

TITLE	Update on Children's Strategy Delivery
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 September 2022
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Children's Services Strategy sets out the Council's vision for children and young people in Wokingham and lays out its approach to achieving the best possible outcomes for this important section of the community.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee reviews and notes the Children's Services Strategy 2021-2024, and key progress made to date.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Since the start of the 21/22 financial year, work has been undertaken to refresh and update the Children's Services Strategy (2021-24) and develop a clear, comprehensive and achievable Delivery Plan. 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 the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee with the details of the Strategy and key actions for review and note.

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, however the Children's Services Strategy 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).

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 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 the best 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 present challenges for the future; the increase in demand for support for asylum-seeking children; the war in the Ukraine; 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 our 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 Intervention and Prevention \and Early Help 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 their non-vulnerable peers. 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 directorate and the wider organisation together. The governance arrangements for delivery have been designed to facilitate cross-service working and breaking down of 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 priority actions are 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.</p>

	<p>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.

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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 and young people is the focus of all our activity.

Governance Arrangements

The 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 the Children’s Directorate 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 “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.

Key Delivery Successes To Date

- Establishment of a Serious Violence and Exploitation Board.
- New approach to Corporate Parenting established, focussed on improving opportunities for Member engagement and understanding of the role of the corporate parent.
- More effective Performance Cycle, driving improvement through learning.
- Stabilisation of the Social Care Workforce, including growing our own through the ASYE programme (post-qualification Assisted and Supported Year in Employment for Social Workers).
- Launch of new Emotional Wellbeing Hub in Wokingham, providing a single front door for access to emotional health support for children and young people.
- Establishment of an Education Partnership for Wokingham, bringing together education providers to champion and drive improved educational outcomes for all children and young people in the borough.

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).

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

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the proposed Children's Services Strategy and Action Plan (2021-24).

Outcomes from this assessment are summarised in the points below:

- 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.

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

Appendix 2: Governance and Delivery Arrangements

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