

TITLE	Children's Services Strategy (2021-2024)
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 4 November 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Children's Services Strategy (2021-24) aims to deliver better outcomes for all children, young people and families in the Borough.

The vision of the Strategy is that Wokingham is a Borough in which all children and young people are safe and cared for; enjoy and achieve; are healthy and resilient; grow up ready for adulthood; and feel happy, hopeful and loved.

This vision contributes directly to the Wokingham Borough Community Vision that Wokingham is a great place to live, learn and grow, and a great place to do business, as well as the Council's Corporate Delivery Plan objectives – particularly those in relation to Enriching Lives, creating Safe, Strong Communities, Changing the Way We Work for You and Being the Best We Can Be.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members of the Committee:

Review and discuss the work completed to date on the new Children's Services Strategy (2021-24) and Action Plan

Provide feedback to officers prior to full implementation and publication of the Strategy and Action Plan

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Since the start of this financial year, work has been undertaken to refresh and update the Children's Services Strategy (2021-24) and develop a comprehensive Action Plan which sets out specific, measurable actions to achieve our strategic priorities. This Strategy builds on the previous Children's Services Strategy and aims to take the service to the next stage of its continuous improvement journey.

The focus of the Strategy is to improve outcomes for all children and young people in the Borough. The strategic Priorities and key actions are aligned with Wokingham's Community Vision and are designed to ensure that the Council and its strategic partners collaborate in putting children and young people at the heart of everything we do.

The purpose of this report is to provide Members of the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to review work completed to date on the Strategy and Action Plan and provide officers with any feedback ahead of formal approval, full implementation, and publication.

Background

Context

As a Council we want to ensure that Wokingham Borough is a great place for all children and young people to grow up.

Most children and young people in the Borough experience highly positive outcomes in relation to educational attainment, health and well-being, and successful transition to independent adulthood. In many cases the outcomes experienced by children and young people in Wokingham are better than the national average. The majority of children and young people in Wokingham have their needs met through universal services, for example through local schools, GPs and health services. They also benefit from easy access to a range of activities they can enjoy with their friends and families, through which they can continue to grow and develop.

When facing challenges or difficulties, most children, young people and families in Wokingham are able cope because they have the means to access the support they need relatively quickly.

However, for some children and young people in the Borough, there is a higher chance of poor outcomes because their circumstances mean they are exposed to higher levels of risk and are therefore more vulnerable. Universal services – whilst of crucial importance to these children and young people – often cannot meet all the needs of our more vulnerable children and young people. We want to ensure our more vulnerable and/or disadvantaged children and young people are supported to have every opportunity of achieving the same social, educational, health and economic outcomes as their peers. We are committed to helping our more vulnerable children and young people achieve personal growth, live happy and fulfilling lives, and feel hopeful and aspirational for their futures.

This Strategy sets out how we will drive the continuous improvement and transformation needed to deliver better outcomes for all our children, young people and their families. The actions to deliver our strategic priorities are designed to ensure that all children and young people have access to a good education, and are enabled to lead safe, happy, healthy lives.

This Strategy has been developed in exceptionally challenging circumstances. The combination of sustained pressure on public finances; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic both in terms of immediate impact and emerging pressures which set up challenges for the future; and changing legislation and expectations from Central Government; all give rise to extremely challenging conditions in which to achieve our ambitions for all children and young people in the Borough. The priorities and actions set out in this Strategy represent the best possible route to achieve our goals.

Analysis of Issues

Our Focus

In the light of the Context set out above, in addition to ensuring our universal offer is of an excellent standard, our Children's Services Strategy (2021-24) will focus on improving outcomes for children and young people who:

1. Are in care or leaving care
2. Have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)
3. Go missing and/or run away
4. Are young offenders
5. Have a child in need or child protection plan
6. Are living in low-income families
7. Are affected by domestic violence
8. Have disabilities and/or long-term health conditions
9. Are at risk of exploitation
10. Have parents with mental health needs
11. Are at risk of engaging in youth violence
12. Are homeless or in temporary housing
13. Have caring responsibilities
14. Are not in full time or mainstream education
15. Are not in education, employment or training (NEET)
16. Are vulnerable and have migrated to the Borough from outside the UK

In addition, there are some children and young people who do not appear vulnerable but who may not be coping as well as we think or whose circumstances are not secure; for these children and young people only small changes or challenges in life may make things difficult. Being aware of children and young people “on the edge” of vulnerability is important, particularly in the context of the pandemic. There is a growing body of evidence across the children’s system that the pandemic has heightened vulnerability, and generated increases in “hidden harm” (harm to children and young people which may not have been detected by services, for example as a result of the impact of pandemic-related restrictions on face-to-face services).

Our Strategy aims to address these sorts of challenges by developing and embedding innovative new models of delivery, which reflect best practice in the sector, and our own experiences of building and developing services which have proven to have positive impact on outcomes for children and young people.

Some key principles have informed our thinking around priorities for the Strategy, and the key actions we will take to achieve these. These are summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Principles which have shaped our Strategy

Principles	Description
Early Intervention and Prevention and Early Help	Early Help and Early Intervention and Prevention may be needed at any point in a child or young person’s life. It refers to interventions made early in a child’s life, as well as interventions early in the development of a problem. It can refer to support at an early stage to help families solve problems, or to reduce the impact of problems that have already emerged. Acting early and ensuring the right support is in place at the right time is a key principle which underpins our Strategy and the actions in our Action Plan.
Strengthening Inclusion	Taking an evidence-based and targeted approach to narrowing the gap in positive outcomes between vulnerable children and young people, and the average for the Borough. This can involve strengthening inclusion of children and young people with SEND in mainstream education; reducing school exclusions through provision of behavioural support; empowering and enabling vulnerable

	children and young people to remain at home rather than in the care system.
Focusing on Sufficiency and Managing Demand	Ensuring we manage demand for our services by investing in our preventative services, and ensuring we have sufficient provision in place to achieve this and provide the right kind of specialist support when this is essential in order to meet a child or young person's need.
Focusing on Quality and Raising Standards	Driving a culture of learning and constructive challenge, to raise standards across children's services. Ensuring the voice of the child and young person is heard and central to our approach to service development and continuous improvement.
Working Together to Focus on Outcomes	The Action Plan for the Children's Services Strategy is organised around Strategic Priorities which bring services across the Department together. The governance arrangements for delivery have been designed to facilitate cross-service working, and breaking down silos to genuinely put outcomes for children at the heart of everything we do. Also included in the Action Plan are actions we will take with our strategic partners (for example through the CYPP) to help ensure we take a "One Wokingham" approach to improving outcomes for all our children, young people and families.

Our Strategy

The Children's Services Strategy (2021-24), and the Action Plan to deliver it, is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Table 2 below summarises two of the key components of our Strategy: our Vision and our Values. Our Vision, which aligns with the Council's Vision for Wokingham as a great place to live, learn and grow and a great place to do business, defines our overarching ambition for children and young people in the Borough.

Our Values define the character of our service, and help establish the principles we apply to the planning and delivery of our services for children and young people, which in turn will help us ensure that we keep our focus on improving outcomes.

Table 2: Summary of Vision, Values and Priorities

Our Vision	Wokingham is a Borough in which all children and young people are safe and cared for, enjoy and achieve, are healthy and resilient, grow up ready for adulthood, and feel happy, hopeful and loved.
Our Values	<p>1. We focus on making a difference. We support children, young people and families on their journey and measure our success in terms of impact on outcomes.</p> <p>2. We aim high. We have high aspirations for every child and young person. We are ambitious for our services, and strive for excellence in everything we do.</p> <p>3. We are strategic, efficient and effective. We manage all our resources efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of our children, young people and families.</p>

	<p>4. We value our people. We highly value and support our children’s workforce. We support our people to excel, grow, and love their work.</p> <p>5. We drive partnership, collaboration and coproduction. We work in strategic partnership with professionals, children, young people and families to achieve our shared goal to improve outcomes.</p>
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Our Strategic Priorities and Business Areas Driving Delivery

Table 3 below summarises two other key components of our Strategy: our Strategic Priorities, and the Business Areas that will drive delivery of the Strategy. Further detail on the priorities – and the actions to deliver them – can be found in **Appendix 1**.

Table 3: Strategic Priorities and Business Areas driving delivery

Our Strategic Priorities	<p>SP1. Ensure we are designed to deliver excellent outcomes for all children, young people & families in Wokingham</p> <p>SP2. Excel in our practice, be known for the quality of our work, and perform to the highest standards</p> <p>SP3. Develop effective strategies which improve outcomes and deliver them in the most efficient way</p> <p>SP4. Recruit, develop and retain a high-performing children’s workforce</p> <p>SP5. Strengthen our partnerships, drive system leadership & put children at the heart of everything Wokingham does</p>
Our 4 Business Areas Driving Delivery	<p>Children’s Social Care and Early Help</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing the right type and amount of help at the right time, to support the most vulnerable children, young people and families • Driving an early intervention and prevention approach to anticipating and addressing needs • Strengthening resilience and well-being • Strengthening our support for vulnerable adolescents in the community • Strengthen our partnership arrangements to ensure children are safeguarded in their homes and in the wider community <p>Learning, Achievement and Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting children and young people to enjoy life and achieve their potential • Supporting the most vulnerable to achieve • Narrowing the gap in attainment outcomes • Supporting schools and building partnerships to drive attainment and independence • Driving inclusion and an inclusive approach to delivering better outcomes for all children and young people

	<p>Quality Assurance and Safeguarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop self-knowledge through quantitative and qualitative analysis • To put in place standards, systems and processes which provide a strong framework for continuous improvement • To produce accurate targeted data, effective analysis and evaluation of performance which supports management and practice across services for children • To embed a culture of challenge and improvement, where quality assurance is everyone’s business • To provide opportunities for learning and development to enable staff to make the most of their aptitudes and abilities (ASYEs – Managers) • To promote excellence of practice which results in the best possible outcomes for children and young people • To advance and enhance practice through the development of the Practice Model <p>Strategic and Operational Delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driving cross-council working to put children and young people at the heart of everything Wokingham does • Developing strategies and programmes to drive excellence & continuous improvement • Driving commercial excellence, effective financial management & Value for Money • Engaging strategically and proactively with peers, networks and regulators
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The Action Plan for the Strategy groups the key actions around Strategic Priorities. This is to help drive collaboration and efficient and effective working across Business Areas, to help facilitate the sharing of intelligence and insight, and to drive continuous improvement in the culture of the services, breaking down barriers and silos in order to ensure improving outcomes for children young people is the focus of all our activity.

Governance Arrangements

Our Governance Arrangements for delivery of the Children’s Services Strategy and Action Plan are attached as **Appendix 2**.

Appendix 2 sets out the Strategic Governance Arrangements in Children’s Services, showing how governance of “business as usual” (e.g. through Children’s Departmental Leadership Team) aligns with governance of strategy delivery, continuous improvement and transformation required to drive efficiencies and financial sustainability (e.g. through the Getting to Good Board).

The second page of Appendix 2 shows more detail on the role of the Getting to Good Board, in particular in terms of its role in overseeing delivery of the Children’s Services Strategy and Action Plan, and sets out the named “Strategic Priority Leads” who will work together to ensure that the actions related to each of the Strategic Priorities are successfully delivered, and report progress on mission-critical activities to the Getting to Good Board.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS TO THE CHILDREN’S SERVICES STRATEGY

Although the Children’s Services Strategy and Action Plan is at an advanced stage of development, and several of the key actions are already underway in order to ensure that all children and young people in the Borough are supported to flourish and thrive, there are several areas of activity related to the Strategy yet to complete prior to publication.

A summary of these are as follows:

- a) Incorporation of feedback from key stakeholders consulted so far.** In particular, further work will be undertaken to ensure that outcomes from recent sessions with strategic partners via the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (CYPP) and previous engagement with the Health and Well-Being Board (HWBB) on priorities for children and young people are incorporated into the final version of the Strategy. The final version will also incorporate any feedback from consultation with this Committee.
- b) Further consultation and engagement with key stakeholder groups** (please see details in the Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation section below)
- c) Development of a contextual narrative.** The final published version of the Strategy will include a short contextual narrative, setting out the context in which the Priorities and Key Actions for the Strategy have been developed.
- d) Summary of evidence base.** Related to the contextual narrative, the final version of the Strategy will summarise the key qualitative and quantitative evidence which justifies the identification of the Priorities

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, however the Children’s Services Strategy and Action Plan will play a key role in enabling the delivery of projects and programmes designed to help ensure delivery of the best possible value for money in Children’s Services, as well as the efficiency savings required to meet the objectives and commitments set out in the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Examples of key projects which fall within the scope of the Children’s Services Strategy and Action Plan (2021-23) which will help to drive financial efficiencies contributing to the MTFP, are set out in Table 4 below.

Please note that these financial savings commitments are illustrative, are subject to the Council’s formal budget setting process, and do not represent the full set of efficiency savings proposals currently being developed by the Service.

Table 4: Examples of some key transformation projects within the Children’s Services Strategy contributing to the MTFP

Projects within scope of the Children’s Services Strategy (21-24)	Indicative efficiency savings (£)		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Delivery of projects within the Corporate Transport Programme	100,000	500,000	0

Placements Review: Strategy and Demand Management	490,000	297,000	55,000
Transforming Children's Services	250,000	525,000	475,000

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	0	0	0
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	840,000	0	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	1,322,000	0	Revenue

Please also note that as part of the Council's budget setting process, the service is developing Growth and/or Special Item proposals to ensure the appropriate resources are in place to enable the delivery of sustainable services and efficiency savings.

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
<p>Senior managers across Children's Services have been consulted and engaged at every key stage of the development of the Strategy and Action Plan.</p> <p>Strategic Partners (including health, education, representatives from the Voluntary and Community Sector) have also helped to shape the actions related to Strategic Priorities around new models of delivery, systems leadership and partnership working. Outcomes from sessions with members of the Children and Young People's Partnership (CYPP) focusing on tackling key systemic issues and challenges in strategic partnership have fed into the content of the Action Plan.</p> <p>Moving forward, and head of implementation and publication of the Strategy and Action Plan, the Youth Council and Children in Care Council will be engaged to ensure that the things which matter most to children and young people are reflected in the final Strategy and Plan.</p> <p>In addition, the Children's Services Strategy and Action Plan will be placed on the forward plan for the Executive for approval, and will therefore be subject to additional consultation as part of that governance process (e.g. consultation with Executive Members, members of the Council's Corporate Leadership Team).</p>

Public Sector Equality Duty
<p>An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the consultation draft of the proposed Children's Services Strategy and Action Plan (2021-24).</p> <p>Outcomes from this initial assessment are summarised in the points below:</p>

- The clear potential for the Strategy to have a positive differential impact on outcomes for groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (including children and young people aged 0-25 with disabilities)
- Commitments in the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure that the voice of the child and/or young person is central to care plans, design and delivery of services are designed to ensure the Strategy has a positive impact on outcomes for some of the most vulnerable groups within the borough
- Governance and performance management arrangements are designed to help ensure that those commissioning and delivering services for children and young people are aware of the impact on outcomes arising from delivery, and are able to take the actions needed to ensure the Strategy achieves its vision for improved outcomes.

Any additional issues arising from wider consultation which have implications for the Council's responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 will be presented to the Portfolio Holder prior to final approval of the Strategy for publication.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

Incorporated in the Action Plan for the Children's Services Strategy are several commitments to transformation which have the potential to make a positive contribution to the Council's efforts to tackle the Climate Emergency. Examples include:- The movement to energy efficient buildings for new premises commissioned and/or developed as part of the new models of delivery within the Strategy- Shift towards a focus on self-service, remote provision of services and digital delivery, reducing motor vehicle traffic and use of paper and other supplies- Delivery of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme and Corporate Transport Programme, which includes commitments to implementation of route-optimised travel (with the potential to reduce traffic) and delivery of Independent Travel Training (with the potential to enable a greater number of children and young people to make their way to their place of learning by walking, cycling or use of public transport, rather than by car or taxi)

List of Background Papers

Appendix 1: The Children's Services Strategy and Action Plan (2021-24)

Appendix 2: Governance and Delivery Arrangements

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