Keeping Children Safe

Annual Report

April 2025–March 2026

KEEPING BRISTOL SAFE PARTNERSHIP



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1. Safeguarding Partners' reflections on this reporting period

We are pleased to present the Keeping Children Safe Annual Report covering the 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. This is produced on behalf of the Partnership by the Bristol multi-agency safeguarding Delegated Safeguarding Partners.

During the year, the Partnership has prepared for changes to statutory guidance and the national Families First reforms, strengthening partnership arrangements and laying the groundwork for implementation in 2026/27.

The work undertaken this year is informed by key strategies and partnerships. These are:

- The Belonging and Thriving Strategy 2025-30 is our partnership strategy for children and young people, with a focus on data, cultural humility and young people's voices; it is the overarching strategy for the Partnership
- The Bristol Harm outside the Home Strategy 2025-2030, delivered and overseen by Prevention of Serious Violence Board
- The Prevention and Early Help Strategy for Children and Families and The Bristol Best Start in Life Plan 2025–2030, informing the work of Early Help Board
- The Bristol SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2028, delivered with embedded partnership governance

The Bristol Future Strategy provides a road map across the Partnership to break the links between deprivation and attainment. The Strategy has been refreshed with buy in and early impact from education leaders evident.

This annual report provides a summary of our collective achievements as safeguarding partners, an analysis of the impact our work has had for children and families and notes areas for development that require further work to strengthen our multi-agency safeguarding practice and our local arrangements.

As a Partnership we were delighted to see positive feedback from Ofsted in the December 2025 ILACS Focused Visit. This evaluation of child in need, child protection planning and private fostering arrangements for children concluded that positive change was being secured for children, and that children were at the heart of Council working. This positive outcome is supported by strong multi-agency partnerships at all levels.

The Partnership has completed four Rapid Reviews in this reporting period. None have progressed to a Child Safeguarding Practice Review. Three of the Rapid Reviews have been in respect of adolescents, and including themes of serious youth violence, child sexual exploitation and grooming gangs, and hidden pregnancy.

The fourth Rapid Review was in respect of serious sexual offences within a regulated setting.

There has been significant learning on identified themes for the Rapid Reviews including cultural humility, anti-racist practice, mental health and capacity, educational inclusion, and partnership responses to harm outside the home.

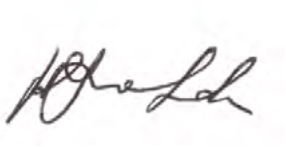
Key changes resulting from these Reviews include re-establishing the Education Reference Group to strengthen links with education partners and repositioning the Preventing Exploitation and Serious Violence Board under the Keeping Children Safe Board for clearer governance and reduced duplication. The learning has informed the development of the Harm Outside the Home Strategy through the Preventing Exploitation and Serious Violence Board which has led to the development of our extra-familial harm services in response to serious youth violence.

The three Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership (KBSP) Board responsibilities (Keeping Children Safe, Keeping Adults Safe and Keeping Communities Safe) have been strengthened, with Terms of References reviewed, updated and agreed.

Good progress has been made on establishing the Keeping Children Safe multi-agency performance dashboard requirements and process agreed. We anticipate that this will support the re-establishment of the Quality Assurance, Performance and Improvement Subgroup from Q2 26/27. It is also anticipated that 26/27 will see the Youth Justice Partnership Board integrated into the KBSP alliance.

We have continued to be supported by our Independent Scrutineer, Sally Rowe who has provided strong scrutiny through examination of practice and at strategic level. We are grateful for the support and robust challenge that she has given to us as Delegated Safeguarding Partners and to the wider Partnership again this year.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all our front-line practitioners and managers, who work tirelessly to improve outcomes for children and families. We appreciate their skilled and committed work to keep children safe in Bristol.



Hannah Woodhouse
Director,
Children and Education
Bristol City Council



Ed Yaxley
Chief Superintendent,
Avon and Somerset Police



Michael Richardson
Director of Nursing and Quality/Deputy Chief Nursing Officer

2. About Bristol

Bristol is the largest city in the South West and one of the UK's 11 Core Cities. The city's population is increasingly diverse, with residents representing at least 45 religions, 187 countries of birth, and 91 main languages.

According to the 2021 census, 84% of Bristol's population is white, 6% black, and 5.5% Asian. Bristol is a welcoming city for refugees, working closely with the Home Office and local partners to ensure their safety and support.



Bristol had the fastest growing population of all the Core Cities in England and Wales over the last decade:

- Bristol has a relatively young age profile with more children aged 0-15 than people aged 65 and over
- The population of Bristol has become increasingly diverse, and some local communities have changed significantly
- Bristol has 41 areas in the most deprived 10% in England, including 3 in the most deprived 1%. Over 70,000 people in Bristol live in the 10% most deprived areas in England, including 18,900 children

If Bristol's children and young people were 100 people...

73 would be white and **27** would be from global majority backgrounds.

22 would have a first language other than English.

29 would be eligible for Free School Meals.

16 would be receiving Special Educational Needs (SEN) support and **5** would have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan.

22 would live in a relative low-income household.

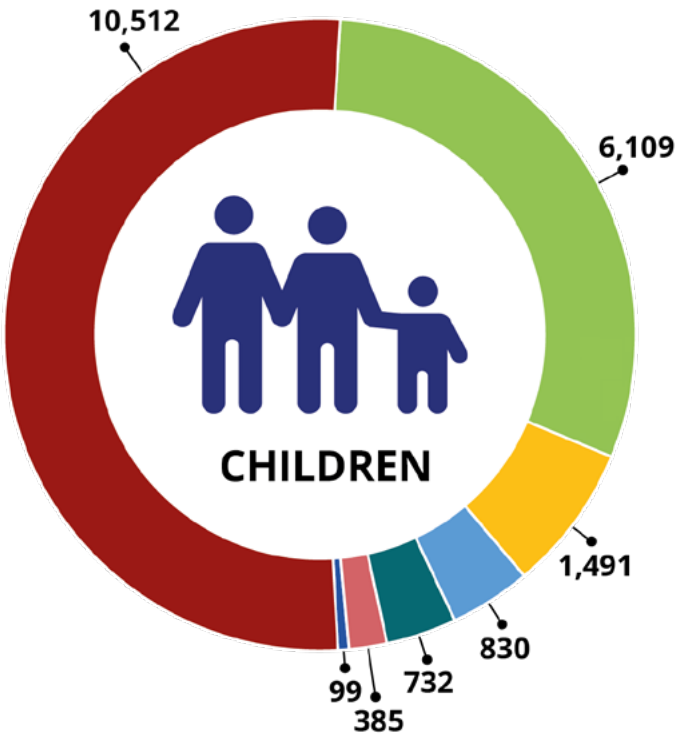
1 would be in care.

9 who live in the most deprived areas of Bristol would be born with low birth weight (compared to **4** in the least deprived areas of Bristol).

20 would be estimated to live in a household experiencing drug or alcohol abuse, domestic abuse or mental health problems.

8 households would be experiencing moderate food insecurity, and **4** would be experiencing severe food insecurity.

8 would have mothers who smoked during pregnancy.



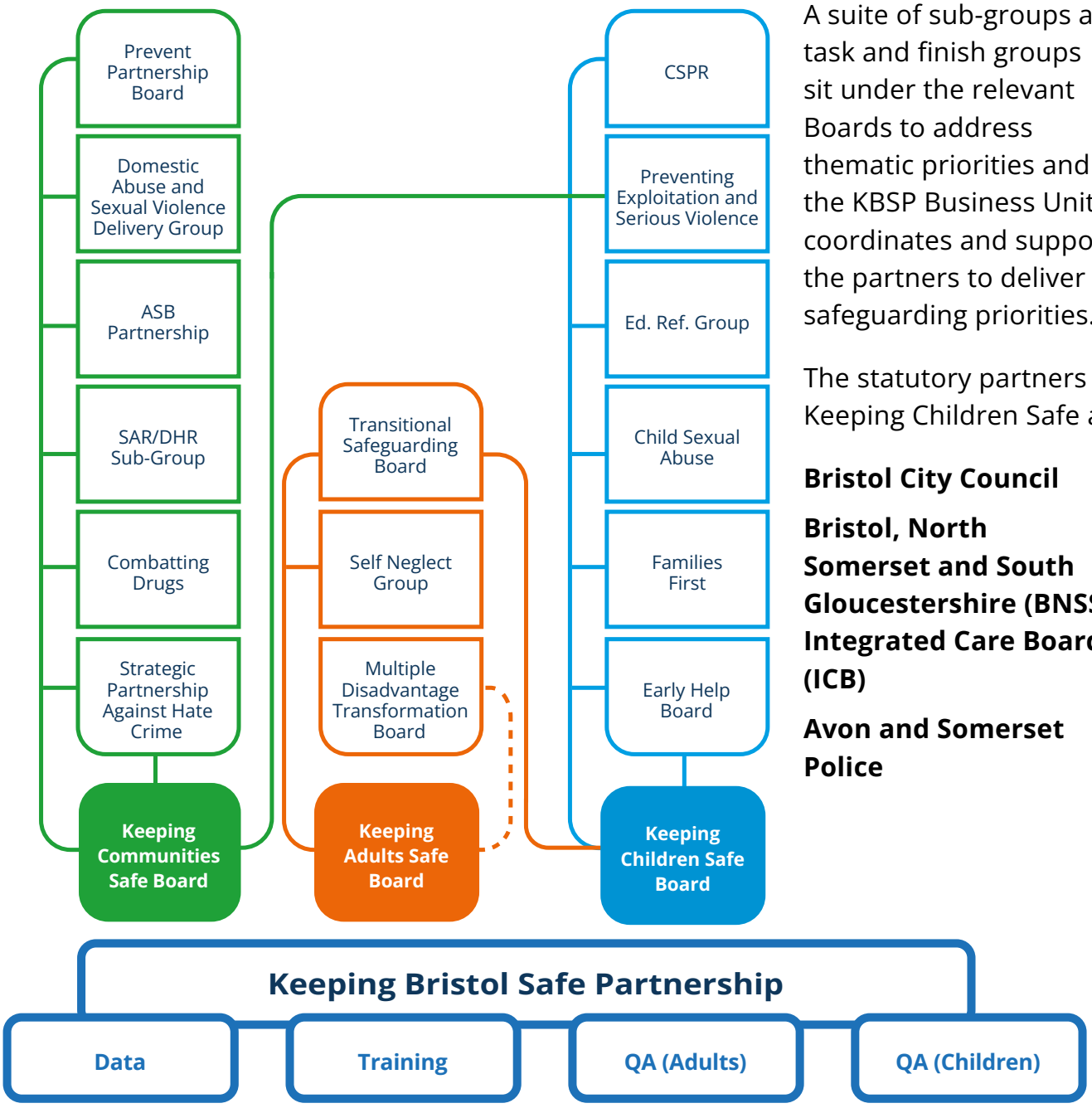
A snapshot of children who are supported by our services - April 2026

- **10,512** children in Bristol schools receiving SEN Support
- **6,109** children and young people with SEND who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- **1,491** children in need
- **830** children in care, including **64** children seeking asylum
- **732** children receiving family help within neighbourhoods
- **385** children the subject of a Child Protection Plan
- **99** children supported by the Youth Justice service

3. Introduction to Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership

The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership is an established and sustained alliance of the key safeguarding and community safety boards. This integrated model reflects Bristol's continued commitment to a person-centred, place-based approach to safeguarding. It enables joined-up responses to complex safeguarding issues such as transitional safeguarding and domestic abuse, and extra-familial harm.

The KBSP context



A suite of sub-groups and task and finish groups sit under the relevant Boards to address thematic priorities and the KBSP Business Unit coordinates and supports the partners to deliver the safeguarding priorities.

The statutory partners of Keeping Children Safe are:

Bristol City Council

Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Avon and Somerset Police

The group is also made up of members from other groups that work directly in the community including other representatives from health, Avon Fire and Rescue Service, Probation Service and the voluntary sector.

Work continues, to improve relationships across the Partnership with education colleagues, particularly multi-academy trusts. The reinstatement of the Education Reference Group has given a place for educators to collaborate, share information and raise concerns from within the sector.

The KBSP works with neighbouring safeguarding Partnerships to promote a joined-up approach to safeguarding. This includes participation in cross-boundary groups and initiatives, helping to ensure consistent responses to key safeguarding issues such as child exploitation and serious violence. To further strengthen multi-agency collaboration across the Partnership, the KBSP created a Partnership wide Information Sharing Agreement: Tier 1 for overall safeguarding and Tier 2 for Preventing Crime and Disorder, meaning that police information can be included more easily across all aspects of safeguarding.



Keeping Children Safe is responsible for ensuring that local organisations work together effectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people through our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. Its key responsibilities include:

- Coordinating safeguarding work between agencies such as local authorities, police, health services, schools, and voluntary organisations.
- Monitoring and evaluating how well agencies protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- Developing and reviewing local safeguarding policies, procedures, and protocols.
- Promoting information sharing and effective multi-agency working.
- Identifying safeguarding risks and emerging issues within the community.
- Leading reviews of serious safeguarding incidents to identify lessons learned and improve practice.
- Supporting and overseeing safeguarding training and continuous improvement across partner organisations

The KBSP Business Unit

The Business Unit plays a vital behind-the-scenes role in supporting the partnership by helping to manage and co-ordinate the work of the safeguarding boards (Adults and Children), and the Community Safety Partnership, and their sub-groups. The Business Unit is funded through contributions from the statutory safeguarding and community safety partners. Funding is allocated annually and this is the income and expenditure for 25/26:



Income	Amount
Police	£97,461
ICB	£92,783
Local Authority	£283,642
Probation	£5,284
Avon Fire and Rescue (Statutory Review Contribution)	£5,000
Training Revenue	£75,046
Total	**£559,216**

Expenditure	Amount
Salaries	£394,688
Running Costs	£32,383
Statutory Reviews	£56,901
Scrutiny/Consultancy	£75,244
Total	**£559,216**

4. Achievement and impact on priorities

The Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership: Strategic Plan 2022-2026 focused on improving information sharing, embedding lived experience in decision making, strengthening responses to serious violence, transitional safeguarding, and enhancing education sector involvement in safeguarding. The activity of the Partnership including the subgroup structure has been informed by these strategic priorities.

Performance and data – what it tells us about the effectiveness of the Partnership

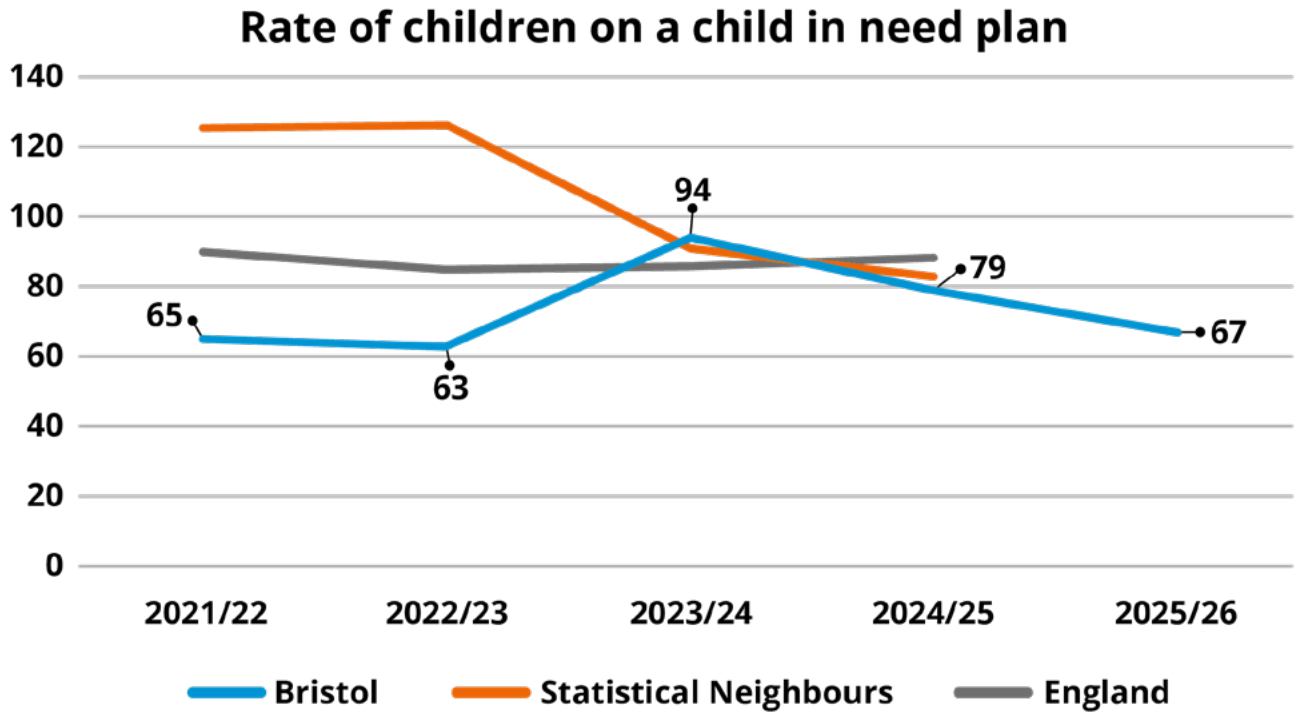
The effectiveness of multi-agency systems and practice is indicated by key performance data. Through this reporting period, the majority of key system indicators show an improved position from previous years. This includes:

- Rates of re-referrals (22% 25/26 v 23% 24/25), are moving steadily in the right direction, indicating further development of multi-agency understanding of application of threshold so that children get the right help at the right time.
- Good short- and long- term stability and outcomes for children in care, maintaining top quartile performance in relation to other local authorities, indicates effective multi-agency support to our most vulnerable children.

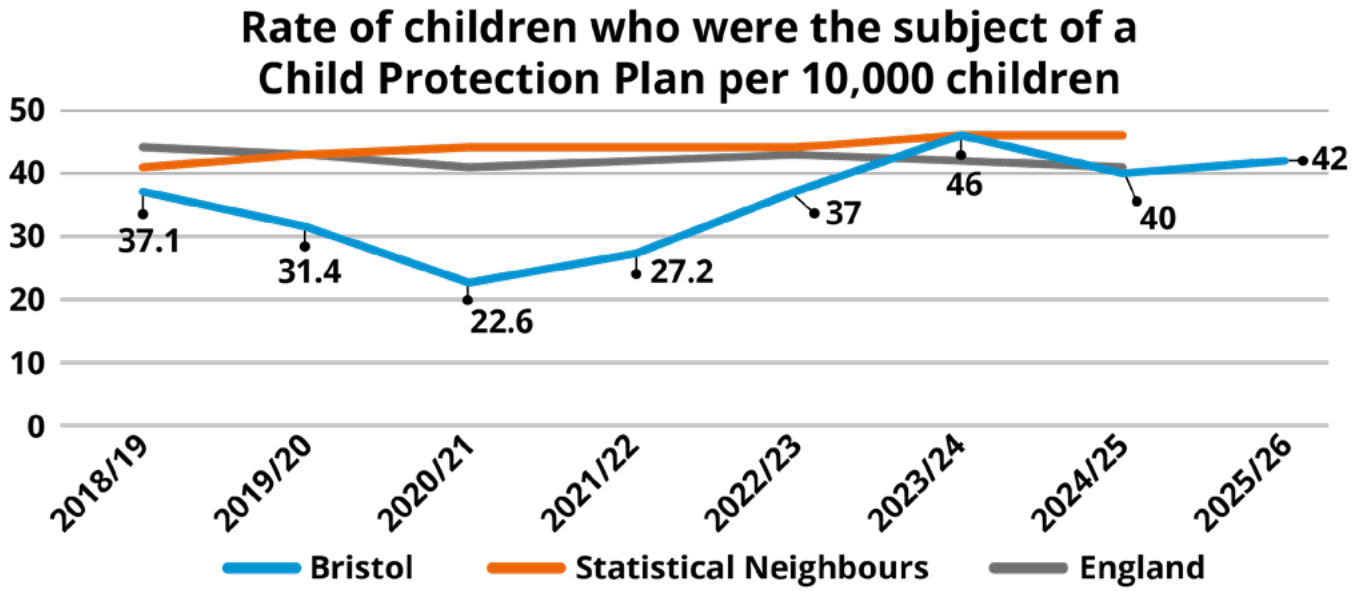
Following Ofsted's Focused Visit in February 2025, multi-agency partners have worked at pace to implement service improvements in the Front Door, delivering improved decision timeliness and increased use of multi-agency safeguarding checks for children. Improvement work in the Front Door and across the Partnership is ongoing, and these indicators of improvement will be monitored over time to ensure sustainability.

There has been a slight decline in overall contact numbers since changes to referral pathways were implemented in the Front Door in July 2025. There has also been a 5% increase in contact to referral conversion rate since these changes, across all referring agencies. These developments indicate increased consistency in application of thresholds and in turn increased efficiency so that services are provided to those in most need. An increasing proportion of Harm Outside the Home contacts is resulting in a referral to Children's Social Care, indicating greater knowledge and understanding of this key area of safeguarding by the partnership, in Bristol.

Through investment in early intervention and by meeting need at the earliest point, the Partnership strives to support children and families on a voluntary basis. Consequently, the rate of Bristol children assessed and supported by statutory intervention remains lower than our statistical neighbours. There continue to be low rates of children with a Child in Need Plan.



The rate of Child Protection plans has reduced and remained stable throughout 2025, and in line with England and statistical neighbour averages. A recent review attributes this reduction to a shift toward relationship-based practice, reducing reliance on procedural mechanisms to manage risk.



Partnership Priorities and Impact - Subgroup work and achievements

The Child Sexual Abuse Group

The multi-agency partnership in Bristol has demonstrated long-standing strategic oversight of child sexual abuse, with the Child Sexual Abuse Pathway Project Steering Group actively leading this work since 2021. Independent scrutiny, audits, practitioner engagement, and a recent rapid review have highlighted strengths and fed into areas of development. There has been significant investment in workforce development via training and regional collaboration. We have seen a notable rise in Child Sexual Abuse identification in Bristol in 2025/26 that is now above the national average (5% of all children subject to child protection planning, above the national average of 4%). This is a positive position, indicating greater knowledge and confidence across the system in this commonly hidden but profoundly damaging type of abuse.

However, use of the CSA pathway was not consistently evidenced in audited cases and governance and training needs to be improved. The CSA group will be overseeing the work necessary to improve this.

Over the course of 2026 the Child Sexual Abuse Group, supported by Keeping Children Safe, is focusing on embedding consistent identification and recording, expanding practitioner training, refining multi-agency coordination, and strengthening support for parents and carers of children who have experienced sexual abuse.

To inform future improvements, the group will engage key stakeholders across the system to identify gaps in current practice and insights from this engagement will shape a whole partnership learning event planned for 26/27.

The Families First Partnership Group

Working Together 2026 enables Local Authorities to utilise alternatively qualified practitioners (non-social workers) in assessment and case holding roles for child in need work under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. In Bristol, these roles are called Child in Need Keyworkers. We now have 27 Child in Need Keyworkers and 46.5 Family Help Keyworkers working with children and families accessing Targeted Support. The additional staffing has led to lower average numbers of children per social worker, supporting good practice.

The Families First Partnership Group ensures multi-agency consultation and collaboration to deliver on the wider Families First Transformation Programme which has brought significant investment and expansion to services available to children and families, and realignment of how services will work across the continuum of need.

We continue to carry out deep dives into children allocated to Child in Need Keyworkers and Family Help Keyworkers to ensure appropriate allocation and identify strengths or areas for development. Quality assurance activity in October 2025 and again in February 2026 confirmed that threshold application was consistent and that children and families are being

supported at the appropriate level in line with the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership Effective Support Guidance, as reflected in findings from Ofsted's Focused Visit, December 2025.

The Families First Partnership Group is overseeing the transformation programme for 2026/27, including the embedding of Family Group Decision Making and implementing Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams.

Preventing Exploitation and Serious Violence Board

Addressing Harm Outside of the Home (HOtH) to protect children is a priority for the Partnership. The Thematic Child Safeguarding Practice Review into Serious Youth Violence commissioned following the tragic deaths of 2024 and the near fatal stabbing of another young person was published on 11th September 2025. The Partnership has shared a public facing action plan in response to the recommendations and the Partnership has produced a joint statement to the review and findings.

This has resulted in significant development and improvement activity in our responses to children at risk of all forms of HOtH over the last 12 months. This has involved:

- Development and publication of Bristol's partnership Harm Outside the Home Strategy, with a defined action plan to prevent and respond to harm, overseen by the KBSP Preventing Exploitation and Serious Violence Board.
- Embedding of the Safer Connections team dedicated to improving consistency and quality of responses to children impacted by, or at risk of, HOtH.
- Enhanced dedicated resource to support the partnership and development of responses to this form of harm within communities, places and spaces.
- Embedding the targeted Connecting Families team, supporting children aged 11+ to remain in the care of their family and network – recognising that children in care are disproportionately impacted by HOtH.
- Implementation of new Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) processes, including daily and weekly intelligence briefings with police, and including colleagues from education and the Youth Justice Service.
- Enhanced oversight and scrutiny of risk management of children going missing.

Safer Connections, established since June 2025 following the transformation of the previous Safer Options team, supports the service-wide response for children at risk of/experiencing Harm Outside the Home (HOtH) and Serious Youth Violence (SYV). The team is comprised of two complementary and interlinked arms:

- The 'children's' arm is responsible for overseeing and delivering the team's direct intervention with children and supporting the practice and skills of the wider service to ensure high quality, responsive and timely support for all children at risk of experiencing HOtH.
- The 'partnership' arm is responsible for developing and delivering our contextual safeguarding approach, providing training to the wider service and partners, and facilitating and supporting a joined-up multi-agency approach amongst statutory and non-statutory partners.

Quality Assurance activity of HOtH/ SYV front door contacts resulting in no further action from children's social care is highlighting improved consistency and proportionality in decision making. MACE structures are now embedded with good partnership engagement and improved information sharing. Safer Connections-led meetings to support social work teams and professional networks focus on diversionary intervention with children at risk of HOtH and activity that can take place to disrupt the harm they are experiencing.

A Child Exploitation app is giving better oversight of the profile of children being exploited. Safer Connections has received positive feedback from partners – that it is making a difference to the service provided to children and families and difference to the lives of children by bringing expertise and focus to responding to HoTH.
The Ofsted Focused Visit in December 2025 noted the positive impact of our improved HOtH arrangements for children.

We have seen improved identification and statutory responses to children at risk of exploitation and serious youth violence since the inception of Safer Connections, reflected across the system. This has involved:

- Increase in referral progression has resulted in more HOtH assessments being undertaken in 2025/26: 23% increase in assessments in Q1-3 compared to period in previous year.
- Increase in assessments has resulted in more HOtH strategy discussions being undertaken in 2025/26: 29% increase in Q1-3 compared to previous year.
- Increase in strategy discussions has led to an increase in child protection conferences: 147% increase in ICPCs in Q1-3 compared to previous year, acknowledging that these numbers are comparatively small.
- Sustained increase in number of children benefitting from MASH checks, meaning that more children referred to the Front Door benefited from multi-agency safeguarding checks.
- Sustained increase in timeliness and uptake of Missing Return Conversations
- The Partnership has established a clear plan of next steps for 26/27 to support the progress secured in 25/26:
- Development of a service-wide quality assurance plan to support a consistent approach to HOtH and serious youth violence, and identify areas of development
- Development of the Safer Connections workplan to provide a clear offer to the wider service with additionally clear routes of referral
- Roll out a regular training offer around HOtH and serious youth violence available to partners through the KBSP with a bespoke offer to social care teams and foster carers and SGO carers
- Development of a prevention panel pathway
- Further strengthen relationships with community organisations to ensure they are interlinked with frameworks
- Further develop data collection and reporting to better monitor impact

The Transitional Safeguarding Subgroup

The Transitional Safeguarding Subgroup has met three times during the reporting period. Following the Partnership Conference in January 2025 which had a focus and keynote speech around Transitional Safeguarding, recruitment to the Subgroup increased with high engagement and interest is addressing this topic for young people in Bristol. A change of chairing arrangements has brought new discussion and direction to the group and activity completed by its members

The Subgroup has created Transitional Safeguarding Principles. These focus on the needs rather than solely eligibility, of children and young people moving into adulthood (up to 25 years). The aim is for Partners to increase their knowledge of support options available to ensure young people are introduced to the right services at the right time and minimise young people being turned away from services and opportunities for help and support.

The group has also started looking at a gap analysis across the system and agree on collective work to ensure better co-ordination across the partnership, including working alongside Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) and MASH to identify where the areas of development lie.

The Early Help Board

In Bristol we always look to meet the child, young person and family's needs at the earliest possible point, working in a consent-led way with children and families to help them thrive and prevent their needs escalating. Our guidance Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership: Effective Support for Children and Families in Bristol sets out our locally agreed Continuum of Need which illustrates the support that a child and family can expect to receive at varying levels of need.

We are pleased to have launched our Prevention and Early Help Strategy for Children and Families, overseen by the Early Help Board and aligning with the Belonging and Thriving Partnership Strategy.

The material impact of a clear and shared Partnership vision is evidenced through slowing rates of re-referrals to Children's Services and reducing rates of children subject to Child Protection and Child in Need Plans.



Rapid Review/Child Safeguarding Practice Review Subgroup

The Rapid Review/Child Safeguarding Practice Review Subgroup ensures effective oversight and progression of the actions and learning from Partnership statutory child safeguarding reviews and rapid reviews.

No Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews have been commissioned in this reporting period. Four Rapid Reviews have taken place, and a learning brief published in respect of the April 2025 Rapid Review. The group has also supported whole system learning from Operation Barracan. This is a complex, cross border police investigation and the associated multi-agency response to group-based Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) across five local authority areas in the Avon and Somerset region. It identified patterns consistent with national learning, including the exploitation of children experiencing vulnerability and grooming within perceived relationships. The review facilitated system focused discussion to identify key themes, potential pressures, strengths in practice and areas for further learning. A regional multi-agency learning event was facilitated in July 2025 to cascade and embed the learning, summarised here in the briefing published on the KBSP website: CSE learning brief.

The Operation Barracan action plan is overseen and driven by a multi-agency cross border working group chaired by the Bristol Director of Children Services. This work is ongoing.

The Subgroup is ensuring that learning and improvement actions from the three other Rapid Reviews, the details of which are not yet published, is informing multi-agency improvement activity which includes, for example, improvements to the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation system, improvements to information available to practitioners and addressing cross-border working challenges.

Education Reference Group

Despite not yet officially the named fourth safeguarding partner, there has been considerable work to improve relationships across the Partnership with education colleagues, particularly multi-academy trusts. With regular reporting into Keeping Children Safe, this group ensures that Education remains firmly on the agenda when working to effectively safeguard children.

The Education Reference Group is a multi-agency group that promotes safety and welfare of children in schools, colleges and other educational settings. It was reinstated to provide strategic direction and governance for safeguarding in education across Bristol. Chaired by a city school leader, the group brings together representatives from local authority education services and schools, meeting every half term to align its work with both local and national safeguarding priorities.

It plays a key role in ensuring that learning from statutory reviews is translated into practice and works closely with the Excellence in Schools initiative to strengthen safeguarding across all education phases and sectors. Alongside its core safeguarding remit, the group also supports wider efforts to break the link between disadvantage and educational attainment. Whilst not solely a safeguarding issue, this work is critical to keeping vulnerable children and young people engaged in education and supporting them to make sustained progress – keeping them safe, improving their long-term life chances, and reducing risk over time.

A key focus is ensuring that children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are fully included in education, with the right support in place to ensure every child has a place in learning and is safe. There is the opportunity to connect the work of the Education Reference Group to wider links within the Safeguarding in Education Team and the broader work across the Partnership. Strong connections have been made to establish a strong line of sight including links to the Harm Outside the Home strategy work, Youth Justice Partnership Board and the KBSP Steering Group.

Keeping Bristol Safe Training

The Partnership provides core and specialist training to statutory partners, voluntary organisations, education and early years settings. This includes alternative providers and independent schools.

Courses run/delegates trained in 2025-2026

Total number of delegates trained for main programme = **839**

Total number of courses run for main programme = **10**

- KBSP Working Together: Our Shared Responsibility = 344 delegates
- KBSP Advanced Child Protection for Safeguarding Leads and Specialist Practitioners = 199 delegates
- KBSP Safeguarding Adults Training = 79 delegates
- KBSP Reducing Parental Conflict = 52 delegates
- Graded Care Profile (GCP2) Training = 37 delegates
- KBSP Safer Recruitment Training = 33 delegates
- KBSP Child Protection for Managers = 30 delegates
- KBSP Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Training = 26 delegates
- KBSP Raising Awareness of Child Exploitation: A Contextual Safeguarding Approach = 23 delegates
- KBSP Child Sexual Abuse Safeguarding Training = 16 delegates

A total of **£58,075** has been spent on the main training programme and **£25,247** on commissioned training.

We implemented a new metric this financial year to determine learning gain for delegates attending the training. A new, rated scale from 1-10 was introduced in the pre- and post-course evaluations learning for delegates to rate their understanding and confidence against the key objectives of the courses before and after the training. This has shown that delegates on all courses have demonstrated learning gain. The **average learning gain** was **2.15 points** on the 10 point scale, with particularly strong learning gain for the Child Sexual Abuse Training (3.18) and Domestic Abuse Training (2.78).

Building on this success of the Child Sexual Abuse Training, we are now developing an enhanced regional training offer in partnership across Bristol, BANES, Somerset, South Gloucestershire, and North Somerset. This new programme, informed by the CSA Centre of Expertise, will provide a more consistent and accessible schedule of training. It is planned for launch in the autumn 2026 and will represent an exciting development, replacing the current training offer.

The Reducing Parental Conflict training has seen strong engagement, with good attendance reflecting clear interest and demand. Funding has been successfully secured to continue offering this training free of charge throughout the 2026–2027 financial year, supporting wider accessibility. Evaluation data for this training also highlights significant learning gains, demonstrating the programme's impact and confirming it as a valuable and well-established component of this year's training offer.



Building on this, and in consideration of learning from reviews and scrutiny work, the proposed developments for 2026 are:

Harmful Practices Safeguarding Training

KBSP Transitional Safeguarding Training

Cultural humility safeguarding training strategic model

Development of the domestic abuse training including specialist training for education settings

Together, these programmes will support earlier intervention, improve the recognition of abuse, exploitation and vulnerability, enhance support for young people transitioning into adulthood, and promote more culturally responsive and equitable practice. This will increase professional confidence, strengthen multi-agency working, improve engagement and trust with diverse communities, and ensure children and families receive timely, appropriate support, leading to improved safety, wellbeing and long-term outcomes.

5. Scrutiny and assurance

Scrutiny and assurance activities are carried out through a range of structured, multi-layered processes designed to monitor, challenge, and improve safeguarding practice across agencies. These include independent scrutiny reports, inspections, multi-agency case audits, thematic reviews and deep dives, data analysis and dashboards, Section 11 audits and peer reviews, reflective practice forums, and action plans with follow-ups on recommendations.

Audit of the multi-agency practice - child sexual abuse

During 2025/6 independent scrutiny focused on reviewing the effectiveness of Bristol's multi-agency response to child sexual abuse within the family context, with a particular focus on the work of the Child Sexual Abuse Pathway Project Group and the Joint Targeted Area Inspection framework.

The review drew on desktop analysis, partnership data, focus groups with social care, education, health, police and specialist voluntary sector colleagues, and a multi-agency audit of six children. It found evidence of strong early strategic intent, particularly through the development and launch of the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway and positive engagement with the National Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse. However, the scrutiny also identified that this early momentum had not translated consistently into operational practice across the partnership.

Key learning points included the need for clearer strategic ownership, completion or formal reconsideration of outstanding deliverables such as a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy and needs assessment, and a more focused and usable partnership data set. The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway was recognised as potentially valuable but was viewed by many practitioners as too lengthy or complex for routine use and there was no evidence of its use in audited cases. Despite getting good feedback, provision of training has been inconsistent and attendance had reduced, despite strong multi-agency appetite for shared learning. The scrutiny also highlighted the importance of the need for better use of existing expertise, particularly within health and specialist services and strengthening communication between agencies when risks remain live.

Overall, a strong foundation of commitment and specialist knowledge was found, but also a need clearer governance, refreshed training, improved data analysis and more consistent practice to strengthen outcomes for children and families affected by Child Sexual Abuse. These are all themes that the refreshed Child Sexual Abuse Group will focus on through 26/27.

Audit of multi-agency practice – children held in police custody

The Partnership has completed a multi-agency audit of Children Held in Custody Overnight. This audit reviewed six months of partner agency involvement with children and young people who had recently been detained overnight in police custody. Partners responded to reflective questions to assess practice, identify strengths, and highlight opportunities for improvement. The audit found that police procedures were applied appropriately, Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership (AWP) played a key role in supporting children and young people in custody, there were no significant delays in accessing appropriate adult support, and no concerns were identified regarding delays caused by the availability of suitable placements.

The group identified neurodiversity, children in care, and cultural competency as key themes emerging from the case reviews. The group discussed early plans for neurodiversity and trauma-informed training, with opportunities for support and collaboration across partner agencies. Partners agreed to hold further discussions to strengthen multi-agency working practices and information-sharing arrangements, particularly in relation to children in care. Avon and Somerset Police discussed plans to introduce a custody prompt to help identify and consider cultural competency needs, working alongside health and care partners. The audit highlighted the importance of ensuring representation from all relevant agencies at future reviews to support more comprehensive multi-agency discussions and learning.

S11 Audit

The children's Partnerships across the Avon & Somerset region concluded a three-year Section 11 audit cycle in 2025-26. A joint learning event brought together professionals from across the region to share good practice and learning identified through the audits.

Partnership themes and areas for improvement included confidence and consistency in the use of escalation processes, understanding of Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) procedures, dissemination of learning from Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) and Rapid Reviews, awareness of the multi-agency training offer, and use of the South-West Child Protection Procedures.

Bristol specific priorities identified through the audit included promoting the KBSP Escalation Policy and LADO processes, strengthening engagement with faith and sports settings, improving multi-agency information sharing, and ensuring learning from reviews is effectively embedded across partner agencies. Work to embed learning and recommendations continues ahead of the next audit cycle, starting in 2026.

Ofsted Focussed Visit

On 3rd and 4th December 2025, Ofsted inspectors reviewed Bristol's services for children in need and child protection planning. This visit was conducted under the ILACS framework. Key findings included:

- Committed and determined political and corporate leadership is bringing positive change to children in Bristol.
- Since the last inspection, additional investment in children's services and collaborative partnerships have reinforced the strategic ambition set out for children in the council's new corporate strategy and the wider city's 'One City Plan': for children to be at the heart of all council priorities and activity.
- Most children in need, and children who are the subject of a children protection plan, are receiving the right type of help at the right time, and benefit from well-supported multi-agency planning.
- The support provided to children who are living in private fostering arrangements has improved significantly.
- Led by a stable senior leadership team and mostly permanent workforce, the implementation of a new children's services model has enhanced social work practice and the support children receive.

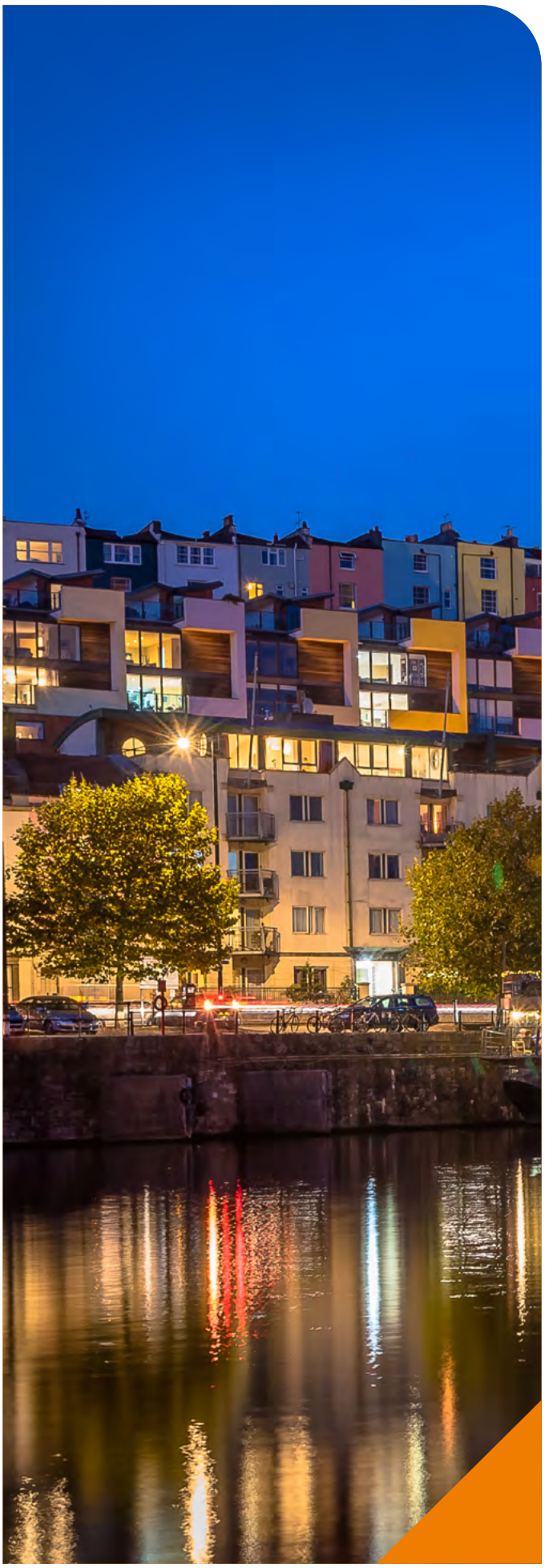


The main areas identified for improvement are the timeliness, consistency and quality of safety plans for children, the quality of recording of reflective discussions within supervisions records, and consistency of the local authority response to neglect. Improvement work is underway to develop these areas of practice and management, progress against which is being monitored via the Council's Children and Education Quality, Improvement and Performance Board. Progress so far includes:

- Timeliness, consistency and quality of safety plans for children
  - Reporting and quality assurance enabled through safety plan document category on LCS
  - Good practice examples have been collated on the Good Practice Library
  - Safety plans are a focus of monthly performance clinics

- Quality of recording of reflective discussions within supervisions records
  - A ‘Resources for Managers’ page has been created on Children’s Workforce Development Hub, providing a single accessible point of reference
  - In-house Systemic Management and Supervision course delivery since January 2026
  - Magic notes roll out from July 2026 to support recording
  - A thematic audit carried out in June 2026 evidenced an increased number of children’s records showing reflective discussions
- Consistency of our response to neglect
  - Bristol Practice Guidance: Identifying, Assessing and Responding to Indicators of Neglect has been developed and is being used by Neighbourhood teams to support safeguarding practice
  - Further partnership work is ongoing to strengthen our multi-agency approach

Next steps will include carrying out quality assurance activity to check the impact of these improvements.



6. Engaging children and young people to hear their views and experiences

Each of the statutory safeguarding partners brings the voice, views and lived experiences of children, young people, families and communities into the work of Keeping Children Safe through their own participation and engagement activities.

This insight helps partners to better understand emerging needs, barriers to accessing support and the effectiveness of safeguarding services. By sharing learning from participation activity across the partnership, agencies are able to shape priorities, inform service development, strengthen safeguarding practice and ensure that children, young people and families remain at the heart of decision-making and continuous improvement.

Throughout 2025/2026 the Shadow Board of children and young people has been involved in the following projects:

- The Domestic Abuse Strategy
- Reduced timetable guidance
- SEND Reform

In respect of SEND Reform, the Shadow Board met with Councillor Christine Townsend, the Children and Young People's Policy Committee chair to support with the development of the local SEND Reform Plan. The young people's voice has shaped the Partnership's plans for working with schools to improve inclusion, including the types of services and support that work with schools and settings to improve mainstream inclusion.

The Shadow Board met with the Children and Young People's lead in the Public Health Substance Use Team from Bristol City Council. Their views fed into the ambitions for the children and young people's drugs and alcohol strategy. This included thought provoking discussions around harm reduction. Discussions included:

- Barriers young people may face when engaging with service including concerns around being judged, peer pressure and worry about any repercussions.
- Knowledge of how to get help and what services are about there
- Anonymous support and information online
- Accessibility of local services
- Transition to adult services at 18
- The design of substance use services to ensure they are young person friendly. This includes how staff should act, inclusion of co production activities and messaging
- How schools approach education around drugs and alcohol

Progress on the Strategy is reviewed regularly by the Children and Young People subgroup of the Combatting Drugs Partnership against any gaps or emerging needs.

The Shadow Board met with Educational Psychologists to discuss how schools could implement guidance on reduced timetables. This discussion suggested that many young people throughout the city were not aware of what a reduced timetable was so further work was needed with both schools and young people to support understanding of why a reduced timetable may be put in place and what the child's rights are. As a result the draft guidance to schools now includes an information page specifically for children and young people. It is hoped this guidance will be able to be rolled out soon.



7. Looking ahead and areas for development in 26/27

Informed by Bristol's Belonging and Thriving Strategy 2025-2030 the 26/27 areas of focus are:

1. Thriving in Early Years

Partners will focus on giving children the best possible start in life through improved early help, family support, health interventions and access to services. A particular emphasis is placed on reducing inequalities that affect children before they reach school age.

2. Families Thrive in Their Communities

The strategy aims to strengthen family and community support networks, expand access to Family Hubs and ensure families can access help earlier. The goal is to build resilience within communities and prevent problems from escalating into crisis.

3. Thriving in Supportive and Inclusive Education

A major priority is improving educational outcomes and reducing the gap between children from more deprived and less deprived communities. Work will focus on inclusion, attendance, reducing persistent absence and ensuring schools are places where all children feel they belong.

4. Thriving into the Future

Partners want every young person to have positive opportunities after age 16, including education, employment and training pathways that support long-term success and independence.

5. Cross-cutting priorities

Across all priorities, three cross-cutting improvements will shape delivery in 2026/27.

These are:

- Putting the voices of children and families at the centre of decision-making
- Developing a culturally competent and trauma-informed workforce
- Improving data sharing between organisations.

To achieve this the partnership will be commissioning Cultural Humility Training, developing a strategic approach to fully embedding trauma-informed working across the partnership and implementing the new information sharing duty into practice.

Key outcomes include tackling health and education inequalities, increasing vaccination uptake, expanding Family Hub accessibility and ensuring better life chances for all children and young people in Bristol.

National Reforms

2026/27 will see the implementation of the national Families First Partnership Programme reforms. These significant changes will build on Bristol's established neighbourhood model and Harm Outside the Home approach, further strengthening early intervention, family-led support and integrated multi-agency working to improve outcomes for children and families across the city.

The reforms are designed to ensure that children and families receive seamless support at the right time, reducing the need for statutory intervention and improving outcomes enabling them to thrive. These principles are already central to Bristol's practice and many of the anticipated reforms have been implemented or are well established locally.

This includes strengthened Family Help arrangements, the introduction of Child in Need Key Workers, and the development of Family Network Meetings, all of which place children and families at the centre of decision-making and support.

The introduction of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) represents a new phase of this transformation and provides an opportunity to further strengthen partnership safeguarding arrangements across the city. Bristol's ambition is to establish a single integrated team structure that brings together professionals from social care, police, health, education, and other key safeguarding partners. Supported by effective information sharing, MACPTs will enable joint assessments, coordinated interventions and more timely decision-making around risk and protection.

For children and families, this will mean clearer communication, fewer repeated assessments and support that is better tailored to their strengths, needs, and circumstances. By bringing together different professional perspectives, the new arrangements will support a more holistic understanding of risk, improve the quality of safeguarding plans and interventions, and enable earlier identification and mitigation of emerging concerns.



As we move towards the statutory implementation deadlines, Bristol is well placed to deliver the reforms, having already established many of the foundations required for successful implementation. During 2026/27, the Keeping Children Safe Partnership will continue to build on this progress, further strengthening multi-agency safeguarding practice so that MACPTs are fully operational from the beginning of 2027/28.

Many of the vulnerabilities associated with youth offending, including exploitation, serious violence, substance misuse, school exclusion, poor mental health, and adverse childhood experiences, overlap significantly with safeguarding concerns. It is therefore planned for the Youth Justice Partnership Board to be integrated into the KBSP governance arrangements to bring greater strategic alignment, improved information sharing, and stronger joint accountability across agencies.

The safeguarding needs of children who are in contact with the youth justice system will be better able to be considered alongside wider partnership priorities, enabling a more coordinated response to prevention, early intervention, and protection.

Priorities from local learning and scrutiny activity

Transitional Safeguarding has been identified through a recent thematic review and an action plan will be developed to implement the agree actions through 26/27 with the support and oversight of the Transitional Safeguarding Board

A learning event into group-based Child Sexual Exploitation identified a number of actions to improve the partnership's response across the region. Implementation of this will continue including a regional conference to co-incide with CSE awareness day.

The partnership will work to ensure that we better understand and address dis-proportionality, particularly (but not only) in respect of CSE, including identification, responses and outcomes. The partnership will do this by ensuring key protected characteristics are secured and inform analysis in multi-agency data sets and reviews.



Several national enquiries will also provide focus for the partnership during 26/27. This includes:

Protecting All Vulnerable Babies Better – Published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, this national review examines how agencies identify and respond to risks affecting babies. Key themes include early identification, multi-agency assessment and planning, information sharing, cumulative harm and parental risk factors, support during pregnancy and infancy.

Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR) Panel Annual Report 2024-25 – Published in April 2026, this looks across national CSPR findings and highlights recuring themes. These include that babies under one are most vulnerable group, online harm is increasingly prevalent, information sharing, risk assessment and co-ordination of responses remain a challenge, and neglect, domestic abuse, mental illness and substance misuse frequently co-exist.

Southport Enquiry Phase 1 report – This requires safeguarding partnerships to strengthen multi-agency risk management, improve information sharing, ensure risks posed by people are included in assessment (as well as risks posed to), ensure online safety and harm reduction approaches are fully understood and implemented, and bolster responses to adolescents displaying fixation on violence (particularly alongside social isolation, concerning online behaviour and neurodiversity).



Changes to Working Together will focus on ensuring these are responded to and relevant changes implemented. Continued improvements to partnership quality assurance will help to underpin this, with the formation of a Quality Assurance Group. This group will look at local data and evidence from national and local review/ enquiries and use this to base audit and scrutiny activity upon. This will then provide a space for the follow up improvement actions to be held, monitored and driven forward.

The regional approach to s11 Audit activity will continue, with 26/27 to focus on obtaining returns from the relevant partners (as set out in Working Together 2026) which will then provide a basis for an action plan.

In summary, 26/27 looks likely to bring some significant, but necessary changes. With the shape of the partnership, it is well placed to respond effectively and deliver improvements for the children, families and communities of Bristol.

8. Reflections from the Independent Scrutineer

As Independent Scrutineer, I have continued to provide rigorous, constructive challenge and independent assurance to the Keeping Children Safe Partnership during this reporting period. My scrutiny has focused on the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, the quality and consistency of partnership learning, and the extent to which agreed strategic priorities are driving measurable improvements in frontline practice and outcomes for children, young people and families in Bristol.

The Partnership has demonstrated clear and important strengths this year. There is strong evidence of sustained commitment from statutory partners and wider agencies, continued investment in early help and family support, and a more coherent and purposeful focus on harm outside the home, serious youth violence, child sexual abuse, transitional safeguarding and educational inclusion. The positive findings from Ofsted's focused visit provide significant external assurance that improvement activity is beginning to translate into better practice, particularly in relation to children in need, child protection planning and private fostering arrangements.

I have also been encouraged by the Partnership's openness to learning from scrutiny, audit and review activity. The work undertaken in relation to child sexual abuse, children held in police custody overnight, Section 11 audit findings and rapid reviews has identified examples of effective practice, while also highlighting areas where greater consistency, pace and grip are required.

The strongest safeguarding partnerships are those that can hold assurance and challenge in balance: recognising progress where it is evident, while remaining alert to indicators that practice, systems and outcomes must continue to improve.

There are, however, important areas that require sustained focus in 2026/27. These include strengthening the use of partnership data to evidence impact more clearly, ensuring that learning from rapid reviews and national reviews is embedded consistently across frontline practice, improving the quality and consistency of multi-agency responses to child sexual abuse and harm outside the home, and developing Quality Assurance, Performance and Improvement arrangements that provide a clear and reliable line of sight from strategic priorities to children's lived experiences.



I note that 839 delegates accessed the main KBSP training programme across 10 courses during the year. This demonstrates valuable reach and continued commitment to workforce development. However, the pattern of attendance also indicates that some key safeguarding areas had comparatively low take-up, including child sexual abuse, child exploitation, domestic abuse, safer recruitment and child protection for managers. Given the significance of these themes within local scrutiny, audit findings and rapid review learning, increasing attendance, removing barriers to access and prioritising engagement in these areas should be a clear improvement priority for 2026/27.

The Partnership should also strengthen how it uses training data to understand which agencies and practitioner groups are engaging, where gaps remain, and whether learning is leading to improved confidence, stronger practice and better outcomes for children.

The voice and experience of children and young people must remain central to this work. The Shadow Board has provided valuable insight, and there is a clear opportunity to strengthen how children's views, particularly those of children who are seldom heard or who experience multiple forms of disadvantage, shape strategic decision-making, commissioning, service design and evaluation. This will be essential in ensuring that partnership activity is informed by lived experience and is responsive to the realities of children's lives.

Overall, I am assured that the Keeping Children Safe Partnership has continued to mature and strengthen during this reporting period. There is clear evidence of strategic grip, sustained partner commitment and meaningful progress against key safeguarding priorities.

The Partnership demonstrates a sound understanding of both its strengths and the areas where further development is required, and it has responded constructively to local scrutiny, audit findings and national learning. Stronger arrangements for assurance, quality improvement and accountability are now being developed, and these should provide a firmer basis for evidencing impact and driving sustained change.

The Partnership is well placed to continue improving safeguarding practice; however, during the next year the emphasis must be on maintaining momentum, using evidence more consistently to demonstrate impact, and ensuring that improvement activity and workforce development lead to a tangible difference in the safety, wellbeing and life chances of children and young people in Bristol.

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