference.
- Feedback, where available, has been largely positive.
- The percentage of cases progressing to conference from consultation has remained remarkably consistent.
- The service has continued to monitor cases progressing to PLO to ensure that there has been suitable oversight from an Independent Chair.
- The number of Child Protection Plans in Milton Keynes remains consistently below national average.
- Despite the increased number of meetings the number of child protection plans at the end of the year has remained almost the same which would support the notion that there is good throughput of cases.
- The majority of cases step down to CIN plans.
- There has been a slight reduction in cases returning to CP within 2 years.
- Monthly meetings between the Team Manager for Safeguarding and the Head of Family Support Services are an effective way of addressing drift and delay.
- There is regular communication with the advocacy service.

What are we worried about?

- Although Feedback has been received, the majority is from other professionals. There is a challenge in relation to obtaining feedback from families and young people.
- The number of meetings taken place has risen significantly for another year.
- Issues with Business Support colleagues and recruitment of skilled minute takers have impacted on the distribution figures.
- There has been a reduction in ICPCs held in timescales.

- The category of neglect is higher than other areas and this requires monitoring and discussion.
- Childrens participation has reduced.
- One feedback said that they were not consulted or asked for scaling, this is a practice issue which needs to be explored.
- It is clear that there have been some ongoing issues with technology.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2022/23

- Feedback – the Safeguarding Team will look at more creative ways in which feedback can be sought from families and young people in particular.
- Continue to scrutinise and discuss categories – Discussion will take place in Team Meetings, peer supervision and individual supervision.
- Writing to children – there is a commitment to writing child protection minutes to children rather than about them.
- Business support recruitment – efforts will be made to ensure that the service is fully staffed.
- Ensure ICPCs held in timescales – Business Support colleagues and Chairs work closely with Social Work colleagues to ensure that meetings are held within timescales. This involves a creative approach given the pressure on the service.
- Encourage participation – Chairs will continue to liaise closely with the advocacy services, Social Workers and families to encourage the participation of families and young people.
- Ensure all participants are invited to share information and scale – colleagues within Childrens Social Care and partner agencies are reminded of their joint responsibility in relation to child protection.
- Ongoing work with technology – improvements will continue to be made.

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