

Children's Service Plan 2018-22

October 2017



Meeting the Challenges - Foreword by Cabinet Members and the Executive Director

Better Every Day
FOR CHILDREN

Welcome to the Children's Service Plan for 2018 - 2022 which sets out our key intentions and areas of work for the next four years.

We want Buckinghamshire to be a great place for all children and young people to live, be safe, to learn and achieve successful and fulfilled lives.

The [Children's Strategy](#) sets out our vision for children and young people in Buckinghamshire

"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. Whilst there are two areas of the service (social care and education) The service works collaboratively across teams and with our partners, in order to improve outcomes for all children and young people including education, health and wellbeing, and keeping children, young people and families safe.

With over 122,200 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 are also recording a rise in children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

To keep children safe and allow them to reach their full potential, we need to ensure strong collaborative partnerships across the county with families, businesses, schools and colleges, Private and Voluntary Sector, Police, Health, District and Parish Councils and many more.

We continue to make progress in our journey to improve services for children and young people. The 'Change for Children' transformation programme is designed to offer improved outcomes for all children and young people and enable us to use our resources more effectively. Ensuring we provide the right support at the right time for children and their families and meeting needs early, avoiding the need for long term statutory intervention is key to this and its success relies on invaluable contributions of our partners.

Sufficiency of suitable local foster care placements remains an challenge in Buckinghamshire, resulting in 53% of Looked After Children being placed out of county at the end of July 2017. The cost of accommodation continues to be high and Buckinghamshire is amongst the top quartile for unit costs.

The education landscape is changing rapidly with a lack of clarity around national policy. However, in Buckinghamshire we are adopting a proactive stance articulating clearly our ambition for all children and young people within the 'Education and Skills Strategy'. We continue to support schools with behaviour management to reduce the number of exclusions, narrow the educational attainment gap and ensure pupils are prepared effectively for work.



Mike Appleyard
Cabinet Member



Warren Whyte
Cabinet Member



Tolis Vouyioukas
Executive Director

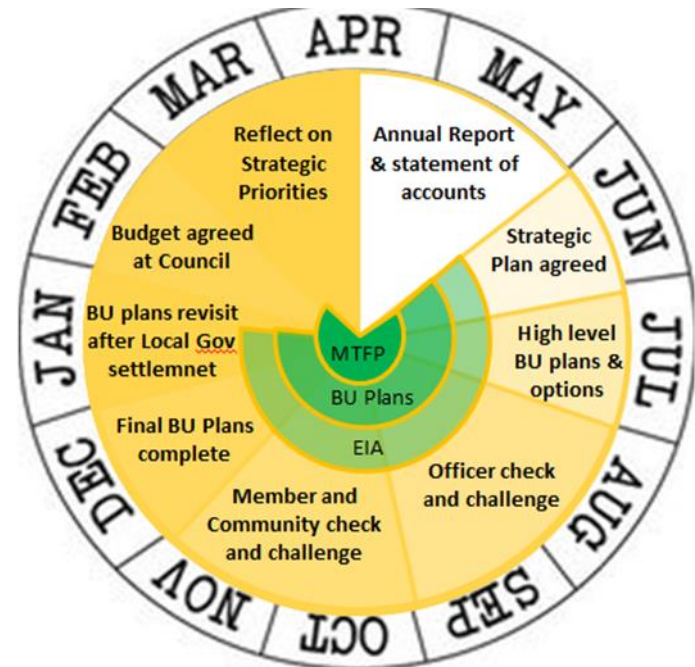
An explanation of the corporate planning process



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.



Growth



The population in Buckinghamshire is projected to increase from 534,000 in 2016 to 598,000 by 2030, an increase of 64,000 or **12%**



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



The number of under 18 year olds is projected to increase from 121,100 in 2016 to 133,000 in 2030, an increase of 11,900 or **10%**

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.

To this end the Council is developing a Buckinghamshire Growth Strategy in collaboration with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Districts and partners. Building upon the LEP Strategic Economic Plan and emerging Bucks Strategic Infrastructure Plan it will support an economic led case for smart and sustainable growth in the county, enabling the Buckinghamshire economy to work together, strengthening the economic ecosystem and capitalising on new regional growth opportunities.

What we're doing to address growth in Children's Services...

Using intelligence and insight to project changes in demand for all children's services both in relation to number and need to inform future planning of resources and services to improve outcomes for all children including:

- 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) 5 years ahead.
- Conducting forecasting of children with SEND who are likely to require ongoing Adult services when they reach their 18th birthday. Working with the Transitions team and Commissioners to facilitate operational delivery and identify demand for future services.
- Ensuring there are enough school places in the right locations when needed.
- Modelling the expected demand for the recently introduced 30hours childcare .

Service Context – 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. Where children and families have complex problems, requiring a multi agency response, Early Help Panels identify a lead agency to ensure that children and families receive the right help at the right time.

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 and reach their full potential. We will deliver the ambitions of the Education and Skills Strategy by adopting an all age approach starting with supporting access to quality childcare moving in to supporting strong attainment in all of our schools and extending to a diverse curriculum offer for young people post 16 so that they can go on to further education or develop the skills they need to enter the workplace.

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

Ensuring all vulnerable children and young people aged 0-25 receive the educational support and provision required in order to assist them in achieving their full potential. We will develop an integrated offer of support across Education, Health and Social to 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 adult services to drive out efficiencies through joint commissioning, removing duplication and sharing skills and experience to improve outcomes for our children, young people and vulnerable adults across Buckinghamshire. The service also hosts Maternity and Children's commissioning on behalf of both Buckinghamshire CCGs.

Our Key Documents

Key Strategies and Policies

Early Help Strategy

[SEND Strategy](#)

Education & Skills Strategy

[Local Offer](#)

[Looked After Children Strategy](#)

[Youth Justice Strategic Plan](#)

[Corporate Parenting Strategy](#)

The Golden Thread

[Corporate Plan](#)

Children's Services features in all of the corporate priorities – read more about our key achievements in the [annual update](#).

[Children & Young People Partnership Plan](#)

Identifies the vision, priorities and objectives of the Partnership and sets out how all those working with families in Buckinghamshire aim to help them improve their lives. It informs and is reflected in the plans of all those working with children, young people and families in the county.

[Children's Strategy](#)

The Children's strategy, developed in 2017 is an overarching vision document that articulates to staff and partners our ambitions and priorities for all Children and Young People in Bucks.

Children's Service Plan

This service plan makes up part of the councils suite of business plan documents. We will be reviewing the plan annually to check on our progress. It also helps us plan our key activities

Team Plans

Individual teams and services develop and work to plans which are linked to the service and strategic priorities.

Individual 'DSP's

'Delivering Successful Performance' (DSP) Objectives identify how individuals contribute to team, service and strategic objectives.

Our improvement journey



Working in partnership with all providers of services for children, young people and families is critical to improving outcomes for our most vulnerable. This includes public, private and voluntary sector partners.

There are a number of strategic partnership boards looking at how together we can achieve better outcomes for all residents. The chairs of the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board, Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Adults Board, Buckinghamshire Health and Wellbeing Board and the Safer and Stronger Bucks Partnership Board regularly meet to share information; gain a common understanding of key areas of work and the inter-connectivity between the boards; highlight cross cutting themes of interest; and evaluate the impact of work programmes. The meetings are chaired by the Chief Executive of Buckinghamshire County Council and future meetings will now include chief officers from key agencies.



The Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children Board (BSCB) is a statutory body established under the Children Act 2004. It is independently chaired and consists of senior representatives from the key agencies and bodies which have regular contact with children and young people or responsibility for services to them.

The statutory objectives of the BSCB are to:

- Coordinate local arrangements to safeguarding and promote the welfare of children
- Ensure that these arrangements are effective



Child and Family Voices

Better Every Day for Children aspires to listen and build upon the voices of children and their families in order to meet outcomes for their future and develop working practices that facilitate them.

“Thank you both so much for giving us a wonderful insight into how our gorgeous boy sees and deals with the world around him”

Email from Early Bird parent after the programme

“I honestly cannot thank you enough and your support and commitment has been 101% from day one and last night you fought R’s ground. Really appreciate it”

Parent email about support received via Bucks Learning Trust Early Years Special Educational Needs & Disabilities Team

“ After your visit I felt like a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders ”

Single mum of five

“Her care and dedication to our current placement, of twins, has been superb. She has always been supportive, communicative and diligent and, in my opinion, gone over and above the call of duty in her work for them. Her attitude toward the twins, their older siblings, their mother and the wider family has always been kind and empathetic yet consummately professional.”

Foster carer about social worker

“I spoke to my social worker and asked if I could see my mum more. She sorted it out so I did. But sometimes you can’t always get what you want. I was glad I spoke to my social worker.”

Child

“We were ultimately impressed that Buckinghamshire County Council were ready to explore other options and the possibility of our becoming adoptive parents from an unusual route. We were then very impressed with the pace at which we were prepared and assessed for adoptive parenting and the overall speed with which the agency worked towards an outcome for our child. “

Adoptive parents

“ Getting along with my brother a bit better. Me getting more attention from mummy ”

Child, 7yrs

“There is no doubt in my mind, that the reason D is going to have a wonderful Christmas, surrounded by all of her family (both sides), who all love her dearly, is down to how amazing you are at your job. We are forever in your debt.”

Child family member

Better Every Day
FOR CHILDREN

Who are we? – Key facts



122,200

of the population is under 18



234

schools
50 academies,
13 grammars



89%

of pupils attend good or outstanding schools



3.1%

of pupils have a SEND statement or EHCP



21%

of 0-19 year olds are BME

As at the end of September:

1,407 children with a Child in Need Plan

579 children subject to a Child Protection Plan

455 children currently looked after, 49% placed in county

28 unaccompanied asylum seekers



111 in-house foster carer households

38 adoptions last year

246 permanent registered social workers, compared to 176 in 2014

1,189 staff in Children's Services

Strengths

- Skilled and dedicated workforce
- Educational outcomes of looked after children compared to their peers nationally
- High attainment at all key stages
- Percentage of good/outstanding early years providers and schools.
- All Special schools and PRUs are good /outstanding.
- Low levels of NEETs compared to national and regional averages
- Attainment for children with SEN is better than national.

Weaknesses

- Number of in-house foster carers,
- Volume of children with Child Protection Plans
- Pace at which Schools progress from an Ofsted rating of “Inadequate”
- Pace at which Ofsted information is made available
- Bridging the attainment gap between mainstream and our most vulnerable
- High Levels of exclusion
- Number of young people placed out of county

Opportunities

- Enhanced, coordinated Early Help Offer
- Enhanced childcare offer supporting better transition for children starting school.
- 88 schools involved in a pilot with SEND team to reduce exclusions and Education , Health and Care Plans.
- Inclusion Hub established with schools to build capacity in County to reduce dependency on out of county placements,
- Develop Inclusion Charter to celebrate inclusive practice in schools.
- School to school collaborative working ongoing via School Liaison Groups and Area Headteacher meetings
- Community Cohesion project to support ‘Living in Modern Britain’ projects in secondary schools being developed with Equalities lead

Threats

- Workforce challenges around.....
- Schools Funding: increasing cuts and rising charges will result in more schools potentially reporting deficit position
- Increased number of children with complex needs requiring additional support placing unsustainable demand on reducing budgets.
- Loss of ring fenced grant to deliver the SEND reforms resulting in the lack of capacity to meet demand.

Key Financials

The gross budget for Children's Services in 2017/18 is £166.7m. Just over 40% of the annual net revenue spend, excluding schools and partnerships, is spent on staffing costs. Total gross Capital expenditure budget is £29m.

There are significant challenges that the Department has to overcome including increase in referrals, increase in placements / costs of placements, agency staff spend and difficulty recruiting permanent staff. Additionally, increased demand for client transport (SEND) and price pressures from suppliers has previously led to an overspend.

Demand Management - There is a considerable attention to provide effective demand management and ensure value for money in the procurement of services, and the anticipation of the increasing demands on Children's Services in particular, increase in volume of placements.

Agency staffing – The service has made considerable improvements in this area and now have one of the lowest agency rates in the south and there is a continuous focus on attracting and retaining good experienced permanent staff. Investment in the recruitment of newly qualified social workers has been particularly successful in terms of growing and retaining our own social workers. In some teams we still have more work to do to reduce reliance on agency staff.

Placement Too many children are placed in out of county placements and we are committed to creating more in-house placements.

Demand for services for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) continues to place significant pressure on all elements of the SEND budget. The Education and Skills Strategy has been developed to make clear the need to target support to our most vulnerable children and young people. Significant work is underway to deliver the objectives of the SEND Strategy including positioning the SEND service to work more closely and preventatively with schools. The Early Help Strategy shares these ambitions to manage pressures down and meet demands more effectively through the provision of support and intervention at first point of need preventing the escalation of need for more costly services.

Expenditure excluding schools & Partnerships

- Employees £34.7m
- Premises £0.6m
- Transport £19.0m
- Supplies & Services £15.9m
- Third Party Payments £52.2m
- Grants and Transfer Payments £42.3m
- Support Services £0.3m
- Capital Charges £1.7m



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.

Within this unified function, there are five teams which are dedicated to the Children's Services Department:

- Children's Information Team (Social Care)
- Information, Advice & Guidance
- Early Years
- School and Pupil Data
- 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 Department's Performance Governance Framework; as well as coordinating quarterly performance reporting to the Corporate Management Team and to Cabinet.

Working in partnership with colleagues within the Department 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 closely with the Department to identify, scope and deliver insight which has the greatest impact on risk, cost and/or outcomes.

This insight work includes analysis completed to map out journeys for children in Buckinghamshire through the Child Protection process from enquiry to termination of plan. The outcomes of this work has been used to support practice changes and training strategies including the 5 year plan.

The team has also delivered insight to support the Change 4 Children programme, including the development of two models that enable us to project future volume and cost of services for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities, and to test potential scenarios that would impact on this projection. This work has been used to agree targets for the next four years

Service Outcomes – How we deliver our key objectives and priorities



1. Safeguard vulnerable children and adults

Key Actions /Activity

- Reduce our re-referral rate to be in line with statistical neighbours March 2018
- Ensure all children open to social care services are visited regularly and their plan is progressed
- Refresh the Domestic Violence & Abuse Strategy to ensure a clearer multi-agency approach to support for **domestic abuse**. March 2018
- Ensure vulnerable learners get support to meet their needs with a **virtual school** by January 2018

2. Keep children in their own home where it is safe to do so and only bring children into care when it is the best option for them

Key Actions /Activity

- Ensure all children in care have a Permanency Plan in place by their second review. March 2018
- For all unborns and babies, concurrent or foster for adoption carers must be considered. March 2018
- Reduce drift and delay for children who are subject to public proceedings by informing parents immediately after the Legal Planning Meeting of our intention to commence Public Law Outline. March 2018
- Bring children closer to home by opening 4 new children's homes in Bucks (first 2 in 2018)

3. Deliver effective interventions and family support in an integrated and coordinated way to achieve better outcomes for all children and reduce the need for them to access statutory services

Key Actions /Activity

- Launch a model for Early Help in 2018 to consolidate our commitment to “right help, right time”. March 2018

Service Outcomes – How we deliver our key objectives and priorities



4. Identify and take action where we find exploitation of children and young people and give care and support to those affected

Key Actions /Activity

- Enhance the delivery of the SWAN unit based on best practice to ensure that it meets the needs of Buckinghamshire children and those who are placed in Buckinghamshire. March 2018
- Improve the communication with OLA's when Buckinghamshire children are placed in OLA. March 2018
- Ensure the effective implementation and embedding of actions arising from the CSE Serious Case Review. March 2018
- Ensure effective links with Adult Social care for non-recent disclosures. March 2018
- Ensure the effective implementation of the electronic tool for Missing children. March 2018
- Ensure the effective links have been established with other forms of exploitation. March 2018

5. Improve outcomes for children and adults with special educational needs or disability

Key Actions /Activity

- Develop and deliver an integrated offer of support to children and young people with additional needs across education, health and social care. through the Integrated Services Board. March 2018
- Restructure the SEND service so that it is fit for purpose. March 2018
- Streamline the decision making processes across Education, Health and Social Care so children's needs are met swiftly and appropriately through the Complex Needs Panel. March 2018
- Ratify and Embed a tripartite funding agreement across education, health and social care for children and young people with additional needs through the Integrated Services Board. March 2018
- Review commissioning arrangements for children and young people with additional needs. March 2018
- Reduce dependency on out of county placements by building capacity to meet need by reconfiguring the current offer to meet need through The Inclusion Hub. March 2018
- Promote inclusive practice through the development of The Inclusion Charter. March 2018
- Prioritise the objectives of the SEND improvement Plan. March 2018

Service Outcomes – How we deliver our key objectives and priorities



1. Ensure that our children growing up are 'school ready' by providing help, support and advice to families with pre-school children

Key Actions /Activity

- Broker child care places for most vulnerable and SEN children to ensure high quality/ appropriate place. March 2018
- Ensure children always have access to suitable high quality appropriate early years and school places to enable them to thrive and achieve. March 2018

2. Enable and support all our children to be successful and cared for throughout their school years, focusing on promoting high quality education across all our schools, enabling the best for every child with particular focus our most vulnerable.

Key Actions /Activity

- Use data intelligently to identify good practice across all of our schools to enable the brokerage of support to schools that are persistently under performing. March 2018
- Develop a schools led sustainable model for school improvement. March 2018
- Adopt a preventative approach to ensure fewer schools fall into inadequate. March 2018
- Raise the level of attainment for all pupil groups through early identification of need and targeted support via commissioned services. March 2018
- Extend the 'virtual school' to include a wider definition of vulnerable groups to more proactively target support. March 2018

3. Enable all our young people to be prepared for the world of work and adult life by promoting volunteering, work experience, apprenticeships and citizenship

Key Actions /Activity

- We work with communities and the VCS to ensure sufficient positive activities are available to improve young people wellbeing . (e.g. 16 community run council owned youth centres and contract to provide support for VCS youth organisations). March 2018
- Reducing number of NEET and those with unknown destinations post 16. March 2018
- Ensure **Pathway Plans are person-centred** and developed by young people so young people have the best transition into independence. March 2018

Equalities

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 victimisation
- 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 provider 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 pool

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 by, for example, discriminating against service users, customers or each other, the Children's management team will undertake a number of steps. It will ensure employees undertake a number of e-learning modules during induction periods including Health & Safety, Data Protection and Equalities training. It will also ensure manager and 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

The Children's department recognises its specific duties under the Equalities Act of 2010.

To this end we:

- *Work with children, particularly those who are vulnerable*
- *Find suitable replacements and provide sufficient placement choices*
- *Work to reduce the differences in achievement between different groups*
- *Meet special education needs and disability (SEND) requirements*
- *Ensure fair access for all children and young people*
- *Ensure children are given the opportunities to reach their full potential*
- *Offer guidance and support to School Leaders inc Governors on meeting their Equality Duty*
- *Deliver training to schools including Governors*
- *Offer opportunities for schools to participate in a range of projects related to Equalities and Diversity*