



# Report to Cabinet

<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday 11 October 2022
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Children's Services Update</b>
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Cllr Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services
<b>Author and/or contact officer:</b>	John Macilwraith, Corporate Director Children's Services
<b>Ward (s) affected:</b>	All
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>Cabinet is asked to note the national and local developments across the Children's Services Directorate</b>

## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The work of Children's Services has always been diverse, demand led and challenging. The impact of Covid-19 has undoubtedly increased levels of demand and need that could not have been predicted.
- 1.2 The child population continues to increase as do the levels of poverty children and families are experiencing. Furthermore, the lasting impact of Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost of living pressures has added an additional layer of complexity to the work of Children's Services. The performance information available to the Service demonstrates that the unprecedented surge in demand began at the end of 2020 and has continued through to the present day. There are currently no indicators to suggest a return to pre pandemic demand levels.
- 1.3 Given the complex demand challenges within the system there is a need to address increasing financial pressures and ensure affordability and financial sustainability through delivery of better outcomes that cost less. Whilst there has and continues to be significant focus on improving outcomes for our children and young people, the Service wants to refresh its evidence base to fully understand the root causes of the current demand coming into the system. This will inform the way in which services are developed and delivered in the future, especially as the Service looks to build stronger relationships with partners. To support the Service with this work, IMPOWER have been commissioned to develop a single programme of change based around a clear profile of demand, with a plan for delivery. The aim of this plan is to help

maximise the impact and effectiveness of early intervention and prevention, alongside our intention for more locality-based support

- 1.4 In addition to the local challenges alluded to above, on the horizon there are a number of national policy developments that when introduced, will impact on the way in which services are delivered to the children and young people of Buckinghamshire. Whilst many of the reforms currently lack detail, the Council is in support of the Government's proposals.
- 1.5 The Service continues on its improvement journey and our number one priority is to strengthen services for children, young people and their families. Whilst there is more to do, the Service is confident in its understanding and knowledge of what needs to be done.

## 2. National Context

- 2.1 The following section gives an overview of the key national policy developments relating to Children's Services announced by the previous Administration. At this stage, the Service remains unclear on the future direction and implementation of these policies following the Government changes and the appointment of a new Secretary of State for Education.

### Schools White Paper

- 2.2 At the end of March 2022, the Government published the [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#). This White Paper sets out proposed reforms to the education system focused on providing an excellent teacher for every child, delivering high standards of curriculum, behaviour and attendance, targeted support for every child that needs it and a stronger and fairer school system.
- 2.3 The main ambitions of the White Paper are:
  - i. for 90% of primary school children to achieve the expected standard in Key Stage 2 reading, writing and maths by 2030, and;
  - ii. to see the national average GCSE grade in both English language and maths increase from 4.5 in 2019 to 5.0 by 2030.
- 2.4 Within the White Paper a series of new measures to support the delivery of these ambitions include:
  - i. By 2030, all children will benefit from being taught in a school in, or in the process of joining, a strong multi-academy trust, which will help transform underperforming schools and deliver the best possible outcomes for children.
  - ii. Local authorities are to be permitted to establish trusts and gain the legal power to request their non-academy schools join a trust, where that is the right approach for local schools. The intention is to allow greater equalisation in the way schools are treated at national level, whilst permitting the continuation of local authority leadership and

support for those schools that wish to receive it under commensurate Trust arrangements.

- iii. Schools will offer a minimum school week of 32.5 hours by September 2023.
- iv. Ofsted will inspect every school by 2025, including the backlog of 'outstanding' schools that have not been inspected for many years.
- v. At least £100m to put the Education Endowment Foundation on a long-term footing so they can continue to evaluate and spread best practice in education across the country.

2.5 Other plans in the White Paper to deliver on improving children's attainment at the end of primary and secondary include:

- i. 500,000 teacher training and development opportunities by 2024.
- ii. £30,000 starting salaries to attract and retain the best teachers.
- iii. A register for children not in school to make sure no child is lost from the system.
- iv. Every school to have access to funded training for a senior mental health lead to deliver a whole school approach to health and wellbeing.
- v. The introduction of a new arm's-length national curriculum body which will create packages of expert-crafted optional, free, adaptable digital curriculum resources for schools to use.
- vi. New legislation to create new statutory guidance on attendance, including a requirement for every school to publish a clear attendance policy. Legislation to include new rules on recording attendance.
- vii. The school system working as a whole to raise standards with trusts responsible for running schools while local authorities are empowered to champion the interests of children.
- viii. A 'Parent Pledge' that the Government, via schools, will identify children who need help and provide targeted support, including small group tuition. The Government has invested £1 billion to establish the National Tutoring Programme and promises to deliver up to six million tutoring packages by 2024.

2.6 The Council welcomes the government's ambitious reform agenda and the commitment to a stronger, fairer school system. In addition, the Council supports the focus on helping each child meet their potential with the right support at right time. The Service will be watching carefully and respond accordingly as the further consultations to inform the associated future legislation and guidance are progressed, and the Service will provide additional updates as more information comes to light.

## Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Green Paper

- 2.7 At a similar time to the release of the Schools White Paper, the Government also published the [SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time](#). This consultation sets out proposed reforms for a single, national SEND and alternative provision system that will introduce new standards in the quality of support given to children across education, health and care.
- 2.8 The Green Paper is consulting on ambitious proposals to deliver greater national consistency in the support that should be made available, how it should be accessed and how it should be funded. It sets out plans for an inclusive system, starting with improved mainstream provision that offers early and accurate identification of needs, high-quality teaching and prompt access to targeted support.
- 2.9 Detailed proposals in the SEND and alternative provision green paper include:
- i. Setting new national standards across education, health and care to build on the foundations created through the Children and Families Act 2014, for a higher performing SEND system.
  - ii. A simplified Education, Health and Care Plan through digitising plans to make them more flexible, reducing bureaucracy and supporting parents to make informed choices via a list of appropriate placements tailored to their child's needs, meaning less time spent researching the right school.
  - iii. A new legal requirement for councils to introduce 'local inclusion plans' that bring together early years, schools and post-16 education with health and care services, giving system partners more certainty on who is responsible and when.
  - iv. Improving oversight and transparency through the publication of new 'local inclusion dashboards' to make roles and responsibilities of all partners within the system clearer for parents and young people, helping to drive better outcomes.
  - v. A new national framework for councils for banding and tariffs of High Needs Funding, to match the national standards and offer clarity on the level of support expected and put the system on a financially sustainable footing in the future.
  - vi. Changing the culture and practice in mainstream education to be more inclusive and better at identifying and supporting needs, including through earlier intervention and improved targeted support.
  - vii. Improving workforce training through the introduction of a new National Professional Qualification for school SEND coordinators and increasing the number of staff with an accredited level 3 qualification in early years settings.


- viii. A reformed and integrated role for alternative provision, with a new delivery model in every local area focused on early intervention.
- 2.10 The proposals are backed by new funding to implement them, worth £70 million. This will build on the £9 billion government investment in local authority high needs budgets next year and £2.6 billion for new places for children with SEND over the next three years.
- 2.11 Later this year, following the completion of the consultation, the DfE will publish a national SEND delivery plan, setting out the government's response to the consultation and how the proposals will be implemented.
- 2.12 Whilst some of the proposals lack detail at this early stage, the Council believes that they will help improve the way that SEND support is delivered to the benefit of children and young people with special needs. Further updates will be provided as more information on the reforms becomes available.

### Children's Social Care Review

- 2.13 In 2021, the Government commissioned an independent review of children's social care in England. This "once in a lifetime" review, led by Josh MacAlister, was published on 23 May 2022.
- 2.14 The outcome of the review is a large and expansive [report](#) setting out an ambitious and wide-ranging review of the present children's social care system, making several dozen recommendations for reform. The key headlines from the review are set out below:
  - i. The Government should develop a National Framework for Children's Social Care that sets out clear objectives for the system and practice within it.
  - ii. The Review asserts that the Funding Formula allocating money to local authorities for children's services is out of date. In the absence of the Fair Funding Review being published, government must urgently reassess how this formula for children's services is calculated so it is fit for purpose.
  - iii. The Review recommends £2.6bn of investment over the period of reform between 2023 and 2027 (comprising £46 million in year one, £987 million in year two, £1.25 billion in year three and £233 million in year four).
  - iv. The Review's primary argument is that loving relationships are what traumatised children need to overcome adversity. The first port of call should be wider family networks followed by care from the state if this is not possible.
  - v. To reduce the number of handovers between services, the review recommends introducing one category of 'Family Help' to replace 'targeted early help' and 'child in need' work, providing families with much higher levels of meaningful support. This would mean the

creation of multidisciplinary teams made up of professionals such as family support workers, domestic abuse workers and mental health practitioners - who, alongside social workers, would provide support and cut down on referring families onto other services. Where concerns about significant harm of a child emerge, an 'Expert Child Protection Practitioner', who is an experienced social worker, would co-work alongside the 'Family Help' Team with responsibility for making key decisions. This co-working will provide an expert second perspective and remove the need for break points and handovers for children and families.

- vi. Services should be community-based and work with and across other agencies such as health visiting, schools and nurseries, employment services, and the police. The services offered will be tailored to meet neighbourhood needs based on a robust needs assessment and feedback from the families.
- vii. The DCS role should be given greater levers to champion the interests of children and families in local areas and hold partners to account – such as “a duty on relevant partner agency strategies that are relevant to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, for instance local mental health plans.” In addition, to ensure all sectors are pulling their weight locally, the Review recommends partner agencies be required to publish details of their spending on child-related services and projects.
- viii. The market for children’s social care must be better commissioned, recruited to, managed and run. Responsibility for this transformation of local children’s care markets should be placed at regional level with new Regional Care Co-operatives (RCC). Local authorities will no longer perform functions in this area themselves but will instead have direct involvement in running of RCCs collectively in a region. Children will continue to be the care of the local authority.
- ix. Ofsted should be empowered to inspect and oversee the operation and functioning of the children’s social care market, including a right to access to provider finances.
- x. Foster care recruitment processes should be streamlined to make the system more accessible, supported by a campaign to recruit 9000 foster carers between 2023 and 2026.
- xi. Kinship care (where a child is allowed to be cared for by an extended family member such as a grandparent, as opposed to foster or residential care) should be extended and these carers receive similar payments and benefits as foster carers.
- xii. Better transition support needs to be put in place for children leaving care to access housing and jobs/apprenticeships.
- xiii. The responsibility of the Virtual School should be extended to support young people from 18 up to 25.

- xiv. The report recommends establishing a National Technology Taskforce to help identify how IT can provide the means to improve efficiency in the system.
- 2.15 During the next 6 months, the Government will publish a White Paper, which sets out a full response to the review; however, the Government's initial response committed to:
- i. Establishing a National Implementation Board, chaired by Ofsted, of sector experts, people with experience of leading transformational change and with experience of the care system.
  - ii. Work with local authorities to boost efforts to recruit more foster carers, including pathfinder local recruitment campaigns and providing more support throughout the foster carer application process
  - iii. Reframing and refocusing the support social workers receive in the early part of their careers, particularly to enhance their skills and knowledge in child protection
  - iv. Joining up data from across the public sector to increase transparency – both between safeguarding partners and to the wider public (more detail will be set out later this year).
  - v. Establishing a new Digital and Data Solutions Fund to help local authorities improve delivery for children and families through technology.
  - vi. Developing a national children's social care framework which will set direction for the system and point everyone to the best available evidence to support families and protect children.
  - vii. The Government's response also committed to funding for family hubs, social workers in schools and designated safeguarding lead supervision programmes.
- 2.16 The report urges Government to introduce legislation to back reform in the final year of this parliament (next year's Queen's Speech), with an expectation of this receiving Royal Assent in Spring 2024.
- 2.17 Many professional organisations have welcomed the report. [The Association of Directors of Children's Services](#) did so while noting the report "doesn't shy away from the big challenges children, families, public services and society faces, in particular the report highlights the need for significant investment in rebalancing the social care system towards early family support."
- 2.18 This report reflects many issues that councils have been raising for some time, including the need to invest further in early help for children and families, better support for kinship carers and making sure that there is the right homes for children in care, as well as ensuring better futures for those leaving care. Whilst the Council agrees with many of the recommendations in this report, there are some significant issues that cannot wait for delivery. In particular, the cost of placements for children in care, placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and the current workforce challenges. As such, the
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Council has written to Government officials in relation to the above points and is awaiting a formal response.

### **3. Local Context**

3.1 The following section gives an overview of the key developments in Buckinghamshire Children's Services.

#### Post Ofsted Action Plan

3.2 As reported previously, in December 2021, Ofsted conducted their Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) reinspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. This inspection found that Buckinghamshire was no longer 'Inadequate', and the overall judgement of Children's Services was 'requires improvement to be good'. Ofsted's report highlights examples of strong practice across the service, including the strengthening of performance measures and increased levels of managerial scrutiny and support for staff at every level which has led to demonstrable improvements in the experience of many children. However, the report also highlights areas where improvement is required and made the following recommendations:

- i. The understanding, and reduction of, a high rate of re-referrals and assessments that result in no services being provided for children and their families.
- ii. The consideration and cumulative impact of earlier interventions and family histories in children and family assessments.
- iii. The quality of social workers' direct work with children.
- iv. The support provided to children aged 16 and 17 years who present as homeless.
- v. The impact of independent reviewing officers (IROs) in decisively escalating children's cases when there is drift and delay in the progress of their care plans.
- vi. The quality of case supervision for social workers in order that it promotes consistently effective work with children.
- vii. The engagement and participation of children in care in the corporate parenting work of the council.

3.3 As a result of this continued improvement of services, the revised Statutory Direction issued to Buckinghamshire in July 2018 has been lifted and Buckinghamshire will now enter a period of 'support and supervision', in line with all authorities who exit formal intervention.

3.4 The Service was required to submit a post inspection action plan to Ofsted by 25 May 2022 clearly indicating what action will be taken to address the 7 recommendations highlighted above.



- 3.5 Since the inspection, there has been a marked difference in the pace of improvement between teams that have not experienced significant changes in complexity and demand and those that have. However, despite the unprecedented changes in both demand and the recruitment challenges that have impacted almost exclusively on the Assessment and Help and Protection teams, the Service continues to remain safe. The demand and recruitment and retention challenges present a new threat to our ambition to become good or better.
- 3.6 In contrast, the Children in Care and Care Leaving teams have workforce stability and have not experience significant changes in demand. As a consequence, the trajectory of these teams continues to demonstrate what can be achieved.
- 3.7 The morale of staff and managers remains positive despite the long hours being worked. The interactions with social work teams and management groups from senior managers and HR colleagues continue to prove valuable. The actions of the Senior Management Team to check and double check that children and young people are being protected in line with their presenting risk and that drift and delay does not become a strong feature of casework have been effective. It is vital that the Service continues to ask the right questions, use performance management data to initiate lines of enquiries and where necessary bring in staff from different parts of the service to support front line work.
- 3.8 In our drive towards delivering the council's ambition to achieve consistently good services, the Service will continue to follow a cycle of improvement, reviewing and testing our practice and oversight to ensure that the Service is making progress and creating actions to address our priority areas. In addition, a suite of key performance indicators will be used to track and monitor progress against each recommendation and priority area.
- 3.9 In order to support the required improvements in children's social care and in light of the significant areas of weakness identified during the local area SEND inspection (further detail in section 3.10 to 3.15 below), John Coughlan, CBE, will continue to be the Independent Chair of the Improvement Board. The scope of the Board has been broadened and will now maintain oversight of the progress being made against the 7 Ofsted recommendations (detailed in section 3.2 above) and the areas of improvement included within the SEND Written Statement of Action.

#### Local Area SEND Inspection

- 3.10 Between the 28 February and 11 March 2022, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspected the services provided for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Buckinghamshire. The inspection team considered how well the local area:
- i. identifies the needs of children and young people with SEND
  - ii. assesses and meets the needs of children and young people with SEND

- iii. ensures positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND
- 3.11 The inspection team spoke to a wide range of professionals across health, education and social care and met with children and young people of all abilities in education settings and focus groups. They received feedback from over 1000 parents and carers. In addition, inspectors reviewed Education, Health and Care Plans and over 150 documents and pieces of supporting evidence.
- 3.12 The inspection found a number of strengths across the local area, despite the ongoing Covid-19 challenges. It recognises the considerable activity that is happening as part of our SEND improvement programme and confirms that our self-evaluation accurately reflects our progress. That said, inspectors also identified 3 areas of significant weakness:
- i. The lack of a cohesive area strategy to identify and meet the needs of those children and young people requiring speech and language, communication and occupational therapy
  - ii. Waiting times for assessments on the autism and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder diagnosis pathways and the system-owned plans in place to address this
  - iii. Waiting times to see a community paediatrician.
- 3.13 As a result of the inspection findings, the local area was required to submit a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to address significant areas of weakness.
- 3.14 As alluded to in section 3.6 above, the independently chaired Improvement Board will provide, where appropriate, scrutiny and direction in order to secure the improvements required as well as challenge the pace and quality of progress, in terms of both actions and their impact.
- 3.15 The Service will of course focus our efforts on improving the areas of significant weakness identified, while continuing with our broader improvement journey to ensure the support children with SEND receive in Buckinghamshire is high quality and effective.

#### Ofsted Annual Conversation

- 3.16 Under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) inspection framework, Ofsted arrange an annual conversation with every local authority. In Buckinghamshire, the annual conversation was held in July 2022 and in preparation for the meeting with Ofsted, the Service shared the latest self-assessment and performance data for both children's social care and education. Ofsted use the annual conversation as an opportunity to scrutinise performance, service development and progress on any actions set at the last inspection. This assists Ofsted in determining the timing and scope of any subsequent inspection activity.
- 3.17 Feedback received from Ofsted at the end of the annual conversation was positive and the Service's self-assessment was accepted in full.

- 3.18 In line with the current framework, the Service anticipates receiving a focused visit which will evaluate an aspect of service, a theme or the experiences of a cohort of children, towards the end of 2022.

### Demand Pressures

- 3.19 As shown in the table below, when comparing demand levels during 2022 so far to those in the early part of 2020, pre pandemic, there have been some marked changes in the demand across the Service both in numerical terms and the seriousness/complexity of the circumstances children and young people find themselves.

	Early 2020 (pre-pandemic) monthly average	2022 monthly average	% change
Contacts	1,375	2,088	52
Referrals	902	1,282	42
Section 47 enquires	200	256	24
Initial Child Protection Conferences	55	74	43
Children subject to a child protection plan	512	730	43
Children with an allocated social worker	2,283	4,144	26

- 3.20 The above indicates a new 'normal' for our teams and demand increases for statutory services are highly likely to continue to rise in both the short and medium term. Societal factors such as worsening mental health in our communities and further family pressures driving by the cost of living crisis being the main drivers.

- 3.21 Given the complex demand challenges within the system there is a need to address increasing financial pressures and ensure affordability and financial sustainability through delivery of better outcomes that cost less. Whilst there has and continues to be significant focus on improving outcomes for our children and young people, the Service wants to refresh its evidence base to fully understand the root causes of the current demand coming into the system. This will inform the way in which services are developed and delivered in the future, especially as the Service looks to build stronger relationships with partners. To support the Service with this work, IMPOWER have been commissioned to develop a single programme of change based around a clear

profile of demand, with a plan for delivery. The aim of this plan is to help maximise the impact and effectiveness of early intervention and prevention, alongside our intention for more locality-based support.

- 3.22 In parallel to the demand increases in children's social care, the number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan continues to increase. In July 2022, there were 5,704 EHCPs maintained by Buckinghamshire, an increase of 10% on the same point in 2021, and a 29% increase on the same point in 2019. The most prevalent primary needs for children and young people with EHCPs are for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which have increased by 49% and 37% respectively since January 2019. Primary needs of specific learning difficulty (SLD) have increased by 75%, multi-sensory impairment (MSI) by 60% and profound and multiple learning difficulty (PMLD) by 59% in the same period.
- 3.23 In response to the growing demand in this area, the Service has developed a [SEND Education Sufficiency Plan](#). In essence, it aims to address the following areas:
- i. The need to increase the capacity of secondary mainstream schools (including alternative provision) for children with Communication and Interaction needs (autism), speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) particularly in both Aylesbury and Wycombe. This is linked to the growth in housing in these areas, and the level of need as demonstrated in the table above; higher numbers of children with EHCPs currently live in Aylesbury and Wycombe.
  - ii. The need to increase the capacity of secondary mainstream schools (including Alternative Provision) for children in Aylesbury with moderate learning difficulties.
  - iii. The need to accommodate some growth in numbers of children with SEN in primary and post-16 mainstream schools particularly in Aylesbury and Wycombe.
  - iv. The need for more secondary and post-16 special school places across the county, but particularly in Aylesbury, primarily for children with autism and learning difficulties.
  - v. The need for specialist provision to support children with autism and/or SEMH for whom a high-level academic education offers the best possible foundation for their future.
  - vi. The need for suitable post-16 further education placements across the county to accommodate a range of needs.
- 3.24 This SEND Sufficiency Strategy will be carried out over three phases and within the strategy there is a comprehensive plan, enabling progress to be monitored and changes to be made in line with variation in forecasts in future years. In order to assist with the above, the Service has completed a pre-registration application to the DfE. New schools approved through this process are part of

the central free schools' programme and will be delivered and funded as such. Free schools are legally academies, which are state-funded educational institutions operated by academy trusts. Successful local authorities will be announced late 2022 to early 2023.

### The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Academy

- 3.25 In 2019, the Service created a Social Work Academy to enable the Council to develop Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) through their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).
- 3.26 The ASYE Academy provides a protected and supported environment for the induction and training of NQSWs which helps:
- I. Recruit and retain staff.
  - II. Drive up the standards of social work practice and in turn outcomes for children and young people.
  - III. Enable NQSWs to understand the child / young person's journey through our organisation.
- 3.27 The Academy works to a 6 month model; NQSWs based within the Academy for their first 6 months where they complete a thorough induction and all essential and mandatory professional and systems training. They will also have worked through a range of more complex cases and tasks, with intensive supervision and support. The training follows the young person's journey through the Service with a strong focus on best practice and the voice of the child or young person. Managing a small caseload alongside training helps NQSWs to effectively integrate learning. NQSWs remain in the Academy for a little longer if required and based on individual need which is assessed by our Advanced Practitioners. All NQSW case work held in the Academy is overseen by the Advanced Practitioners including direction and oversight and signed off by the Team Manager. At the end of the first 6 months or when the NQSW is ready, they then join their permanent front-line team for the remaining 6 months of the ASYE with continued support through the programme. This support includes regular reflective supervision from an Advanced Practitioner who has demonstrable skills and experience in developing others. The focus is on learning and developing, critical reflection and supporting the NQSW to understand the links between theory and practice.
- 3.28 Between 2019 and June 2022, 42 of the 60 NQSWs that have been through the Academy remain within the service. Given the success and in order to alleviate some of the significant challenge in recruiting high quality social workers, the Academy has recently been expanded to support a further 60 newly qualified social workers by April 2023.
- 3.29 Having a permanent workforce and reducing reliance on agency staff is one of the main priorities for the Service and achieving this will no doubt lead to better service outcomes for children and young people as well as reducing expenditure.

### Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

- 3.30 Buckinghamshire Council has now, along with all other local authorities, been mandated to take Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) when they are referred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). In addition, the Council is also now required to continue to receive referrals until it reaches 0.10% of the child (0-18) population (127 individuals for Buckinghamshire) compared to the previous ask of 0.07%, 89 individuals for Buckinghamshire. Currently, the Service supports 32.
- 3.31 There are 68 UASC over the age of 18 open to the Service; however, the percentage calculated for each local authority does not include care leavers.
- 3.32 These decisions by central government will have a significant impact directly and indirectly on the Council's budgets. The direct impacts will be on placement costs and on subsistence payments. Indirectly, there will be an impact on placement availability for all children that will decrease supply and enable providers to increase their charges.
- 3.33 The financial burden on this Council is also influenced by the increasing timeframe in which the Home Office make final decisions on each individual's asylum claim. It used to be the case that final decisions on claims would take about a year (average for 2017). Between 2018 and 2020 this slowed to within 2 to 3 three years. It appears since the pandemic and now as a result of the Ukrainian sponsorship scheme, over 4 years is the norm.
- 3.34 A number of commissioning actions are underway to procure increased provision for care leavers including UASC. This includes block purchasing 'semi-independent' provision increase the supply of placements at a lower price. The Service will also continue to work with colleagues from Housing and our Housing Associations to ensure care leavers access their own tenancies in a timely and cost-effective way.

### School Inspections

- 3.35 Since the resumption of regular Ofsted inspections and changes to the inspection methodology and framework introduced in September 2021, 30 Buckinghamshire schools have been inspected (24 primary, 5 secondary and 1 special school).
- 3.36 Overall, our schools have performed well. 4 improved their rating to good or better, 22 maintained their previous judgements (18 maintained their good or better judgement and 4 remained requires improvement) and unfortunately the rating dropped in 4 schools. This was anticipated in light of the changes to the inspection methodology and the length of time since the schools' previous inspection.
- 3.37 Where inspections have been challenging this academic year, a theme of safeguarding is a thread that has been identified in the reports, which is

mirrored in feedback across the south east. This is something that the Service is working proactively with school leaders to address and have provided training and support for all schools as well as bespoke work in schools where this is identified as a vulnerability.

- 3.38 At the end of the academic year 2022, 90% of Buckinghamshire pupils attended a good or outstanding school.

### The evolution of the Early Help Offer

- 3.39 The Buckinghamshire Partnership Early Help Strategy has recently been reviewed and refreshed. The emphasis within the [refreshed strategy for 2022-2025](#) is focused on two broad areas. Firstly, strengthening the partnership offer and oversight, as the Service looks to expand and streamline access to our increasingly broad early help offer across the county. Secondly, ensuring the offer responds effectively to emerging issues, including minimising the long-term impact of the pandemic on our children, young people, and families in Buckinghamshire.
- 3.40 Early help maintained its service offer with some adaptations throughout the different stages of the pandemic and, as with all Children's Service areas demand has never been higher. Services have been fully operational for some months now and the Service has established the wide range of activities led by the Family Support Service, partner agencies and community groups in our network of Family Centres.
- 3.41 Family Centres were acknowledged by Ofsted during the recent inspection, as key support hubs within communities and the Service continues to develop locally based programmes. In addition, the Service is keen to develop these sites into Family Hubs, in line with the national model, so that they become community access points for a wide range of services and support at a locality level.
- 3.42 The Family Support Service has also launched for the first time, a [Participation Strategy for Young People](#). This strategy describes a new approach to engaging all young people, building their interest and participation in local democracy, working alongside officers so that the Service can develop and design practice, policy, and strategy, enabling the Council to benefit from listening to and acting upon the views and wishes of young people in the recruitment of staff, service improvement and policy development.

## **4. Other options considered**

- 4.1 N/A

## **5. Legal and financial implications**

- 5.1 There are no specific legal or financial implications as a result of agreeing to the recommendations the paper. However, there are significant financial pressures associated with a number of areas detailed within the report,

particularly pertinent to the mandated transfer scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, demand pressures faced across the Service and the reliance on agency staff due to the significant social worker recruitment challenges. The financial pressures related to these areas will feature within the Service's 2023/2024 medium term financial planning process.

## **6. Corporate implications**

6.1 Similar to above, there are no specific corporate implications as a result of agreeing to the recommendations the paper; however, changes made to Government policy as a result of the Schools White Paper, SEND Green Paper and Children's Social Care Review will no doubt require additional support from corporate support services such as HR and Finance.

## **7. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views**

7.1 N/A

## **8. Communication, engagement & further consultation**

8.1 N/A

## **9. Next steps and review**

9.1 The next update will be provided to Cabinet on 11 April 2023.

## **10. Background papers**

10.1 N/A

## **11. Your questions and views (for key decisions)**

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone [01296 382343] or email [democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk]