

Safeguarding

Score: 3

3 - Evidence shows a good standard

What people expect

I feel safe and am supported to understand and manage any risks.

The local authority commitment

We work with people to understand what being safe means to them and work with our partners to develop the best way to achieve this. We concentrate on improving people's lives while protecting their right to live in safety, free from bullying, harassment, abuse, discrimination, avoidable harm and neglect. We make sure we share concerns quickly and appropriately.

Key findings for this quality statement

Safeguarding systems, processes and practices

The local authority worked in accordance with the Berkshire multi agency safeguarding policies and procedures. These were clearly documented and explained when and how to raise a safeguarding concern, and how these would be dealt with. Guidance for the public was available through the Local authority's and Bracknell Forest Safeguarding board's websites. This document gave a clear definition of safeguarding, the expectations given to providers, and the threshold at which a referral to the safeguarding team should be made. The local authority also had a provider concerns process to identify and manage themes, trends and potential organisational abuse. Organisational abuse is the inability to provide a good level of care to an individual or group of people in a care setting such as a hospital or care home, or in a person's own home if they receive care assistance there.

The local authority had a joint children's and adults safeguarding board with an independent chair. The Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board (BFSB) as currently configured was set up in 2019. The Board's strategic plan for 2023-26 outlined their approach as to "protect children and adults working in partnership with Frimley Health and Care Integrated Care System (ICS), Bracknell Forest Council and Thames Valley Police."

Both the Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board peer review report March 2023 and partners told us that the combined board enabled system/safeguarding leaders and practitioners to think in a more holistic approach. The review also recognised the all-age approach was helpful when developing responses for safeguarding issues which were not age specific, such as various forms of exploitation. Operational staff we spoke with were less aware of the impact of the joint board and did not reflect that they worked more holistically with families as a result.

Partners told us that there was a memorandum of understanding, including information sharing arrangements, between all agencies coming together operating at different levels which worked well at a strategic level. They also noted there was a healthy challenge amongst the partnerships on the board which allowed the airing of information that needed to be addressed, weighing up the information being received to strengthen the partnership going forward.

Responding to local safeguarding risks and issues

There was a clear understanding of the safeguarding risks and issues in the area. The local authority worked with safeguarding partners to reduce risks and to prevent abuse and neglect from occurring. Specific issues included the increase of hoarding and the risk of suicides, for which specific protocols and strategies were in place.

Lessons were learnt when people had experienced serious abuse or neglect and action was taken to reduce future risks and drive best practice.

There were 3 safeguarding adult reviews (SARs) between February 2022 and March 2024. Themes that came out of the review included safeguarding young people through transition and the impact of complex trauma on mental health, self-neglect or self-harm, substance misuse, domestic violence and confusion by professionals regarding consent. Recommendations were for agencies to review their guidance on professional curiosity, to support staff to understand mental capacity. The learning from all case reviews published by BFSB is shared by publication of the review reports on the Board's website, circulation of learning briefs, multi-agency webinars facilitated by the BFSB and other means. Staff told us that safeguarding was a standard agenda item on their team meeting agendas and a leader reported that specific safeguarding issues such as modern slavery, coercive control, human trafficking, honour-based violence had been the subject of training and other learning opportunities in 2023-24. Staff confirmed that there was a lot of training available, and they were supported to access it to meet learning needs. An annual training audit monitored uptake, alongside audits of practice and recording to identify the effectiveness of any learning undertaken.

More generally, according to Skills for Care Workforce Estimates: (ASC-WE October 23) fewer independent/local authority staff who might be involved in safeguarding work of staff had completed safeguarding adults training (25.42% as compared to the England average of 48.81%).

Responding to concerns and undertaking Section 42 enquiries

The local authority's policies and procedures were clear about what constituted a section 42 (s42) safeguarding enquiry. They operated a hub and spoke model. Concerns were responded to in the Hub and enquiries dispersed across adult social care to the best placed team and practitioner. Enquiries were undertaken by qualified social workers or senior non-social work qualified practitioners with appropriate training. Some completed joint enquiries with health professionals or providers.

All safeguarding planning meetings were chaired by experienced practitioners, which provided assurance about practice, supported consistency, and positively involved people and their families/advocates. This also enabled them to pick up themes and trends. This learning was cascaded through training or written briefings including to provider forums.

Safeguarding plans were put in place and actions taken to reduce future risks for individual people before safeguarding enquiries were closed. The policies and procedures followed by Bracknell Forest stated that before an enquiry was closed, relevant agencies should be informed of any outcomes from the enquiry when it was necessary to the ongoing safety of the person concerned.

Providers we spoke with told us they were unclear about what met the threshold for a safeguarding concern. Leaders and staff at the local authority told us they were unaware of this and noted that they provided guidance about their safeguarding policies through contract documentation and monitoring, and by providing both standard and bespoke training. Safeguarding was featured in provider forums, and providers were invited to attend safeguarding forums.

The Safeguarding Adults Collection (SAC August 2022) showed that in 2017, 300 concerns led to 95 s42 enquiries. This had trebled by 2022 to 945 concerns which led to 270 S42 enquiries. This was reflected in the Bracknell Forest Safeguarding Board report for 2022-3. Over this period an average of 686 concerns leading to 133 S42 enquiries. The percentage conversion in 2022/3 from concern to enquiry was 28.7%. This had increased significantly from the year before when only 12% of concerns were converted into enquiries. Staff told us that the earlier conversion figures were incorrect, due to a data collection issue. They reported no change in methodology except an online administrative change. They suggested that the conversion rate from concern to enquiry had not actually changed, although the number of concerns received had increased.

The local authority told us there were no safeguarding concerns awaiting initial review and no s42 enquiries awaiting allocation for enquiries to be made. Staff told us that staff shortages could however impact on completion times for safeguarding investigations.

Recommendations made following an audit completed in 2023 of children's and adult's services, saw changes to safeguarding forms and highlighted that the new Hub model had only just been implemented and therefore its effectiveness was not yet proven. Staff told us however that the Hub was improving consistency regarding practice, recording, decision making and understanding of themes and trends. The Safeguarding Working group provided oversight and coordination for all aspects of safeguarding work and acted as the link between the local authority and Safeguarding board.

The ASC-WE data (October 23) which showed that only 23.73% of independent/LA staff completed MCA DoLS training (TNV England Av 37.48%).

Bracknell Forest received 30 – 50 Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications monthly, At the time of our assessment there were 81 DoLS applications awaiting authorisation or review. As of January 2023, the maximum wait for an application to be assessed was 181 days, median 43 days. The target to review new requests was 3 working days with decisions made for urgent requests within 7 days and standard requests within 21 days. Delays were caused by staffing resources, allocation to Best Interest Assessors (BIAs) and Section 12 Doctor, delays in receiving completed assessments and delays in authorising. We were told that refresher training for BIAs had been postponed pending the implementation of Liberty Protection Safeguards, but as these new measures were on indefinite hold, the training would be reinstated.

Making safeguarding personal

The lack of a waiting list meant that safeguarding enquiries were carried out without delay. The importance of keeping the wishes and best interests of the person concerned at the centre was emphasised in policies and procedures, Delivery of this was monitored by lead safeguarding practitioners. Observed practice and audit records showed staff demonstrated a person-centred approach, but we were also told monitoring showed people's wishes and views were not consistently and clearly recorded. A partner noted that people's voice was a weakness and remained a constant item on the Safeguarding Board's agenda. There was an overall emphasis on the partners to assure the board that people's voices were being heard. They felt that the introduction of the Hub had increased the person-centred approach.

According to the Adult Social Care Survey (ASCS October 2022), 67.33% of people who use services felt safe and 89.11% of people who use services said that those services made them feel safe both of which were similar to the England average of 69.69% and 87.12% respectively. The Survey of Adult Carers in England (SACE June 2022) showed that carers in Bracknell Forest were slightly less likely to report they felt safe at 76.74% as compared to 80.51% across England.

The majority of people felt safe, and had the information they needed to understand safeguarding, what being safe meant to them, and how to raise concerns when they didn't feel safe or they had concerns about the safety of other people.

People could participate in the safeguarding process as much as they wanted to, and people could get support from an advocate if they wished to do so. People were supported to understand their rights, including their human rights, rights under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and their rights under the Equality Act 2010 and they were supported to make choices that balanced risks with positive choice and control in their lives. The SAC (August 2022) found that 82.35% of individuals lacking capacity were supported by advocate, family or friend which was similar to the England average of 83.12%.