

Children's Services Plan 2019-23



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Foreword by Cabinet Members and the Executive Director

Welcome to the Children's Service Plan for 2019 - 2023 which sets out our key intentions and areas of work for the next four years.

Our vision for children and young people in Buckinghamshire is for:

“Children and young people are safe, happy and healthy, feel valued and value others, are treated fairly, have lives filled with learning, thrive and are able to enjoy life and spend quality time with family and friends.”

The work of Children's Services is diverse, critical and challenging. The service works collaboratively across all teams and with our partners, in order to improve outcomes for all children and young people.

With approximately 123,075 children in Buckinghamshire (23% of the overall population), the teams, at all stages in a child's life, work together to ensure they are safe and reach their full potential. We are seeing an increase in the complexity of needs of children and young people as well as a rise in children with special educational needs and disabilities.

To keep children safe and support them to reach their full potential, we need to work together with all partners across the county.

We are working hard to improve the service in order to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. Whilst there is more to do, we are confident in our understanding and knowledge of what the service requires to deliver our plans.

The 'Change for Children' transformation programme is designed to assist the service to deliver a more effective offer to children and young people who are the most vulnerable and in need of our help. It is critical that we provide the right support at the right time for children and their families in order to meet their needs at the earliest opportunity, avoiding the need for statutory intervention. The success of this relies on the invaluable contribution from all partner agencies.

The availability of local placements remains a challenge for us; however, we are confident that our plans to improve our in-house residential and fostering capacity will deliver better outcomes for our children.

The education landscape is changing rapidly. In Buckinghamshire we are adopting a proactive stance articulating clearly our ambition for all children and young people within the 'Education and Skills Strategy'. Our Side by Side programme is targeted at those on schools that require support to improve and sustain the quality of their teaching and learning. Additional work is required, to narrow the educational attainment gap and ensure pupils are prepared effectively for work.



Warren Whyte
Cabinet Member



Mike Appleyard
Cabinet Member



Tolis Vouyioukas
Executive Director

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On 1 November 2018 the Secretary of State announced that a brand new, single council for Buckinghamshire will be established on 1 April 2020. This is a great opportunity to improve services for residents, local communities and businesses. A single council will be simpler for residents to access the services they need, make better use of public money, and be more local to communities who can get involved at a truly local level.

It is vital through the transition period to the new council that services continue as normal. The business critical transformational programmes and Medium Term Financial Planning savings must be delivered as planned and any decisions on new areas of work must be made with the new council in mind.

Over the next year all five councils will work together to support the effective and seamless transition to the new council bringing

together the best skills and experience of the current councils to shape the future.

There will be an overarching programme of work to deliver this change and establish the new council. The programme will be overseen by county and district members. The priority is to establish a new council by April 2020 and deliver on the key commitments in the business case.

All service areas will be involved in the change programme although some will be much more directly affected than others. Services will need to be flexible in responding to the programme as it develops. Key for all areas of the council will be retention and engagement of employees who will be critical in ensuring that high quality services to residents and communities continue.



Key Dates

- New Council 1 April 2020
- Election for members to the new council 7 May 2020



Programme Principles

- To minimise the impact on critical 'business as usual' activity.
- To ensure there is continuity of service delivery to residents, communities, businesses and service users.
- To ensure that a clear vision for the new council with goals and actions is owned, communicated and delivered.
- To involve councillors and staff from all five councils in designing and establishing the new council, building on the history and legacy of each.
- To maximise the use of in-house resources to provide opportunities for staff, ownership of solutions and to minimise spend on external resources including consultants.
- To ensure that issues of equality and diversity are addressed in all areas of the programme.
- To develop effective means for residents, service users, staff and stakeholders to influence decisions and shape local communities, to strengthen links with partners and to ensure all have a clear and positive understanding of the new council.

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An explanation of the corporate planning process

Safeguarding Our Vulnerable



Creating Opportunities & Building Self Reliance



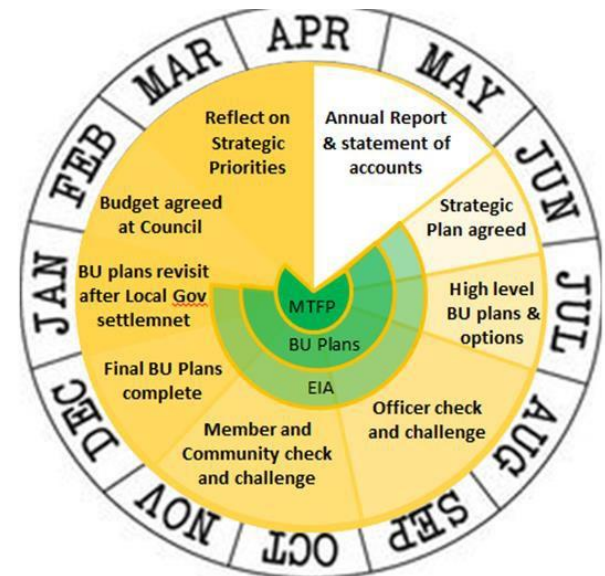
Keeping Buckinghamshire Thriving and Attractive



The Council's corporate planning process brings its key plans together in a clear hierarchy that shows the relationship between long term vision for the Council and the mid-term plan of action; the plan for the Council's finances, all the way down to what each Department plans to achieve in the next year.

These plans cover a four year period but are refreshed every year to ensure they are fit for purpose. Plans are monitored quarterly by the Department's Board (Senior Managers for the service area, Cabinet Member and Deputy) where achievements / risks are escalated to the Corporate Management Team.

Watch the [clip](#) to understand more about the strategic plan priorities.



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Growth



The population in Buckinghamshire is projected to increase from 534,000 in 2016 to 585,000 by 2030, an increase of 51,000 or **9.4%**.



32,722 more houses by 2030 necessitating the right infrastructure to enable sustainable growth.



65+ year olds are set to increase in number from 98,300 in 2016 to 129,900 in 2030, an increase of 31,000 or **32.1%**.
85+ year olds are projected to increase in number from 13,600 in 2016 to 22,100 in 2030, an increase of 8,500 or **62.5%**.



The number of under 18 year olds is projected to increase from to 132,200 in 2030, an increase of 11,100 or **9.2%**.

Bucks strategy

Buckinghamshire is set to experience significant growth, bringing challenges as well as opportunities. The County Council is being proactive in planning for this effectively and is working in close partnership with the Bucks Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership in its development of the Local Industrial Strategy.

Building upon the LEP Bucks Growth Strategy 2017-2050 and linking with the emerging Bucks Industrial Strategy, and district council local plans, the emerging Bucks Strategic Infrastructure Plan defines the infrastructure needed to enable sustainable growth in the county

What Children's Service are doing to address growth

Using intelligence and insight is helping us to project changes in demand which assists with future planning of resources and services to improve outcomes for all children, examples include:

- Projecting changes to the numbers and needs of children requiring the care of the local authority to inform placement planning.
- Projecting demand for services for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).
- Conducting forecasting of children with SEND who are likely to require ongoing Adult services when they reach their 18th birthday.
- Ensuring there are enough early years and school places in the right locations when needed.

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The main aspects of our service

Early Help

Working with the whole family to make positive changes to their lives to prevent or reduce the need for statutory services. Early Help is delivered at different levels by many services. It is about supporting families to do well, stay safe and resolve problems at the earliest possible opportunity, before they become more serious.

Children's Social Care

Provision of care and protection for children at risk of or subject to harm through assessment, planning and interventions to reduce the risk to children and enable them to remain with their family whenever it is safe for them to do so.

Education and Learning

Ensuring all children and young people have access to a good education. We will deliver the ambitions of the Education and Skills Strategy by adopting an all age approach starting from supporting access to high quality early years provision through to the delivery of a diverse curriculum offer for young people, post 16. This includes supporting strong attainment in all our schools.

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

Ensuring all vulnerable children and young people aged 0 – 25 receive the education support and provision required in order for them to achieve their full potential. We will develop an integrated offer across Education, Health and Social Care for children with additional needs.

School place Planning

Ensuring that schools in Buckinghamshire are sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide education suitable for the different ages (including pupils who are over compulsory school age but under the age of 19), abilities and aptitudes and special educational needs of pupils of school age.

Joint Commissioning

Our service brings together the commissioners in children's and adults' services to drive out efficiencies through joint commissioning, removing duplication and sharing skills and experiences to improvement outcomes for our children, young people and vulnerable adults across Buckinghamshire.

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Who are we? – Key facts



123,075
of the
population is
under 18



235
schools



88.7%
of pupils attend
good or
outstanding
schools



3.3%
of pupils have a
SEND statement
or EHCP

As at the end of September 2018:

1,647 children with a Child in
Need Plan

607 children subject to a
Child Protection Plan

502 children currently looked
after, 45% placed in county

36 unaccompanied asylum
seekers



81 children placed with an
in-house foster carer

24 adoptions last year

238 permanent registered
social workers,
compared to 176 in 2014

796 staff in Children's
Services

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Safeguarding our Vulnerable

Safeguarding children and young people is paramount to all we do. It is and will remain a priority and responsibility for all partners across the Children's Services partnership. To keep our children safe we will continue to strengthen and improve our operational service delivery, systems, procedures and commissioning of services.

In line with the national changes, our Local Safeguarding Children Board is in the process of reviewing its safeguarding arrangements and remains committed to:

"A strong and shared safeguarding culture across partners ensures every child and young person in Buckinghamshire grows up safe from maltreatment, neglect and harm. Children and their parents receive the right help and support when they need it, leading to better outcomes for children and young people."

All agencies in Buckinghamshire understand the change in demographics in the county and the particular safeguarding concerns identified in families who experience domestic abuse, mental health issues and substance misuse.

Child sexual exploitation, modern slavery, human trafficking, the prevent agenda, youth offending, forced marriage and female genital mutilation are areas where the Council and its partners will continue to concentrate on. We will capture lessons learned from serious case reviews, both local and national, to improve and strengthen practice across all partner agencies. Work is also underway with the Council's Community Safety team to assist in the areas highlighted above, as part of the Children's Exploitation Subgroup.



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Strengths

- Experienced, competent Senior Management Team with a proven track record.
- The service has a clear and well-informed understanding of the area in need of improvement.
- Strong support from Elected Members, Corporate Management Team, Improvement Board and Partners.
- Emerging initial indicators of improvement recognised by OFSTED and Commissioner.
- High attainment at all key stages.
- In most key stages and subject areas, attainment for children with SEN is better than national.
- % of good/outstanding early years providers and schools.
- Low levels of NEETs compared to national and regional averages.

Weaknesses

- The number of children subject to Child Protection plans is too high.
- The volume of legacy cases that require remedial action and reworking.
- Caseloads in some teams are too high.
- Non-compliance remains a concern within Social Care.
- Casework with the absence of robust management oversight
- An early help offer that identifies and works with the families most in need to prevent escalation to statutory services.
- The number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- The attainment gap between the most vulnerable and their peers.
- High Levels of exclusion.

Opportunities

- Enhanced, coordinated Early Help Offer targeted at those most in need, due to go live in September 2019.
- To build a child focused culture that achieves good outcomes across education and social care.
- To assist the wider children's partnership to take collective responsibility for strong safeguarding practice.
- To continue to develop and embed best practice.
- Improve availability of local provision by increasing in-house residential and fostering capacity.
- To improve value for money.

Threats

- As the service is still in discovery phase, there is the risk of further examples of poor historical casework coming to light which will require immediate action.
- Staff working in teams with caseload pressures may require additional support to work through the immediate actions required.
- Increasing demand and complexity from growing population.
- Prevalence of Domestic Abuse, Adult Mental Health and Substance Misuse in referrals.
- Local Government funding arrangements and national shortfalls in children's services funding.

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Service Outcomes – How we deliver our key objectives and priorities

Keep children and young people safe and in their families where possible.

Key Actions

- Make sure that all initial contacts are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner.
- Ensure that all assessments identify the needs of children and young people and what is required in order to keep them safe.
- All children with an allocated social worker are visited regularly and are supported effectively.
- Improve awareness of, and responsiveness to all form of exploitation.
- Help children and young people understand how to keep themselves safe (e.g. recognising grooming, cyber bullying), thereby reducing the possibility of children taking part in risky behavior.
- Improve our response to children who go missing from home or care.
- Strengthen the partnership's approach to domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse and its impact on children.

Enable and support children, young people and their families to overcome the challenges they may face.

Key Actions

- Ensure children, young people and families are able to find the information, advice and guidance they need to assist them.
- Support children and their families to develop the skills they need to take responsibility for their own outcomes and maintain their resilience without the need for statutory intervention.
- Where appropriate and necessary, provide time limited interventions to support families to get back on their feet. This may include, where appropriate, a young person's admission into care.
- As a last resort, make prompt decisions about permanence in the event that this is the only way to secure better outcomes for the child and their family safe.
- Work with young offenders to help them stop committing crime.

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Service Outcomes – How we deliver our key objectives and priorities

Ensure that children and young people are healthy.

Key Actions

- Ensure all children and young people and their families have access to health promoting information and activity.
- Improve the health and wellbeing of children looked after through access to timely health assessments.
- Promoting healthy lifestyles and relationships for children, young people and their families as the best way to prevent poor health outcomes.
- Work with communities to highlight the risks to children of unhealthy eating and obesity and highlight the benefits of physical activity to children.
- Ensure that early years settings, schools and colleges promote healthy eating and the benefits of physical activity.
- Help children and young people to understand the long term impact of smoking, alcohol, drugs and sexual health.
- Work with partners to improve access to mental health services at the earliest opportunity to prevent problems escalating.

Provide opportunities for children and young people to realise their potential.

Key Actions

- Raise the educational achievement of all children and young people in early years settings and schools, with a particular focus on those settings and schools who are underperforming.
- Narrow the attainment gap between the most vulnerable and their peers.
- Support schools to work more effectively together to drive up standards.
- Ensure vulnerable learners get the support they need to succeed in their education through the virtual school.
- Reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- Support vulnerable young people to experience a smooth transition to adulthood.
- Increase in the number of EHCPs completed within statutory timescales.
- Ensure the early identification and assessment of vulnerable children and young people, so

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The gross budget for Children's Services, excluding schools and partnerships, in 2018/19 is £171.0m. Total gross Capital expenditure budget is £42.0m.

There are significant challenges the service is currently facing. These challenges include: cases that requiring immediate action, cases with identified complex needs, significant increase in new cases coming through with domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse as the three main presenting themes, cost of external placements and legal costs. Additionally, the high levels of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan, coupled with the increased demand for client transport (SEND) and price pressures are also contributing to the financial pressures within the service.

The service has been working hard to mitigate the existing financial pressures by: increasing the in-house capacity of both foster care and residential placements, reducing our reliance on high cost external placements where possible and reviewing our current high cost placements to ensure that placements meet the needs of our children. In addition, our transformation programme continues to focus on improving both the service offer and achieving value for money.

Gross expenditure budget, excluding schools and partnerships

- Employees £41.8m
- Premises £2.2m
- Transport £19.2m
- Supplies & Services £13.2m
- Third Party Payments £58.1m
- Grants & Transfer Payments £34.5m
- Support Services £0.3m
- Capital Charges £1.7m



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Business Intelligence & Insight

How we deliver high quality Insight and Intelligence

Buckinghamshire County Council has a unified Business Intelligence & Insight function which aims to ensure we have the expertise, tools and capacity to meet the Council's needs. This team works collaboratively with colleagues and partners to drive improvement for local people and communities.

There are five teams which are dedicated to the Children's Services: Children's Information Team (Social Care), Information, Advice & Guidance, Early Years, School and Pupil Data and School Performance.

How Insight and Intelligence is informing our work

The Business Intelligence & Insight team produces the monthly performance scorecard that is central to the service's Performance Framework.

Working in partnership with colleagues within the service and across the Council, the Business Intelligence & Insight team conduct further analysis to facilitate a deeper understanding of the reasons for high or low performance, including root cause analysis, and ensure that evidence is available to inform performance improvement.

How are we using this information to develop our services / better value for money

The Business Intelligence & Insight team work collaboratively with colleagues across Children's Services to identify, scope and deliver insight which is aligned to strategic priorities and will have significant impact on risk, cost and/or outcomes.

Within the last 12 months, 2 needs analyses have been developed to provide a better understanding of current activity and expected demand, and inform decision-making on key areas as follows:

1. Early Help: The team conducted a deep-dive needs assessment to inform the Early Help review. The analysis considered current levels of activity and trends against expected population growth and determinants of need, to inform the review and provide a reliable evidence base for any proposed changes.
2. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND): The team developed a detailed needs assessment for SEND in Buckinghamshire. This analysis describes the statutory framework for SEND and a child's journey through this, provides analysis of trends and benchmarking, and identifies risk factors that influence rates of SEND.

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Our legal obligations

As a local government authority, Buckinghamshire County Council has a number of legal obligations and the Council is fully committed to meet the requirements of the relevant legislation, particularly in the execution of its statutory duties. The Council is committed to:

- Address unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization.
- Advance equality of opportunity.
- Safeguard the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals.
- Prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.
- Protect and share data and information as appropriate in line with current legislation.
- Foster good relations between those with a protected characteristic and those without.

As an employer and as service we will:

- Ensure Equality Impact Assessments are completed for all new or changing policies and strategies.
- Undertake at least annual equalities training for staff and Members.
- Ensure corporate complaint procedures, disciplinary rules and practices are accessible.
- Ensure stakeholders will be consulted on change to ensure services remain and/or become more inclusive.
- Monitor our workforce to make sure we're attracting the best candidates from a diverse talent.

Public Sector Equality Duty Compliance

To comply with our duties as an employer under the Equality Act 2010 and reduce the risk of employees breaching the Duty, the Children's management team will undertake a number of steps. It will ensure employees undertake a number of e-learning modules including Health & Safety, Data Protection and Equalities training. It will also ensure employees within the service area are aware of the corporate complaint procedures, disciplinary rules and practices and how to access them.

How we achieve this within Children's Services:

- Work with children, particularly those who are vulnerable.
- Find suitable placements and provide sufficient placement choices.
- Work to reduce the differences in achievement between different groups.
- Meet SEND requirements.
- Ensure fair access for all children and young people.
- Ensure children are given the opportunities to reach their full potential.
- Deliver training to schools, including Governors.