



MAKING A DIFFERENCE KEEPING OUR CHILDREN SAFE IN BOLTON

Bolton Safeguarding Children
Partnership Annual Report
April 2024 to March 2025

'In Bolton we want to give all our children the best possible start in life, so that they have every chance to succeed, be safe and be happy'

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Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership

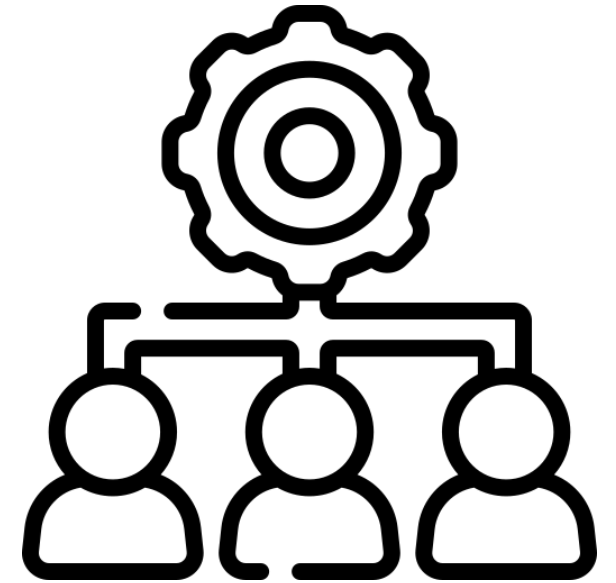
Executive Summary

Overview

The Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) continues to demonstrate strong multi-agency collaboration, strategic leadership, and a commitment to improving outcomes for children and families. This report outlines key achievements, challenges, and priorities from April 2024 to March 2025, with a forward look to 2025–2026.

Key Achievements

- **Neglect Summit:** Over 70 practitioners contributed to a comprehensive review of neglect, leading to strategic improvements and reframing the approach to a “Thriving Child” model.
- **Exploitation Assurance:** Strengthened training, data integration, and pathway mapping to tackle criminal and sexual exploitation, with a refreshed strategy planned for 2025.
- **Working Together Compliance:** Full alignment with *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023*, including revised safeguarding arrangements and improved education sector engagement.
- **Education Collaborative:** Established to enhance safeguarding practice across schools and colleges, with national recognition for Bolton’s approach.
- **Operation Encompass:** Significant increase in notifications and improved school responses to domestic abuse incidents.
- **Child Protection Effectiveness:** Improved timeliness of strategy discussions (94% within 24 hours), reduced repeat child protection plans, and stronger early help pathways.
- **Learning from Reviews:** One Rapid Review completed (Louis), with key learning around concealed pregnancy, overseas recruitment, and referral processes.
- **Training Impact:** 6,896 practitioners accessed training; 97% reported increased knowledge and 96% rated sessions as “great” or “good”.



Focus Areas

- **Workforce Stability:** supporting partners with their strategies to ensure a stable multi-agency workforce.
- **Neglect and Early Help:** ensuring prevention and family help approaches are embedded across all safeguarding arrangements. Investment to create larger Early Help teams in response to the Families First agenda
- **Missing Children:** New Missing Protocol launched. Increase in individual children reported missing, though repeat episodes have declined.

Strategic Priorities for 2025–2026

- **Safeguarding Reform Implementation;** offer support to the Families First Partnership rollout, review the Integrated Front Door and threshold documents.
- **Tackling Child Neglect / Thriving Children;** embedding strength-based approaches and seeking assurance on early help and whole-family support.
- **Exploitation and Extra-Familial Harm;** continued focus on prevention, disruption, and strategic intelligence.
- **Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment;** with a focus on trauma-informed, child-centred responses and co-production of resources with lived experience.

Independent Scrutineer Perspective

The Independent Scrutineer commended the partnership's commitment, leadership, and progress. Key strengths include:

- Strong governance and assurance culture
- Improved education sector engagement
- Strategic alignment across safeguarding domains
- Continued focus on voice of the child and family

However, sustainability of the Business Unit and embedding impact measurement remain areas for development.



Welcome and Foreword

Welcome to Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership's Annual Report. This report covers the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

Local organisations and agencies that work with children and families have a shared role to play when it comes to safeguarding children in Bolton, including those who are looked after. The responsibility for joining-up local safeguarding arrangements rests with the three safeguarding partners - Bolton Council, NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Greater Manchester Police.

Our Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements, set out our shared and equal duty to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in our local area. Through this annual report, we shine a light on some of the partnership's key priority areas, the activity that has been undertaken, the difference it is making, and the actions we are taking to further strengthen and assure ourselves of our local safeguarding arrangements.

The Partnership recognises its collective responsibility as corporate parents to children who are looked after and remains committed to ensuring that the needs and experiences of Looked After Children and Care Leavers are considered across all safeguarding and wellbeing priorities. This report also provides oversight of the resources the partners have access to, the contribution that individual member organisations are making and our focus for 2025-2026. As the strategic safeguarding partners, there is a commitment to offer challenge not only to ourselves but to our partnership system and seek ongoing assurance that our safeguarding arrangements are as safe as practicable, that our workforce feels supported and confident and that children are listened to.

We recognise that it is the commitment, dedication, care and passion our practitioners give to children and their families, daily that is the beating heart of our arrangements and personifies our 'Bolton Family' and we thank them for their continued commitment to the children of Bolton.





Strategic Leadership and Governance

We have clear and transparent structures in place to support effective leadership of our safeguarding arrangements .

About Bolton's Safeguarding Children Partnership

Purpose and Vision

Our shared purpose is to ensure that every child in Bolton is safe, supported, and able to thrive. We do this by working collaboratively to prevent harm, identify risks early, and respond effectively when children need protection.

In Bolton we want to give all our children the best possible start in life, so that they have every chance to succeed, be safe and happy.

The Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership is built on the principle that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Our local arrangements bring together the three statutory safeguarding partners—Bolton Council, Greater Manchester Police, and the NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board—to provide strategic leadership and oversight of safeguarding practice across the borough.

The primary aim of the arrangements is to:-

- Promote the welfare of all children in the local area.
- Prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation through early identification and intervention.
- Ensure effective collaboration between agencies to safeguard children.

How We Work Together

- Strategic Leadership: We set priorities and drive improvements in safeguarding practice across all agencies.
- Learning and Improvement: We review serious incidents, share learning, and promote continuous improvement.
- Voice of the Child: We are committed to listening to children and young people, ensuring their experiences shape our work.
- Accountability and Scrutiny: Through independent scrutiny and transparent reporting, we hold ourselves and our partners to account.
- Community and Partnership: We work closely with schools, health services, voluntary organisations, and families to build a safer Bolton for children.

Together, we are committed to creating a culture of trust, transparency, and shared responsibility, ensuring that safeguarding is embedded in every service and every decision that affects children's lives.

Our Children

Data correct at time of publication.

75,599
Children in Bolton aged **0-17**

8,500
Young people in Bolton aged **16-17**

Percentage of population who are children
Bolton
24.4%
(ONS Data set 2024)

Number of children from ethnic diverse communities
Bolton
42.3%
(Census 2021)

Percentage of population in low income families
Bolton
37.5%
(Children in low-income families local area 2024)



Primary pupils eligible for free school meals
Bolton
26.4%
(DfE Schools, pupils and their characteristics 2024-25)

Secondary pupils eligible for free school meals
Bolton
30.5%
England
24.7%
England
25.8%



30,859
Children in **primary education**

22,016
Children in **secondary education**
(School census reports Summer 2025)

3,604
Children with an **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**
(DfE EHCP 2024-25)

63.8%
Children reaching **Good Level Development**
(DfE GLD 2024)

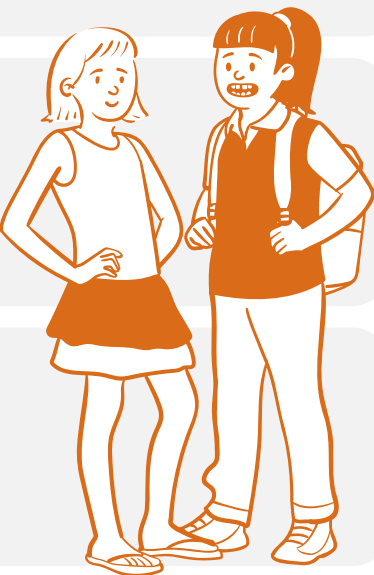
60%
of children's **two year take up**
(FRAS Summer 2025)

357 (4.3%)
Young people that are **not in education, employment or training (NEET)**
(DfE NEET age 16 to 17 Academic Year 2024-25)

1,856
Children supported through an **early help assessment**
(RIG / RIIA September 2025)

360
Children subject to **child protection planning**

659
Children in **our care**



Vision and Purpose

BSCP's core vision is to ensure that every child in Bolton has the best possible start in life, enabling them to be safe, succeed, and be happy. This vision is underpinned by a commitment to multi-agency collaboration, continuous improvement, and child-centred practice.

Strategic Safeguarding Partners

The partnership is led by three statutory partners Bolton Council, NHS Greater Manchester ICB and Greater Manchester Police.

These partners share equal responsibility for coordinating local safeguarding arrangements and ensuring the welfare of children.

Safeguarding Children: Key Functions of Statutory Safeguarding Partners

■ Shared Responsibilities	
Joint Leadership	Collaborate to lead and oversee local safeguarding arrangements.
Strategic Planning	Develop and publish multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
Accountability	Ensure effective delivery and scrutiny of safeguarding practices.

■ Core Functions	
Identify and Respond to Need	Ensure early help is available and promote timely intervention.
Protect Children from Harm	Lead multi-agency responses and oversee Section 47 enquiries.
Promote Welfare	Support children and families with outcome-focused approaches.
Information Sharing	Facilitate timely and secure sharing across agencies.
Quality Assurance	Monitor effectiveness and respond to safeguarding reviews.

■ Guiding Principles	
Child-Centred	Prioritise the voice, needs, and rights of the child.
Whole-Family Focus	Build trust and deliver tailored support.
Multi-Agency Practice Standards	Embed consistent, high-quality safeguarding.

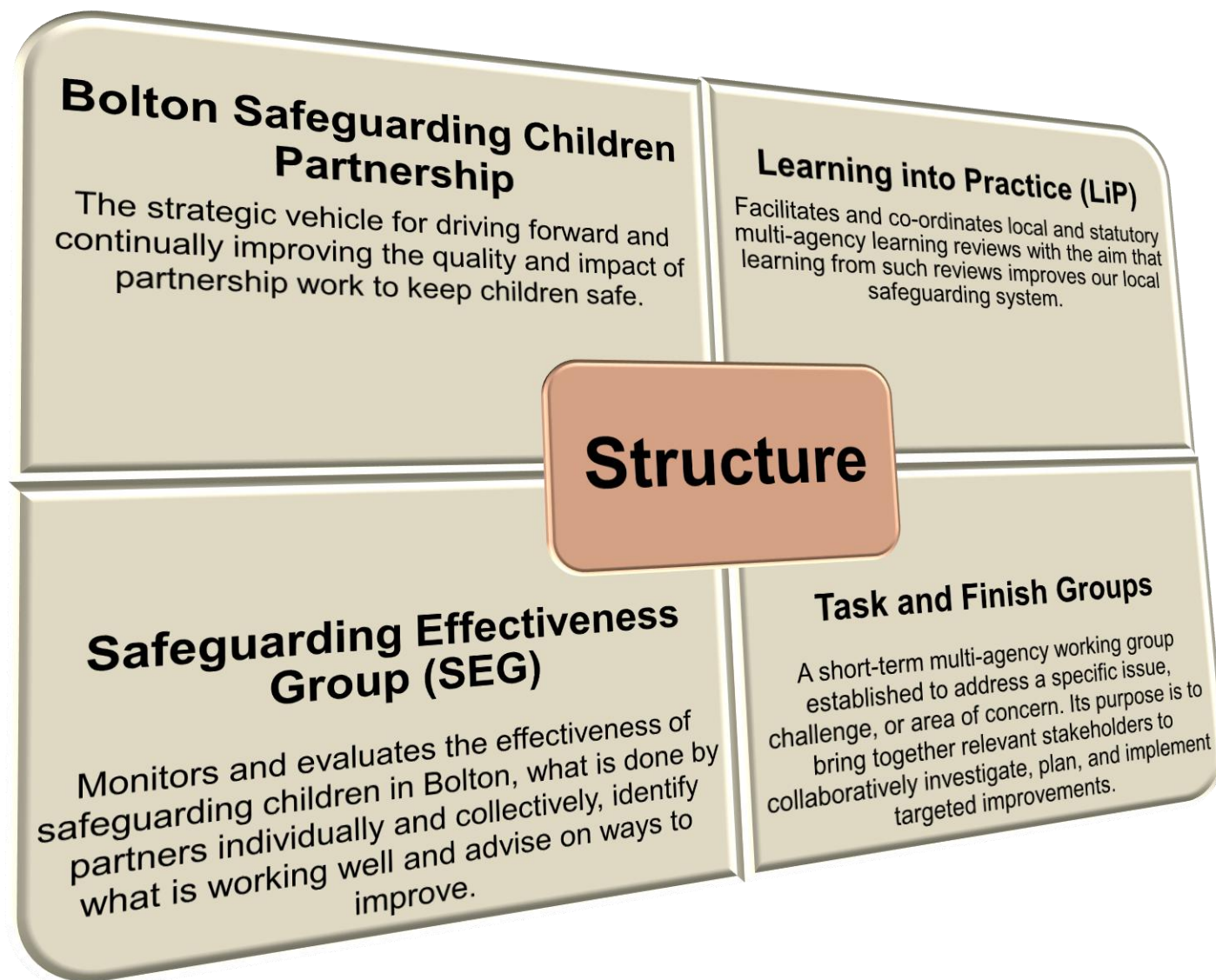
Together, We Safeguard: Collaboratively, Transparently, Proactively.

Roles and Responsibilities of Safeguarding Partners

It is the responsibility of the safeguarding partners to ensure their safeguarding arrangements:

- Promote effective collaboration across agencies.
- Ensure timely and appropriate information sharing based on the principle of "need to share" rather than consent.
- Deliver child-centred services that are responsive to children's lived experiences.
- Engage with families to co-produce solutions and learn from their experiences.
- Ensure effective scrutiny including case review processes

Safeguarding arrangements in Bolton are delivered through several key groups, with the oversight of Lead Safeguarding Partners and Delegated Safeguarding Partners. Full details of the lead and delegated partners, as well as the partnership structure can be found in our local [Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#). The diagram below highlights some key partnership groups:



One of the ways to demonstrate commitment to local safeguarding arrangements is for agencies to ensure they attend and contribute to key partnership meetings. In 2024-2025 attendance was as follows:

- **BSCP** - 6/12 members achieved 100% attendance at BSCP meetings (5/5 meetings). This included all three DSP's prioritising attendance. 1/12 members achieved 80% attendance (4/5 meetings). The remaining 5 members attended 3 meetings or less.
- **SEG** – 3/18 members achieved 100% attendance at SEG meetings (5/5 meetings). 5/18 members achieved 80% attendance (4/5 meetings). The remaining 10 members attended 3 meetings or less.
- **LiP** - 3/10 members achieved 100% attendance at LiP meetings (4/4 meetings). 2/10 members achieved 75% attendance (3/4 meetings). The remaining 5 members attended 2 meetings or less.

Attendance gaps are being addressed with the Chairs of each of the relevant group for 2025-2026. This will be further strengthened as attendance at partnership meetings will be reported via the quarterly SEG report.

In the last twelve months the safeguarding partners have worked with education leads from Early Years through to Further Education to create an Education Collaborative. The collaborative aims to:

- **Enhance Multi-Agency Safeguarding Practice**
by bringing together education leaders to improve coordination and consistency in safeguarding responses.
- **Promote a Child-Centred and Whole-Family Approach**
Ensures safeguarding strategies are tailored to the needs of children and their families, with education settings playing a proactive role in identifying and responding to concerns.
- **Support Early Help and Intervention**
Enables schools and colleges to work with other agencies to provide timely support before issues escalate.
- **Improve Information Sharing**
Facilitates secure and effective communication between education providers and partners to protect children from harm.
- **Embed National Safeguarding Standards**
Aligns education safeguarding practices with the latest statutory guidance, including the *Working Together to Safeguard Children* framework.

In addition to establishing the group, a 'working agreement' has been developed to further ensure that the education sector is recognised as a key strategic partner in local safeguarding arrangements with a strong voice to influence and inform local developments.



Partnership Resources

The tables below sets out the income and key expenditure for the partnership over the last twelve months. The staffing costs include the partnership Business Manager, Multi-agency training lead, Local Authority Designated Officer and an administrator. All other expenditure is as detailed.

Partner	Income 2024-2025
Local Authority	£147,600.00
NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board	£90,998.00
Greater Manchester Police (via Greater Manchester Combined Authority)	£19,263.00
Education	£60,900.00
Other Income	£450.00
From reserves	£32,098.70
Total Income	£351,309.70

Expenditure	Costs 2024-2025
BSCP Staffing (including on costs)	£204,890.52
Independent Scrutiny	£46,880.75
Case Reviews	£0.00
Multi-agency Training Programme	£11,335.10
Multi-agency Child Protection Arrangements	£65,000.00
Child Death Overview Arrangements	£15,700.00
Subscriptions	£1,685.00
Room Hire	£1,852.87
Sundries (Mobile costs, stationary, ICT equipment etc.)	£3,965.46
To reserves	£0.00
Total Expenditure	£351,309.70



Bolton's Priorities 2024-2025

**We set priorities and drive
improvement in safeguarding
practice across all agencies.**

BSCP Priority 1 – Tackling Neglect

Why this Priority?

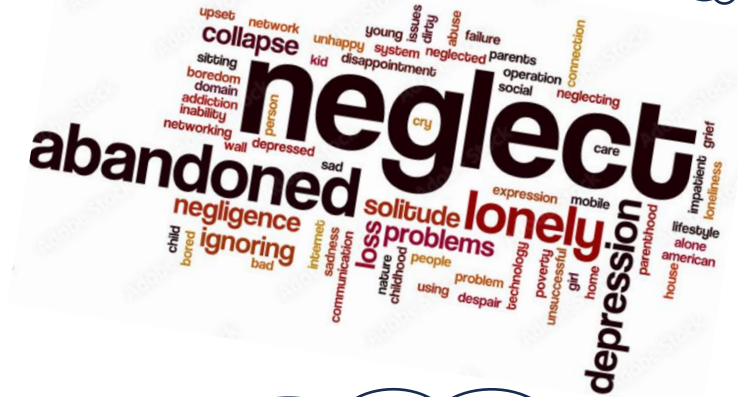
As identified in the previous years annual report Neglect was identified as a priority area. The effects of persistent neglect on a child's development are significant and long-lasting. Research consistently shows that prolonged neglect can severely limit both physical and emotional development. Children experiencing neglect are more likely to face challenges such as:

- Difficulty forming and maintaining healthy relationships, both now and in the future
- Struggles in achieving their full educational potential and transitioning into further education, employment, or training
- Low self-esteem and limited confidence in their abilities
- Poor emotional wellbeing and a lack of effective coping strategies

In 2024-2025 the partners committed to:

1. Work alongside practitioners and system leaders to ensure our local resources and pathways are effective in supporting the earlier identification and response to child neglect.
2. Work with early help strategic leads to address the challenges highlighted in the report.
3. Work alongside children, parents and carers with lived experience to seek their insights into what works and the help and support they feel is needed.

*"Being neglected, you have learned and know no different. That is the world to you, almost from the moment you are born."**



*"There was no one to talk to, no one who cared."**

Commitment 1 - Work alongside practitioners and system leaders to ensure our local resources and pathways are effective in supporting the earlier identification and response to child neglect.

In July 2024, BSCP facilitated a 'Neglect Summit'. The summit brought together over 70 practitioners and leaders who work with children, young people and their families from a range of statutory and voluntary organisations and settings in Bolton.

A summit provides a forum to share ideas and have a constructive conversation on a very specific topic or issue. The purpose of the Neglect summit was to:-

- Review and share our current evidence base and intelligence about child neglect in Bolton and nationally.
- Seek the views and experiences of practitioners and leaders about current practice; what works well, what need to be better and how we can make improvements.
- Use the intelligence generated from the Neglect Summit to inform and shape strategic direction and service developments in the coming 12 months.



One of the main activities at the summit was to engage with practitioners and leaders to seek their views on the impact and effectiveness of current neglect arrangements. This activity generated a significant amount of intelligence relating to 'what is working well', what we are worried about' and what needs to happen' from their perspective. To collate the findings, the framework outlined in the National Panel Review methodology was used. This is because the National Panel consider it a useful tool for all safeguarding partners when analysing and understanding intelligence generated as part of any review. The systems framework has four domains; Systems and Processes, Practice and Practice Knowledge, Wider Service Context and Leadership and culture. The findings from the summit are captured in the next section.



Summit Findings by Domain

• Systems and Processes

Strengths: Effective multi-agency information sharing, strong Early Help assessments, and good use of tools.

Concerns: Delays in information sharing, inconsistent thresholds, lack of continuity when children move boroughs.

Recommendations: Improve transition and handover arrangements or identify opportunities to reduce these for children and families, enhance Early Help engagement, and standardise threshold training for neglect with supporting pathways..

• Practice and Practice Knowledge

Strengths: Empowering families, engaging with complex cases, listening to children's voices.

Concerns: Unseen children (e.g., Elective Home Education), lack of historical context, cultural barriers.

Recommendations: Support for adults, better understanding of parental capacity, parent participation panels, and community cohesion initiatives.

• Wider Service Context

Strengths: Community-based services, Family Hubs, quality CPD.

Concerns: Funding constraints, long waiting lists, staff turnover, poverty impact.

Recommendations: Mandatory neglect training, develop an adolescent strategy, workforce integration and development, and better use of existing resources

• Leadership and Culture

Strengths: Strong multi-agency commitment, good partnership networks, resilience among staff.

Concerns: Misunderstanding of roles, siloed working, inconsistent communication.

Recommendations: Promote shared understanding, empower frontline escalation, accelerate strategic alignment of services and funding to meet identified needs, and foster a collective practitioner voice.

Commitment 2 - Work with early help strategic leads to address the challenges highlighted in the report.

In 2024-2025 the findings from the Neglect Thematic Review and the Neglect Summit were shared with Early Help Strategic Leads. These were received well and used to inform the development of the first phase of Family Hubs.

It has been a year of development for early help arrangements in Bolton. This has included the transition from an Early Help Steering Group to a Prevention Board, the launch of a revised Early Help Assessment framework and an online portal as well as significant investment from the Council to create additional teams across our 6 neighborhoods as part of our approach to developing our Families First approach. The Families First agenda is now informing the way we progress findings from the summit as we seek to embed our local ambition to reframe our neglect strategy to a thriving child approach and move our narrative from deficit and risk to strength and opportunity. Building on the intelligence gained in the summit, the aim through the partnership will be to challenge our system to focus on:

- Early recognition of unmet needs and missed opportunities for thriving.
- Seamless access to support and universal services.
- Relational practice and deep listening to children and families.
- Integrated, whole-family support rooted in community networks.
- Empowerment pathways that build capacity and confidence.

Commitment 3 - Work alongside children, parents and carers with lived experience to seek their insights into what works and the help and support they feel is needed.

Despite challenges in the pace at which this has progressed, as a partnership we have strengthened focusing lived experience within meetings to ensure children and their families remain at the heart of our decision-making. For 2025-2026 we are committed as a partnership to:

- **Family and Community Voices**

Incorporating lived experience from families and communities ensures service design reflects real needs and realities.

- **Regular Feedback Loops**

Surveys, interviews, and focus groups provide continuous insights for service improvement and responsiveness.

- **Partnerships and Trust**

Collaborating with community organizations expands reach and builds trust with underrepresented groups.

- **Transparent Safeguards**

Embedding lived experience in governance and acting transparently prevents tokenism and builds accountability.

While the partners **are** confident in understanding the strengths in local practice it remains evident that there is a need to continue to focus on this practice area and to ensure that the transition to a thriving child approach is effective.

BSCP Priority 2 – Assuring Exploitation Arrangements

Why this Priority?

For a significant number of years, leaders and practitioners in Bolton have worked together to improve and implement effective approaches to Child Exploitation. The work delivered across the partnership has sought to provide help at the earliest opportunities to avoid harm and reduce risk to children. While there have been many successes within this work, additional risks and threats continue to emerge. In particular, the risks to children from 'County Lines', Modern Slavery and Trafficking and online harms. The terms 'contextual' or 'complex safeguarding' is used to describe such threats.

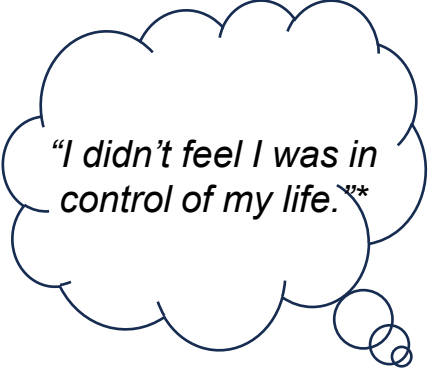
It is important that Bolton is fully prepared for this threat and has strong partnership plans in place to ensure children are protected, practitioners are responsive to the threat and swift action is taken to pursue and prosecute those responsible.

Working with our partners it is our aim to further improve our understanding of this issue locally and seek assurance that:-

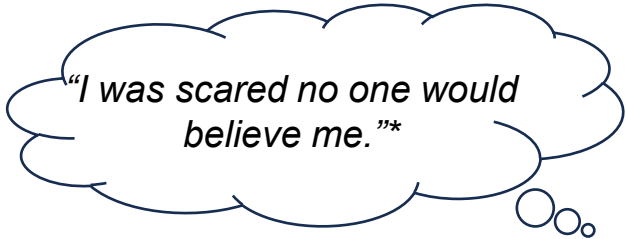
- Children are aware of and informed of the risks and methods of sexual and criminal exploitation
- Practitioners recognise and identify children vulnerable to the different forms of exploitation
- A co-ordinated and consistent multi-agency approach to divert and disrupt those who seek to exploit children and their families.

In 2024-2025 the partners committed to:

1. Review our current exploitation training offer to ensure it addresses the learning from the audits and further strengthens frontline practice.
2. Review our data and intelligence arrangements, identifying any gaps and opportunities to improve our strategic response.
3. Review our local pathways for help and support for those children at risk of or experiencing exploitation and seeking further assurance that these pathways lead to effective help and support for children.



*"I didn't feel I was in control of my life."**



*"I was scared no one would believe me."**

*Quotes children experiencing sexual and criminal exploitation

Commitment 1 - Review our current exploitation training offer to ensure it addresses the learning from the audits and further strengthens frontline practice.

- The multi-agency trainer has undertaken a full review of the face-to-face training delivered in relation to exploitation. This was completed with the training leads and includes local, regional and national learning. 5 Sessions were delivered across the year and 93% of delegates rated it 'good' or 'great'.
- The partnership continues to promote its online exploitation awareness resource. Audits have shown settings across Bolton use this as part of their core induction.
- The multi-agency trainer has reviewed the wider programme and ensured that the theme of exploitation is embedded where relevant, for example training related to serious youth violence, case review processes, domestic abuse, neglect etc.
- For 2025-2026, the multi-agency trainer will undertake an exploitation training needs assessment to identify specific knowledge gaps.

Commitment 2 - Review our data and intelligence arrangements to improve our strategic response.

- A significant amount of work has been undertaken in 2024-2025 to integrate existing data and reporting arrangements for exploitation within the wider partnership data set. This has led to improved quarterly reporting to the safeguarding partners about the impact and effectiveness of exploitation arrangements.
- A 'deep dive' of three children's experiences was completed in mid 2024 and highlighted several learning points which have been embedded within training.
- The focused work undertaken on data and intelligence has highlighted clear strengths in its operational application. For the 2025–2026 period, there is an opportunity to build on this foundation by developing a comprehensive 'problem profile' for the area, which will inform and enhance preventative strategies.

Commitment 3 - Review local pathways and seek assurance that pathways lead to effective help and support for children.

- The exploitation assurance group has mapped the child's journey from the point where potential exploitation is identified through to intervention from the specialist exploitation team.
- This identified that once social care and the specialist team are involved, help and support is effective. However, the mapping identified a potential gap in prevention pathways and how services are coordinated prior to referral to children's social care. This will be an area of focus for 2025-2026.
- Pathways and arrangements to identify and disrupt those who exploit children have been independently observed and re-developed to improve the triangulation between child, place and exploiter. The revised model was introduced in late 2024 and in 2025-2026 this will be subject to independent scrutiny.

It is evident that in 2024-2025 we have identified and addressed several of the challenges highlighted in the previous annual report, however the landscape for exploitation and extra-familial harm is ever evolving.

In early 2025 the government announced its intent to undertake a 'National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse', led by Baroness Casey. The terms of reference for the audit include building a national picture of what is known about current group-based child sexual exploitation, identify local and national trends, assess the quality of data available and review police understanding of this crime; providing an assessment of what is known about the demographics of grooming gangs and their victims, including ethnicity and conduct a review into the cultural and societal drivers for this type of offending and the motivations and characteristics of grooming gang offending, to provide an evidence-base for prevention, early intervention and disruption.

The publication of this report in Summer 2025 will undoubtedly present questions, challenges and opportunities for local arrangements to safeguard children from exploitation. This will be a timely publication as:

- The local 'Tackling Exploitation Strategy' will be refreshed.
- Partners will be commissioning an exploitation problem profile.
- Local prevention pathways will be a focus, including strengthening mapping arrangements.
- Disruption arrangements will be independently scrutinised.

Given the dynamic landscape in relation to exploitation arrangements, this will remain a focus area for the safeguarding partners in 2025-2026.



BSCP Priority 3 – Working Together Ready

In late December 2023, the Department for Education published its revised statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. The revised guidance emphasises more clearly the expectations on different agencies to work together across the whole system of help, support, and protection. This includes statutory bodies, education, health, local authorities, voluntary & charity sectors. A new chapter highlights how outcomes for children depend on strong multi-agency partnerships and sets clear standards for practitioners and leaders to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. The guidance strengthens clarity with the introduction of the distinct roles of Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) and Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs), and for the first time introduces a Partnership Chair. Schools, childcare providers, voluntary and community organisations are more firmly included in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. There's more emphasis on working in partnership with parents and carers: building positive relationships; communicating clearly and respectfully; involving them in decisions; designing processes affecting them in the family environment and in the wider community.

To meet the challenges of the revised guidance and to raise awareness about its requirements for the safeguarding system, the safeguarding partners established a 'Working Together Task and Finish group. The group was led by Greater Manchester Police and supported by the Partnership's Business Manager. Additional scrutiny and oversight was provided by an Independent Scrutineer. Partner's commitment to the group was excellent and supported us in achieving compliance by the end of the year.

The achievements of the group are as follows:



As a partnership we can demonstrate we have ensured compliance with Working Together and been successful in raising awareness. However, as part of ongoing work in 2025-2026 and linking in with regional and national developments, namely the implementation of the Children's Well-being and Schools Act, we will begin work on revising our local threshold document and in collating our safeguarding Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.



Learning and Improvement

We strive to use learning about our safeguarding system to improve experiences and safeguard children and their families.

Learning from Reviews

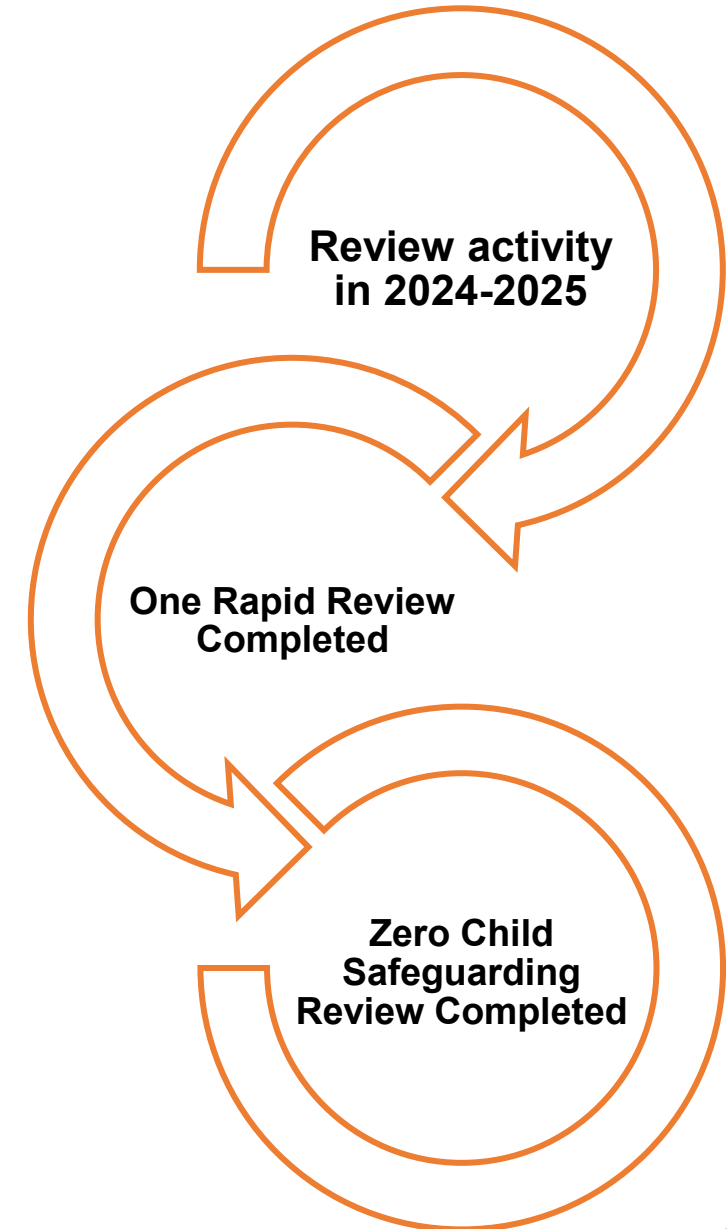
Safeguarding partners must have in place arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases which, in their view, raise issues of importance in relation to their area. A serious child safeguarding case is one in which abuse, or neglect of a child is known or suspected, and the child has died or been seriously harmed. Learning from local and national child safeguarding practice reviews forms part of the partnership quality assurance framework.

Carrying out learning reviews enables local partners to understand not only what happened but also why things happened as they did. They provide opportunities to reflect whether different systemic approaches or actions are likely to reduce the probability of serious incidents recurring. In developing their case review arrangements, the safeguarding partnership aims to ensure:-

- Robust and transparent arrangements are in place to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases
- Timely and effective Rapid Reviews are completed and where required Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are commissioned
- Learning from reviews leads to improved safeguarding arrangements

Progresss against individual and multi-agency actions identified following a review are monitored via the Learning into Practice Group. A quarterly report is provided to the Delegated Safeguarding Partners for further scrutiny and challenge.

One Rapid Review, Louis, was carried out in 2024-2025 and this is outlined on the next page.



Rapid Review – Louis

Louis was ten weeks old at the time of their death and lived with their mother; both Louis and mother were Black African. Louis was an unplanned baby and potentially a concealed pregnancy. Their mother denied being aware of the pregnancy up to the point of going into labour. Mother had moved to the UK from Africa as part of an international nurse recruitment programme; father remained in Africa with no plans to relocate. Within a few weeks of Louis's birth, mother returned to work as she had limited finances; she had discussed childcare arrangements with universal services and assured them these were in place. On the day Louis died he had been left alone for several hours in the family home while mother went to work. He was reported to have been left in an unsafe sleep position.

What worked well in practice

- The effective support offered to Louis and mother from Bolton NHS Foundation Trust and the International Nurse Recruitment Team following the birth. This was child centred, took account of their circumstances and demonstrated culturally competent practice.
- Understanding and sensitivity to the emotional impact for mother and the swift access to and assessment by the Perinatal Mental Health midwife.
- The Health Visitors curiosity about childcare arrangements and talking through how they would work in practice; followed up the International Nurse Recruitment Team.

What did we learn

- **Concealed Pregnancy Process** – The current agreed process was not followed in this instance and the reasons for this are not known. The Rapid Review Group were advised that work is underway in Bolton to revise this process, alongside pre-birth assessment processes.
- **Recruitment of Practitioners from Overseas** – It is evident that safe recruitment processes were followed, and these have been further strengthened by NHS Bolton Foundation Trust following their own internal review of Louis's experience. This includes advising potential recruits of the implications of pregnancy and employment rights at the interview stage, for those recruits who do become pregnant they will be supported at the earliest opportunity. Their options will be discussed, and support offered, as it was in this case. In circumstances where a pregnancy is disclosed at the interview stage there are arrangements for recruits to 'step-off' the recruitment process until after the birth. NHS Bolton Foundation Trust have also provided additional safeguarding children and adult training for international recruits to reinforce expectations in the United Kingdom.
- **Out of Routine** - the Rapid Review confirmed this was a 'one-off' incident. Mother's childcare was not available on the day in question, and she could not find an alternative. Her actions occurred in the context of desperation and not knowing or being confident about her employment rights. There were no indications that her intent was to harm her child.

In response to the learning from 'Louis', it was recommended that:-

- **Concealed Pregnancy** - As part of the revisions to local concealed pregnancy and pre-birth assessment protocols the partnership requested that children's social care ensure changes are clearly communicated across the multi-agency system and supported by a visual pathway that is easily accessible to practitioners in urgent situations.
- **Overseas Recruitment** - It was evident that safe recruitment processes were followed, and these have been further strengthened by NHS Bolton Foundation Trust following their own internal review of Louis's experience. The partnership recognised that recruitment from outside the United Kingdom is a key part of NHS England's workforce supply strategy and recommended to the National Panel they draw attention to this review and relevant learning to key government departments.
- **Contacts and Referrals to the Integrated Front Door** - While not a key learning point from the review, Louis's circumstances highlighted the need to refresh the partnership guide to [making a good referral](#) to children's social care. This was completed and published.

In addition to carrying out local reviews the Safeguarding Partnership has initiated three 'true for us' evaluations in response to National Panel Briefings and Ofsted Reports in the year 2024-2025. Two of these were completed in 2024-2025 ([Elective Home Education](#) and [Serious Youth Violence](#)) and the third, [Response To Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment](#), will be completed in 2025-2026.

The first of these was the National Panel report in relation to Safeguarding Children who are Electively Home Educated (EHE), and the scrutiny of local practice is demonstrated as an example.

Elective Home Education True for Us – What did we find?

The 'true for us' was led by the Deputy Head of Inclusion Services with the purpose of providing assurance to the safeguarding partners and wider partnership that current arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children electively home educated were effective. A template was agreed based on the key findings contained in the report and this was completed and submitted to the safeguarding partnership in September 2024. The True for Us highlighted:

CONTEXT

- 575 children registered as EHE at end of academic year (June 2024).
- 278 new registrations in 2023–24; 28% from four secondary schools.
 - Common reasons: mental health, dissatisfaction with school, lifestyle choice, school preference issues.
- 29 children had open social care referrals; 66 had SEND; 9 had EHCPs.
- Numbers expected to rise in line with national trends.

STRENGTHS

- Families receive more than statutory minimum contact and support.
- Positive inspection feedback from ILACS and SEND inspections.
- Clear safeguarding protocols in place for non-compliance.
- National recognition for Bolton's EHE Officer (KIT Award).

CHALLENGES AND GAPS

- Ensure parents are fully aware of the requirements before choosing EHE.
- No formal analysis of parental feedback.
 - Limited visibility of children and opportunities to build trusting relationships.
 - Partner awareness of EHE and legal landscape is inconsistent.
- Resource constraints: One term-time EHE Officer with minimal support.

Recommended Actions

The True for Us provided a high level of assurance that local arrangements are effective. However, several recommendations were identified including providing training for all safeguarding partners, improving advice and guidance for parents and carers to enable them to make informed decisions about EHE and consideration of capacity of the EHE offer. The issue of capacity will be particularly relevant in the context of changing legislation outlined in the Children's Well-being and Schools Bill.



Scrutiny and Assurance Arrangements

We hold ourselves and others to account for ensuring effective arrangements to keep children in Bolton safe.

Scrutiny Arrangements - Framework

As stated earlier in the Annual Report, the partners have prioritised the development of their quality and scrutiny arrangements as part of the implementation of the revised Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

Working with an Independent Scrutineer, the safeguarding partners have:

- Revised and refreshed the BSCP Quality Assurance Framework, aligning to the principles and ethos of Working Together 2023.
- Created and implemented a standardised quarterly partnership safeguarding scorecard for partners with a separate analysis report.
- Developed an annual scrutiny and assurance plan to reflect activity in individual organisations as well as BSCP to avoid duplication and manage resources.
- Developed and implemented a 'scrutiny and assurance highlight report' that summarises activity and exceptions to the safeguarding partners and is also shared with the wider partnership to ensure connectivity between BSCP and 'front-line practice'.

The revised quality assurance framework has enhanced accountability by clearly defining roles and responsibilities across all involved agencies. This clarity ensures that each partner understands their duties and can be held responsible for their contributions to safeguarding arrangements. Additionally, the framework strengthens the ability to demonstrate impact and outcomes through robust evidence collection and analysis. It also facilitates the identification of gaps in practice or provision, enabling timely interventions and improvements.

The refreshed approach has promoted enhanced data and insight by encouraging consistent and meaningful data collection across safeguarding partners. This consistency allows for more accurate and comprehensive analysis of both qualitative and quantitative evidence. With improved data practices, partners can better identify trends, risks, and emerging issues that may affect children and families. The insights gained from this data enable more informed decision-making and strategic planning, ultimately leading to more effective safeguarding interventions. Continuous improvement is a key benefit of the revised framework, as it establishes regular feedback loops between frontline practice and strategic oversight. This iterative process helps ensure that safeguarding practices remain effective and relevant, and that they evolve in response to changing needs and challenges within the community.



Section 11 Scrutiny

Section 11 of The Children Act and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 places duties on a range of organisations, agencies, and individuals to ensure their functions, and any services that they contract out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. These organisations and agencies should have in place arrangements that reflect the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including:

- A clear line of accountability for the commissioning and/or provision of services designed to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- A senior board level lead with the required knowledge, skills, and expertise or sufficiently qualified and experienced to take leadership responsibility for the organisations or agency's safeguarding arrangements
- A culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, both in individual decisions and the development of services

Each local area multi-agency safeguarding partnership are encouraged to seek assurance these duties are being undertaken through a Section 11 Audit. There is no timescale given as to when these need to be carried out, or how frequently. As it had been some time since Bolton had carried out this audit it was agreed by the safeguarding partners to commission this piece of scrutiny as a benchmark for the implementation of revised multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

The Section 11 was led by an Independent Scrutineer. Organisations, including probation, the Local Authority, Housing providers, Health providers, ICB etc, were asked to complete a self-assessment. The self-assessment covered nine key domains and within each there were agreed standards that the agency should meet. Organisations were required to reference the evidence they hold that demonstrates they have met the standard. This self-assessment process allows each partner to identify the standards that they meet and those where further actions are needed. There was also an option to leave blank or respond with 'Not Applicable' (N/A).

Alongside the organisational response, a questionnaire was circulated extensively to the multi-agency workforce to ask for their views on similar themes. This allowed the opportunity to triangulate practitioner experience and to listen to their voice.

The findings from both approaches are highlighted in this report, along with proposed responses for 2025-2026.

The analysis of practitioner experience demonstrated:

- Over 95% of the 121 professionals surveyed knew of the threshold guidance/framework for action; they also emphasised the importance and benefit of strong safeguarding training.
- Safeguarding arrangements are strong/work well.
- Partnership forums and working across education (DSLs) are strong.
- Regular update training and relevant subjects on safeguarding by Bolton is 'fabulous'.
- Arrangements are flexible to meet the needs of disabled children and young people.
- Home schooled children are often overlooked & this does cause concern for practitioners in schools
- It can be extremely hard to get the support needed for a family at the right time. Sometimes it is hard to know where to go as a practitioner for help and advice
- We need to use the digital strategy to create better access for staff who work outside of the 'office hours' model and have limited access to emails. An app with notifications, training and information to support the workforce would be ideal.
- Improved relationships with Social Care. Comments included areas that related to national issues such as recruitment and vacancy rates for social workers leading to high turnover of social worker for some children and challenges around thresholds.

The analysis of organisational compliance by the moderation panel highlighted:

- Respondents were generally articulate about how they met the standards; some respondents 'under-scored' their compliance, i.e. rating as amber when the evidence referenced indicated they had met the standard.
- The number of responses that indicated a lack of awareness and compliance with Private Fostering Arrangements was too high, and every agency should have basic knowledge about private fostering. This findings will be fed back to all partners and their attention drawn to local resources to increase organisational awareness.
- On reviewing the standards, the moderation panel queried the extent to which safeguarding standards are embedded within service specifications and contract monitoring arrangements. This is an area that requires further exploration in 2025-2026.
- A consistent theme from all organisations was the need to strengthen engagement and participation with children and their families, not only in seeking their experiences of service provision but involving them at the outset in co-production and service design.

The findings of the Section 11 audit were presented to the safeguarding partners and wider partnership. The recommendations from the moderation panel have been brought together as an action plan and will be fully progressed in 2025-2026, this will be supported by the Independent Scrutineer.

Operation Encompass – Progress and Impact



**Operation
Encompass**

**Supporting children and young
people exposed to domestic abuse**

Operation Encompass

Operation Encompass is a long-standing proven police and education information sharing arrangement enabling immediate support to be given to children experiencing domestic abuse. In Bolton the arrangements were initially introduced as good practice in 2018 and in May 2024 Royal Assent was granted to The Victims and Prisoners Act. This new act placed Operation Encompass into Law and puts a statutory obligation on police forces to share Operation Encompass notifications with schools.

For Encompass to deliver good outcomes for children, we need:-

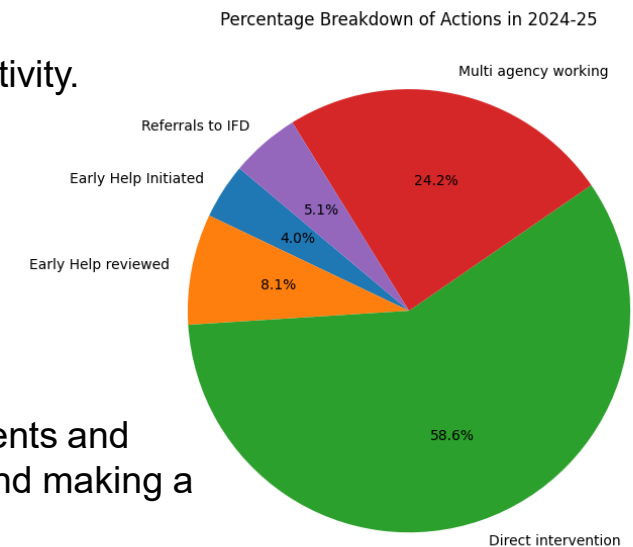
- Timely information sharing
- Information to be accurate, consistent and of a good quality
- Effective responses from those receiving the information

Schools and colleges receive Operation Encompass notifications when there is a Domestic Abuse incident in a property where a child resides. On a termly basis schools and colleges in Bolton are asked to submit data to the Safeguarding in Education Team (SET) regarding the number of notifications received and the actions they have taken to safeguard children in their setting. Currently the data submission is voluntary, and we continue to work with education settings to encourage their completion. The insights provided from the returns help the safeguarding partnership to identify practice themes and emerging challenges, as well as good practice.

Operation Encompass arrangements are overseen jointly by SET and Greater Manchester Police. In 2024-2025 they have:-

- **Ensured Compliance with National Guidance;** A multi-agency working group has reviewed the Operation Encompass protocol and introduced a new reporting form, alongside expectations for Key Adults to attend dedicated training. Strategically, the Safeguarding in Education Officer has engaged with Greater Manchester leadership to support consistent implementation. While Early Years rollout is paused, education now has formal representation on the DAV Board and Operations Group, with standing agenda items at key safeguarding meetings in relation to the impact and effectiveness of local encompass arrangements.
- **Revised the Encompass Scorecard and reporting arrangements;** This has led to a marked improvement in data submissions from education settings, with Spring Term figures rising from 67 schools in 2023/24 to 116 in 2024/25—likely influenced by senior leadership communications. This was within the context of Operation Encompass notifications increasing significantly, from 1,891 in 2023-2024 to 3,177 2024-2025. Schools have reported better police communication, with clearer guidance ensuring data is submitted only for domestic abuse cases (DABS).
- **Evaluating Outcomes from Encompass;** As part of the termly data return, schools are asked to report on their response to Encompass Notifications. Schools can choose multiple responses and these range from direct action in school through to referrals to IFD. The breakdown of interventions across the academic year are as follows:
 - Direct intervention dominates with 2,063 actions, making up 58% of all safeguarding activity.
 - Multi-agency working follows with 838 actions (24%).
 - Early Help reviewed and initiated together account for 12% (451).
 - Referrals to IFD make up 5% (181).
 - Early Help being initiated scores the lowest with 4% (151).

The safeguarding partners receive quarterly updates as part of the quality assurance arrangements and have consistently been assured over the last twelve months that the arrangements are strong and making a difference to children.



Impact and Effectiveness of Child Protection Arrangements

Over the past year, Bolton's multi-agency child protection arrangements have continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to safeguarding children and young people. The partnership has focused on improving outcomes through early intervention, robust risk assessment, and coordinated service delivery. In term of performance:

Key Performance Data

- **Referrals and Assessments:**

Between April 2024 and March 2025, 3,795 referrals were made to children's social care in Bolton, with 94% (3578) progressing to assessment or strategy meeting. Of the 1449 strategy meetings that were convened 427 (29.4%) resulted in an initial child protection conference.

- **Child Protection Plans:**

As of March 2025, 305 children were subject to a child protection plan. This represents an 8% decrease from the previous year and a 19.5% decrease from 2023. This likely reflects improved early help engagement and timely decisions for those children who may need to be looked after.

- **Repeat Plans:**

In 2023-2024, 29.5% (146/495) of child protection plans that started during the year were for a second or subsequent time. In 2024-2025 this slightly increased to 30.1% (120/399). However, the number of repeat child protection plans within 2 years reduced slightly from 17% in 2023-24 to 13.3% in 2024-25. This figure is tracked and scrutinised by the partners to ensure there are no underlying challenges that need to be addressed.

- **Timeliness of Strategy Discussions:**

94% of strategy discussions were held within 24 hours of referral, exceeding the national benchmark of 90%. This indicates that timely intervention is protecting children from harm.

Analysis of Data over the last twelve months has shown:

- **Improved Multi-Agency Collaboration:** Regular strategy meetings and joint training sessions have strengthened inter-agency communication, leading to more timely and effective responses to safeguarding concerns. This has been further enhanced with local multi and single agency [child protection practice standards](#).
- **Enhanced Early Help Pathways:** Local developments to strengthen Early Help services are a likely factor in reducing the escalation of harm to statutory intervention, supporting families at an earlier stage and promoting resilience. This aligns with the implementation of Family Hubs within localities.
- **Voice of the Child:** Mechanisms to capture and act upon the views of children and young people have been embedded across services, ensuring that safeguarding plans are child-centred and responsive to lived experiences.
- **Quality Assurance and Learning:** Learning from audits, serious case reviews, and practitioner feedback has informed continuous improvement. Notably, learning from front-line practice on themes such as neglect and domestic abuse have led to revised practice guidance and targeted workforce development.
- **Performance and Outcomes:**
 - A reduction in repeat child protection plans indicates improved effectiveness of initial interventions.
 - Timeliness of assessments and strategy discussions has consistently met or exceeded national benchmarks.
 - Increased engagement from education and health partners has contributed to more holistic safeguarding plans.



While improvements have been made, these will need to be sustained in a sometimes-difficult environment. As a partnership tools, such as the child protection handbook and multi-agency standards have been created to support our workforce maintain good practice in challenging times. Looking forward to 2025-2026, the safeguarding partners recognise and will respond to:

Challenges

- **Workforce Stability:**
Achieving stability across the social care workforce has been challenging but a recruitment campaign initiated in 2024 has led to an increase in permanent staff. By the end of March 2025, the safeguarding teams had moved from a low base of 0% permanent managers to 80% and social workers from 40% to 60%
- **Disproportionality:**
Children from minority ethnic backgrounds continue to be overrepresented in some services. This theme is being explored to better understand disproportionality and develop culturally competent responses and interventions for specific communities.
- **Trauma-Informed Practice:**
While training has begun, embedding trauma-informed approaches across all agencies will continue for 2025–2026.

Forward Look

- **Extra-familial Harms**
The partnership will continue to focus on strengthening contextual safeguarding approaches, improving data sharing and analysis, and ensuring that all professionals are equipped to respond to emerging risks such as online harm and exploitation.
- **Strengthening Use of Data and Intelligence**
Enhancing data sharing and developing local analytical approaches to identify emerging risks within communities.
- **Family Group Decision Making**
Plans are in place to expand family group conferencing and decision-making arrangements. This restorative approach emphasises empowerment, collaboration, and sustainable solutions.

Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment

In November 2024 the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published “I wanted them all to notice”, a thematic review in relation to sexual abuse in the family home. The findings in the report are extremely stark and identify a national “systemic failure across all agencies to recognise and respond when children are at risk of, or are already, being sexually abused by someone in their family environment”. In response to the findings in the national report, Bolton undertook a ‘true for us’ in respect of front-line practice. Led by BSCP’s Learning into Practice Group and it was agreed that focus groups with frontline practitioners would be held to seek their practice experiences in relation to learning from the national review. A facilitator’s framework was developed to promote consistency. In addition to the focus groups a practitioner questionnaire was also developed and circulated to the wider workforce to enable input from other sectors. In total 68 practitioners contributed their views.

It was assuring that in the focus groups and through the practitioner survey a significant number of strengths were identified, and these are summarised here:

Agencies individually hold a lot of information about children and their presentation; there are good recording systems in place.

When joint visits are undertaken, they are effective.

Immediate multi-agency responses to disclosures or allegations of CSA are consistent, timely and felt to be good.

Agencies are accessing training in their settings on this theme.

There is an expectation that agencies will bring together information about who lives with the child and who is important to them.

ABE training is valued by partners.

There is understanding in respect of why children retract allegations.

Practitioners across the workforce from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

Lucy Faithful was referenced a number of times as a positive support for practice.

Education settings use Hackett’s Continuum of Children’s Sexual Behaviour to support assessment and decision-making; they use NSPCC resources to help children keep safe.



Several learning points and ideas for further developing local arrangements to safeguard children at risk of familial sexual abuse were identified. These included:

- Consider a review of ABE arrangements exploring opportunities for education settings, specialist health practitioners and others to support children prior to police interview and with any follow-up. This is particularly important for children with disabilities or SEND.
- Develop local guidelines to support practice when a child or their family retracts allegations or does not support further investigations.
- Create an environment that empowers practitioners to respectfully and confidently address behaviours shaped by family norms and cultural differences, while upholding safeguarding principles
- Strengthen and further develop existing frameworks to assess adults and children/siblings who present a risk of sexual harm in the family environment. This should include interventions with non-abusing family members to support their understanding of risk from sexual abuse, how they can continue to maintain safety over time and especially when social care involvement ends.
- An approach to assessment and intervention that empowers families to develop their safety arrangement using a Family Group approach.

These findings were shared with the safeguarding partners and wider partnership. It was recommended that this is an area of focus for 2025-2026 to not only take forward and respond to the views of practitioners, but, if possible, to co-produce resources with those who have lived experience.

Effective Arrangements to Safeguard Missing Children

Safeguarding partners are tasked with preventing children from going missing through proactive measures. This includes developing local protocols tailored to community needs, promoting early help services to families, and conducting thorough risk assessments for children identified as vulnerable. Early intervention is key to reducing the likelihood of missing episodes.

Partners must work collaboratively to identify warning signs and provide support before issues escalate. This involves engaging with schools, healthcare providers, and social services to create a safety net around at-risk children. By addressing underlying issues such as family conflict, neglect, or mental health concerns, safeguarding partners can mitigate risks and enhance protective factors. Prevention strategies also include public awareness campaigns and training for professionals to recognize and respond to early indicators of risk.

In Bolton these local arrangements are led by the Missing Co-ordinator who supports the effective coordination among safeguarding partners. This role works alongside agencies to clearly define roles and responsibilities to ensure:

- A swift and unified response.
- Information is shared and analysed in a timely manner.
- Support partners to assess risk accurately and make informed decisions.
- Offer challenge to practitioners and leaders when required.



Our local safeguarding arrangements for missing children include protocols for joint working, data monitoring to identify patterns and trends, tracking of individual children to ensure appropriate responses and a multi-agency training offer. In 2024 Bolton's Missing Procedures were refreshed and strengthened including improved escalation. The Exploitation Assurance Group refreshed the approach to our complex safeguarding case panel to include missing children to ensure that as a partnership we are sighted and tracking our most vulnerable children.

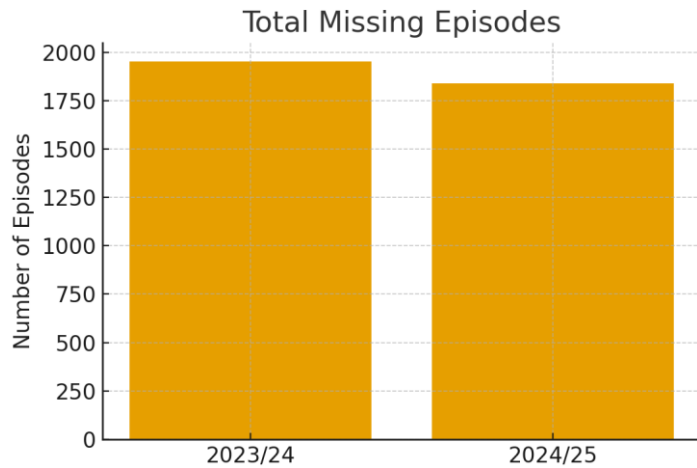


Figure 1: Total Missing Episodes (2023/24 vs 2024/25)

The total number of missing episodes in 2024-2025 was 1838 and in 2023-2024 this was 1951 incidents. This shows a small decrease of 113 episodes. This is potentially connected to the implementation of Right Care Right Person (RCRP) by GMP in the later part of 2024-2025, but it may also be a consequence of natural fluctuations.

It will be important for the Missing Co-ordinator to continue to track this in 2025-2026 to determine the impact of RCRP for potentially vulnerable children.

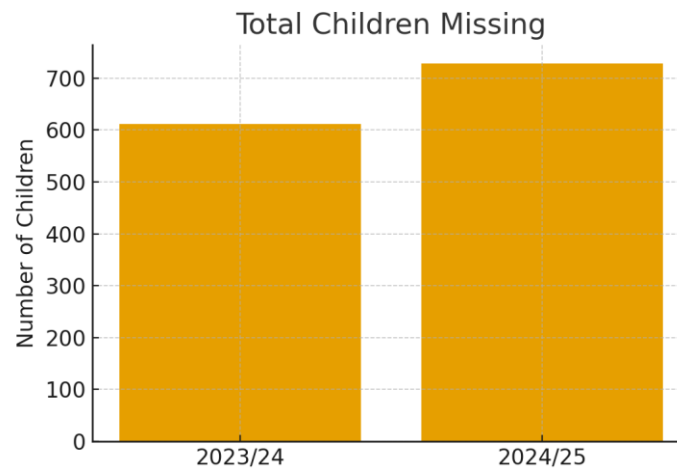


Figure 2: Total Missing Episodes (2023/24 vs 2024/25)

The number of children going missing in 2024-2025 was 728 individual children and is an increase from 612 in the 2023-2024 year.

Overall while there has been an increase in the number of children being reported as missing there are fewer children who are missing for a second or subsequent.

The reduction in repeat missing episodes is likely to indicate the impact of return interviews and the early identification and response to missing triggers.

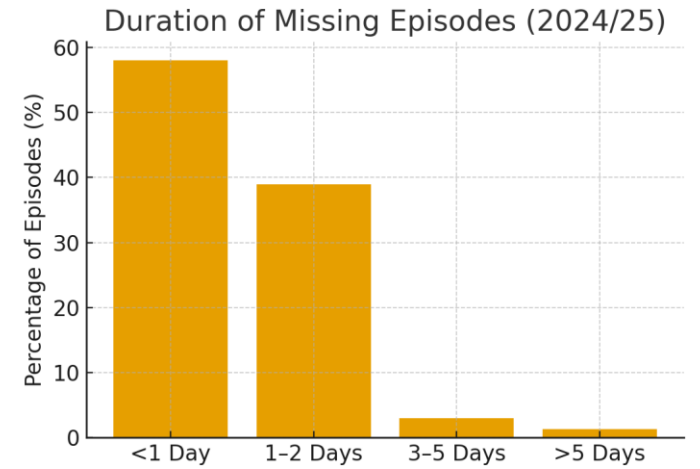


Figure 3: Duration of Missing Episodes (2024/25)

The age profile shows most missing children are aged 13+, but 19% are under 13, highlighting the need for tailored early intervention.

58% of children are missing less than a day; a further 39% of children are missing 1-2 days. Only 3% of children were 3-5 days, with a small number of episodes (10/1838) being for longer than 5 days.

Most children (87%, 638/728) are reported missing from their home or residential placement.

Return interviews

When a child is found, they must be offered an independent return interview. Independent return interviews provide an opportunity to uncover information that can help protect children from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing or from risk factors in their home. The interview should be carried out within 72 hours of the child returning to their home or care setting. In Bolton RUNA, an independent charity, are commissioned to provide this service and this is offered to all relevant children in a timely manner.

In 2024-2025, 64% of return interviews were completed. Reasons for refusal included no consent given by parents who considered that the missing episode was not serious, and they didn't want RUNA to see their child, young people declining the offer or other practitioners involved spoke with the child instead.

Impact of Independent Return Interviews

This child's experience highlights how a missing episode and subsequent Return Interview led to an enhanced partnership approach to support the young person involved.

Sophie (name has been changed) is 16 and was reported missing for the first time in over a year. Sophia goes to college out of area everyday so the most appropriate way to conduct the return interview was over the phone. Sophia spoke openly about what had happened which had included her leaving college premises and seeing an ex-boyfriend who has charges against him for harassment and stalking of Sophia.

She shared with the RUNA worker that he had persuaded her to go back to his flat and that he took her to hide in a different flat when Sophia heard the police were on the way. Sophia shared how her ex-boyfriend told Sophia he was suicidal and wanting to harm himself because she would not be in a relationship with him. Sophia had spoken to someone at college about this since who told her this could be coercive control. Sophia had not understood this, so the RUNA worker and Sophia discussed more about what this means and what Sophia understands it to be.

The RUNA practitioner was able to pass all this information onto the Lead Professional who had more understanding of the situation. The RUNA worker and Targeted Early Help worker had a discussion, and it soon became clear that the return interview had given Sophia a place to share her experience, which would then help the Targeted Early Help worker develop a further safety plan with Sophia. For example, part of Sophia's safety plan was to keep her location switched on. Sophia had turned this off during the missing report and she shared that her ex-boyfriend had told her to do so which highlighted her vulnerability, particularly around this person, which brought to light that more support was needed.

As a partnership we have agreed further work to ensure continued scrutiny and assurance around 'Missing' Arrangements in 2025-2026

- **Evaluate the Impact of RCRP:** Work with partners in Greater Manchester Police to increase our local understanding of the impact of Right Care Right Person in relation to its influence on missing episode trends and police involvement.
- **Evaluate the impact of revised missing strategy meeting timescales;** In 2024-2025 a revised missing protocol was introduced with a key change being the implementation of a strategy meeting after a 48-hour missing episode rather than 72-hours. The rationale behind this shift was to enhance early intervention involving missing children. By holding these meetings sooner, agencies can respond more effectively to potential risks and ensure better outcomes for vulnerable children. This change of policy will need to be evaluated in 2025-2026.
- **Strengthen Early Intervention for Younger Children:** Share the findings with the local Prevention Board and offer challenge in relation to the impact and effectiveness of targeted support for children under 13, particularly those appearing in the data for the first time.
- **Enhance Return Interview Engagement:** Seek opportunities to co-design engagement strategies with young people and families to improve uptake and timeliness of return interviews.
- **Improve Data Integration Across Agencies:** Continue to ensure consistent and timely data sharing between police, social care, education, and health to support proactive safeguarding.
- **Monitor Repeat Missing Patterns:** Explore the potential of analytics to identify children at risk of repeat episodes and intervene with wraparound support.
- **Increase Community-Based Recovery Options:** Explore alternatives to police-led recovery, such as outreach teams, residential homes or trusted adults, to reduce reliance on enforcement.



A Safe Workforce

This section of the annual report summarises the impact and effectiveness of the partnership's multi-agency arrangements for Managing Allegations Against those who Work with Children.

The Role of the Local Authority Designated Officer



Purpose

- The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is responsible for overseeing the management of allegations against individuals working with children in positions of trust.
- This includes professionals, volunteers, and carers. The purpose of the LADO is to ensure allegations are handled fairly, consistently, and promptly, safeguarding both the child and the adult involved.



Key Responsibilities

- **Oversight of Allegations:** Manages cases where an adult may have harmed a child, committed a criminal offence against a child, behaved in a way that suggests a risk to children, or demonstrated unsuitability to work with children.
- **Advice and Guidance:** Supports organisations in responding to concerns
- **Coordination:** Works with police, social care, and other agencies.
- **Monitoring:** Tracks progress and outcomes of cases.
- **LADO Strategy Meetings:** Chairs multi-agency meetings when required.



Referral Thresholds

- Referrals should be made within one working day if any of the following apply:
- Harm or risk of harm to a child.
- Possible criminal offence.
- Behaviour indicating potential risk.
- Concerns about suitability to work with children.

LADO – Key Data Findings

Referral Trends

- In 2024/25, there were 464 referrals, compared to 466 in 2023/24. This indicates a plateau following significant increases in previous years.
- Only around 10% of referrals met the LADO threshold in both years. In 2023/24, 49 out of 466 referrals met the threshold, and in 2024/25, approximately 46 out of 464 did. As a partnership we have committed in 2025-2026 to look at our threshold for referral to LADO as part of our wider safeguarding training. It is acknowledged that partners value the discussion and consultation even if referrals are not progressed
- Education remains the largest source of referrals, accounting for 41% in 2024/25
- The number of referrals remain consistent with the previous year and may indicate consistent awareness and reporting practices across the multiagency system. However, there is a potential challenge in threshold application as most LADO contacts do not progress to further investigation.

Meeting Volume

- The number of LADO meetings increased slightly from 40 in 2023/24 to 47 in 2024/25.
- There were 11 review meetings in 2024/25, compared to 7 the year before.

LADO Enquiries and Investigations

- In 2024-2025 there were 86 open cases at the end of the reporting year (31 March 2025)
- At year end 11 investigations had been open 1 month or less, 10 investigations for 1-3 months, 28 open for 3-12 months and 50 open for over 12 months.

Timeliness of investigations is an area that requires further exploration. In previous years, some delays have been the consequence of police enquiries, particularly those where an online element is present. Other causes for delay include, the complexity of the harm being investigated, awaiting the conclusion of parallel investigations, and internal disciplinary processes.

For 2025-2026, the LADO will evaluate the impact of the 'Managing Allegations Portal, review those cases which remain open beyond 12 months and continue to raise awareness about Managing Allegations thresholds.



A Confident Workforce

This section of the annual report summarises the impact and effectiveness of the partnership's multi-agency arrangements for Multi-agency training and development.

Training Strategy Overview



Alignment with statutory guidance



Strategic aims and objectives



Priority areas set by the safeguarding partnership

Priority Areas

The Priority areas of the BSCP are Exploitation, Neglect and Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment. This places a specific expectations on the training provided; ensuring the offer includes the wider strategic aims of effective information sharing, family help, child centred, and culturally competent.

Alignment with Statutory Guidance

Multiagency training plays a central role in aligning practice with statutory guidance, specifically Working Together to Safeguard Children (WTSC), Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) and EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) safeguarding requirements. Examples of how training supports this include:-

Enhancing Family Help & Prevention

- WTSC: Advocates for early identification of needs and coordinated support.
- Training Impact: Encourages joint problem-solving and improves coordination at the prevention stage.

Improving Information Sharing

- WTSC: Stresses effective and timely information sharing.
- Training Impact: Provides case studies and scenarios where practitioners learn how, when, and what to share within legal and ethical frameworks.

Supporting Local Safeguarding Partnerships / Multiagency working

- WTSC: Requires effective local safeguarding arrangements.
- Training Impact: Strengthens partnerships by building trust and common understanding among agencies.

Strategic Aims and Objectives

- The strategic aims and objectives for training are detailed within the 'Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for Promoting the Welfare of Children in Bolton' (MASA) and these have been achieved by:-
- The creation of varied training to establish a culture of **continuous learning, development, and improvement**
- **Enabling practitioners to be confident in their practice and processes**, including multiagency working, challenge and escalation and understand what support is available to children and families
- Agencies and staff **understanding good practice in their roles and in others**
- **Ensuring that areas for improvement from 'practice reviews' are a focus** within training (information sharing, neglect, professional curiosity and challenge etc.).
- By collaborative training **developing a strong working relationships between agencies and frontline practitioners**
- **Multi-agency training and workforce development opportunities are provided and aligned to the strategic priorities** of the partnership to make a positive difference to practice and therefore outcomes for children and their families.

Multi-agency Training Offer

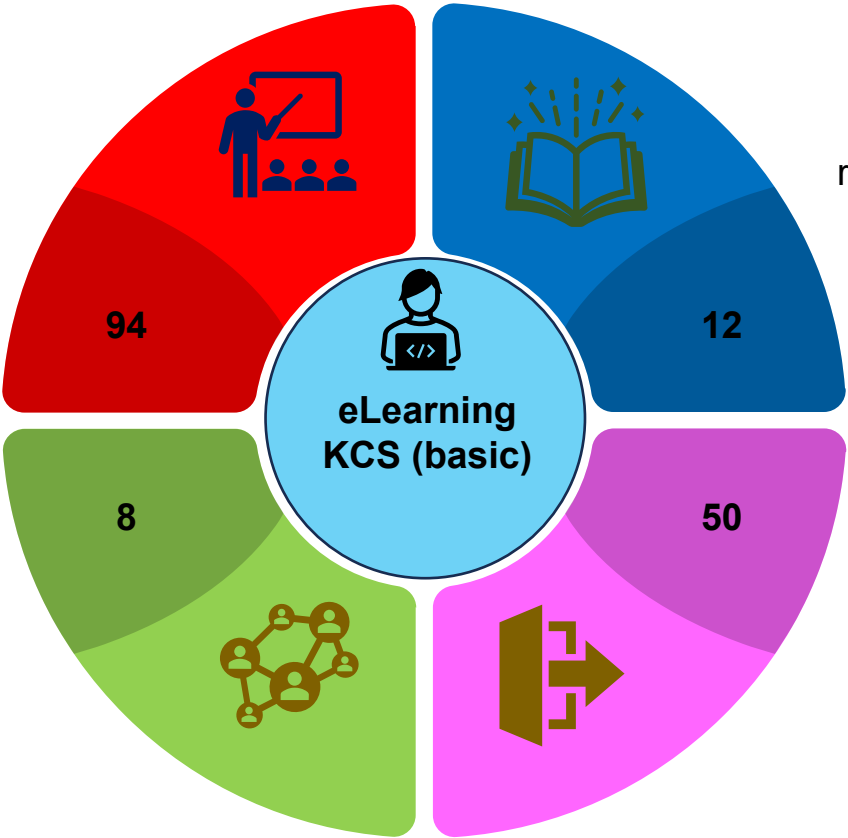
The chart below shows end of year data for each of the training methods used by BSCP, from trainer led ‘classroom’ to online methods, as well as the total number of sessions delivered by the partnership. In 2024-2025 the partnership offered an additional 57 learning opportunities to practitioners when compared with 2023-2024. Most of the increase was in the Trainer Led provision and in promoting more external courses/webinars.

Trainer Led Courses

Sessions are either online or in the classroom and form the bedrock of the training offer.

Network Bites

Topic/subject/agency webinars, which are recorded and then available on the BSCP website for future reference and viewing.



Knowledge Nuggets

These 15–20-minute short online resources have increased in number to fulfil specific topic areas e.g., Framework For Action, child abuse linked to faith or belief etc.

External Courses/ Webinars

Many courses and resources come to the attention of the Multiagency training coordinator and when appropriate they are shared with the wider workforce.

eLearning Keeping Children Safe (Basic) course

Anyone who works with children in Bolton is required to complete the basic BSCP course which is delivered face to face but largely via this elearning course. This course was reviewed, updated and relaunched on the ME learning platform July 2024.

Accessing the Training Offer

Despite the increased offer, there has been a small decline in practitioners accessing the training offer overall when compared to the previous year. In total 6896 practitioners registered to use one or more of the partnership’s training resources in 2024-2025, however when compared with the previous year’s registrations of 7222, this represents a 4.5% fall.

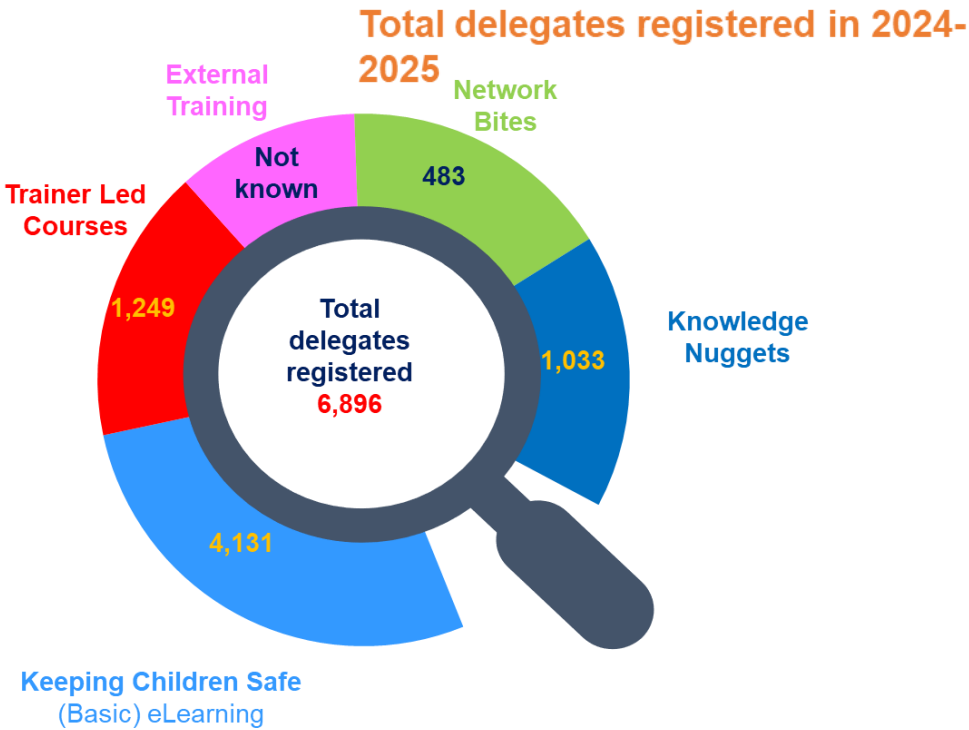
The reason for the decrease is the lower uptake of the online Keeping Children Safe (KCS) Basic, as every other training method has shown increases on the previous year. Thus, the decline is not necessarily a cause for concern as:-

- There will be year on year fluctuations in take-up of the KCS Basic training as it is recommended this is refreshed every three years.
- In 2023-2024 BSCP introduced a single agency trainer led KCS Basic training and our data shows several agencies have taken this up to replace their use of the online package. Our analysis of the data shows 68 Designated Safeguarding Leads have been trained by BSCP to deliver KCS Basic course within their organisation, and this has equated to 492 practitioners being trained as a result

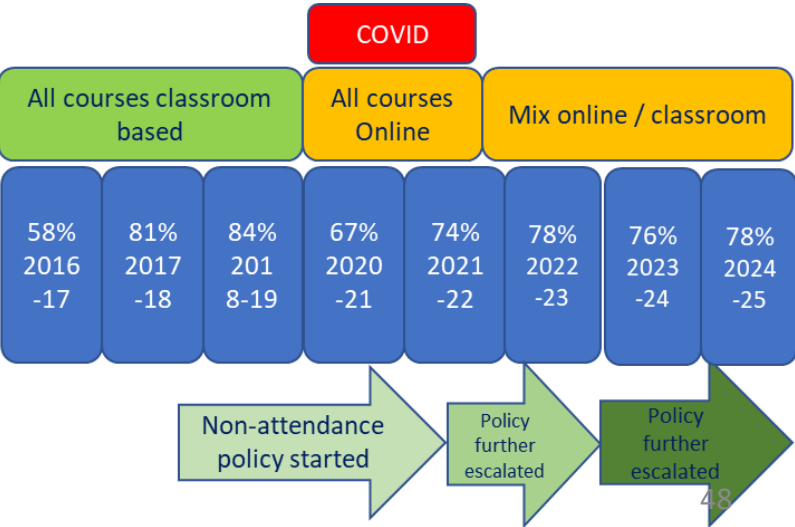
Attendance at Training

In 2022-2023 the safeguarding partners set a benchmark of 85% overall attendance. In 2024-2025 this has still not been achieved with the attendance rate being 78%. Despite not achieving the performance measure, there has been a small increase of 2% in overall attendance when compared to the previous year and a marked increase from 2017. This is likely to be reflective of the diverse training methods available to match work patterns and learning styles.

Partnership data shows that staff from the Education, Voluntary Sector and Local Authority are the top three sectors who attend. However, staff in the local authority and voluntary sector are also in the top three for non-attendance. Staff from the housing sector, law enforcement and childminding are least likely to access the multi-agency training offer.



Attendance Rates Over Time from 2017 to 2025



Evaluating the Impact of the Partnership Training Offer

The impact of the partnership training offer is largely measured via immediate evaluation post course with a follow-up evaluation after three months. The immediate post-course evaluations have a high response rate whereas the three-month follow-up response rate is poorer.

The diagram highlights the three main domains utilised to evaluate overall training impact from the partnership offer.

Increased Knowledge

Delegates self reflection as to the extent the training has increased their knowledge”

Knowledge Increase: 97% of participants agree the training increased their knowledge.

This is a very strong indicator that the training content was well delivered and informative. Participants clearly felt they learned something new, which is a key outcome for any learning activity.



Impact of Training

“Delegates self-reflection if this training will impact or change your practice?”

Practice Impact: 62% of participants state the training will impact their practice ‘significantly’ or with ‘many changes’. This increases to 97.75% when include the next data level (Minor alterations). Participants believe the training will affect their practice with ‘many’ or ‘significant’ changes. This indicates there is a strong likelihood participants feel confident in applying what they have learned into their practice.



Course Rating

Delegates overall rating of the training/ trainer / course this training?”

High Satisfaction: 96% of participants rate the training as ‘Great’ or ‘Good’

The overwhelmingly positive quality rating suggests that the training was well-organised, engaging, and met participant expectations.



Practitioner Voice

In training the practitioner's voice and experience is fundamental. Listening to, as well as "reading and understanding their needs" is essential for continual improvement. For example, the partnership developed 'The Knowledge Nuggets' (short topic based basic training) in response to a practitioner's request for something short and accessible which could be done individually or with their team on specific safeguarding themes. As a partnership, this resource has developed and there are thirteen Knowledge Nuggets including in the past twelve months 'Implementing Working Together 2023' and ICON awareness. In total **2,405 practitioners** have completed at least one of the nuggets since their inception.

A BSCP quarterly newsletter and Facebook page have been launched in the last year to improve communication with frontline practice; both initiatives have proved successful; one practitioner fed back that the newsletter was 'brilliant and so useful'.

The practitioner's voice is also given a platform in the regular Network Bites (webinars) which are co-produced with practitioners to inform the multi-agency workforce of their services, referral processes or knowledge of law and procedures which can have safeguarding implications. In the past twelve months the topics have included Elective Home Education Offer, Learning from Case Reviews and Revised Missing from Home Guidance.

Practitioner evaluations provide a wealth of feedback for continuous development of the partnerships training programme and individual courses. Even this is thoughtfully engineered to get maximum feedback. Trainers able to remotely access their own course evaluations immediately after to take this direct feedback and make timely changes in advance of future sessions. A selection of the comments are included.

"I will ensure I look for subtle neglect and be aware of nutritional excess as well as too little food available."

"As a result, it has made me more aware to use professional curiosity and the services that are available to support families."



"(I will) be more confident in changing questioning styles"

"The trainers were knowledgeable, interesting and engaging."

Working Well

- **Maintained High Course Evaluations:** Practitioners who have attended one of more of the training events have consistently rated the training 'great' or 'good' and provided evidence as to how the learning from training is impacting on their practice.
- **Delivering Cost Effectiveness:** The training investment by the partnership equates to £11.82 per delegate; this includes the costs of the Full-Time Multi-agency Training Co-ordinator and Part-time Administrator. This enables delegates to access the full programme, including commissioned training on Child Sexual Abuse, Child Bereavement and Working with Boys and Men.
- **Improved Communication:** A quarterly newsletter is circulated to over 4,500 multi-agency practitioners. The partnership has also set up a Facebook page. These are used to communicate information about the partnership's progress, regional and national developments as well as 'day in the life' practitioner spotlights, upcoming training opportunities and key practice tips.

Challenges

- **Gaps in Agency Engagement:** Multi-agency training is not simply about developing knowledge and skills it also provides a safe space for the multi-agency workforce to come together to learn, understand each other's roles and explore challenges. When key agencies are not in attendance, either by not registering or not attending, these opportunities are missed, and it can lead to disparities in understanding and implementation of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. **It is recommended that key safeguarding leads in all agencies regularly review their organisations engagement with the multi-agency training programme.**
- **Changing Safeguarding Landscape:** It can be a challenge to maintain the core training programme and provide a training response to new and emerging safeguarding risks. This has been mitigated to some extent with the 'Knowledge Nuggets' however these are dependent on support from local 'specialists' whose own work pressures may impact.





Partners Safeguarding Highlights

This section of the annual report shines a light on how members of Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership contribute to safeguarding arrangements in Bolton.

Bolton Together

Supporting BSCP Priorities:

Working Together:

- Contributed to safeguarding task group with VCSE and parent and youth input.
- Facilitated parent feedback via Family Hub Parent Panel; updates shared quarterly.
- Improved safeguarding visibility and staff training in Family Hubs.
- Held safeguarding briefing with VCSE members.
- Delivered IThrive provision with strong safeguarding practices.

Exploitation:

- Secured Million Hours Lottery funding for youth outreach.
- Launched 'Youth Against Violence' project with diversionary activities and mentoring.
- Collaborate through IThrive to support youth mental health.
- Support members offering youth work to prevent exploitation.
- Coordinate multiagency Huddle for mental health case review and service navigation.

Internal Safeguarding Activity:

- Emphasis on clear communication and professional challenge across agencies.
- Holistic support approach starting early with families.
- Reviewed Service Level Agreements to enhance safeguarding requirements and redeveloped membership contract to clarify expectations.
- Created templates for providers to report safeguarding concerns.
- Addressed inadequate referral information to ensure proper management.

Challenges and Barriers:

- Short-term funding limits long-term provision and continuation of successful initiatives.
- Limited recognition of VCSE sector value affects partner buy-in.
- Disconnected services, though multiagency collaboration is improving.
- Challenges in engaging new and unengaged individuals.
- Competing priorities and limited capacity hinder support.
- Referral forms often lack holistic information, requiring deeper investigation.
- Increasing complexity in cases diverts early intervention efforts.

Education Settings

Supporting BSCP Priorities:

- An Education Collaborative has been formed with senior representatives from education settings. This provides a strategic link between BSCP and the sector.
- Education representatives attend strategic boards and meetings; safeguarding is a standing item in education meetings thus enabling the sector to be active in new developments but also to ensure their voice is heard.
- An Education Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) presented their whole school approach to tackling exploitation at a partnership event. While some individual schools have carried out exploitation events to increase awareness with children, parents, carers and the wider community.
- The Working Together, Exploitation and Neglect knowledge nuggets are regularly promoted as part newsletters, briefings and in training.
- The schools model safeguarding and child protection policy has specific sections on child neglect and exploitation.
- Questions are asked in relation to Neglect and exploitation in the education section 175 which is a self-assessment of the settings safeguarding practices.

Internal Safeguarding Activity:

- The Section 175 provides evidence of high compliance across several safeguarding areas in Bolton schools, with neglect, online safety, private fostering and Elective Home Education (EHE) shows strong engagement.
- Bolton schools provide consistent evidence of delivering essential support to pupils through free food, uniforms, and learning resources. They lead in completing Early Help assessments, ensuring timely intervention when issues arise.
- The PSHE curriculum, along with external programmes such as Fortalice and Real Love Rocks, helps build resilience and educate pupils on healthy relationships and consent. These initiatives collectively contribute to a robust prevention strategy that addresses emerging problems at the earliest opportunity.

Challenges and Barriers:

- Further strengthen information sharing arrangements with schools e.g. when a child is picked up by police or presents at A&E, etc. as this can inform the help and support school can offer to the family.
- Staff capacity can be a challenge when working to help and support children and families with more complex needs.
- Supporting education settings to understand the safeguarding implications of 'AI' would be welcome.
- Share learning about approaches to staff well-being in schools.

Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board (NHSGM)

NHS GM has maintained their statutory duties across the GM Safeguarding Children Partnerships as one of the equal and joint statutory partners (Local Authority, ICBs and Greater Manchester Police) and as a statutory partner for the GM Adult Safeguarding Boards. NHS GM has supported the implementation of the Multi Agency Safeguarding arrangements (MASA) across out ten Safeguarding Children Partnerships.

Supporting BSCP Priorities:

- NHSGM is a statutory partner in safeguarding governance and representatives from the organisation chair and co-chair subgroups as part of the safeguarding arrangements.
- Extra familiar harm and criminal and sexual exploitation of children remains a priority area of focus both nationally and within GM. During 2024-25 (22.7%) of our GM Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) had a theme of Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation and 9.1% had a theme of child criminal exploitation.
- Within the Bolton locality, NHSGM have sought assurance from Bolton NHS Foundation Trust in respect of its specialist nurse assessment model for children vulnerable to extra-familial harms. This is part of the partnerships wider strategy to ensure children are safe from exploitation and other harms out with their family network. NHSGM supports this review and is ensuring health input into Bolton's exploitation strategy.

Internal Safeguarding Activity:

- Named GP has completed audit of primary care contribution to child protection conference reports; analysis of the audit has been fed back to primary care to improve quality and compliance. Learning has been that there has been an inconsistent response the primary care reporting into child protection planning and work has been done to improve quality of reporting.
- NHSGM has worked with commissioners of 0-19 Public Health Nursing (health visiting & school nursing) to ensure safeguarding prevention and attendance at statutory safeguarding meetings is met with a quality contribution to care planning. The impact has been that 0-19 service specification ensures safeguarding is seen through a public health lens, there is commitment to focus on early help and prevention.
- NHSGM have created a statutory review platform and tracker system which draws together themes for safeguarding learning from statutory reviews specific to health providers. This enables gaps and themes to be highlighted as well as a driver to influence commissioning decisions.
- Named GP cascades learning from statutory reviews to GP safeguarding leads via quarterly GP safeguarding briefings. There has been a focus within primary care of their role within early help conversations with families in response to learning from a rapid review.

Developments:

- While the IFD has specialist nurse provision from NHS Bolton Foundation Trust, there is a plan to extend the health offer within the IFD and include a specialist CAMHS mental health practitioner from Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust.
- NHSGM have a Children & Young People (CYP) System Group that set out a firm commitment to actively involve children and young people in its decision making. Building on the existing practice within localities and services, the CYP System Group will support young people to develop a young person's shadow panel. The shadow panel will work with the CYP System Group to embed the Lundy Model of participation and will amplify young people's voices within mental, physical and public health as part of our Joint Forward Delivery Plan for Children and Young People.
- In Bolton, NHSGM has sought verbal feedback from children looked after via the corporate parenting board; in response to children's feedback changes were made to the health passport.
- Going forward, NHSGM will continue to address any newly acquired statutory responsibilities and reforms including those identified in subsequent iterations of Working Together to Safeguarding Children (2023).
- However, it will be important to acknowledge NHS reforms are likely to have an impact on structures and in personnel. It will be essential to maintain dialogue with statutory safeguarding partners and the wider partnership landscape to ensure a safe and effective transition for safeguarding within organisational reform.



Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust (GMMH)

Supporting BSCP Priorities:

- The Trusts mandatory training offer includes Level 1-3 Safeguarding Children training. This training includes sections on the partnerships priority of Exploitation to aid staff awareness and response. The Trust has policies and guidance which are accessible to all staff, and staff have access to support in relation to complex casework and planned and reactive supervision. Staff also engage with Partnership meetings in relation to exploitation.
- Staff knowledge and awareness of the partnerships priorities are supported and informed through a range of resources which includes training, policy, guidance and supervision. The Trust actively attends and contributes to partnership activities such sub-groups and learning events. Where learning is identified this is shared across the workforce, to improve the outcomes for children and families. Training impact audits are also undertaken to measure the impact of training on practice
- In relation to the implementation of Working Together 2023, the Trust engages with Section 11 audits and has dedicated Named Health professionals responsible for ensuring effective safeguarding systems and processes are in place across the organisation. Additional resource has been identified for the Trusts Corporate Safeguarding Team to support safeguarding activity.

Internal Safeguarding Activity:

- GMMH are committed to ensuring that learning from single and multi-agency reviews is shared and actions identified from reviews are monitored and tracked by the corporate safeguarding team.
- As part of continual improvement, the team have introduced a safeguarding review and action plan module on the Trusts incident record system which will improve central oversight and progress.
- Safeguarding training is regularly reviewed and updated to include learning from reviews; the Patient Safety newsletter and Safeguarding briefings also include learning updates.
- Bitesize learning has been introduced to raise awareness which will continue to be delivered as a priority during 2025/26.
- Our Bolton CAMHS service has patient participation leads who actively engage in ways to develop and improve the service. Young person panels are integrated within job interviews for key practitioners.

Challenges and Barriers:

- Transitions remain a challenge across the Partnership - current internal task and finish group and SOP being developed to support practice.
- Strengthening multi-agency information-sharing and practice, cross boundary working and safeguarding thresholds and resolving professional differences also remain as themes requiring pro-active partnership working and improvements.

NHS Bolton Foundation Trust

Bolton Foundation Trust has undertaken a range of activities to strengthen safeguarding within the trust and across the multi-agency partnership. The Trust has reshaped their Safeguarding Committee framework and membership which now includes BSAB Independent Chair as a core member. This change has strengthened the relationship of trust with a focus of key safeguarding concerns of the Board. There has been a clear step change in system issues being identified early and evidence of a joined-up response.

As part of our assessment processes within Emergency Department and Maternity, information relating to Domestic Abuse is captured and audited. The maternity audit highlighted further training to upskill of midwives to signpost and offer relevant support during pregnancies. As part of Safeguarding Awareness week, a one-day focus on Domestic Abuse. This was well received by both visitors and staff.

Over the past year, we have strengthened our commitment to supporting staff affected by Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) by working closely with ward managers to ensure consistent and compassionate application of the Trust's Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy. This has led to increased confidence among ward managers in handling disclosures and enhanced support for staff members affected.

Close partnership working continues to be enhanced with the local authority to co-develop and refine our process and guidance documents around safeguarding enquiries and the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Policy, to ensure our processes complement one another in the best interests of children and adults. In terms of learning and development, 7-minute briefings have been used to cascade key messages to frontline staff through divisional leadership structures, with assurance being sought through the Trust Safeguarding committee Safeguarding Adults and Prevent Training is part of the mandatory training suite.

The Safeguarding team continues to build expertise through specialist training for key staff working with children and their families. A new Level 3 Safeguarding Training e-learning package was developed in 2025 to run alongside face-to-face training. This was designed to encourage staff to reflect on poor safeguarding practices and to improve responses and accountability.



Childrens Services

Supporting BSCP Priorities:

- **Working Together** - Strong partnership engagement in implementing reforms, including development of an assessment protocol to guide families and agencies, revision of multiagency child protection standards to improve conference quality. Briefings delivered to all children's social care and early help practitioners on key changes and practice impact. DSP and LSP Engagement: Active involvement with clear reporting mechanisms and shared accountability. The Chief Executive attends partnership meetings and post-meeting reviews.
- **Child Exploitation & Missing from Home Young People Plans** - processes within children's social care have developed to include younger children at risk of exploitation, enabling more creative and preventative planning. Missing from Home Protocol revised and implemented from 1st March 2025, promoting consistency and multi-agency strategy discussions.

Internal Safeguarding Activity:

- Internal Learning Reviews processes have been strengthened and two completed reviews and a further two planned. First review focused on historical sexual abuse allegations and current responses.
- Refreshed the quality assurance framework, social care practice standards and recruitment and retention strategy.
- Families First Agenda is developing and beginning implementation and reviewing social care structures in line with national reform.
- Regular thematic and full case audits completed across the service to ensure consistent responses for children.
- Youth Voice & Participation continues to develop with Youth MPs, Bolton Youth Council, Voice4U, and Next Steps actively engaging with senior leaders. A Participation Strategy is in development to improve co-ordination.
- Children are actively involved in their care planning with tailored communication support. Recent practice audits evidenced that in 69% of interventions reviewed the child's voice had a direct and positive influence. While this is encouraging further work is planned for the coming year to strengthen this.

Challenges and Barriers:

- One of the key themes emerging is the need to further strengthen our helping earlier response in relation to children vulnerable to exploitation. Whilst it is positive that arrangements for children at risk are strong there remains a challenge in ensuring the early signs of vulnerability are recognised and responded to as part of a whole family approach.
- Ensuring consistent, high-quality responses to neglected children remains an area of focus.

Bolton at Home

Supporting BSCP:

- All staff have attended/attending training delivered by Challenger staff (GMP) in relation to Modern day slavery, exploitation and Cuckooing. This has been further supplemented by mandatory safeguarding training from Bolton At Home E-learning.
- While Bolton At Home directly work with adult tenants, including care leavers and families. There is a strong culture of working collaboratively with colleague's from Homefinders, Allocations, Tenant Support, Adult and Children services to ensure a whole family approach.
- Information sharing between partners has been working well, however there has been a breakdown in sharing with police colleagues. That is now being addressed to agree a new sharing protocol.
- All Bolton At Home practitioners have completed mandatory training via e-learning of safeguarding adults and children. Staff who have customer facing roles completed additional training and development, including . accessing training provided by BSCP. In 2025-2026 this training is being further revised.
- Bolton At Home have completed the Section 11 audit and used this as a tool to identify strength and areas for development.





Independent Scrutineer

This section of the annual report shares the perspectives of the Independent Scrutineer on the impact and effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in Bolton.

Independent Scrutineer

As Bolton's Independent Scrutineer, I want to recognise the commitment and hard work of all our partners in striving to give children the best possible start in life, so that every child can be safe, happy, and to succeed. Effective safeguarding across our complex systems depends on more than structures and procedures – it requires genuine joint leadership, a culture of collaboration, and shared accountability. I am pleased to report strong evidence that partnership working in Bolton has embraced the key principles of Working Together 2023, helping to shape and strengthen our collective safeguarding arrangements.

This Annual Report highlights the breadth of work undertaken over the past year, offering insight into the dedication and professionalism shown daily by practitioners across agencies to keep children safe and improve outcomes. Much has been achieved in the last 12 months across all areas of business; however, safeguarding is never a completed task. We must continue to build on this progress, maintaining momentum and ensuring that learning and improvement remain at the heart of our partnership.

Annual Report

This year's Annual Report is well presented and provides clear information on key aspects of the Partnership's work, including independent scrutiny, the multi-agency training offer, and wider safeguarding arrangements. It offers valuable insight into a broad range of activity aligned to the Partnership's priorities.

Importantly, the link between the Safeguarding Effectiveness Group (SEG) and the Delegated Safeguarding Partner (DSP) leads has been strengthened over the past year. DSPs have shown a clear commitment to demonstrating how they collectively shape priorities, respond to local needs, and enable effective scrutiny that remains focused on system-wide risks and challenges.

Leadership

Working Together 2023 and Bolton's newly published Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements emphasise the central role of the Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) and Delegated Safeguarding Partners (DSPs) in shaping and leading the local safeguarding response. In practice, structural complexities within the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Greater Manchester Police have made it more challenging for the named LSPs to maintain meaningful involvement in Bolton's local partnership. By contrast, the Local Authority LSP has been able to engage more effectively and continues to meet regularly with Bolton's DSPs and the Independent Scrutineer.

The decision for DSPs to chair the Partnership has been a positive development, bringing consistency and leadership to the past 12 months of business. Looking ahead, the ongoing NHS and ICB reform agenda is likely to bring further changes to health structures, which may require adjustments to locality leadership arrangements. Despite these wider system pressures, Bolton's local NHS lead has remained a strong and collaborative presence, providing the leadership and partnership working required throughout the year.

Governance and Statutory Functions

The Partnership's governance arrangements have been realigned to ensure delivery of its statutory functions. Meetings are very well attended with appropriate multiagency senior leadership taking an active part. The continuing development of the Safeguarding Effectiveness Group (SEG) provides a strong evidence base to monitor delivery against safeguarding priority areas and to review how effectively Bolton's policies and practice are working in practice.

The Partnership's priorities are well publicised, with clear delivery plans, appropriate leadership, and assurance mechanisms in place. The work of the SEG, Learning into Practice (LiP), and other task-and-finish groups is well supported by the Business Manager and consistently delivers quality outputs.

However, the current Business Unit structure remains under-resourced and is heavily reliant on the Business Manager's personal commitment. In my view, this presents a sustainability risk to the ongoing effectiveness of the Partnership and should be considered a priority for review.

Voice of the Child and Family

Over the past 12 months, the Partnership has continued to prioritise hearing and acting on the voices of children and parents. There are positive examples of how the Safeguarding Effectiveness Group (SEG) has promoted this work, with children's views and experiences being reflected in several pieces of work presented to the SEG during the year.

Ensuring that the voice of the child and family remains central must continue to be a core focus for the Partnership. Embedding their perspectives in all aspects of safeguarding activity is essential if services are to be responsive, effective, and truly child centred.

Strategic Alignment

The Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP) recognises the importance of alignment across Community Safety, Adult Safeguarding, and children's services. The continued development of the Strategic Partnership Alignment Group has strengthened opportunities for system leaders to connect, reduce duplication, and streamline workstreams where appropriate.

Key areas such as Transitional Safeguarding, Domestic Abuse, and criminal exploitation (including cuckooing) demonstrate the necessity of working across business areas and avoiding siloed approaches. Over the past 12 months, the Group has agreed new Terms of Reference and developed a work plan, with the Locality Board now joining as an additional partner, further reinforcing collaborative leadership.

Raising the Profile of Education

Working Together requires Safeguarding Children Partners to strengthen the engagement and profile of education colleagues and to demonstrate the impact of this work. Over the past 12 months, activity in this area has been very positive.

The co-produced Education Working Agreement has been signed up to across the sector and recognised as an example of *good practice* by the Department for Education and regional colleagues. Building on this, education leads have established an Education Collaborative with a clear focus on strengthening safeguarding arrangements within schools and improving the interface with key safeguarding partners.

This represents a significant step change for the Partnership and provides strong evidence of progress in meeting the expectations of *Working Together* guidance.

BSCP Assurance Culture

The Partnership continues its development journey, moving from a focus on completing large volumes of 'activity' to strengthening its assurance function. While this report demonstrates the breadth of work undertaken over the past year, the priority must now be to evidence the *impact* of this activity and whether it is making a tangible difference for children and families.

The continued development of the Safeguarding Effectiveness Framework (SEG) has been an important step in supporting this cultural shift. It provides a structure for understanding outcomes, identifying risks, and setting priorities based on evidence rather than process. This work must continue if the Partnership is to develop a robust evidence base for decision-making.

I am beginning to see encouraging signs of the Partnership becoming more confident in seeking assurance and providing constructive challenge, both in governance meetings and operational practice. A strong example is the work of the Child Exploitation Group, which is developing innovative approaches to strengthen understanding of threat and improve wider system responses.

The opportunity now is to embed an intelligence-led approach to the Partnership's business, ensuring decisions and priorities are consistently informed by high-quality analysis and evidence.

Early Help

The Partnership continues to play a vital role in strengthening and challenging Bolton's Early Help offer. Areas for development highlighted in the last ILACS inspection report remain a priority, alongside issues raised by frontline practitioners, partners, and system leaders. The Early Help offer must provide timely and effective support to children and families to reduce the risk of escalation into crisis. Over the coming year, the Partnership will support the delivery of necessary improvements, while also holding statutory partners and relevant agencies to account to ensure progress is made and sustained. This remains a key area of work for all partners and should remain a focus for future scrutiny.

Conclusion

Safeguarding arrangements within BSCP remain strong, supported by a high level of scrutiny and a clear commitment to improvement. The Partnership's ambition to strengthen assurance and develop a more intelligence-led approach to its work is to be commended. Multi-agency working continues to be active, well led, and focused on achieving positive outcomes. The ongoing collaborative commitment, shared vision, and determination across partners will further enhance the effectiveness of safeguarding in Bolton. Independent scrutiny will continue to drive continuous improvement, ensuring that safeguarding arrangements deliver effectively for children, families, and practitioners

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Neil Smith
BSCP Independent Scrutineer



Priorities 2025-2026

This section of the annual report highlights the priorities for 2024-2025.

Priorities 2025-2026

It can be seen from the 2024-2025 safeguarding partnership annual report that progress has been made in understanding what works well in local safeguarding arrangements, where improvement is needed and how the partnership is leading improvement and/or offering challenge across the system.

Moving into 2025-2026 will present further challenge to all, not least with the implementation of reforms outlined in the Children's Well-being and Schools Bill and the Family First Partnership Programme. The statutory safeguarding partners recognise through their work on reviews, audits and stakeholder engagement that keeping children safe is as complex as ever. The impact of the rising costs on local families continues, coupled with the complexity of family life, our changing Bolton community, the increasing demand for help and support across the continuum of need and pressures on resources all add to this challenging landscape. There is also a need to acknowledge that all partners in the safeguarding system are experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining their workforce, and ensuring they have the right skills, knowledge and support to keep children safe .

It is within this context that the priorities for 2025-2026 are set as follows:-

- **Effective Implementation of Safeguarding Children Reform;** The Safeguarding Partnership will have a key role in contributing to and assuring the effective implementation of the Families First Partnership. This will include revision of the local threshold document (Bolton Framework for Action), review of the Integrated Front Door and implementation of the multi-agency safeguarding teams
- **Tackling Child Neglect/Thriving Children;** Neglect continues to be an area of challenge and while some improvements have been evidenced, more is needed to ensure that we recognise the early signs and respond using a family focused approach. As we move to a new approach through Families First the partnership will be seeking assurance on how this is being developed and addressing our approach to building on strengths and opportunities.
- **Exploitation and Extra-familial Harm;** As the report evidences a lot has been achieved in the last twelve months with regards to our systems and processes. However, as the national agenda unfolds, it will be important for Bolton that this area of practice remains a priority for leaders and practitioners alike.
- **Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment;** Child sexual abuse in the family environment is a hidden but deeply harmful issue. The complexities of this area of child abuse were highlighted in the National Panel's report and in our local research with practitioners. Safeguarding partners must prioritise this area to ensure early identification, effective intervention, and long-term support for victims. A coordinated, trauma-informed, and child-centred approach is essential to protect children and prevent future harm.

For further information about the arrangements, share your experiences of safeguarding in Bolton, give your views on the report or get involved in the work we do, contact: -

Phone: **01204 337479**

Email: boltonsafeguardingchildren@bolton.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk/>

This document is available in alternative formats, please contact 01204 337974 to request a copy.



Are you worried about a child?

If you're worried about the safety and wellbeing of a child, it's important to take action.

To discuss your concerns, contact a member of our team on 01204 331500 or visit

<https://www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk/worried-child> .