

Report Title:	Achieving for Children Reserved Matter Ownership Decisions
Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	No – Part I
Lead Member:	Cllr Stuart Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Health, Mental Health and Children's Services
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet 25th March 2021
Responsible Officer(s):	Kevin McDaniel, Director of Children's Services
Wards affected:	All

REPORT SUMMARY

The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead owns 20% of Achieving for Children Community Interest Company (AfC) and is responsible for making reserved matter decisions in relation to the strategic direction of the company jointly with the two other council owners. Following a governance review and subsequent constitutional change in late 2020 the responsibility for this decision making moved from a Joint Committee meeting to Cabinet. This report seeks approval of the following reserved matters:

- Approval of the Company's strategic direction through the adoption of the updated Business Plan
- Approval of the Company's budget for 2021/22
- Approval of the Company's arrangements for managing cashflow through the adoption of the Financial Plan (known as the Treasury Plan) for 2021/22
- Approval of arrangements for the appointment / recruitment of Non Executive Independent Board Directors over the coming year

1. DETAILS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

RECOMMENDATION: That Cabinet notes the report and:

- i) Approves the Business Plan including the Business Development Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy (Annex A,B,C)**
- ii) Approves the detailed 2021/22 budget (Annex D)**
- iii) Approves the Treasury Plan (Annex E)**
- iv) Agrees to delegate the reappointment / recruitment of Non Executive Independent Directors to the Council's Managing Director in consultation with the Leader of the Council**

2. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) AND OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is a joint owner of Achieving for Children Community Interest Company (AfC). The Royal Borough owns a 20% share of the company together with Kingston who own 40% and Richmond who own 40%. AfC was set up by Richmond and Kingston in 2014 to deliver children's services on behalf of the owning boroughs and Windsor and Maidenhead joined in 2017 as a third council owner. The three council owners retain significant control over AfC and as such are responsible for making a number of key reserved matter decisions.

2.2 The AfC Joint Committee considered and approved a number of changes to the ownership governance of AfC in March 2020. The three council's constitutions have now been updated to reflect those changes. The previous Joint Committee, which was the mechanism used for the councils to make joint decisions about AfC reserved matters, has been repurposed as a dispute resolution mechanism and meetings will be arranged only if required. The reserved matter decisions that would have been previously made by the Joint Committee will now be taken by each of the three owning councils individually as part of their established governance processes. Councillors from each owning council still meet twice yearly via an Ownership Board to discuss strategic direction and performance.

2.3 The following table contains a summary of the reserved matters and the new decision making body:

Table 1: Reserved Matter Decisions

Reserved Matters	Band	Decision Making Mechanism
Permit the registration of any New Member of the Company	1	Council / Cabinet
Vary, in any respect, the Articles	2	Chief Exec / Leader
Pass any resolution for the winding up of the Company or present any petition for the administration of the Company, other than where the Company is insolvent.	2	Chief Exec / Leader
Appoint or remove the Chief Executive of the Company in consultation with the AfC Board	2	Chief Exec / Leader
Change the name of the Company	2	Chief Exec / Leader
Form any subsidiary of the Company or acquire shares in any other company or participate in any partnership or joint venture with a view to providing services to third parties without being subject to the Trading Opportunity Evaluation Process as prescribed by the Members.	2	Chief Exec / Leader
Sell or dispose in any way whatsoever, any part of the business of the Company.	2	Chief Exec / Leader
Amalgamate or merge with any other company or business undertaking.	2	Chief Exec / Leader
Enter into any arrangement, contract or transaction resulting in expenditure either with a capital value greater than £10,000 or revenue value greater than £10	3	Cabinet

Reserved Matters	Band	Decision Making Mechanism
million. Any expenditure of such revenue by the Company being less than £10 million shall be subject to the Company's own financial regulations and shall be subject to prior approval within the Business Plan and operating revenue budget, which shall be approved by the Members in accordance with the Reserved Matters.		
Enter into any arrangement, contract or transaction where the Company is providing services to third parties without following the Trading Opportunity Evaluation Process as produced by the Members. Such arrangements, contracts or transactions shall also be subject to prior approval within the Business Plan, which shall be approved by the Members in accordance with the Reserved Matters.	3	Cabinet
Enter into any borrowing, credit facility or investment arrangement (other than trade credit in the ordinary course of business) that has not been approved by the Members under the Financial Plan.	3	Cabinet
Appoint or remove any auditor of the Company.	3	Cabinet
Adopt or amend the Business Plan in respect of each financial year, which for the avoidance of doubt shall include the adoption and amendment of an operating revenue budget for the financial year to which it relates.	3	Cabinet
Adopt or amend the Financial Plan.	3	Cabinet
Enter into any arrangement, contract or transaction within, ancillary or incidental to the ordinary course of the Company's business or is otherwise than on arm's length terms.	3	Cabinet
Deal with any surpluses of the Company.	3	Cabinet
Appoint or remove any Company Directors [from the Achieving for Children Board].	3	Cabinet
Agree any terms for any Directors (but for the avoidance of doubt this does not include the terms and conditions of employment of Executive Directors as defined in the Articles of Association of the Company).	3	Cabinet
Agreeing changes in employment terms and conditions which would be inconsistent	3	Cabinet

2.4 This report seeks approval of the following reserved matters:

- Approval of the Company's strategic direction through the adoption of the updated Business Plan
- Approval of the Company's budget for 2021/22
- Approval of the Company's arrangements for managing cashflow through the adoption of

the Financial Plan (known as the Treasury Plan) for 2021/22

- Approval of arrangements for the appointment / recruitment of Non Executive Independent Board Directors over the coming year

3. RESERVED MATTER DECISION 1: APPROVAL OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION VIA THE BUSINESS PLAN

3.1 The AfC Joint Committee approved a five year Business Plan in December 2019. This plan is the overarching strategy for AfC. It describes the organisation’s strategic priorities for the coming years and details non ‘business as usual’ planned activity. The Plan was put together following extensive engagement with council colleagues, partners, staff and young people. The full engagement process was outlined in the December 2019 report. The Plan sits alongside the company’s Medium Term Financial Strategy.

3.2 Both the Business Plan and the Medium Term Financial Strategy have been updated to reflect the changing context in which AfC operates and also emerging priorities. Additional strategic statements have been included to reflect a renewed commitment to Equality and Diversity as well as to the Environment.

3.3 The AfC Board considered and approved the Business Plan in December 2020 and in refreshing the plans AfC officers have sought feedback from:

- AfC Board
- AfC leadership teams
- Council Joint Ownership Board
- Council commissioners
- Council Chief Executive Officers

The council Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) / Managing Director (MD) have specifically asked that AFC better define the organisation’s Business Development Strategy and a specific strategy and associated plan has now been appended to the Business Plan.

3.4 AfC Business Plan - Achieving *More For Children*

3.4.1 The updated AfC Business Plan is attached at annex A. The Plan defines AfC's overarching vision as:

“Our vision is to provide children and their families with the support and services they need to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.”

3.4.2 The Plan outlines six strategic priorities for the Business Plan period as follows:

Table 2: AfC Strategic Priorities

Strategic priority	What we will achieve for children and young people?	Why is this important?
Stronger families	We will have a relentless focus on safeguarding children and young people across all our services. The services we deliver will be high-quality and will protect and promote the wellbeing of children and young people by promoting family resilience. We will work collaboratively with our key partners to ensure we are able to	<i>“Ensuring children and young people are safe from harm is our core business. We want to build resilience in our families and communities so that they are better able to help, support and protect children without the need for statutory intervention. As part of this we want to ensure our relationships with key partners are strong and that our families</i>

Strategic priority	What we will achieve for children and young people?	Why is this important?
	realise the benefits of joint working to support our children, young people and families.	<i>really benefit from collaboration and joined- up working”.</i>
Positive futures	We will invest and work collaboratively to improve our local education, health and care offer to children and young people so that they have access to high quality services, are able to stay close to their families and friends, achieve well, and develop their skills for independence.	<i>“It is crucial that we provide the right support at the right time, this will enable us to help children and young people to develop their independence and prepare for adulthood. Putting in place local provision means children and young people can stay close to their families and essential support networks and they can benefit from our integrated services giving them the best chance for a positive future”.</i>
Excellent workforce	Our workforce will be experienced, talented, empowered and motivated to deliver the best possible services and outcomes for children and young people; we will invest in the recruitment, retention and development of our workforce and reward their achievements.	<i>“Feedback from children, young people and families always emphasises the importance of a consistent, skilled and motivated workforce. We want to make AfC a place where people want to come and work and a company that they are proud to tell their family and friends that they work for.”</i>
Financial stability	The services we deliver will provide excellent value for money and we are trusted by our commissioning Councils to deliver the best possible services within the agreed contract price, including the efficient delivery of our financial savings plans.	<i>“Given the financial context, both nationally and locally, it is essential that we are focused on delivering efficient, cost-effective and financially sustainable services so we are able to support those most in need.”</i>
Commercial success	We will secure the sustainability of the community interest company through contract renewal, business development, fundraising and good growth, so that we are able to reinvest in the services we deliver directly to children and their families.	<i>“Greater commercial success will enable us to generate a profit to reinvest in our services thereby benefiting the children and young people that we support.”</i>
Smarter working	Our business processes will be efficient, cost-effective and supportive to frontline practitioners so that they are able to spend as much time as possible working directly with children, young people and their families to improve outcomes for them.	<i>“Better business processes, and effective use of new digital technologies, will allow our workforce to reduce the amount of time they spend on unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy, freeing them up to spend more time with the children, young people and families we support.”</i>

3.4.3 The Plan contains high level detail in relation to specific programmes which will be progressed over the coming years through a business case and then where viable implementation phase. The programmes are divided into cross company projects and borough specific programmes to support alignment with each council's service and financial priorities.

3.4.4 There are a number of key themes that apply to the whole organisation as follows:

- Strengthened approaches to quality assurance and better defining AfC's approach to children's services practice
- Strengthened approaches to placement commissioning to support improved outcomes and value for money
- Programmes that support local placement sufficiency and support improved outcomes and value for money
- Supporting families and young people to reach their potential and live as independently as they are able
- Developing the organisation's culture and refining support services to improve recruitment/retention and efficiency through digital innovation

3.4.5 The Windsor and Maidenhead specific programmes are outlined on pages 32 to 35 of the plan attached in annex A.

3.5 Business Development Strategy and Plan

3.5.1 A Business Development Strategy has been developed this year to better define AfC's Business Development ambitions. The strategy and plan are attached at annex B.

3.5.2 The Business Development Strategy outlines the organisation's objective to grow as a specialist children's services provider over the coming years. It outlines a structured approach to identifying, evaluating and agreeing which opportunities are right for AfC and our owning councils.

3.5.3 At the heart of the strategy is an ambition to improve the lives of children and young people by providing affordable and outstanding children's services support to the young people of Richmond, Kingston and Windsor & Maidenhead. Services may be extended to other organisations supporting children outside of our three AfC boroughs where there are clear ethical, financial or developmental benefits.

3.5.4 This strategy complements the main AfC Business Plan and the priority areas for further work and development will be key themes within the overarching five year Business Plan.

3.5.5 The strategy outlines three key areas for development as follows:



SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY - These projects should emerge from the Sufficiency Strategy and look to address growing business placement and support needs in a cost effective way. AfC will develop more local provision (education, social care, health) and maximise use of this provision. This will improve the quality of local provision and reduce the cost of supporting AfC children. Where there is surplus capacity / a mismatch of short term need to provision, vacancy rates will be managed by selling to other boroughs using a cost plus profit margin model.

BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES - Development of internal best practice that can be scaled up and used to generate income. These projects provide an opportunity to improve local services, and generate income as well as contribute to a wider social good. There will be a specific focus on developing and marketing the emerging digital offer over the coming years.

GRANTS / RESEARCH - AfC is uniquely positioned to undertake research across three LA areas which puts it in a good position to bid for funding and research grants. This activity not only provides an opportunity to access money for AfC projects and initiatives but also provides an evidence base for developing best practice approaches which can be scaled up to generate income in the future. AfC is also well known as a Partner in Practice and for successfully bidding for grant income to trial / develop innovative practice.

3.5.6 A draft Business Development Plan has also been attached at annex B. The plan outlines the projects that have either already been evaluated and implemented or that will be evaluated over the coming years. Over the next 12 months there will be a specific focus on programmes in two key areas:

- Developing affordable local provision in line with the recommendations of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy and in partnership with the councils. This will support better management of the local placement market and support the control of placement costs, which are the biggest financial risk for the organisation. This is specifically likely to include development of more supported accommodation for care leavers across all three boroughs and development of the Independent Fostering Agency.
- Development of the organisation's digital competence and service offer to both

improve and modernise practice within AfC services and also to generate external income from the sale of this technology and advice.

3.5.7 In the short term the Business Development will be undertaken within existing resources but as projects yield additional income and cost avoidance / savings it is recommended that some of this money is reinvested back into business development activity to grow the potential to achieve greater medium term financial benefits.

3.6 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)

3.6.1 The draft Medium Term Financial Strategy is attached at annex C. The strategy sits alongside the Business Plan and is produced as part of the budget process. It is reviewed and updated at least annually.

3.6.2 The 2021 strategy will continue to focus on achieving financial sustainability for the Company in the context of escalating financial pressure in the specific delivery of children's and education services as well as in Local Government generally. The organisation will be following three overarching principles:

1. Delivery of value for money services that are low cost and high outcome
2. Maximise resources available to front line services
3. Shared budget responsibility

3.6.3 The strategy prioritises ensuring services are affordable as follows:

- Ensure there is a mutual understanding of what is affordable for each council in terms of funding and quality
- Achieving value for money
- Achieving challenging cost reduction targets
- Generating income to support services
- Ensuring available funding is directed at priority areas
- Ensuring that the financial interest of each owner is safeguarded
- Planning for financial sustainability over a medium to longer term period

3.6.4 The strategy recognises that AfC is achieving good value for money currently but that there is still an affordability gap for services and room to improve particularly in relation to SEND. The next couple of years will be hugely challenging for AfC and the strategy draws out a number of themes and activities from the business plan that will be a key focus to achieve sustainability over the coming year:

Table 3: MTFS Themes

PRIORITY ACTIVITY TO CONTROL COSTS	HOW WILL IT BE DELIVERED?
<p>DEMAND MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Supporting the prioritisation of services to young people most in need and demand management through the application by service teams of consistent thresholds.</p>	<p>Core services have well established threshold guidance that is periodically reviewed both internally and externally through inspections or specific requests for independent review. The Directors of Children's Services are responsible for ensuring there are arrangements in place to monitor compliance and support staff to</p>

	understand the threshold guidance.
<p>DEVELOPING LOCAL PROVISION</p> <p>Delivering the recommendations of the AfC Sufficiency Strategy at pace in terms of using commissioning opportunities effectively and developing more local provision where it makes financial sense to do so.</p>	<p>The draft Sufficiency Strategy and associated recommendations has been considered by the AfC Board and will now progress through council approval processes. There will be a focus in the coming months to identify those programmes that are likely to have the most positive financial impact and to develop these into business cases for agreement by the councils as appropriate.</p>
<p>COMMISSIONING/PROCUREMENT COMPETENCE</p> <p>Building commissioning and procurement capacity and competence in the organisation to ensure that placement and other procurement activity is as effective as possible in finding solutions and driving down cost.</p>	<p>The organisation will continue to build competence and capacity within the commissioning team to ensure that the improved practice from the last three years in relation to placement commissioning continues and that we get the best price when undertaking procurement activity. The Director of Commissioning will continue to develop the commissioning strategy to ensure that we are making best use of our market share and where appropriate planning ahead with providers to get preferable rates. We will also continue to link in with commissioning partnership arrangements for SEND and social care.</p>
<p>REVIEW</p> <p>The effective review of placements, plans and working models is key to ensuring that we are promoting independent, resilient families and that we are prioritising the funding we have in an effective way.</p>	<p>The company has established practices to ensure that plans and placements are periodically reviewed to support the continued alignment of funding and support to the changing needs of young people. It is important that we continue to work to improve these practices particularly in social care and SEND where the financial pressure and scope for changing need is most significant.</p>
<p>MODERNISATION OF WORKING PRACTICES</p> <p>Review of how we work to ensure that we are making best use of technology, flexible working practices and that support services offer value for money.</p>	<p>The company will reflect on learnings from Covid to ensure we build back better in terms of efficient use of buildings, homeworking, digital technologies and reduced travel / printing.</p> <p>A key priority will also be on improving the current HR arrangements to lead to a more consistent offer across AfC and in time improvements in recruitment and retention.</p>

FINANCIAL MONITORING & PLANNING

Detailed monitoring of all high risk areas on an ongoing basis and consistent reporting internally, to the AfC Board and to the Councils.

The finance team will continue to monitor budgets and report performance to budget managers, leadership teams, the board and councils regularly. The finance team will also work to further improve budget awareness and confidence in managing budgets across the organisation.

3.7 Cabinet is asked to discuss and approve the AfC Business Plan and associated strategic documents.

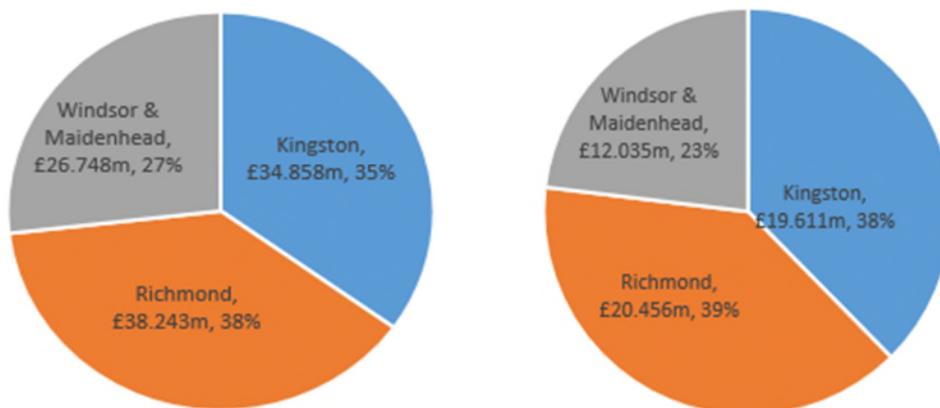
4. RESERVED MATTER DECISION 2: APPROVAL OF THE AFC BUDGET 2021/22

4.1 The approval of the AfC budget is a reserved matter decision and provides the three owning councils with a significant amount of control over AfC's finances. Annex D to this report contains a copy of the AfC Budget Report which was considered and approved by the AfC Board in December 2020, subject to final approval by AfC's three owning councils.

4.2 AfC fully engages in the Windsor and Maidenhead budget setting process each year and the proposals outlined that relate to Windsor and Maidenhead mirror the proposals outlined for children's services in the council's own budget paper. This is also the case for Kingston and Richmond.

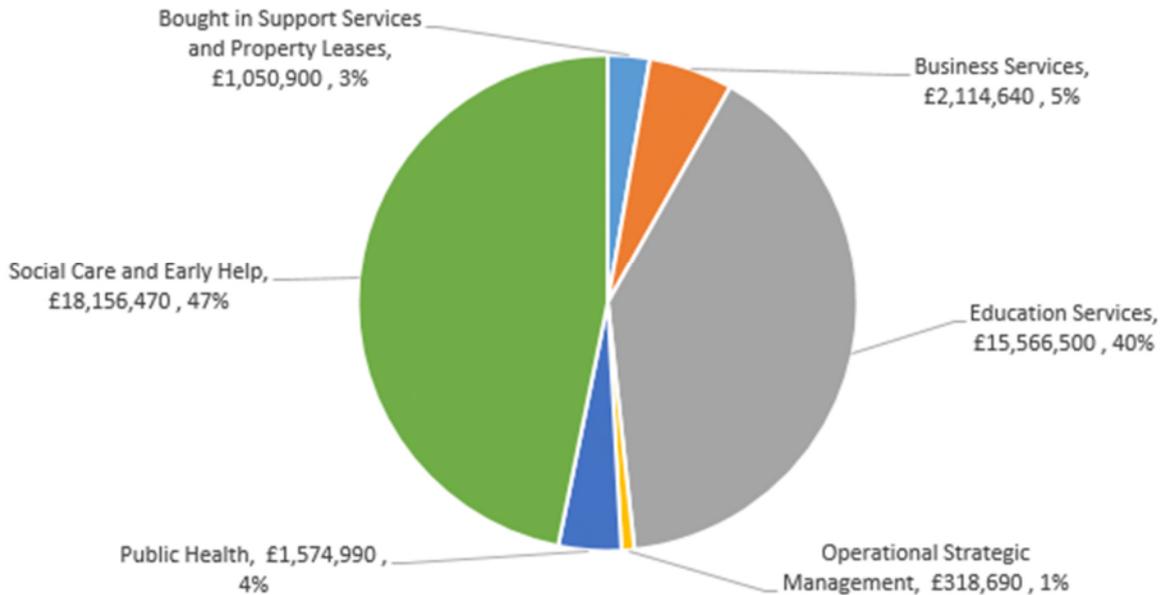
4.3 A net revenue operating budget of £151,948,400 is proposed for AfC in 2021/22. The following pie charts break that down between the three boroughs and between General Fund and DSG Funding:

General Fund Budget 2021/22 Dedicated Schools Grant Budget 2021/22



4.4 The budget report contains more detail about how these base contract prices have been agreed. The Windsor & Maidenhead elements are planned to be spent as follows:

RBWM AFC BUDGETS



- 4.5 The provisional Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) allocations were released for all three boroughs on 17th December 2020. AfC is responsible for administering the DSG but the income and expenditure forms part of each council's retained budget. Some DSG funding is used to pay for services that are delivered by AfC on behalf of each council and this is the amount included in the pie chart above. The detail of how the grant will be spent is available as part of each council's detailed budget setting papers. The Windsor and Maidenhead paper is available at the following [link](#). The DSG amount within the AfC contract price above relates to high needs and central education funding that either funds teams or support that is commissioned by AfC staff. The DSG not included in the contract price relates to amounts that are passported to education providers in accordance with a pre-determined formula.
- 4.6 Cabinet is asked to approve the AfC 2021/22 budget as part of the council's role as joint owner of AfC.

5. RESERVED MATTER DECISION 3: TREASURY PLAN

- 5.1 The approval of the Treasury Plan for AfC is a reserved decision for AfC's three owning councils. The plan is approved annually and when events require a review and was last reviewed and approved by the AfC Joint Committee on 2nd March 2020.
- 5.2 The Treasury Plan outlines how AfC is permitted to borrow and invest for cashflow purposes in the coming year. The Plan also provides assurances to the councils around the procedures in place for banking and treasury management in AfC and for monitoring by the Councils.
- 5.3 The treasury management and banking functions in AfC are overseen by the Chief Operating & Finance Officer and carried out by suitably experienced staff with appropriate training. Treasury transactions are undertaken on the basis of formal proposals and authorisations requiring at least two members of staff and following the current treasury procedures and policies of the Company. Physical transactions are carried out using a secure internet banking system. AfC plans and reviews its treasury activities on a regular basis and longer term plans are reviewed at least annually in line with AfC's business planning process.

5.4 The councils monitor AfC’s borrowing through the formal borrowing and repayment requests and they have access to all AfC’s financial records on request. Proposed changes to the Treasury Plan are agreed at officer level prior to reporting to this meeting. AfC will take advice from the councils on all aspects of its treasury management function and will comply with any instruction or direction from the councils, acting jointly, with regard to its treasury activities and investments.

5.5 The Treasury Plan is attached at annex E.

5.6 Borrowing

5.6.1 Although the Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) provides for AfC to seek finance or debt funding from third party sources (subject to agreement by the Councils), the primary funding for AfC is provided by the Councils through the Revolving Credit Facility (RCF) because the cost of any borrowing undertaken directly by AfC will be higher than for the Councils. As AfC is unlikely to seek funding from third parties for the foreseeable future no provision for this is included in the current Plan.

5.6.2 The RCF sets out the terms on which AfC can borrow from the Councils. The total amount of loans made available by the Councils is £45million and the shares are split in accordance with the value of each council’s base contract price. The Revolving Contract Facility should be used to support operational cash requirements in the delivery of children’s services for the three councils. Interest is set at 0.5% above base rate and applies to borrowing in relation to the ‘Qualifying Expenditure’ to comply with State Aid rules. The table below summarises the current RCF borrowing and the recommended % splits for 2021/22:

Table 4: Borrowing Summary

Council	Current Borrowing (Dec 20)	Current Borrowing (Dec 20)	Max Borrowing 2021/22	Max Borrowing 2021/22
	£	%	£	%
LB Richmond upon Thames (LBR)	£8,724,000	38.1%	£17,469,000	38.82%
RB Kingston upon Thames (RBK)	£8,221,000	35.9%	£16,106,000	35.79%
RB Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM)	£5,954,000	26.0%	£11,425,000	25.39%

5.7 Investment

5.7.1 There are no specific provisions in the legal documents governing AfC’s activities that deal with investments apart from the reference in the IAA that decisions in relation to investments by AfC are a Reserved Matter.

5.7.2 The only use that AfC has made, and is likely to make, of investments for the foreseeable future, is in relation to treasury management where AfC needs to maintain sufficient funds on deposit and with instant access in order to meet its regular payments. The alternative would be for AfC to borrow from the Councils on almost a daily basis to fund its payments, which is not realistic in terms of the administration and bank costs involved.

5.7.3 The banks that AfC can use to hold deposits, and the amounts that it can hold in each, will require specific approval from the Councils because as ‘guarantors’ for AfC the Councils will ultimately bear the risk of AfC’s investments. Thus AfC will only make investments in banks/institutions that are included in each Council’s list of counterparties and to the

amounts that the Councils advise AfC.

5.7.4 The current Plan includes the following limits:

Table 5: Investment Limits

BANK	LIMIT OF INVESTMENT
Barclays Bank	£4,000,000
Nationwide	£3,000,000
NatWest bank	£5,000,000
Svenska Handelsbanken	£2,000,000
Total Investment	£14,000,000

AfC's main operational bank accounts are with NatWest and the limit for this bank includes both the operational current accounts and deposit account.

5.7.5 The Plan allows a degree of flexibility to deal with events that may arise during the course of the year that could impact on the risk of approved banks and investment limits, and provides for the Councils (through their s151 officers or nominated deputies) to agree such urgent actions as required with subsequent reporting to the Cabinet for retrospective amendment to the Plan as a Reserved Matter.

5.8 Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the 2021/22 Treasury Plan.

6. RESERVED MATTER DECISION 4: APPOINTMENT OF NON EXECUTIVE INDEPENDENT DIRECTORS

6.1 The AfC Board of Directors is responsible for ensuring the good governance of AfC as a company, setting the company's strategic aims, supervising the management of AfC as a business and holding the management team to account. The Board is composed of Council Directors, with each owning council eligible to appoint two directors, three Non-Executive Independent Directors (NEIDs), and up to two Executive Directors.

6.2 In March 2020 the Board commissioned a review into the Board's effectiveness with the aim of ensuring that the Board was operating effectively and had good engagement with the three owning Councils. The report made 24 recommendations, the majority of which have now been implemented, with remaining actions relating to the updating of the Board's articles of association and reviewing internal audit arrangements. As a result, over the past six months the relationship between the Board and owning Councils has been strengthened through increased communication and visibility. The Board has appointed a Chair who has provided improved stability and leadership. The Chair has established regular meetings with the Managing Director/Chief Executives, met with Lead Members from each owning Council and voluntary and community sector groups, and led three Board development days. Windsor and Maidenhead have appointed the Council's Director of Children's Services and the Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT to the Board.

6.3 Each NEID is appointed for up to a three year term and is eligible to serve two terms; with all three NEIDs current terms due to expire in 2021. It is proposed that the owning Councils take this opportunity to review the make-up of the Board to ensure it meets the needs of the company, ensuring that the overall composition of the board is reflective of the community AfC serves, has the broad range of skills and expertise required, and maintains stability of leadership. A recent skills audit completed by the Board showed that the Board lacked diversity with no BAME Directors and no Directors with a declared

disability. Where new NEIDs are required a nomination panel will be established to oversee the recruitment and appointment, with representation from each owning Council.

- 6.4 It is recommended that Cabinet delegates authority to the Managing Director, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health, to appoint NEIDs taking into consideration the recommendations from the nomination panel. This will allow the prompt appointment of NEIDs following the recruitment process and effective coordination between the three owning Councils. Details of those appointed to the Board will be reported to the subsequent meeting of the Cabinet.

7. FINANCIAL DETAILS / VALUE FOR MONEY

- 7.1 The financial implications are detailed in the report and associated annexes. AfC has worked with Council officers to reach a proposed 2021/22 budget and the budget contained within this report is also reflected in the Council's budget that was approved on 23/02/2021. It is clear that there will continue to be significant financial pressures in relation to children's services moving into 2021/22 and it is important that the Council continues to gain assurance on what AfC is doing to proactively manage those pressures.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The recommendations concerning approving the Business Plan (including the Business Development Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy, the detailed 2021/2022 budget and the Treasury Plan, are band three Reserved Matters which require approval of the Cabinet.
- 8.2 The recommendation with regards to Cabinet delegating to the Managing Director in consultation with the Leader of the Council the reappointment and/or recruitment of Non-Executive Independent Directors is permissible under S101 of the Local Government Act 1972.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 The specific risks are outlined in the various annexes to this report and the three key risks are highlighted in Table 6.

Table 6: Key Risks

Risks	Uncontrolled risk	Controls	Controlled risk
Risk that the strategic direction of AfC becomes misaligned with that of its three owning councils	Medium	The approval of the strategic direction and budget for AfC is a decision reserved for the three owning councils. This governance approach provides the three councils with a mechanism to directly control AfC's strategic direction. In putting the various strategies and plans together AfC has engaged with the Ownership Board which includes representation from all three councils as well as the council's Managing Directors, commissioners and a number of other key council officers. The AfC Board also consists of two representatives from each council who are responsible for representing the views of the council in strategic decision making throughout the year.	Low
Risk that Covid 19 delays implementation of key programmes or causes additional budget pressure	High	AfC will be monitoring progress against the Business Plan and budget throughout the year and will report progress, risks and opportunities to commissioners as part of the monthly contract monitoring meetings. Where pressures arise these will be identified at the earliest possible opportunity so that alternative action can be identified and agreed between AfC and the Council.	Medium
Risk that the cost of delivering services exceeds budget	High	AfC has well established systems to ensure that financial or demand led pressure in one local authority area does not adversely impact on other AfC boroughs. There are plans detailed in the Business Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy that support the development of placement sufficiency and commissioning strategies to improve AfCs ability to drive value for money and control costs. The budget is monitored on a monthly basis and where needed mitigating actions are discussed within AfC	Medium

Risks	Uncontrolled risk	Controls	Controlled risk
		and with the councils to reduce the scope for overspends and reach a mutually agreed position. The Council also holds a Demography Fund to provide for anticipated growth pressures within demand led budgets as they arise.	

10. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 10.1 AfC produces an Annual Equalities Report which is published on its website and sets out actions to address any inequalities identified. Equalities Assessments are publicly available at the following link: <https://www.achievingforchildren.org.uk/equality-diversity-documents/>
- 10.2 The updated Business Plan now includes a commitment to the environment and tackling climate change.
- 10.3 AfC follows an Information Governance Framework. The Framework establishes and sets out the roles and responsibilities associated with the management of AfC's information assets. It pulls together all the requirements for information governance so that all information held by AfC is processed lawfully and securely.

11. CONSULTATION

- 11.1 In putting together the Business Plan AfC has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders including young people, families, partners, the councils and AfC staff. AfC and the Council will work together to consult on specific proposals in the Business Plan as required as part of the implementation plans for each project.

12. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 12.1 The Council is approving the reserved matters in this report jointly with the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. All three councils will be meeting to consider and approve the reserved matters with implementation of the revised documents from 1st April 2021.

Table 7: Implementation timetable

Date	Details
4th January 2021	AfC Ownership Board
15th February 2021	Richmond Education and Children's Committee
18th March 2021	Kingston Children and Adults Care and Education Committee
25th March 2021	Windsor and Maidenhead Cabinet
8th April 2021	Implementation

13. APPENDICES

13.1 This report is supported by five appendices:

- 1.1 Annex A - Business Plan, Achieving *More* for Children
- 2.1 Annex B - Business Development Strategy and Plan
- 3.1 Annex C - Medium Term Financial Strategy
- 4.1 Annex D - 2021/22 Budget
- 5.1 Annex E - Treasury Plan

14. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

This report is supported by two background documents:

- AfC Business Plan approval December 2019
- AfC Governance Review

15. CONSULTATION (MANDATORY)

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
Cllr Carroll	Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Health, Mental Health and Children's Services	19/2/21	4/03/21
Duncan Sharkey	Managing Director	19/2/21	23/2/21
Adele Taylor	Director of Resources/S151 Officer	19/2/21	24/2/21
Andrew Durrant	Director of Place		
Kevin McDaniel	Director of Children's Services	8/2/21	18/2/21
Hilary Hall	Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning	8/2/21	12/2/21
Andrew Vallance	Head of Finance	19/2/21	
Elaine Browne	Head of Law	19/2/21	24/2/21
Emma Duncan	Deputy Director of Law and Strategy / Monitoring Officer	19/2/21	
Nikki Craig	Head of HR Corporate Projects and IT	19/2/21	24/2/21
Louisa Dean	Communications	19/2/21	
Karen Shepherd	Head of Governance	19/2/21	23/2/21

REPORT HISTORY

Decision type:	Urgency item?	To follow item?
Key decision and first entered into the Cabinet Forward Plan: 25 th January 2021 Council decision	No	No

Report Author: Lucy Kourpas, Chief Operating and Finance Officer, Achieving for Children CIC

A group of diverse children are running joyfully in a schoolyard. In the foreground, a child with a large afro hairstyle is running towards the camera, wearing a red and white checkered shirt over a white t-shirt and denim shorts. To their right, another child in a bright pink shirt and white pants is running. In the background, other children are visible, and a large stone building with many windows serves as the backdrop. The sky is bright with some clouds. The overall mood is energetic and positive.

Achieving for Children's **BUSINESS PLAN** 2020/24

Achieving *more* for Children

CONTENTS

01	Introduction	1
02	About Achieving for Children	3
03	Our business plan	8
04	Our vision and values	10
05	Our ambition	12
06	Our strategic priorities to 2024	14
07	Delivering our strategic priorities in 2020/21	16
08	Our financial plan	36

01

INTRODUCTION

We are delighted to introduce Achieving more for Children - our business plan for 2020/24.

This is an ambitious plan that builds on our success over our first five years of operating, and explains how we will achieve even more for children and young people so that they have the best start in life and are able to have safe, happy, healthy and successful childhoods.

It sets out the projects that the company will deliver over the next four years to meet these aims. A number of these projects will be delivered across Kingston, Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead because they meet a common need. However, some have been designed to meet specific local challenges and circumstances or to reflect the priorities of each individual council. The business plan does not include our day-to-day business, but we will continue to maintain our attention on providing those early help, education, health and social care services that many families rely on every day.

The programmes in the business plan are based on our conviction that, in order to maintain the quality of our services and achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and families within the resources we have available, we must truly focus our work on six important priorities: building resilience in families, creating inclusive local provision to meet increasing need, investing in a skilled and flexible workforce, taking a more commercial approach to service development and innovation, implementing smarter and more agile working practices, and ensuring we deliver excellent value for money in all that we do.



Our plan builds on our achievements over the last five years where we have:

- achieved an Ofsted 'Outstanding' judgement for our children's social care support services in Kingston and a 'Good' judgement in Richmond and in Windsor and Maidenhead
- developed our own local residential provision, including supported accommodation for care leavers, short break care for children and young people with disabilities, and a new residential children's home
- secured over £7 million from the Department for Education as part of the Partners in Practice initiative to develop innovative ways of supporting children and young people on the edge of care
- implemented the Signs of Safety model across all our services which has enabled practitioners to better work in partnership with children and families, building on their family strengths to promote their safety and wellbeing
- become a national leader in the delivery of the Troubled Families programme with over 650 vulnerable families being given the additional support they need to improve the care and support they provide to their children

- established a Staff Council in Kingston and Richmond and Staff Voices in Windsor and Maidenhead to provide staff with a means of influencing the direction of the company and working with senior leaders to make Achieving for Children an employer of choice

All three of our owning councils face challenging financial settlements which means that the company must operate within its budget, including the delivery of planned efficiency savings.

At the same time the need for our services is increasing, predominantly in relation to our need to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and to deliver our responsibilities for children in care and those leaving care.

Our business plan must focus on ensuring the company is able to better manage demand, meet needs, deliver required efficiency savings and achieve longer-term financial sustainability, balanced with a drive to maintain the quality of those services and support innovation and creative solutions to our challenges.

Since the business plan was developed, we have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic which has had a significant impact on our service delivery. This impact is likely to continue for some time and may result in future changes to our priority projects over the coming years.

For 2021/22, we have reviewed the plan and made some amendments to priority projects and their deadline for completion. Dealing with COVID-19 took precedence over the past 12 months which has meant a number of the projects have been delayed and timescales have been amended to reflect this.

Our response to the pandemic and the impact on our organisation and the children, young people and families we support is set out in Section 3. We have also included a new priority action relating to the whole company to demonstrate the importance we are placing on ensuring we can mitigate the impact of the pandemic as far as is possible.

02

ABOUT ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN

Achieving for Children was created as a community interest company in 2014 and is now owned and commissioned by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. We now deliver services to more than 120,000 children and young people. We work closely with our local authority owners and local strategic partners, such as schools, the police, health services and voluntary sector organisations, to ensure that the services we provide are relevant and responsive to the differing needs of children and young people in the three local areas, and support the delivery of each council's local strategic priorities. Where it makes sense to scale-up and deliver services across all three areas, we do that in order to achieve better outcomes for children and young people and deliver better value for money.

Our initial seven year contract with Kingston and Richmond councils comes to an end in March 2021. We are delighted that the councils have jointly agreed to extend our contract for a further five years until March 2026. We also have a seven-year contract with the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead which ends in 2024 with an option to extend for a further five years.

We deliver the full range of children's services for the three councils. Our service offer is based on strong universal provision delivered through our children's centres and youth centres, alongside a targeted early help offer that provides support to families at the earliest opportunity to prevent children's and young people's needs escalating and facilitate family resilience. We expanded our universal services with the addition of health visiting and school nursing when Windsor and Maidenhead joined the company. These public health services complement our specialist nursing and therapy services for children with disabilities and complex health needs. Our statutory offer includes child protection, support for children in care and leaving care, youth justice and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Our final service area is the support we provide to early years settings and schools to deliver high quality teaching and learning. This includes planning school places, school admissions, advice on school improvement and targeted support for vulnerable pupils.

To support the delivery of these services, we employ just over 1,100 professionals from a wide variety of disciplines, including social work, teaching, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and clinical psychology. Our performance and the quality of our early help, health and social care services are good and this has been recognised by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in their service and regulatory inspections. Inspection outcomes for special educational needs services are less positive and are an area for continued improvement.

Service benefits

Achieving for Children has a single organisational focus on services for children, young people and their families. A single organisation working across three local authorities brings operational efficiency and service resilience through a flexible workforce that is skilled and able to manage peaks in demands for services.

Our larger scale means that specialist expertise, which may have been lost or unaffordable in a single local authority, can be retained and developed.

The joint company model provides increased opportunities for employee engagement and empowerment, enabling cost-efficient decisions to be taken by practitioners working directly with families and reducing the need for more intensive work and interventions further down the line.

The service benefits for Achieving for Children are best seen in three areas.

First, our investment in systemic family therapy to complement social work interventions when working with families with the most complex needs.

Second, our Virtual School where our larger scale has enabled us to retain specialist practitioners focused on improving educational outcomes and destinations for children in care.

Third, the development of a company-wide independent fostering agency (IFA) to lead on the recruitment and retention of a highly-skilled pool of local foster carers. The agency was graded as good by Ofsted at its initial regulatory inspection in 2019.

The large majority of our funding comes from contracts with the local authorities that own us and commission us to deliver their children's services. The annual value of these contracts is £148 million. In addition, the company manages the allocation of £413 million in Dedicated Schools Grant to early years providers and schools.

Since 2015, there has been a significant financial pressure on the high needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant in Kingston and Richmond due to increasing need and complexity of need and the associated costs of school placements for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

There is the same emerging pressure in Windsor and Maidenhead, although not to the same scale.. There has similarly been an increase in children in need of social care support and becoming looked after. Again, this follows a national trend and is placing significant financial pressure on the three local authorities.

One contributing factor to this increased cost has been a lack of local provision to meet the increasing numbers of children needing support and to meet their complexity of needs, leading to a reliance on external and independent provision which is often at a much higher cost.

Financial benefits

Our company model is designed to be flexible enough to respond to the individual priorities of each of our owning councils, but also to deliver jointly across the two or three partners where this improves outcomes and increases efficiency, resilience and cost effectiveness.

We have a shared corporate management structure and operating model which delivers efficiencies from a single approach to financial management and business services.

This model has reduced central costs by just over £3 million since the company was established.

There have also been financial efficiencies from a more stable workforce and a reduced reliance on more expensive locum and agency workers. This has been achieved through improved recruitment and retention schemes and the increased opportunities for career development and progression available in a larger organisation.

In addition, we have increased our purchasing power for placements for children in care, care leavers and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and we have invested in developing our own residential provision for children in care and supported accommodation for care leavers to help meet their needs locally at a lower cost. We opened a 17-bed unit offering 24 hours supported accommodation in Kingston in 2017 and are due to open our first children's home during 2020. Overall we have reduced the costs of delivering services for the councils by £12 million since 2014.

One of the reasons Achieving for Children was established as a community interest company was to benefit from increasing our commercial and income-generation opportunities whilst maintaining our social focus on giving children the best start and improving their life chances. In our first five years, we have successfully diversified our income by providing a consultancy offer to local authorities who are considering alternative delivery models, or who require support to improve the effectiveness and impact of their children's services. We have provided in-depth support to eight local authorities in England since 2014 and, as a result of this success, we were named as a Partner in Practice by the Department for Education in 2018 and have successfully provided improvement support to a further five local authorities.

Since 2014, we have also generated income from traded services, trusts and foundations, fundraising and corporate partnerships. This has enabled us to innovate our service offer and implement creative solutions to meet families' needs. Over the next four years, we intend to focus our commercial efforts on this activity and reduce our consultancy offer as this is considered a more sustainable approach for the company.

Commercial benefits

As a community interest company, Achieving for Children is able to trade its services to other local authorities and public bodies, through management consultancy and the provision of services under contract, in order to create a surplus for reinvestment in frontline services for children, young people and their families.

It also has the potential to expand the range of services provided by the company and to access funding opportunities that are not open to local authorities, such as charitable trusts and foundations and corporate sponsorship that can be used to fund or supplement funding for non-statutory services. Since 2014, Achieving for Children has generated £5 million in traded services with schools and from our improvement consultancy offer to twelve local authorities.

We have secured more than £10 million in grant funding to develop our services, including substantial funding from the Department for Education to develop innovative solutions for children experiencing domestic violence, substance misuse and parental mental health issues. This has resulted in the development of a nationally-recognised service which provides a multi-disciplinary approach to building family resilience to prevent children requiring child protection interventions or needing to come into care.

To ensure we take advantage of opportunities, a Business Development Strategy has been developed to sit alongside this overarching Business Plan.

The AfC Business Development Strategy outlines the organisation's objective to further develop as a specialist children's services provider and commissioner over the next five years. It outlines a structured approach to identifying, evaluating and agreeing which opportunities are right for AfC and our owning councils.

At the heart of the strategy is an ambition to improve the lives of children and young people by providing affordable and outstanding children's services support to the young people of Kingston, Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead. Services may be extended to other organisations supporting children outside of our three AfC boroughs where there are clear ethical, financial or developmental benefits.

The strategy and plan are appended.

Environmental aim

Achieving for Children will minimise the environmental impacts of its own activities to promote a sustainable environment for future generations to enjoy

AfC is committed to taking proactive steps to minimise the environmental impact of our activities over the plan period. We will have a particular focus on improving our carbon footprint through the use of digital technologies to reduce the use of paper and non sustainable forms of travel. We will seek to deliver services in an environmentally friendly way and consider how this can be improved when developing policy, service delivery models and in procuring assets.

Children's social care services in Kingston were inspected by Ofsted in October 2019 and judged to be '**Outstanding**' in terms of the effectiveness of the support we provide to children in need of help and protection, children in care and young people leaving care.

91% of families have improved the care they provide to their children following intensive support from the Strengthening Families service. The service has provided support to **265** families experiencing domestic violence, substance misuse and parental mental health concerns.

More than **1,000** children with disabilities receive short break care, including overnight respite care, from Achieving for Children. **96%** of parents and carers rate the care and activities that their children receive as good or better.

More than **10,000** young people regularly use our youth services to take part in positive activities that develop their interests and talents. More than **1,500** young people complete their Duke of Edinburgh's award each year delivering over **45,000** hours of volunteering to their local communities with a social value of more than **£475,000**.

We have delivered **9,074** additional school places including expanding SEND provision in mainstream schools and co-developing five new free schools. This means that more of our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are now educated within their local communities.

98% of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) are completed within the statutory timescale of 20 weeks from the request for assessment. This places our services among the best in the country for the timeliness of assessments and plans for children with SEND.

We support **165** schools to deliver high quality teaching and learning. **91%** of schools in our three boroughs are judged to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and are at the top of the school league tables for progress and attainment at all key stages.

89% of children and young people report improved mental health and emotional wellbeing following support from our emotional health services. Our services include art therapy, clinical psychology and systemic family therapy.

More than **13,000** families attend one of our children's centres each year for health appointments, to access local childcare, and to attend activities that help their children get ready for school. **77%** of children achieve a good level of development in their first year at school which is well above the national average at **72%**.

03

OUR BUSINESS PLAN

What is the business plan?

Achieving 'more' for Children - the business plan for Achieving for Children for 2020 to 2024 is the company's most important strategic document. It articulates our vision for the company together with the most important outcomes that we want to achieve for children in partnership with our owning councils and local strategic partners. It also sets out our objectives for what we want the company to be and how we will change and develop in order to deliver these outcomes. Against each of our strategic outcomes, the business plan sets out priority activities that we will focus on delivering over the next four years. These are the key priorities that will enable us to deliver our vision. Each priority includes targets and milestones so that the three councils, our partners and stakeholders and children and young people can hold us to account. The intention of our business plan is not to capture everything we do as a company. It is a high-level strategic document which provides a clear framework for decision-making about our services and how we prioritise and allocate our resources.

How we have developed our business plan

The priorities in our business plan are based on a sound understanding of the local needs in each of the three local authority areas. We have developed a strong evidence base for our plan using demographic trends, performance data and the needs analyses produced by the councils in their joint strategic needs assessments to better understand local needs, alongside more qualitative feedback about the effectiveness and impact of our services.

To make sense of all of this information we held a 'Big Conversation' in 2019. This involved a series of listening events with children, young people, parents, carers, partner organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors, the councils and our own employees. These conversations enabled us to hear about those issues that are most pressing and that should be our highest priority, as well as identifying creative solutions and potential areas for innovation. The 'big conversations' also enabled us to ensure that our plan is aligned with the strategic priorities of our owning councils in their corporate plans and with our strategic partners, including the local health and care plans developed by the clinical commissioning groups.

How we will measure our progress

We will monitor progress in two ways. Firstly, by being clear about our priority activities, when we expect these to be delivered and monitoring our progress against those delivery plans. Secondly, through a set of key performance indicators and quality measures. These have been set by the councils as part of our contracts with them and by our Board of Directors to ensure the continual development of the company and the services it delivers. There is regular monitoring and scrutiny of our performance by councils and the Board of Directors, with progress against the key performance indicators reported publicly to each of the owning councils. All the success measures that we have used in this plan are reported to the councils and published as part of our quarterly contract monitoring.

Annual review

Each year the business plan priority areas will be reviewed and updated. The annual review will be reported to the councils in public meetings. The annual review will provide a self-assessment of our progress at implementing our priorities in the previous year, as well as refreshing our priorities and activities for the year ahead.

COVID-19

It should be noted that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact on our business plan. The pandemic has provided the opportunity to be innovative and creative to develop new ways of delivering our services, for example, through the increased use of digital solutions. Going forward, as part of our recovery planning we will be reviewing the lessons learnt and will apply best practice to our service delivery so we can continue to effectively meet the needs of our children, young people and families. In addition, some projects set out in this plan may be delayed because our response to COVID-19 has required a major programme of work and resources have been diverted to enable us to continue to provide high quality services.

Our commitment to equality and diversity

Along with so many others both here in the UK and across the globe, all of us at Achieving for Children have been deeply affected by the tragic death of George Floyd. We recognise that discrimination has a destructive impact on many people's lives. The recent events have highlighted the continued racial disparity, structural inequalities and systemic injustices experienced by many Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities across the world, and given us all the opportunity to reflect on ourselves, our society and our organisation. The powerful and collective response of the Black Lives Matter movement and the feedback we are seeking from colleagues within Achieving for Children will help us to better understand where we are as an organisation and where we would like to be. We have developed a plan based on feedback from our staff and as an organisation we have committed to taking action to address any areas of concern within Achieving for Children and for the children, young people and families we support. We now report on the impact of this work as part of our business plan reporting arrangements. We will report on the impact of this work as part of our business plan reporting arrangements.

04

OUR VISION AND VALUES

Our vision

Our vision is to provide children and their families with the support and services they need to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.

Our values

Trust:

We are reliable, others can count on us to undertake tasks and deliver on what was agreed – we will do what we said we would do. We will encourage open and honest communication, and model clear and fair professional boundaries.

Respect:

We will listen to and value other people's perspectives and differences. We will show empathy and humility in the way we communicate.

Empower:

We help others to realise their ability and potential, and show emotional intelligence in our approach. We show appropriate and respectful use of the power given to us in our jobs or positions and we use this to encourage and enable others.



Who we are

At Achieving for Children, we champion children and families, putting their wellbeing and education first. As a social enterprise, we take the values of public service and combine them with a business approach to deliver our social aims. We have the independence and flexibility to tailor innovative solutions to the needs of children and their families, whilst maintaining our focus on delivering priorities for each of the councils that owns the company.

How we work

We put children and young people first:

We are passionate about ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and young people and this drives everything that we do.

We embrace diversity and champion inclusion:

We are committed to valuing difference and diversity in our workforce and in the children and families we work with, so that their identities are promoted and their individual needs are met.

We are resourceful, adaptable and dependable:

We find and create solutions that work well for children and their families. We build our reputation based on our professionalism, our dedication, our flexibility, and by always delivering what we promise.

We nurture strong, responsive and caring relationships:

We build strong and productive partnerships with children, young people, parents, carers and communities so that we can listen and learn from one another.

We lead and support partnerships to meet the needs of children and families:

We build strong and effective partnerships with our owning councils, other statutory services, schools, education providers, local businesses, as well as organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

We value and invest in our staff to deliver innovative and quality services:

We know that our employees are our most important asset – they make our ambitions a reality. We recruit and retain the best people, value their experience and expertise, and support their professional development and personal growth.

We will work with our own councils to deliver the most effective solutions for them:

We understand the requirements of each council that commissions us to deliver their children's services, and work closely with elected members and corporate leaders to help deliver their plans and priorities.

05

OUR AMBITION

By 2024, Achieving for Children will be a strong and financially stable organisation. Children's services throughout England are facing unprecedented financial challenges, predominantly because of the need to support more children and an increase in the complexity and longevity of their needs.

This relates to services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and leaving care, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and children with special educational needs and disabilities. It is placing significant pressure on the three councils' revenue budgets and, in the case of support for children with special educational needs and disabilities in Kingston and Richmond, is building a substantial in-year and cumulative financial deficit because the allocated government grant is insufficient to meet the increasing need.

We will meet this challenge by having a relentless focus on outcomes for children and young people based on local needs and priorities. Delivering our vision to give children the best start in life and improve their life chances is not just a job for Achieving for Children, but is a shared responsibility with the wider public and voluntary sector. By 2024, Achieving for Children will be characterised by its strong and meaningful relationships with our partner organisations and our whole-system approach to improving services and outcomes for children and young people.

We will have strengthened relationships with parents and carers, and our service offer will be shaped by them and by the direct involvement of children and young people. The co-production of effective solutions to local priorities, including financial challenges, will be evident in our successful delivery of this business plan, as well as our response to emerging issues. We will have invested in integrated services and joint commissioning with our partners, bringing together our collective ideas, talent and resources to better meet the needs of children and young people, especially those with the most complex needs. This will most be evident in our delivery of children's health services where we will have strengthened our integrated health services for children with disabilities, and we will have expanded our offer to include health visiting and public health nursing in schools.

We will focus our early help services on building resilience in families so that they are better able to help, support and protect their children without the need for statutory interventions. Our services will consistently use reflective, collaborative and strengths-based approaches to working with the whole family so that parents are able to make positive and lasting changes to the care they provide to their children. This means maintaining strong universal services, such as youth services, and investing in targeted early help services based on evidence-based interventions that are proven to work in supporting sustained change in families.

Our services will be high quality. By 2024, our social care services will be judged to be outstanding by Ofsted in their inspection of local authority children's services or the subsequent inspection framework. Local area inspections of services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and for youth justice services will also have positive outcomes, as will inspections of our health services by the Care Quality Commission. Most importantly, satisfaction with our services by children, young people and parents will also be high.

We will consistently get the basics right for families in terms of good quality assessments, plans, interventions and support packages that are regularly reviewed, and use evidence of what works coupled with effective risk management that supports children and young people to remain at home with their families as much as possible.

By 2024, we will have successfully invested in local provision so that children and young people can stay closer to their families and support networks, and benefit from our local offer of integrated education, health and care services. We will have met the increasing demand for school places and have maintained local choice for children and young people by working with government to create more free schools and by having permanently expanded good and outstanding local schools.

We will have invested in inclusive education so that more children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities can be educated in local mainstream schools. We will have also opened more local special schools with a specific focus on autistic spectrum conditions, speech, language and communication needs, and social, emotional and mental health needs. In the next four years, we will also have increased the number of foster care families, opened our own residential children's homes and increased our range of supported accommodation for care leavers, and we will have joined-up this support to provide holistic support to children in care and on the edge of care. All our services will be focused on promoting independence and developing the skills that young people will need in adulthood.

Achieving our vision for children and young people is reliant on a skilled, motivated and stable workforce. So, by 2024, we will be recognised as an employer of choice for professionals working with children and young people. We will have reduced the number of vacant posts and agency workers in our organisation, reduce our annual voluntary turnover, and increased our employee satisfaction rates to above 90%.

Our frontline employees will be able to spend the large majority of their time working directly with children and families because we have lean, streamlined business process and have invested in new technology and digital solutions that enables more agile and smarter working. This will include bringing in-house those support services that will enable us to provide better and more cost-efficient services for children and their families.

We will also be more commercial in our approach. We will have strengthened our commissioning practices to foster innovation and achieve higher quality services at a lower cost and we will have developed our residential care provision on a commercial basis enabling us to offer these services to the market and reinvest any surplus in our early intervention services to prevent children needing to come into care. This will be the focus for our commercial activity over the next four years, meaning that we will significantly scale-back our improvement consultancy offer to other local authorities and reduce our original plans to expand the company to five local authority members. However, we will remain open to opportunities to bring on board a partner local authority to work alongside our services in Windsor and Maidenhead.

06

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES TO 2024

Based on our vision and ambitions, we have identified six strategic priorities for our business plan for the next four years

Strategic priority	What we will achieve for children and young people?	Why is this important?
Stronger families	<p>We will have a relentless focus on safeguarding children and young people across all our services. The services we deliver will be high-quality and will protect and promote the wellbeing of children and young people by promoting family resilience.</p> <p>We will work collaboratively with our key partners to ensure we are able to realise the benefits of joint working to support our children, young people and families.</p>	<p>Ensuring children and young people are safe from harm is our core business. We want to build resilience in our families and communities so that they are better able to help, support and protect children without the need for statutory intervention.</p> <p>As part of this we want to ensure our relationships with key partners are strong and that our families really benefit from collaboration and joined- up working.</p>
Positive futures	<p>We will invest and work collaboratively to improve our local education, health and care offer to children and young people so that they have access to high quality services, are able to stay close to their families and friends, achieve well, and develop their skills for independence.</p>	<p>It is crucial that we provide the right support at the right time, this will enable us to help children and young people to develop their independence and prepare for adulthood. Putting in place local provision means children and young people can stay close to their families and essential support networks and they can benefit from our integrated services giving them the best chance for a positive future.</p>

Strategic priority	What we will achieve for children and young people?	Why is this important?
Excellent workforce	Our workforce will be experienced, talented, empowered and motivated to deliver the best possible services and outcomes for children and young people; we will invest in the recruitment, retention and development of our workforce and reward their achievements.	Feedback from children, young people and families always emphasises the importance of a consistent, skilled and motivated workforce. We want to make Achieving for Children a place where people want to come and work and a company that they are proud to tell their family and friends that they work for.
Financial stability	The services we deliver will provide excellent value for money and we are trusted by our commissioning councils to deliver the best possible services within the agreed contract price, including the efficient delivery of our financial savings plans.	Given the financial context, both nationally and locally, it is essential that we are focused on delivering efficient, cost-effective and financially sustainable services so we are able to support those most in need.
Commercial success	We will secure the sustainability of the community interest company through contract renewal, business development, fundraising and good growth, so that we are able to reinvest in the services we deliver directly to children and their families.	Greater commercial success will enable us to generate a profit to reinvest in our services thereby benefiting the children and young people that we support.
Smarter working	Our business processes will be efficient, cost-effective and supportive to frontline practitioners so that they are able to spend as much time as possible working directly with children, young people and their families to improve outcomes for them.	Better business processes, and effective use of new digital technologies, will allow our workforce to reduce the amount of time they spend on unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy, freeing them up to spend more time with the children, young people and families we support.

07

DELIVERING OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES IN 2020/21

Achieving *more* for children across our whole organisation

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Stronger families	Implement a consistent practice framework for early help and children's social care services, including embedding Signs of Safety and the systemic family therapy model to promote a strengths-based approach that better supports families to make sustainable change and reduce risks to children and young people	Director of Children's Social Care	A strength-based practice framework will be established across all our services. External reviews and inspections of our services will consistently demonstrate the success of our practice in promoting resilience in families so that children are safe and well cared for. Ofsted will judge our children's services to be outstanding in their overall effectiveness.	The practice framework will be in place and implemented across all services. Internal reviews of practice will evidence that Signs of Safety and systemic approaches are embedded. Ofsted will judge services in Kingston to be at least 'Good' or Outstanding'.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
<p>Stronger families</p>	<p>Ensure Achieving for Children is able to effectively respond to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing to keep our children and young people safe, ensuring our families feel supported, and helping our staff to adapt to new working arrangements.</p>	<p>Chief Operating Officer</p>	<p>The disruption to our services caused by COVID-19 will have been minimised by adopting a flexible and pragmatic approach to service delivery. Children, young people and families will have continued to receive high quality services, either face to face or virtually, and our staff will have felt supported throughout the pandemic. Our accommodation strategy will reflect new ways of working implemented during COVID-19 with a stronger focus on home working. There will be a strong understanding of the long-term impacts of the pandemic on our children, young people and families.</p>	<p>Service delivery will have returned to normal, with best practice identified during COVID-19 implemented that is communicating with children in care virtually. A new approach to working arrangements will be in place which recognises the potential for greater home working. There will be a better understanding of the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the services we deliver to children, young people and families.</p>

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Continue to develop as a provider of residential support for children and young people in care and as a provider of supported accommodation for young people leaving care so that more young people are able to stay local and closer to their support networks.	Associate Director for Provider Services	90% of children and young people will be living locally in high quality care placements close to their friends and family and will be effectively support to full independence and adulthood.	We will have opened a new residential children's home and will have completed business cases for two new supported accommodation units for care leavers leading to 60% of children in care and young people leaving care being in local care placements.
	Strengthen compliance and the quality of services delivered by the independent fostering agency, so that it supports the recruitment, training, development and retention of foster carers, enables more children and young people to benefit from in-house family-based care.	Associate Director for Provider Services	Our IFA will be judged as outstanding by Ofsted. We will have increased our number of foster carers by 100 families so that more children and young people are able to benefit from family-based care.	Our IFA will be judged as good by Ofsted. We will have increased our total number of foster carers by 25 families.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Excellent workforce	Strengthen the approach to recruitment and retention to attract experienced and well-qualified practitioners and managers, retain a permanent workforce, and reduce employee turnover and reliance on a higher-cost agency workforce.	Associate Director for Workforce	We will have a strong and stable workforce with a voluntary turnover rate below 15% and an agency staff rate below 10%. There will be clear career development pathways with more than 75% of our employees saying that Achieving for Children is a good place to work.	Our voluntary turnover rate will be 18% and our agency staff rate will be 16%. 60% of our employees say that Achieving for Children is a good place to work.
	Develop the organisational culture of the company, including redefining and embedding values, behaviours and ways of working that are focused on achieving the best possible support and services for children and young people.	Associate Director for Workforce	75% of employees say that they consistently experience our organisational values of trust, respect and empowerment from their senior leaders to their frontline colleagues. This has a positive impact on the children, young people and families that we support.	60% of employees say that they consistently experience trust, respect and empowerment within Achieving for Children.
Financial stability	Review and strengthen capacity and arrangements for commissioning, procurement and contract management, including the joint commissioning of services with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), to achieve quality, value and improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.	Director of Commissioning and Partnerships	We will have a robust and comprehensive commissioning arrangements including effective joint commissioning with the CCG. Procurement and contract management has been strengthened across the organisation.	A new commissioning framework has been agreed with a focus on joint commissioning, supported by a skilled commissioning team.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Commercial success	Develop and implement a commercial strategy for residential care that enables the company to provide additional placement capacity to the market with any income generated reinvested into local services for children in care and on the edge of care.	Associate Director for Provider Services	£600,000 is reinvested each year into local services for children in care and on the edge of care from the income generated from the commercial strategy for residential care.	£150,000 is reinvested into local services for children in care and on the edge of care from the income generated from the commercial strategy for residential care.
	Develop and implement a revised fundraising strategy that brings in grants and other income to support the delivery of innovative new services that promote positive outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people.	Head of New Business	The company generates £1 million annually through fundraising for investment in prevention and early intervention activities for the most vulnerable children and young people.	The company generates £250,000 through fundraising for investment in prevention and early intervention activities for the most vulnerable children and young people.
	Develop and implement a more formalised approach to business development through a new Business Development Strategy and Business Development Plan.	Chief Operating and Finance Officer	The Business Development Strategy will be established and we will have successfully put programmes in place to improve impact on children and young people, reduce average cost, generate income and improve national reputation.	We have a clear process for approving business cases for priority business development areas with well established mechanisms for assessing viability of proposals. Construction is underway for a number of sufficiency programmes and we have successfully implemented our fostering strategy.
	Take opportunities to expand the company by finding a children's services partner for Windsor and Maidenhead that would enable service effectiveness, operational efficiency and resilience, and longer-term financial sustainability.	Chief Operating Officer	There is an integrated delivery model in Windsor and Maidenhead with services delivered in partnership with another local authority, delivering financial and operational efficiencies for both partners.	Potential partners have been identified and approached to ascertain their interest in exploring an integrated delivery model with services in Windsor and Maidenhead.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Smarter working	Review and put in place strengthened arrangements for corporate support services so that the company has the services it needs to be efficient, effective and deliver excellent value for money.	Chief Operating Officer	The company benefits from effective and cost-efficient corporate support services. Employee satisfaction rates with support services are high because 98% of issues and incidents are successfully resolved within agreed timescales.	The service level agreements for ICT, legal services and health and safety have been revised and HR services have been brought in-house delivering £350,000 in efficiency savings. 94% of issues and incidents are successfully resolved within agreed timescales.
	Implement digital strategies and solutions to improve the operational efficiency of frontline and corporate support services, maximising the time available to practitioners for working directly with children and young people.	Head of Business Support and Digital Transformation	Achieving for Children is a lean and efficient organisation; 100% of routine tasks, such as booking appointments, have been digitised.	The digital transformation strategy has been implemented leading to the digitisation of at least 60% of routine business support tasks.

Achieving *more* for children in Kingston

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Stronger families	Embed the strengthened approach to the quality assurance of frontline services so that they continue to effectively safeguard children and young people and promote their wellbeing and achievement. This will include strengthening the multi-agency focus on quality assuring EHCPs for children and young people with SEND.	Associate Director for Quality Assurance and Review	Quality assurance practice informs the continual development of our services so that they are relevant and responsive to changing local needs. 90% of casework is judged to be good or better as part of our quality assurance of practice in early help, children's social care, health services and support for children with SEND. Quality assurance processes identify that the education, health and social care contributions to the plans for children with SEND are completed within statutory timescales and to a high standard. Positive feedback from parents, children and young people reflects this multi-agency approach.	Permanent appointments have been made to increase capacity for quality assurance in both operational areas. A revised quality assurance framework is in place following feedback from recent inspections. 75% of casework is judged to be 'Good' or better. The strengthened multi-agency focus on EHCPs results in an improvement in the quality as evidenced through audits.
	Implement the revised early help strategy and partnership offer, operationalising the early help resilience networks in 2021 with a focus on developing a partnership and community led approach to early help that supports and strengthens families at the earliest opportunity, so that they can protect and meet the needs of their children without the need for higher tier services or social work intervention.	Associate Director for Early Help	We have a strong partnership-focused early help offer that provides coherent and coordinated support to families from the right service at the earliest opportunity, led by the early help resilience networks. Universal services and targeted early help services are effective at reducing the need for statutory interventions meaning that there has been a 20% reduction in child protection planning and the number of children coming into care.	The early help resilience networks are operating effectively with strong attendance from across partner agencies and, as a result, there has been an increase in partnership led early help assessments. The networks are also supporting the creation of new practice and partnership innovation including the development of targeted youth work responses for adolescents and the enhancement of community led responses to contextual safeguarding. There has been a 5% reduction in child protection planning and the number of children in care.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Review and reconfigure the future delivery of health services, establishing an operating model that promotes high quality and integrated services that support children and young people to maximise their independence, resilience and health outcomes.	Associate Director for Health Services	Public health nursing services are integrated with other children's services providing effective universal child health services and improved support for children and young people with more complex health and wellbeing needs, thereby reducing the need for more intensive interventions such as EHC planning.	A First 1,000 Days service has been implemented, bringing together public sector and voluntary sector organisations to improve outcomes of young children aged 0 to 3 years and reduce the longer-term need for statutory services and support.
	Deliver the SEND Futures Plan to transform the experience of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that local, high-quality education, health and social care provision meets needs and promotes independence for all children and young people with SEND within the resources available in the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and pooled budgets with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). This will include ensuring intervention activity in mainstream provision effectively supports children and young people who are on the SEN support register.	SEND Programme Director	The needs of most children and young people with SEND are met at the earliest stage in mainstream schools without the need for an EHCP. 75% of children and young people with a plan are educated in local mainstream and special schools with much reduced reliance on independent and non-maintained school provision outside of the borough. The educational needs of children and young people with SEND are met within the funding provided in the Dedicated Schools Grant.	There are fewer than 1,275 EHCPs. 60% of children and young people with a plan are educated in local mainstream and special schools. The plan leads to cost avoidance and mitigations of £2.5m per plan year.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Work with the CCG and other partners to implement the Written Statement of Action for SEND so that services are high quality and respond better to the needs, views and ambitions of children, young people and their families.	Associate Director for SEND	Services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are consistently high quality with 75% of parents and carers rating services as 'Good' or better.	The re-inspection of local area SEND services by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission judges that sufficient progress has been made in implementing the Written Statement of Action and that the overall quality of services has improved. 60% of parents and carers rate services as good or better.
	Improve the provision of occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and physiotherapy through the implementation of recommendations identified in the review of therapies across Achieving for Children, the CCG and key partners.	Associate Director for SEND	There is an enhanced local therapies offer which is more accessible and more responsive to growing demand. 75% of parents and carers rate therapies as 'Good' or better. The revised staffing model impacts positively on the recruitment and retention of therapists and develops wider expertise across the whole SEND workforce.	25% of recommendations identified in the therapies review are implemented.
	Work with adult care and housing providers to improve pathway and transition planning for young people with SEND so that services and support are in place to meet their needs, promote independence and enable a positive experience of early adulthood.	Associate Director for SEND	All young people with SEND have an effective transition plan in place by age 15 that plans for their independence and maximises their opportunities for a positive experience of early adulthood, including planning for their transition to adult social care services where needed.	A revised transitions protocol has been agreed between Achieving for Children and adult social care services and is embedded across SEND and leaving care services.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Expand vocational learning opportunities for young people through the development of work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships (particularly for those leaving care or with SEND) to support them to gain meaningful employment.	Associate Director for Workforce	98% of young people are in meaningful education, employment and training due to the availability of more vocational learning opportunities. There has been a 100% increase in the number of young people completing traineeships or apprenticeships.	92% of young people are in education, employment and training. There has been a 25% increase in the number of young people completing traineeships or apprenticeships.
	Develop and implement a mental health strategy that outlines responsibilities for Achieving for Children, CCG and partner organisations, with clear pathways and thresholds that are easily understood by families and that effectively meet the mental health needs of children and young people in universal and more targeted provision.	Associate Director for Emotional Health	Children and young people are easily able to access high quality mental health services that have a strong focus on early intervention and prevent issues escalating to higher levels of need. 75% of families will rate mental health services as good or better.	The review of current mental health provision at the universal level and tier 2 and tier 3 is complete with a clear action plan in place for implementing identified recommendations.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Smarter working	Develop and implement a local engagement strategy and service that strengthens relationships with children, young people and families so that their views, wishes and ambitions shape the delivery of high quality, relevant and responsive services that offer the best value for money.	Director of Commissioning and Partnerships	Collaboration and involvement is the organisational culture within Achieving for Children. Our whole workforce (supported by a specialist participation team) routinely engages with parents, carers, children and young people to ensure that our services are relevant, responsive, focused on local needs and deliver maximum value for money.	A new engagement strategy is developed in collaboration with parents, carers, children and young people. A central participation function is in place to create capacity to improve involvement and collaboration. Five collaborative activities have been completed in significant service areas agreed with parents, carers, children and young people.
	Develop and implement a new approach to partnership working that marshalls the skills, capacity, resources and creativity of the whole community to better identify and meet the changing needs of children and young people.	Director of Commissioning and Partnerships	Achieving for Children is recognised as an excellent partner that champions the needs of children, young people and families as part of local strategic partnerships and by actively contributing to the wider corporate priorities of the council.	Achieving for Children makes a positive contribution to local strategic partnerships through active involvement and leadership.

The priorities in our plan for Kingston are aligned with the Corporate Plan for 2019 to 2023: Making Kingston better, together - in particular strategic outcome 3: Healthy, independent and resilient residents, with effective support to those who need it most.

Achieving *more* for children in Richmond

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Stronger families	Embed the strengthened approach to the quality assurance of frontline services so that they continue to effectively safeguard children and young people and promote their wellbeing and achievement. This will include strengthening the multi-agency focus on quality assuring EHCPs for children and young people with SEND.	Associate Director for Quality Assurance and Review	Quality assurance practice informs the continual development of our services so that they are relevant and responsive to changing local needs. 90% of casework is judged to be good or better as part of our quality assurance of practice in early help, children’s social care, health services and support for children with SEND. Quality assurance processes identify that the education, health and social care contributions to the plans for children with SEND are completed within statutory timescales and to a high standard. Positive feedback from parents, children and young people reflects this multi-agency approach.	Permanent appointments have been made to increase capacity for quality assurance in both operational areas. A revised quality assurance framework is in place following feedback from recent inspections. 75% of casework is judged to be ‘Good’ or better. The strengthened multi-agency focus on EHCPs results in an improvement in the quality as evidenced through audits.
	Implement the revised early help strategy and partnership offer, operationalising the early help resilience networks in 2021 with a focus on developing a partnership and community led approach to early help that supports and strengthens families at the earliest opportunity, so that they can protect and meet the needs of their children without the need for higher-tier services or social work intervention.	Associate Director for Early Help	We have a strong partnership-focused early help offer that provides coherent and coordinated support to families from the right service at the earliest opportunity, led by the early help resilience networks. Universal services and targeted early help services are effective at reducing the need for statutory interventions meaning that there has been a 20% reduction in child protection planning and the number of children coming into care.	The early help resilience networks are operating effectively with strong attendance from across partner agencies and, as a result, there has been an increase in partnership led early help assessments. The networks are also supporting the creation of new practice and partnership innovation including the development of targeted youth work responses for adolescents and the enhancement of community led responses to contextual safeguarding. There has been a 5% reduction in child protection planning and the number of children in care.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Review and reconfigure the future delivery of health services, establishing an operating model that promotes high quality and integrated services that support children and young people to maximise their independence, resilience and health outcomes.	Associate Director for Health Services	There is an integrated health service for children with disabilities in Richmond that complements the service in Kingston. Public health nursing services are integrated with other children’s services providing effective universal child health services and improved support for children and young people with more complex health and wellbeing needs, thereby reducing the need for more intensive interventions such as EHC planning.	Business cases have been developed for an integrated health service for children with disabilities and a First 1,000 Days service to bring together public sector and voluntary sector organisations to improve outcomes of young children aged 0 to 3 years and reduce the longer-term need for statutory services and support.
	Deliver the SEND Futures Plan to transform the experience of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that local, high-quality education, health and social care provision meets needs and promotes independence for all children and young people with SEND, whilst also delivering good value for money.	SEND Programme Director	The needs of most children and young people with SEND are met at the earliest stage in mainstream schools without the need for an education, health and care plan. 75% of children and young people with a plan are educated in local mainstream and special schools with much reduced reliance on independent and non-maintained school provision outside of the borough. The educational needs of children and young people with SEND are met within the funding provided in the Dedicated Schools Grant.	There are fewer than 1,646 education, health and care plans. 60% of children and young people with a plan are educated in local mainstream and special schools. The plan leaves to cost avoidance and mitigations of £2m per year.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Develop a self-evaluation of SEND services and an accompanying action plan to ensure that services are high quality and respond to the needs, views and ambitions of children, young people and their families, and that this is recognised in the local area SEND inspection.	Associate Director for SEND	Services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are consistently high quality with 75% of parents and carers rating services as 'Good' or better.	The inspection of local area SEND services by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission judges them to be effective. 60% of parents and carers rate services as 'Good' or better.
	Improve the provision of occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and physiotherapy through the implementation of recommendations identified in the review of therapies across Achieving for Children, the CCG and key partners.	Associate Director for SEND	There is an enhanced local therapies offer which is more accessible and more responsive to growing demand. 75% of parents and carers rate therapies as good or better. The revised staffing model impacts positively on the recruitment and retention of therapists and develops wider expertise across the whole SEND workforce.	25% of recommendations identified in the therapies review are implemented.
	Work with adult care and housing providers to improve pathway and transition planning for young people with SEND so that services and support are in place to meet their needs, promote independence and enable a positive experience of early adulthood.	Associate Director for SEND	All young people with SEND have an effective transition plan in place by age 15 that plans for their independence and maximises their opportunities for a positive experience of early adulthood, including planning for their transition to adult social care services where needed.	A revised transitions protocol has been agreed between Achieving for Children and adult social care services and is embedded across SEND and leaving care services.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Develop a high quality, in-borough alternative education provision for children and young people who find it difficult to access mainstream education to enable them to reach their potential in the education environment most suited to their needs.	Director for Education Services	Children and young people who find it difficult to access mainstream education are provided with a safe, supportive and stimulating environment where they are encouraged to have high expectations and to take responsibility for their learning and their school community. Success will be measured not just through academic performance but through the children and young people developing positive relationships, self-confidence, resilience, and creativity.	A model of alternative provision has been agreed with schools, and a long term site considered for development by September 2020.
	Expand vocational learning opportunities for young people through the development of work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships (particularly for those leaving care or with SEND) to support them to gain meaningful employment.	Associate Director for Workforce	98% of young people are in meaningful education, employment and training due to the availability of more vocational learning opportunities. There has been a 100% increase in the number of young people completing traineeships or apprenticeships.	92% of young people are in education, employment and training. There has been a 25% increase in the number of young people completing traineeships or apprenticeships.
	Develop and implement a mental health strategy that outlines responsibilities for Achieving for Children, CCG and partner organisations with clear pathways and thresholds that are easily understood by families and that effectively meet the mental health needs of children and young people in universal and more targeted provision.	Associate Director for Emotional Health	Children and young people are easily able to access high quality mental health services that have a strong focus on early intervention and prevent issues escalating to the higher levels of need. 75% of families will rate mental health services as good or better.	The review of current mental health provision at the universal level and tier 2 and tier 3 is complete with a clear action plan in place for implementing identified recommendations.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Smarter working	Review and reconfigure the future delivery of health services, establishing an operating model that promotes high quality and integrated services that support children and young people to maximise their independence, resilience and health outcomes.	Associate Director for Health Services	There is an integrated health service for children with disabilities in Richmond that complements the service in Kingston. Public health nursing services are integrated with other children’s services providing effective universal child health services and improved support for children and young people with more complex health and wellbeing needs, thereby reducing the need for more intensive interventions such as EHC planning.	Business cases have been developed for an integrated health service for children with disabilities and a First 1,000 Days service to bring together public sector and voluntary sector organisations to improve outcomes of young children aged 0 to 3 years and reduce the longer-term need for statutory services and support.
	Develop and implement a local engagement strategy and service that strengthens relationships with children, young people and families so that their views, wishes and ambitions shape the delivery of high quality, relevant and responsive services that offer the best value for money.	Director of Commissioning and Partnerships	Collaboration and involvement is the organisational culture within Achieving for Children. Our whole workforce (supported by a specialist participation team) routinely engages with parents, carers, children and young people to ensure that our services are relevant, responsive, focused on local needs and deliver maximum value for money.	A new engagement strategy is developed in collaboration with parents, carers, children and young people. A central participation function is in place to create capacity to improve involvement and collaboration. Five collaborative activities have been completed in significant service areas agreed with parents, carers, children and young people.

The priorities in our plan for Richmond are aligned with the Corporate Plan for 2018 to 2022: Standing up for Richmond residents - in particular the strategic outcome 4: a borough for everyone.

Achieving *more* for children in Windsor and Maidenhead

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Stronger families	Embed the strengthened approach to the quality assurance of frontline services so that they continue to effectively safeguard children and young people and promote their wellbeing and achievement. This will include strengthening the multi-agency focus on quality assuring EHCPs for children and young people with SEND.	Head of Quality Assurance and Principal Social Worker	Quality assurance practice informs the continual development of our services so that they are relevant and responsive to changing local needs. 90% of casework is judged to be 'Good' or better as part of our quality assurance of practice in early help, children's social care, health services and support for children with SEND.	Permanent appointments have been made to increase capacity for quality assurance in both operational areas. A revised quality assurance framework is in place following feedback from recent inspections. 75% of casework is judged to be 'Good' or better.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Develop resources to support assessment and early intervention in mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges so that they are equipped to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND who are below the threshold for an education, health and care plan.	Service Leader - Education and School	All mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges are observed to confidently and effectively support children and young people with SEND who are below the threshold for an EHCP. An inclusion charter mark has been developed to formalise engagement in this scheme.	Resources to support assessment and early intervention have been developed and put in place. 80% of mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges are observed to confidently and effectively support children and young people with SEND who are below the threshold for an EHCP.
	Work with the clinical commissioning group and other partners to implement the Written Statement of Action for SEND so that services are high quality and respond better to the needs, views and ambitions of children, young people and their families.	Service Leader - Education and School	Services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are consistently high quality with 75% of parents and carers rating services as 'Good' or better.	Monitoring of local area SEND services by the Department for Education judge that services are effective and continue to improve. 60% of parents and carers rate services as 'Good' or better.
	Develop alternative education provision to better support the educational progress, achievement and wellbeing of children and young people with challenging behaviours who have been permanently excluded or are at risk of exclusion from school.	Service Leader - Education and School	New alternative education provision has been developed to support the needs of 36 children and young people with challenging behaviours leading to improved educational progress, attainment and outcomes (no young people are currently excluded from primary school).	The local service is judged 'Good' or better by Ofsted. 12 alternative education places are available. The permanent exclusion rate has reduced by 10%.
	Work with adult care and housing providers to improve pathway and transition planning for young people with SEND so that services and support are in place to meet their needs, promote independence and enable a positive experience of early adulthood.	Schools Leadership Development Manager	All young people with SEND have an effective transition plan in place by age 15 that plans for their independence and maximises their opportunities for a positive experience of early adulthood, including planning for their transition to adult social care services where needed.	A revised transitions protocol has been agreed between Achieving for Children and adult social care services and is embedded across SEND and leaving care services.

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Positive futures	Work with adult care and housing providers to improve pathway and accommodation planning for care leavers so that services and support are in place to meet their needs, promote independence and enable a positive experience of early adulthood.	Associate Director Corporate Parenting	All care leavers have an effective transition plan in place by age 15 that plans for their independence into adulthood including where they will live.	Care Leavers are engaged in agreeing their pathway plan and there is suitable accommodation to support young people of differing needs into adulthood.
	Expand vocational learning opportunities for young people through the development of work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships (particularly for those leaving care or with SEND) to support them to gain meaningful employment.	Associate Director for Workforce	98% of young people are in meaningful education, employment and training due to the availability of more vocational learning opportunities. There has been a 100% increase in the number of young people completing traineeships or apprenticeships.	92% of young people are in education, employment and training. There has been a 25% increase in the number of young people completing traineeships or apprenticeships.
	Work to reduce gaps in attainment in reading, writing and mathematics between children in receipt of the Pupil Premium grant and their peers to provide the foundation for all children to achieve well and have positive choices for their future learning.	Associate Director for Inclusive Education	The attainment for reading, writing and mathematics (combined) at the end of Key Stage 2 for pupils in receipt of the Pupil Premium Grant is better than the results of the statistical neighbour peer group (summer 2024 results).	The attainment for reading, writing and mathematics (combined) at the end of Key Stage 2 for pupils in receipt of the Pupil Premium grant and their peers is better than the national average (summer 2021 results).

Strategic priority	Priority project	Lead	How will know we have been successful in 2024?	What will we achieve by March 2022?
Smarter working	Develop and implement a local engagement strategy and service that strengthens relationships with children, young people and families so that their views, wishes and ambitions shape the delivery of high quality, relevant and responsive services that offer the best value for money.	Service Leader - Education and School	All mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges are observed to confidently and effectively support children and young people with SEND who are below the threshold for an EHCP.	Resources to support assessment and early intervention have been developed and put in place. 80% of mainstream early years settings, schools and colleges are observed to confidently and effectively support children and young people with SEND who are below the threshold for an EHCP.
	Develop and implement a new approach to partnership working that marshalls the skills, capacity, resources and creativity of the whole community to better identify and meet the changing needs of children and young people.	Director of Children's Services	Collaboration and involvement is the organisational culture within Achieving for Children. Our whole workforce (supported by a specialist participation team) routinely engages with parents, carers, children and young people to ensure that our services are relevant, responsive, focused on local needs and deliver maximum value for money.	A new engagement strategy is developed in collaboration with parents, carers, children and young people. A central participation function is in place to create capacity to improve involvement and collaboration. Five collaborative activities have been completed in significant service areas agreed with parents, carers, children and young people.
	Specify, procure and implement a new case management system to replace the existing PARIS system that is used across children's services with the aim of improving consistency of practice, reducing the administrative burden on staff, automating much of the standard reporting needs and enabling more effective collaboration with partners, families and children.	Director of Children's Services	The new case management system is in place and is operating effectively across all areas of the service. Families, children and other partners contribute to the system electronically, improving the knowledge of a given child, with data migration and staff training programmes underway.	Following a successful business case, approved by AfC and Windsor and Maidenhead, the migration of the data to the new system is complete and core social work processes are live on the new system. Statutory data reports for social care are reliable and run automatically.

The priorities in our plan for Windsor and Maidenhead are aligned with the Interim Strategy for 2020/21 and will align with the new Corporate Plan due to be finalised in April 2021.

08

OUR FINANCIAL PLAN

Achieving for Children's Medium Term Financial Strategy focuses on achieving financial sustainability over the business plan period and explains how the business plan programmes and business development strategy will help achieve financial sustainability. In setting the medium term budget, we have focused on making informed recommendations that align with our commissioning councils' affordability objectives as well as making best use of available funds to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

The six business plan principles align with the organisation's financial objectives through the promotion of family resilience, maximising independence into adulthood through supporting young people to meet their full potential, investment in local borough resources and focusing on efficient business processes and commissioning.

The organisation will be following three overarching financial principles over the coming years.

Achieving value for money

All three of Achieving for Children's commissioning councils have historically received relatively low levels of funding for council services and as a result, services must be delivered at a lower than average cost. Achieving for Children delivers good quality services for a relatively low cost across general fund services. Education services that are funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant are delivered at average cost and the organisation is working proactively towards improving services in line with inspection findings. The programmes detailed in this programme facilitate the improved use of resources.

Maximise resources available to frontline services

Achieving for Children regularly reviews budgets to ensure that resources available to frontline services are maximised and there is a sufficient balance to ensure that frontline services have the infrastructure to ensure they can continue to support children and families.

The following four aspects are important in achieving this objective.

- Adequate needs-led budget growth and achievement of savings
- Maximise income generation
- Periodic review of emerging priority areas
- Business plan programmes must facilitate the effective use of resources

Shared budget responsibility

Achieving for Children operates a culture of shared budget responsibility with all staff being responsible for ensuring that every pound spent is maximising positive outcomes for children and young people and is in line with budget control processes. Each of the programmes identified in this business plan will have a project sponsor as well as project management and finance support. Progress against the plan and on the associated spend and savings implications will be monitored on an ongoing basis with the relevant leadership team having overarching oversight.

The financial implications, in terms of spend and savings will be carefully monitored over the plan period. It is clear that the coming years will be financially challenging for Achieving for Children given the ongoing pressure on wider public sector budgets and national increases in levels of need for children's services. It is of paramount importance that the organisation continues to work with commissioning partners to ensure a mutual understanding of existing and emerging pressures and reaches agreement on the level of funding available and how that funding should be prioritised to achieve the best possible outcomes for the children and young people we support.





**achieving
for children**



Champions for children and families

Business Development Strategy

1. Purpose of strategy

The Achieving for Children (AfC) Business Development Strategy outlines the organisation's objective to grow as a specialist children's services provider over the next five years. It outlines a structured approach to identifying, evaluating and agreeing which opportunities are right for AfC and our owning councils.

At the heart of the strategy is an ambition to improve the lives of children and young people by providing affordable and outstanding children's services support to the young people of Richmond, Kingston and Windsor & Maidenhead. Services may be extended to other organisations supporting children outside of our three AfC boroughs where there are clear ethical, financial or developmental benefits.

This strategy complements the main AfC Business Plan and the priority areas for further work and development will be key themes within the overarching five year Business Plan.

2. Context

There are a number of key contextual factors that have influenced the direction for this strategy as follows:

➤ Financial context

AfC delivers children's services that are principally funded through local government, education and health funding. It is well documented that there are funding pressures across all three of these sectors with there being an ongoing focus on delivering services with less money. This strategy will prioritise increasing the affordability of services for our three AfC boroughs through both improvements in unit cost efficiency as well as income generation. It is recognised that most organisations who are responsible for supporting children and young people are focusing resources on essential and statutory services only

and this will need to be reflected if AfC looks to market services externally. The impact of BREXIT on the national and local finances is also still unknown but it could lead to an increase in levels of need and associated cost coupled with further funding pressures.

➤ **Market Environment**

There are two key elements to the children's services market.

The first area relates to direct provision of care / support placements. National demand for placements has outstripped supply for a number of years now and this has driven up the price that organisations who support children pay across the country. This area of the market is highly regulated but there is a clear opportunity to look at how local assets can be used to drive down ongoing revenue costs for our three local authorities as well as a need to maximise income where local places can not be used for our AfC borough children.

The second area relates to the provision of consultancy and advice services. AfC are already actively engaging in this market with activity underway to support local schools as well as other local authority partners. More recently the scope to generate income through social care consultancy services has reduced as most local authorities who require improvement to their services can access support for free through the Partners in Practice programme run by the Department for Education. AfC provides some of this support on behalf of the DfE as part of a grant funded programme. There is an emerging market for digital advisory services and AfC is recognised and actively involved in this area.

➤ **Covid Context**

Covid has changed the way in which most organisations work and deliver services. It has brought into sharp focus the importance of risk management, continuity planning and having an organisation that has the digital infrastructure and competence to adapt to different ways of delivering services. The development of digital competence has been an area of focus in AfC for a number of years and we are now well placed to build on this knowledge base. Covid has also broadened the geographical market place as it is now generally accepted that a lot of support can be delivered virtually.

➤ **Demography and Need**

The need for children's services has been rising across the country as well as in our local boroughs. Most local authorities have seen a rise in the number of young people requiring social care and early help support as well as a rise in the number of young people requiring additional support with their education in the past five years. This rise has meant that the infrastructure to support young people via social care, health and education provision has become stretched and the creation of local, affordable options is key to controlling costs and supporting young people to avoid escalation in need where possible. This strategy

aims to maximise AfCs placement options and improve ability to shape the local market and control cost.

➤ **Corporate priorities**

AfCs core operational objective remains the provision of high quality and affordable children's services for our three AfC borough areas. This strategy seeks to explore how the development of AfCs core business can assist in the successful delivery of children's services. AfC will need to work closely with our three owning councils in developing proposals to ensure that there remains alignment between the four organisations' corporate priorities. The annual Business Plan refresh and approval process ensures there is dedicated time to focus on aligning objectives across the group at least once a year.

3. Children's Services Market Insight and Opportunities

This strategy looks at opportunities for AfC to further develop into the children's provider market space. AfC are well placed to assess the opportunities and difficulties in the market as at present we both deliver children's services and also commission services from external providers. This strategy looks at opportunities for AfC to further develop its provider arm and it is important that this activity is informed by our information about local needs as well as independent market insights.

Laing Buisson publishes a Children's Services UK Market Report each year. The press release for the June 2019 addition summarises the children's social care market as follows:

"As of 31 March 2018, LaingBuisson estimates that 95,855 children were being looked after in care in the UK. This represents growth of 9% in the past 5 years, and 28% in the past 10, with many children and young people presenting with complex and multi-layered needs. This increase in demand came at a time when local authorities were asked by central government to constrain budgets to reduce public sector debt, meaning that increases in spending to meet rising children's care and special education demand have come at the expense of other services for children and young people, and other council services.

The main sectors of children's and young people's services in which the independent sector is active are special education, residential care and fostering. In March 2019, there were 499 special schools and 106 special colleges operated by the independent sector in England, and an average of 20-25 new school developments have been registered in both 2018 and 2017. The main driver for this is the prevalence of children with EHC (Education, Health and Care) Plans or Statements, estimated at 2.9% of pupils in England as of January 2018. Children's care providers have also responded to the growing need for joined up care, therapy and education.

The number of children in foster care has risen by 8% in the past five years. One-third are placed by independent fostering agencies. The Government has plans to get local authorities and the independent sector working collaboratively to ensure sufficient high-quality fostering placements, for example by providing seed funding for joint recruitment drives.

The rise in the number of children cared for in residential settings is even sharper, at almost 17% in the past five years for the UK. Within this sector of the market, the independent sector is sought out for innovation and new development and plays an important role in providing specialised services in the right type of setting for more vulnerable children with complex needs. One-third are placed by independent fostering agencies. The Government has plans to get local authorities and the independent sector working collaboratively to ensure sufficient high-quality fostering placements, for example by providing seed funding for joint recruitment drives.

The rise in the number of children cared for in residential settings is even sharper, at almost 17% in the past five years for the UK. Within this sector of the market, the independent sector is sought out for innovation and new development and plays an important role in providing specialised services in the right type of setting for more vulnerable children with complex needs.”

(direct quote from - Laingbuisson 14th June 2019, https://www.laingbuisson.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Children%E2%80%99s-Services-UK-Market-Report-Press-Release_June-14-2019.pdf)

Across Richmond, Kingston and Windsor & Maidenhead there has been increasing local need for foster care, residential and SEND placements. Over time the amount spent on procuring these placements has increased due to volume and complexity of placement as well as a clear excess of demand over supply regionally and nationally. The AfC Sufficiency strategy evaluates current and future levels of need and makes recommendations about how AfC can work in partnership with the three owning councils and other partners to develop local provision as a mechanism to manage costs.

In addition to the placement sufficiency opportunities, Covid 19 has brought opportunities around digital development in children's services to the fore. AfC was already active in this market pre-covid and Covid has increased opportunities for AfC to bid for grant funding to further develop internal digital competence which can be used to develop AfC practice and also provides opportunity to market digital innovation to other children's services providers. AfC has been successful in bidding for a DfE grant of £250,000 to support this activity in 2020/21.

Conversely the market opportunities for children's services improvement consultancy services has become more limited since AfC was first established in 2014. Most local authorities requiring help can access free consultancy advice through the DfE Partners in Practice programme. This has limited the potential for significant external consultancy income but AfC is a recognised DfE Partner in Practice and continues to deliver and fund consultancy advice through the programme.

4. Strategic Vision

The AfC vision, as outlined in the Business Plan, is to provide children and their families with the support and services they need to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives. As an organisation we plan to embark on proactive business development to facilitate the achievement of this objective.

AfC plans to be a key player in developing innovative children's services approaches and will develop services and competency to:

- Develop cost effective approaches to support children and young people with a particular focus on more affordable, high quality, local placement options
- Innovate to improve services and support children to achieve better outcomes. We will be pioneers in the digital development space with a focus on improving efficiency and using technology to better engage with young people and partners

5. Key Business Development Principles

It is important that AfC harnesses business development opportunities that will support the organisation to achieve its core strategic objectives. Business development should not distract from the primary priority of supporting our AfC borough children in the most effective and affordable way. All opportunities will be evaluated against the following key principles to ensure we only embark on 'good' growth.

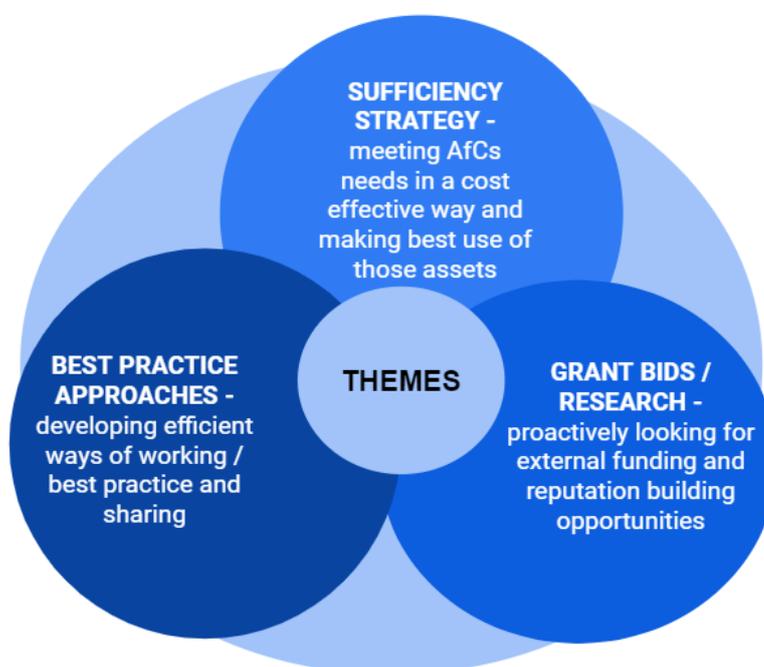
- Opportunities must align with AfCs strategic objectives, ethos and Business Plan.
- Programmes should provide an opportunity to improve the lives and outcomes of children and young people.
- Programmes should have the potential to improve services or reduce the net cost of services through income generation / cost avoidance / efficiency.
- Programmes should be based on AfCs areas of strength and what we are already

doing well.

- Programmes should not put the organisation at undue reputational risk.
- Programmes should prioritise positive impact on AfCs three borough services and develop internal capability. They should not divert significant resources away from service delivery in the three AfC boroughs without appropriate contingencies / backfill.
- External charging should be undertaken on a full cost recovery plus profit model.

6. Development Areas

AfC will seek to develop under three overarching themes:



SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY- These projects should emerge from the Sufficiency Strategy and look to address growing business placement and support needs in a cost effective way. AfC will develop more local provision (education, social care, health) and maximise use of this provision. This will improve the quality of local provision and reduce the cost of supporting AfC children. Where there is surplus capacity / a mismatch of short term need to provision, vacancy rates will be managed by selling to other boroughs using a cost plus profit margin model.

BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES - Development of internal best practice that can be scaled up and used to generate income. These projects provide an opportunity to improve local services, generate income as well as contribute to a wider social good.

GRANTS / RESEARCH - AfC is uniquely positioned to undertake research across three LA areas which puts it in a good position to bid for funding and research grants. This activity not only provides an opportunity to access money for AfC projects and initiatives but also provides an evidence base for developing best practice approaches which can be scaled up to generate income in the future. AfC is also well known as a Partner in Practice and for successfully bidding for grant income to trial / develop innovative practice.

7. Identifying development areas

All staff will be encouraged to identify new development areas and will be supported by key Business Services staff in developing those ideas to a concept that can be evaluated via a tollgate process. The following methods of identifying ideas will be key:

- Digital Strategy and Digital Innovation Group
- Recommendations of key strategies and reviews e.g. Sufficiency Strategy
- Proactive staff innovation events throughout the year to encourage staff at all levels and disciplines to identify and submit ideas
- Periodic evaluation of feedback from service users, review of data and quality assurance audits to understand what works and what needs improving
- Rolling programme of Business Process Re-engineering
- Annual evaluation of progress and new market opportunities

8. Programme evaluation

Decisions about the development areas should be based on sound business cases that consider staff capacity, resourcing, market viability, impact on the organisation and financial benefit. Business cases will be supported by reliable data and needs assessment.

Ideas will go through a formalised tollgate evaluation process that will be commensurate with the level of investment, risk and reward potential for the programme. This will:

- Provide a fair, transparent, consistent and reliable approach to evaluating proposals
- Ensure that evaluation resource is used effectively with unviable ideas not progressed through an early tollgate
- Ensure a quality of business case that considers all relevant factors and involves staff with relevant skills
- Provide a structured approach to evaluation and decision making and ensure that decisions are made by the appropriate staff / governance body including where relevant the council committees

Ideas will progress through three tollgates as follows:



AfC will seek to engage with relevant stakeholders and partners when considering development areas and also as part of the decision making process. The following key stakeholders will be critical to the process:

Stakeholder	Input
Children, young people and families	We will engage with children in young people to inform how we develop services and to ensure that they remain aligned to need and reflect what works
Staff and leadership teams	We will seek ideas from staff across AfC as they are best placed to identify opportunities and have first hand knowledge about what makes a difference to the lives of young people
AfC Board	The AfC Board will be part of the evaluation process and have oversight of the overall strategy to ensure that plans remain in line with strategic direction and risk management expectations. The Board will also be a key source of ideas and market intelligence.
Councils	We will work closely with the councils to ensure that development opportunities align with council ownership priorities. The councils will also be critical in the development of proposals and decisions that require capital investment or invest to save.
Department for Education and other grant giving bodies	AfC is a Partner in Practice and the DfE are a key source of information and advice in terms of market need, upcoming funding / innovation opportunities and national priority areas for innovation.

9. Business Development Plan

The Business Development Plan will outline specific areas that will be evaluated and where appropriate developed over the next five years. The most significant projects will also feature as priorities within the overarching AfC Business Plan.

DRAFT BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME PLAN

SUFFICIENCY PROGRAMMES

These projects should emerge from the Sufficiency Strategy and look to address growing business placement and support needs in a cost effective way. AfC will develop more local provision (education, social care, health) and maximise use of this provision. This will improve the quality of local provision and reduce the cost of supporting AfC children. Where there is surplus capacity / a mismatch of short term need to provision, vacancy rates will be managed by selling to other boroughs using a cost plus profit margin model.

Status	Programme	Loc	Description	Outcome / Progress / Opportunity	Year	Future Financial Implications
LIVE	Greenleas Supported Accommodation Unit	RBK	17 bed supported accommodation unit for care leavers	Opened in 2018. Improved supported accommodation offer for 17 care leavers	2018	Savings of £150k per year
LIVE	Hope House Children's Home	LBR	5 bed residential childrens home	Build and registration complete. Provision open with full occupation being phased in over the coming months. Improved access to local emergency and specialist residential places	2020	None expected but may be future opportunities
WIP	Moor Lane Respite Centre	RBK	7/8 bed respite centre for children with SEND	Build and registration complete. Anticipated opening in January 2021. Delivery arrangements being reviewed.	2020	Anticipated savings £200k per annum

WIP	Independent Fostering Agency	ALL	Developing a more ambitious IFA strategy to increase the % of our children in our own foster care provision and to sell any excess foster places	Improved outcomes for children and young people and increased placement options. IFA has been established and the Board has agreed a four year strategy with implementation from April 2021. Target 85% inhouse IFA by 2025.	2021	<p>Cost avoidance / income generation</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td>£394,421</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022/23</td> <td>£1,032,857</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022/23</td> <td>£1,593,212</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2023/24</td> <td>£1,792,984</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Total	2021/22	£394,421	2022/23	£1,032,857	2022/23	£1,593,212	2023/24	£1,792,984
	Total															
2021/22	£394,421															
2022/23	£1,032,857															
2022/23	£1,593,212															
2023/24	£1,792,984															
TBC	Supported Accommodation for young people aged 16+	ALL	Development of further in house supported accommodation units for care leavers in line with need identified in the Sufficiency Strategy	Sufficiency strategy drafted and going through the final drafting / approval process. Need identified in all three LA areas. Business cases needed	2022 - 2025	Capital investment required to purchase or refurbish sites. Savings likely to be in the region of £100k to £200k per year per unit developed.										
TBC	Children's Home	RBK	Development of a further children's home in line with need identified in the Sufficiency Strategy	Sufficiency strategy drafted and going through the final drafting / approval process. Options appraisal and business case needed	2023	Capital investment required to purchase or refurbish a site. Savings / cost avoidance limited.										

BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES

Development of internal best practice that can be scaled up and used to generate income. These projects provide an opportunity to improve local services, generate income as well as contribute to a wider social good.

Status	Programme	Loc	Description	Outcome / Progress / Opportunity	Year	Financial Implications	Opportunity to expand
LIVE	Berkshire Sensory Consortium	RBWM	Host organisation for the Berkshire Sensory Consortium Service	Consortium transferred to AfC in April 2020. The service continues to work with schools and families to improve outcomes for children and young people.	2020 +	Service pays for itself and potential to expand service to generate income	yes
LIVE	Digital offer	ALL	AfC Digital Strategy which includes digital improvement, efficiency and innovation	Strategy in place and significant developments made. Digital offer being marketed to other LAs. Successful £250k DfE grant bid. Investment provided by LBR/RBK for service specific projects. Key areas: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children's services digital transformation strategy 2. Audio recording 3. Replacing paper through channel shifts 	2019	2020 fee income £40k 2020 PIP Grant £250k Council specific project investment	yes

				<p>4. Mobile and remote working</p> <p>5. Troubleshooting business processes using technology</p>			
LIVE	Partner in Practice consultancy offer / specialised consultancy offer	ALL	Consultancy on social care improvement, business services processes as well as best practice that has been developed in relation to Covid response	Consultancy being delivered directly or through associates to inadequate/requires improvement LAs as part of PIP and wider DfE improvement programme.	2016	2020 expected fee income £30k	Yes but requires capacity
LIVE	School Support Offer	ALL	Paid for support offer to schools around school improvement, therapies, governor support	Traded school support offers are well developed across both operational areas.	+2014		yes
LIVE	Training Offer	ALL	The workforce development training offer is being marketed to external organisations including specialist training, apprenticeships as well as generic development training.	Covid has necessitated more virtual delivery of training which has been successful internally and with local partners.	+2014	£662k per year budgeted income	yes

GRANTS / RESEARCH

AfC is uniquely positioned to undertake research across three LA areas which puts it in a good position to bid for research grants. AfC is also well known as a Partner in Practice and for successfully bidding for grant income to trial / develop innovative practice.

Status	Programme	Loc	Description	Outcome / Progress / Opportunity	Year	Financial Implications	Opportunity to expand
LIVE	Partner in Practice - understanding what works	ALL	Grant funding to develop early intervention best practice models	AfC has continued the development of the PIP What Works innovations across all three boroughs with a focus on most effective innovations from previous four year programme - family resilience, family coaches, Mental health and domestic abuse	2020 +	Grant funding of £920k in 2020, £7m in prior 4 years	Depends on whether programme continues

The organisation applies for two grants per month on average and opportunities will be added as they arise.



Champions for children and families

MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY **2021-2024**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Achieving for Children's (AfCs) Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sits alongside the Business Plan and is produced as part of the budget process. It is reviewed and updated at least annually. This document outlines the company's financial strategy.

1.2 There are a number of key factors that influence AfC's finances:

- Central government funding of children's services, local government and specifically the impact of this on the Councils that own and fund the majority of AfC's costs
- The relative financial positions of each of the commissioning councils
- Central government's policies and guidelines on children's services
- Changing demographics and levels of social need in our three boroughs that impact on the number of children requiring support and the complexity of that need
- Need for children's services both statutory and preventative.
- Income generation
- The ongoing COVID 19 pandemic

2. KEY OBJECTIVE OF THE MTFS

2.1 The 2021 strategy will continue to focus on achieving financial sustainability for the Company in the context of escalating financial pressure in the specific delivery of children's and education services as well as in Local Government generally. The organisation will be following three overarching principles:

- Delivery of value for money services that are low cost and high outcome
- Maximise resources available to front line services
- Shared budget responsibility

2.2 The Strategy prioritises ensuring services are affordable as follows:

- Ensure there is a mutual understanding of what is affordable for each council in terms of funding and quality
- Achieving value for money
- Achieving challenging cost reduction targets
- Generating income to support services
- Ensuring available funding is directed at priority areas
- Ensuring that the financial interest of each owner is safeguarded
- Planning for financial sustainability over a medium to longer term period

3. FINANCIAL CONTEXT

3.1 This plan is being written in the context of continued and escalating pressure on children's and education budgets in our local boroughs and the rest of the country. This pressure has been exacerbated in 2020/21 by the Covid pandemic which has increased the need for children's services and could potentially have a lasting financial impact over the coming years. The funding and demand pressures in social care and high needs education services has continued to feature in national press and also in national findings reports undertaken by Local Government representative groups. Need for these services has continued to increase during the 2020/21 financial year and whilst there is a clear requirement to meet statutory need the organisation must ensure that it continues to develop mechanisms to drive down average costs of support if services are to remain affordable. The budgets of all three of AfCs commissioning councils remain challenging and it is not acceptable to just adjust the level of funding requested to match escalating levels of need.

3.2 The Local Government sector has seen significant funding reductions since 2010 and our commissioning councils are all balancing borough priorities as well as increasing demand for adult and children's services. It is important that in the delivery of services there is ongoing discussion with the commissioning councils regarding affordability, scope of services, service models and quality. AfC must support each council to make decisions about how the funding that is available should be prioritised between children's services and this may lead to difficult decisions. In addition it is important that AfC safeguards the individual financial resources of each council where financial positions dictate a different level of service offer than can be afforded.

3.3 Given the tightening financial envelope it is important that as an organisation we are clear about what can be afforded and look to transform services to continue the quality journey whilst delivering within the financial resources available. This may involve doing things differently and challenging the way things have always been done. The Business Plan outlines how this will be achieved over the coming years.

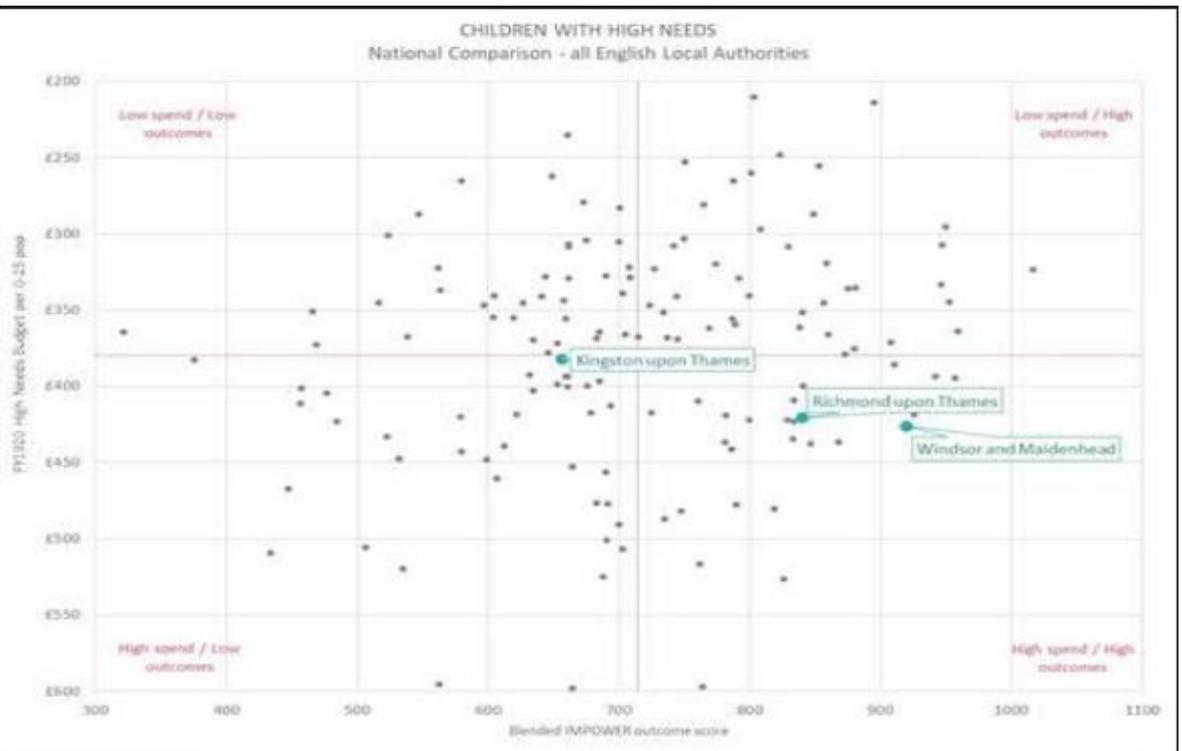
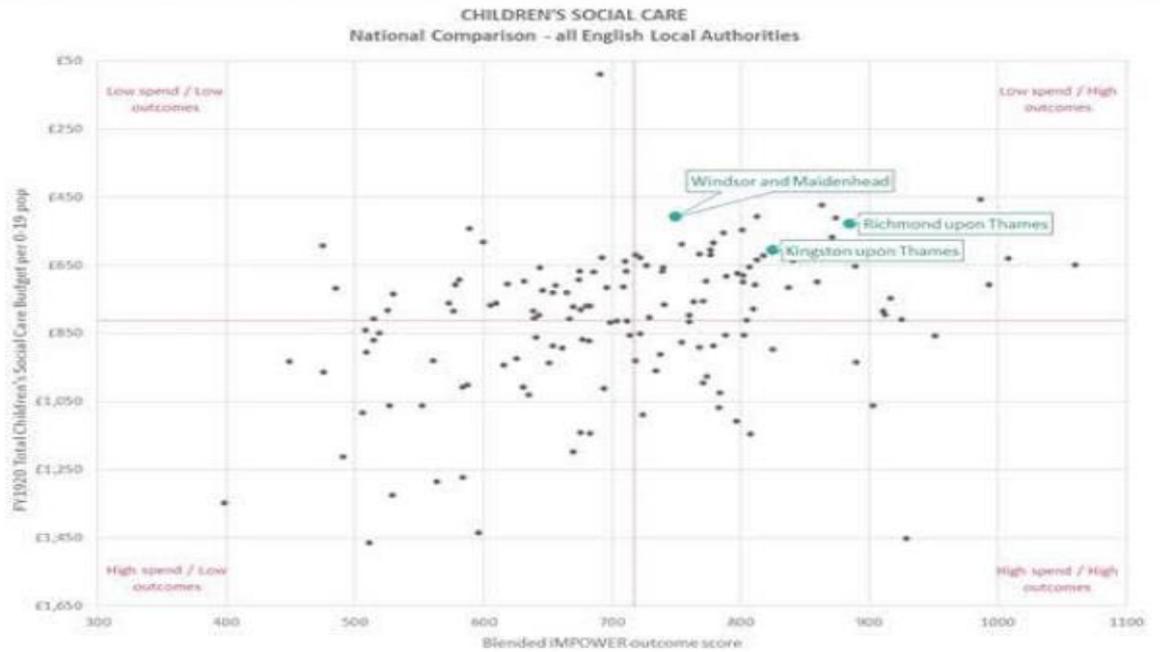
4. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

4.1 Financial performance can be measured by looking at how our services benchmark based on two key financial performance elements:

- Relative value for money
- Ability to deliver services within what is affordable for each commissioning council

Value for money

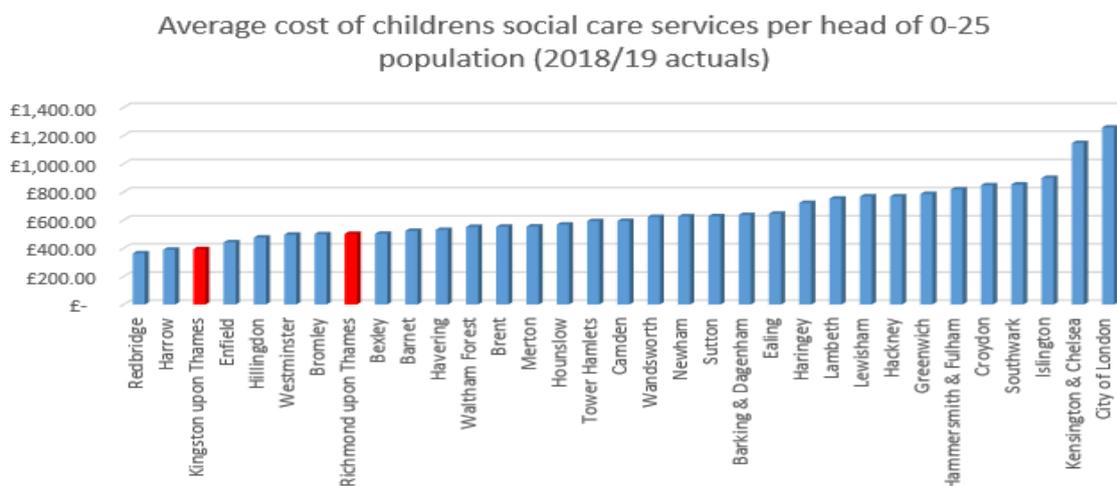
4.2 AfC aims to deliver low cost and good quality services across all three council contracts. The following research by Impower demonstrates that based on 2019/20 budgeted spend all three AfC children's social care services perform well when comparing level of investment to outcomes being achieved. There is a more mixed picture for high needs education.



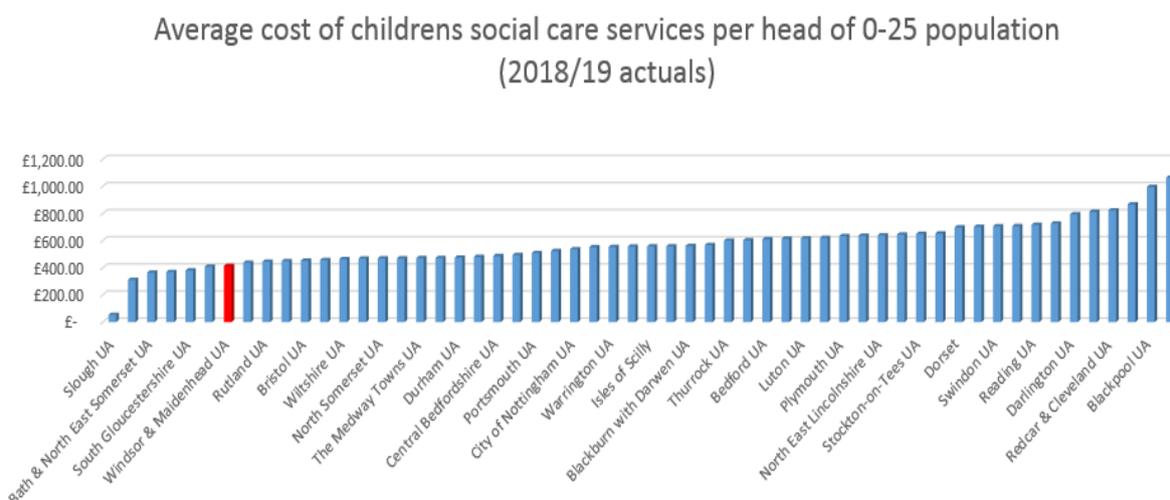
source - IMPOWER index 201920 <https://www.impower.co.uk/index>

4.3 When looking at the latest actual spend benchmarking data (2018/19) all three council contracts continue to be delivered at a relatively low / below average cost.

4.4 When looking at social care, Kingston upon Thames was the third lowest cost in London at £393.61 and Richmond upon Thames was the 8th lowest in London at £502.45 per head of 0 – 25 population. This compares to an average London spend per head of 0 – 25 population of £621.05.



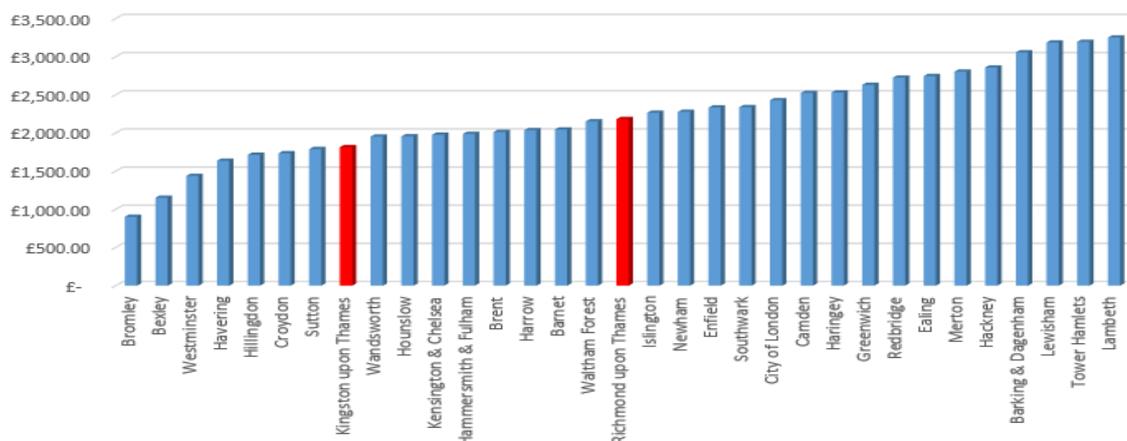
4.5 Windsor & Maidenhead had the seventh lowest spend per head of 0 – 25 population on children's social care at £413.50 per head of 0 – 25 population. This compares to an average for a unitary authority of £527.01.



4.6 When looking at education services (both DSG and non DSG funded) the results are more mixed and although services are not high cost there are clearly lessons that could be learnt from other Local Authorities who are achieving lower average costs. Kingston ranks eighth lowest out of the London comparator group with an average spend of £1,814.10 compared to

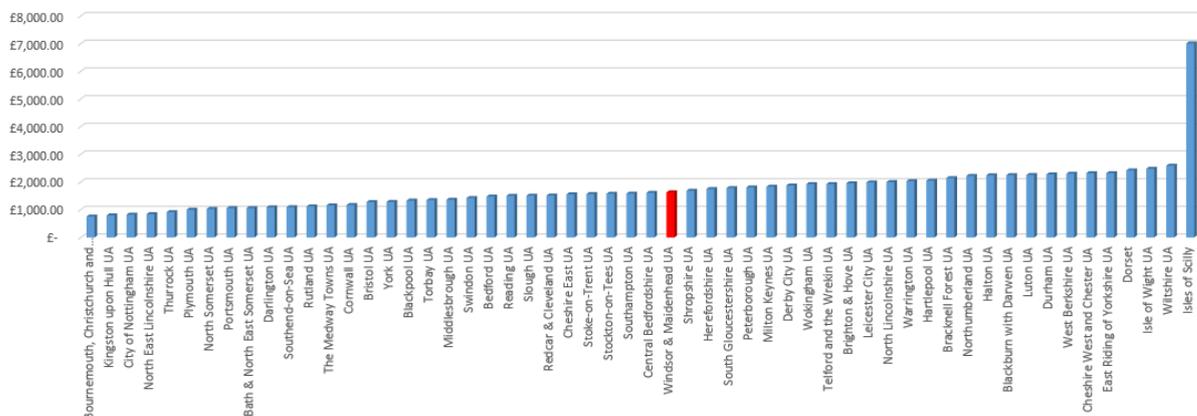
Richmond who ranks seventeenth out of 33 London boroughs at £2,181.77. Both are below the London average spend of £2,249.35.

Average cost of education services per head of 0-25 population (2018/19 actuals)



4.7 When comparing Windsor and Maidenhead education spend to other unitary authorities there is an above average picture with an average spend of £1,628.72 and a rank of 30 out of 56 unitary authorities. This compares to the group average spend of £1,586.23 and Windsor and Maidenhead is marginally below average when excluding the Isles of Scilly who are an outlier due to area specific factors.

Average cost of education services per head of 0-25 population (2018/19 actuals)



Commissioning Council Affordability

4.8 Although value for money benchmarks would indicate a relatively strong performance, services are still costing significantly more than is provided within the base contract prices. Overspends are occurring to different scales across all three contracts due to a number of reasons:

- Increasing levels of need for services beyond what can be accommodated within base budget envelopes and current average costs

- Insufficient funding being provided within base contract price relative to annual growth requested during budget setting process
- Non funding of non-avoidable inflationary pressures e.g. pay increment / pension inflation
- Systemic underfunding of high needs education services within the ringfenced DSG funds
- Non achievement of some savings that were built in to the base budgets

4.9 It is important that service quality and spending expectations are mutually agreed and understood with each commissioning council to improve this position. The approach to this has improved in recent years with AfC contributing at a more granular level to each commissioning council's budget setting process. The key ways in which a mutual position is reached are as follows:

- AfC staff and the DCS engage with the relevant council process in setting the annual budget. The three councils have subtly different approaches but all include the identification and agreement of growth and savings.
- Annual AfC contract review as part of commissioning process to look at the budget and performance targets for the following year.
- Submission of monthly budget and performance monitoring data and periodic meetings with the commissioner to discuss performance.
- Input into each council's political approval and monitoring process which dovetails with AfC Board approvals and monitoring.

5. LINKS TO BUSINESS PLAN

5.1 Achieving a financially sustainable business model is one of the Company's key priorities in 2021/22 and the medium term. The priorities outlined in the Business Plan look to balance quality and affordability as well as achieve service improvement within a challenging financial envelope. The Business Plan and budget has been produced with significant amounts of engagement with staff, stakeholders and the councils. The Business Plan focuses on six themes, which align with borough specific projects and objectives. The following table looks at these strategic themes to identify how they can be aligned to the organisation's financial objectives.

Strategic priority	What we will achieve for children and young people?	Link to Financial Sustainability
STRONGER FAMILIES	We will have a relentless focus on safeguarding children and young people across all our services. The services we deliver will be high-quality and will protect and promote the wellbeing of children and young people by promoting family resilience. We will work collaboratively with our key partners to	This theme should help manage needs led services through providing early intervention support to prevent need and costs escalating, reinforcing thresholds to access services and manage need, ensuring that funding is prioritised to those children most in need and where possible reducing the requirement for costly permanent accommodation.

	ensure we are able to realise the benefits of joint working to support our children, young people and families.	
POSITIVE FUTURES	We will invest and work collaboratively to improve our local education, health and care offer to children and young people so that they have access to high quality services, are able to stay close to their families and friends, achieve well, and develop their skills for independence.	This theme should have a positive impact into adulthood. Focusing funding on support that will increase independence should both reduce average costs over time but will also enable the councils to attract increased funding through the apprenticeship scheme. The support of children locally will enable financial resources to be focused on developing local provisions rather than on costly transport and out of borough independent sector provision.
EXCELLENT WORKFORCE	Our workforce will be experienced, talented, empowered and motivated to deliver the best possible services and outcomes for children and young people; we will invest in the recruitment, retention and development of our workforce and reward their achievements.	This theme will ensure that staff are skilled and retained which should reduce reliance on the more expensive agency workforce and ensure that staff are delivering efficient and high quality services through developing to their full potential.
FINANCIAL STABILITY	The services we deliver will provide excellent value for money and we are trusted by our commissioning Councils to deliver the best possible services within the agreed contract price, including the efficient delivery of our financial savings plans.	This priority is at the heart of the organisation's sustainability model. We will work with our commissioning councils to agree an affordable funding envelope and work to ensure that we achieve maximum value for every pound spent. We will learn best practice from other local authorities who are delivering good quality and relatively low cost services.
COMMERCIAL SUCCESS	We will secure the sustainability of the community interest company through contract renewal, business development, fundraising and good growth, so that we are able to reinvest in the services we deliver directly to children and their families.	These activities will enable the continued investment in services in the context of challenging contractual financial envelopes. We will also explore more efficient service delivery models for some services and generate income to provide external investment into our children's services.
SMARTER WORKING	Our business processes will be efficient, cost-effective and supportive to frontline practitioners so that they are able to spend as much time as possible working directly with children, young people and	This workstream will maximise the resources that are available for front line services and lead to an affordable support service that meets business needs. We will develop our use of technology to make processes and business services more

	their families to improve outcomes for them.	efficient including developing our accommodation and flexible working strategy.
--	--	---

6. KEY BUSINESS PLAN / DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

- 6.1 It is clear that affordability of services must be a key focus over the term of this strategy and the Business Plan across all three boroughs. Increasing need and complexity of needs is continuing to add pressure across education, social care and health services. In addition there is the potential for Covid 19 and BREXIT to exacerbate these pressures. The following key areas of work will be integral to delivering affordable services in the coming year and beyond:

PRIORITY ACTIVITY TO CONTROL COSTS	HOW WILL IT BE DELIVERED?
<p>DEMAND MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Supporting the prioritisation of services to young people most in need and demand management through the application by service teams of consistent thresholds.</p>	<p>Core services have well established threshold guidance that is periodically reviewed both internally and externally through inspections or specific requests for independent review. The DCSs are responsible for ensuring there are arrangements in place to monitor compliance and support staff to understand the threshold guidance.</p>
<p>LOCAL PROVISION</p> <p>Delivering the recommendations of the AfC Sufficiency Strategy at pace in terms of using commissioning opportunities effectively and developing more local provision where it makes financial sense to do so.</p>	<p>The draft Sufficiency Strategy and associated recommendations has been considered by the AfC Board and will now progress through council approval processes. There will be a focus in the coming months to identify those programmes that are likely to have the most positive financial impact and to develop these into business cases for agreement by the councils as appropriate.</p>
<p>COMMISSIONING/PROCUREMENT COMPETENCE</p> <p>Building commissioning and procurement capacity and competence in the organisation to ensure that placement and other procurement activity is as effective as possible in finding solutions and driving down cost.</p>	<p>The organisation will continue to build competence and capacity within the commissioning team to ensure that the improved practice from the last three years in relation to placement commissioning continues and that we get the best price when undertaking procurement activity. The Director of Commissioning will continue to develop the commissioning strategy to ensure that we are making best use of our market share and where appropriate planning ahead with providers to get preferable rates. We will also continue to link in with commissioning partnership arrangements for SEND and social care.</p>

<p>REVIEW</p> <p>The effective review of placements, plans and working models is key to ensuring that we are promoting independent, resilient families and that we are prioritising the funding we have in an effective way.</p>	<p>The company has established practices to ensure that plans and placements are periodically reviewed to support the continued alignment of funding and support to the changing needs of young people. It is important that we continue to work to improve these practices particularly in social care and SEND where the financial pressure and scope for changing need is most significant.</p>
<p>MODERNISATION OF WORKING PRACTICE</p> <p>Review of how we work to ensure that we are making best use of technology, flexible working practices and that support services offer value for money.</p>	<p>The company will reflect on learnings from Covid to ensure we build back better in terms of efficient use of buildings, homeworking, digital technologies and reduced travel / printing.</p> <p>A key priority will also be on improving the current HR arrangements to lead to a more consistent offer across AfC and in time improvements in recruitment and retention.</p>
<p>FINANCIAL MONITORING & PLANNING</p> <p>Detailed monitoring of all high risk areas on an ongoing basis and consistent reporting internal, to the AfC Board and to the Councils.</p>	<p>The finance team will continue to monitor budgets and report performance to budget managers, leadership teams, the board and councils regularly. The finance team will also work to further improve budget awareness and confidence in managing budgets across the organisation.</p>

7. SHORT TERM BUDGET

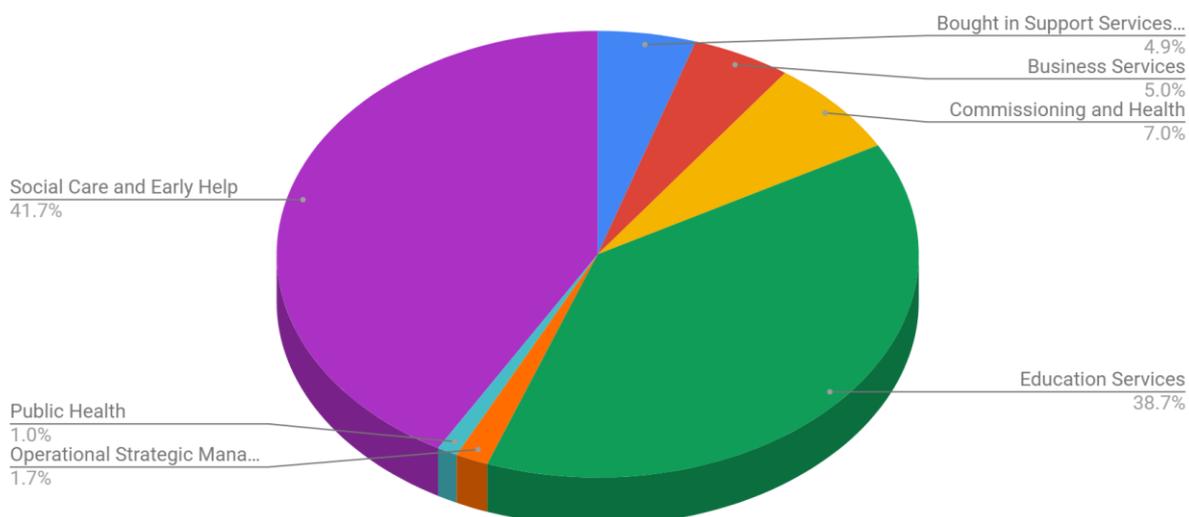
7.1 In setting the 2021/22 AfC has worked closely with each of the three councils and the table below shows the proposed position and movement for next year. Detailed budget reports will be considered by each council between January and March 2021.

Contract price movements	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
2020/21 Q2 contract price excl DSG	35.222	37.332	25.799	98.352
Growth	1.283	2.444	2.077	5.804
Unfunded Growth	0.000	0.693	0.396	1.089
Savings	-0.971	-0.685	-1.396	-3.052
Savings associated with unfunded Growth	0.000	-0.693	-0.396	-1.089

Savings associated with unfunded Inflation	-0.151	-0.151	-0.120	-0.422
Inflation - pay	0.404	0.000	0.000	0.404
Inflation - contracts	0.196	0.181	0.145	0.522
Unfunded Inflation - contract/pay award	0.151	0.151	0.120	0.422
Inflation - income	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Grant and virement changes	-1.276	-1.029	0.123	-2.182
2021/22 opening contract price excl DSG	34.858	38.243	26.748	99.848
DSG funding in contract price	19.611	20.456	12.035	52.101
2021/22 base contract price incl DSG	54.468	58.698	38.782	151.949

7.2 The budget is planned to be spent as follows:

Achieving for Children Budget 2021/22



7.3 The biggest risk to achieving a balanced position on general fund services is the achievement of savings and volatility in cost of needs led services.

7.4 The ringfenced DSG funds are not expected to achieve a balanced position due to underfunding for high needs education services within the councils' DSG grant allocations. Cost management programmes are in place and outlined in the respective borough Deficit Management Plans and these plans must be a core focus over the period of this strategy and beyond. AfC continues to work to raise awareness of this issue and has the clear remit that statutory obligations to the young people should continue to be met despite the government underfunding.

7.5 Where the savings plans identified do not achieve an in year balanced position discussions have been held with the relevant Council to agree authorised overspends (e.g. Richmond and Kingston

DSG). Where a balanced position is reliant on the achievement of the riskier savings, contact is ongoing with the relevant Council to report progress against achievement of the cost reductions and if these do not come to fruition there should be an agreement about alternative cost reductions or an in year contract change control.

8 MEDIUM TERM BUDGET

8.1 The Company undertakes high level budgeting for a five year period (including current) to ensure that there is a planned approach to delivering services. The following table outlines the high level changes to the general fund budget (Non DSG). The expectations are reviewed with the Councils in June / July each year to ensure that medium term financial planning remains aligned and the detailed budget setting process for the following year then commences. This table represents a point in time. Savings plans and growth requirements are periodically reviewed during the year to identify how budget gaps can be resolved. This is informed by changes in the council's relative financial positions as well as emerging pressures and opportunities within children's services.

Included in council MTFs	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	TOTAL
	£	£	£	£	£
Social care demand growth	3,367,840	1,312,927	1,297,795	1,357,066	7,335,627
SEND Transport Growth	807,050	30,000	30,000	30,000	897,050
Other Controllable Growth / Investment	2,718,000	283,000	305,400	325,708	3,632,108
Savings	-4,563,000	-1,815,000	-855,000	-280,000	-7,513,000
Inflation - contractual	521,686	422,229	428,418	433,706	1,806,038
Inflation - pay award	403,920	1,048,285	1,069,250	1,090,636	3,612,091
Inflation - increments	422,000	422,000	422,000	422,000	1,688,000
Other grant/virement changes	-2,181,996	0	0	0	-2,181,996
Net change before budget adjustments	1,495,500	1,703,441	2,697,863	3,379,115	9,275,919
<u>Business Dvt Savings incl above</u>					
Independent Fostering Agency ALL	-65,000	-130,000	-130,000	-130,000	-455,000
Supported Accommodation LBR/RBK	0	-100,000	-100,000	-50,000	-250,000
Children's Home LBR	-50,000	-50,000	-25,000	0	-125,000
Digital	-20,000	-90,000	-20,000	0	-130,000
Total	-135,000	-280,000	-275,000	-180,000	-870,000

- 8.2 The table above summarises the latest position and work is ongoing to identify further cost avoidance / efficiency savings for the latter years of the plan. The plan includes £870,000 of savings that will emerge from business development activity. There is scope to include more as business cases are developed and agreed. Some reinvestment back into the organisation's infrastructure will be required to ensure there is enough capacity to deliver against business development plans.
- 8.3 In relation to the general fund the biggest financial challenges for the medium term period are:
- The management of need for social care and health services and the management of unit costs in these areas. This will be undertaken through the monitoring of thresholds to access services, continued investment in early intervention and the further development of the local placement market and placement commissioning function.
 - Management of increasing staff costs, particularly in social care due to regional shortages of suitably qualified staff. The workforce strategy will look to reduce reliance on expensive agency workers through targeted recruitment campaigns, improved agency arrangements and a review of the incentives package for staff groups where recruitment and retention is challenging. The organisation will also be increasing the number of trainee social workers that are supported to assist with this pressure in the medium term.
 - The challenging savings targets that have been built into all three council contracts as well as additional savings required to fund pressures that have not been funded within the base contract prices. The project management approach will keep the leadership team focused on the achievement of these programmes and associated savings. There will be early conversations where the achievement of savings is not possible to reach a mutual agreement with the relevant council about associated actions.
- 8.4 In addition to the general fund pressures the company is working towards bringing DSG funded high needs education expenditure more in line with the associated Government Grant allocation across all three boroughs. This activity is likely to last for at least the period covered within this plan. The cost of high needs education services, relative to the level of Government funding remains a significant risk. The Council and AfC are active in lobbying the Government to provide sufficient funding to provide for the duties set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. To date this has yielded some extra funding but not to the scale required to sufficiently resolve the budget pressures and allow for current as well as increasing levels of need. Even after the additional funding provided by the Government, significant overspend on the high needs block are anticipated. This will lead to an increase in the cumulative deficits on the funds by the end of 2021/22. Deficit management plans have been drafted and on the Richmond and Kingston side the council / AfC is in ongoing discussion with the Department for Education
- 8.5 The Directors of Childrens Services and Chief Operating & Finance Officer are responsible for identifying savings with their leadership teams and planning for the implementation of these changes. They are supported in doing this by a senior member of the finance team who attends their leadership meetings. All major areas of pressure have detailed financial recovery plans which are subject to continual monitoring, review and contingency action planning where actions do not achieve the required financial impact. It is integral that AfC achieves the plans' ambitions to reduce and control needs led budgets so that services can be sustained in the longer term.

9 FINANCIAL CONTROL

- 9.1 AfC operates a devolved approach to budget management with nominated budget managers responsible for service spend. The budget manager is a member of staff at team manager level or above and is the officer who makes the operational decisions about how to spend money. The ongoing financial challenges faced by the company has necessitated a review of the arrangements that govern budget manager spend. Under the revised financial regulations budget managers are able to spend up to their designated budget but must formally seek permission from their SLT member to spend above this limit. The SLT member may opt to transfer budget from elsewhere in their department on a temporary or permanent basis to enable the higher level of spend or may seek a contract change control from the relevant commissioning council. Each budget manager is supported by a dedicated management accountant who meets with them at least quarterly and more frequently for higher risk budgets. The finance team produces monthly monitoring information which is signed off by the relevant SLT before being sent to the Board and relevant council.
- 9.2 The Company has three main categories of spend which determines the key controls and levers for controlling spend:

Budget Type	Key controls
<p>Controllable budgets are budgets that AfC can directly impact by taking associated actions. They support statutory services but may not in themselves be statutory. Examples include staffing, training, stationary, travel, supplies and services.</p>	<p>SLT approval of vacancies prior to recruitment.</p> <p>Centralisation of general budgets e.g. training, stationary, furniture and equipment etc.</p> <p>Where overspends are anticipated senior level sign off of spend over a pre agreed limit</p> <p>All budgets allocated to individual budget managers and signed off prior to the year</p> <p>Periodic review of agency staff by SLT</p> <p>Budget manager sign off of all invoices</p> <p>Budget manager training</p> <p>Monthly budget monitoring produced by finance team in consultation with the budget manager</p> <p>Consideration of overall position by SLTs monthly</p>
<p>Stepped Costs are those that are demand led but can be directly controlled through associated action and the risks associated with reducing spend can be managed more easily. The main category of budget here relates to salary costs within frontline teams where the number of staff may not have to increase with</p>	<p>SLT approval of all vacancies prior to recruitment.</p> <p>SLT consideration of alternative options via the request form before recruitment decisions made</p>

<p>every increase in demand but where there are a certain number of staff needed to maintain caseloads within an agreed range.</p>	<p>Monitoring of workloads via information produced by the data intelligence team</p> <p>Manager sign off of funded establishment annually</p> <p>Periodic SLT review of teams over establishment</p> <p>Monthly budget monitoring produced by finance team in consultation with the budget manager</p> <p>Consideration of overall position by SLT monthly</p>
<p>Demand led budgets are those that are directly linked to the meeting of statutory duty and are difficult to influence in the short term. Examples include placements for children looked after, rent and allowances for care leavers, direct costs related to agreed educational placements and legal costs associated with specific cases.</p>	<p>Child by child placement monitoring and sign off by budget manager monthly</p> <p>Budget manager sign off of all invoices</p> <p>Attendance of key staff at decision making panels including finance where finance decisions are being made</p> <p>Periodic high cost placement reviews</p> <p>Monthly reconciliation and production of management information</p> <p>Periodic review of placement types by commissioning team</p> <p>Monthly budget monitoring produced by finance team in consultation with the budget manager</p> <p>Consideration of overall position by SLT monthly</p> <p>Development of the commissioning team and placement sufficiency strategy</p>

9.3 Where base budget funding has been reasonable, AfC has consistently maintained stepped costs and other controllable costs within the required budget envelopes but has struggled to deliver needs led costs within the Council's contract prices due to a number of reasons:

- fluctuations in need
- increases in unit costs / limited supply of placements
- failure to deliver on savings plans

9.4 To break this cycle and ensure that demand led services remain affordable for the commissioning councils, a more focused project management approach has been introduced with the DCSs and COFO have overarching responsibility for the achievement of savings in their areas. The relevant leadership team and the Board receive updates on progress and risks. Each programme has a service lead, a project lead and a finance lead. Progress and achievement of net cost reductions will be monitored during the year with alternative actions being agreed with commissioners, if needed, through periodic commissioning meetings.

10. RISKS AND MITIGATIONS

10.1 The following table summarises key financial risks for the coming year and associated actions

RISK / CHALLENGE	ACTION
Ongoing overspend and balancing reaction to financial pressure with importance of making decisions in best interest of children	<p>The relevant Leadership Team reviews the monthly monitoring and agrees all financial actions that could impact on services. This ensures that the service impact of financial action plans is considered and risks identified/ monitored.</p> <p>DCS overview of all decisions relating to LA areas / services.</p>
Placement budgets – Increasing average cost and demand pressures	<p>Internal review system for all placements to ensure they are the most appropriate in terms of service and cost.</p> <p>Detailed financial monitoring at an individual placement level.</p> <p>Continuation of centralised commissioning team model under the direction of the new Director of Commissioning.</p> <p>Sufficiency Strategy recommendations including developing more local place capacity through the fostering agency and new provisions</p> <p>Engagement with joint LA commissioning groups / initiatives to drive down cost and increase purchasing power</p> <p>Monthly financial monitoring updates provided to each Council and quarterly meetings with commissioners to discuss latest performance and activity data, risks and associated actions</p>
Achievement of savings and agreement of one off costs for redundancy etc.	<p>Regular monitoring of progress against savings plans.</p> <p>Project plans for each of the high value schemes with regular reporting to the Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p>Quarterly progress reporting to the AfC Board and Commissioners.</p>

<p>Risk of cross subsidy as the level of funding that can be afforded by each LA becomes more distinct</p>	<p>Operational area budgets recorded separately to avoid high level cross subsidy</p> <p>Demand budgets ringfenced to ensure that placement / transport budgets can not be vulnerable to cross subsidy</p> <p>DSG funds ringfenced to ensure the grant is only used for the benefit of pupils in the borough for which it was intended (separate budgets and cost recording)</p> <p>Scrutiny of DSG budgets by borough based Schools Forums</p> <p>Definition of core service provided by Business Services and agreement about level of support for each borough in the context of funding levels</p> <p>Annual financial exercise undertaken to check actual expenditure levels against contract prices</p> <p>Oversight by Directors of Children’s Services</p>
<p>Risk that councils do not agree proposed savings</p>	<p>Regular briefings for Councillors throughout the budget setting processes</p> <p>Clear breakdown of financial implications of savings proposals not being agreed</p> <p>Regular feedback between DCS and SLT / finance so that decisions can be reflected in latest financial reporting</p>

11. CASHFLOW AND LIQUIDITY

11.1 AfC has access to a contractual Revolving Credit Facility of up to £45m to provide working capital for the provision of the three major contracts with the owning Councils. This is needed as services are billed for in arrears and so it can be up to two months before the company receives payment for services delivered. The company uses the facility to ensure that there is sufficient liquidity to meet day to day operational needs. AfC holds short term deposits with a number of banking institutions to ensure that the administrative burden of operating the loan facility remains practical. Investment limits are agreed with the owning councils annually as part of the Financial Plan.

11.2 AfC has had an average borrowing of £27m over the last 12 months, comfortably below the £45m. The borrowing essentially pays for the services delivered to the councils on credit and any one off set up costs that remain on the Company’s Balance Sheet.

12 GOING CONCERN

12.1 As a company, AfC is required to demonstrate that it is a going concern. In order to do this the Board needs to consider its future financial position and assure itself that its position for the short/medium term is capable of continuing to trade. It also needs to provide assurance to the

councils that its financial plans are robust and issues around its future financial position are presented to, and agreed by the Councils as part of the detailed budget setting process.

- 12.2 It is important that AfC continues to engage with the three owning Councils in relation to what is affordable and what level and cost of service the councils need to make the contracts with AfC financially viable for them.
- 12.3 Due to the nature of AfC's services and the decision to offer AfC staff the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) AfC holds a considerable pension liability on its Balance Sheet. The decision to offer the LGPS was made at the inception of AfC and is an important factor in ensuring that AfC is in a good position to recruit and retain high quality social care staff. It is important that AfC is able to explain this position to potential trading partners and provide assurance that it is a going concern. This will be done through the Statement of Accounts and associated publications.

13 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- 13.1 It is clear that the coming years will be financially challenging for Achieving for Children. It is of paramount importance that the organisation continues to work with commissioning partners to ensure a mutual understanding of existing and emerging pressures and reaches agreement on the level of funding available and how that funding should be prioritised in line with both organisation and council objectives. The following activity will be prioritised over the coming months to move this plan forward:
- Progression of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy and associated recommendations through council approval processes
 - Development of business cases at pace for those business development opportunities that could have the most scope for cost avoidance / savings
 - Achievement and monitoring of detailed budgets and associated savings plans
 - Continued demand management through early intervention work and threshold management
 - Continued focus on developing and delivery of placement commissioning activity
 - Continued detailed monitoring and reporting to AfC leadership teams, AfC Board and commissioners
 - Progression of this strategy alongside the AfC Business Plan and 2021/22 budget through council decision making processes



AFC 2021/22 DETAILED BUDGET

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This annexe details the proposed 2021/22 AfC budget and the overall DSG fund budgets that are administered by AfC but do not wholly form part of the contract prices. The contract prices are proposed as follows:

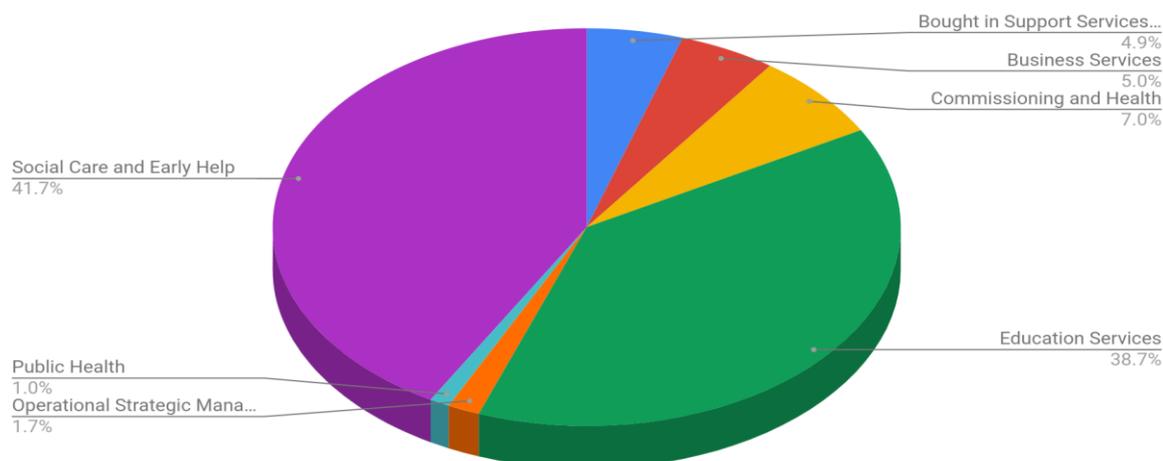
	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor & Maidenhead	Total
Contract Prices	£m	£m	£m	£m
General Fund	34.858	38.243	26.748	99.848
Dedicated Schools Grant	19.611	20.456	12.035	52.101
TOTAL	54.468	58.698	38.782	151.949

2. GENERAL FUND BUDGET

- 2.1 The overall AfC budget is £151.949m, profiled as follows:

<i>Reporting Category</i>	Budget 2021/22 £m
Bought in Support Services (incl Property)	7.511
Business Services	7.567
Commissioning and Health	10.584
Education Services	58.798
Operational Strategic Management	2.521
Public Health	1.575
Social Care and Early Help	63.393
Grand Total	151.949

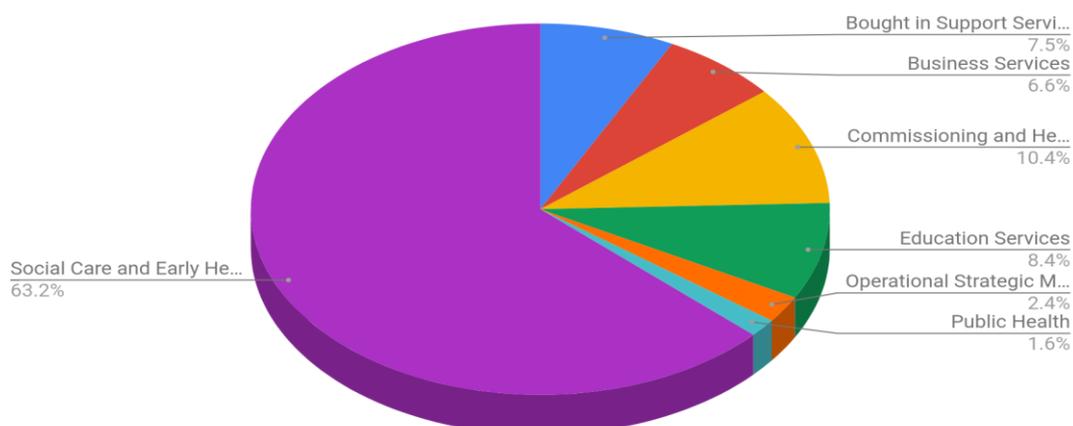
Achieving for Children Budget 2021/22



2.2 The General Fund element of the AfC budget (excl DSG) is proposed at £99.848m profiled as follows:

Reporting Category	Budget 2021/22 £m
Bought in Support Services (incl Property)	7.511
Business Services	6.549
Commissioning and Health	10.372
Education Services	8.413
Operational Strategic Management	2.362
Public Health	1.575
Social Care and Early Help	63.066
Grand Total	99.848

Achieving for Children General Fund Budget (excl DSG) 2021/22



2.3 AfC have been fully engaged in each of the three budget setting processes taking place in the Councils and have undertaken the company's detailed budget setting process alongside the council's respective timetables.

2.4 The changes to the 2021/22 budget can be summarised as follows:

	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor & Maidenhead	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Contract price movements				
2020/21 Q2 contract price excl DSG	35.222	37.332	25.799	98.352
Growth	1.283	2.444	2.077	5.804
Unfunded Growth	0.000	0.693	0.396	1.089
Savings	-0.971	-0.685	-1.273	-3.052
Savings associated with unfunded Growth	0.000	-0.693	-0.396	-1.089
Savings associated with unfunded Inflation	-0.151	-0.151	-0.120	-0.422
Inflation - pay	0.404	0.000	0.000	0.404
Inflation - contracts	0.196	0.181	0.145	0.522
Unfunded Inflation - increments	0.151	0.151	0.120	0.422
Grant and virement changes	-1.276	-1.029	0.000	-2.182
2021/22 opening contract price excl DSG	34.858	38.243	26.748	99.848
DSG funding in contract price	19.611	20.456	12.035	52.101
2021/22 base contract price incl DSG	54.468	58.698	38.782	151.949

GROWTH (£5.8m, £6.9m incl unfunded pressures)

2.5 The proposed 2021/22 growth levels are listed in the table below. There are two categories of growth; those that have been proposed to be funded by each council (£5.8m) and those that have not (£1.09m). Where growth is not funded AfC will need to identify additional in year mitigations to avoid overspending.

Growth	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor & Maidenhead	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Social Care (incl Legal) Q2 demographic growth	-0.379	0.741	0.607	0.969
Social Care (incl Legal) future demand	1.001	0.839	0.075	1.915
Social Care staffing	0.137	0.137	0.210	0.484
Total Demand Growth	0.758	1.718	0.892	3.368
Early Help	0.050	0.050	0.000	0.100
Home to School Travel	0.302	0.505	0.000	0.807
Bought in support services	0.150	0.150	0.000	0.300
Digitisation staffing	0.022	0.022	0.000	0.044
Employee related growth	0.000	0.000	0.903	0.903
Operational Pressures	0.000	0.000	0.282	0.282
Total Service Growth	0.524	0.727	1.185	2.436
2021/22 Budget Growth	1.283	2.444	2.077	5.804
Unfunded Growth - salaries (grant reduction)	0.000	0.000	0.396	0.396
Unfunded Growth - social care placements	0.000	0.693	0.000	0.693
2021/22 Budget Growth (including unfunded)	1.283	3.137	2.473	6.893

2.6 Covid-19 has been incorporated into the growth requests for all three councils. There is a risk, as the pandemic remains prevalent, that 2021/22 budgets will face greater pressure than has been anticipated. The growth requests incorporate known and expected demand pressures, as well as a smaller allowance for controllable expenses and income. Business as usual will need to be monitored closely to ensure that any legacy impact of the pandemic is identified. This will be particularly important in relation to income collectable.

2.7 In LB Richmond there is significant concern in relation to recent activity in the current, and projected, Social Care cohort budget position. The 2020/21 overspend position, as well as future demand pressures, has created a larger growth requirement than was anticipated in August. Following discussions on systems pressures, mitigations and affordability, there is an unfunded balance for demand requirements of £0.693m that will need to be mitigated through in year actions.

- 2.8 In Windsor and Maidenhead there is a funding gap of £0.396m. This gap includes £0.300m relating to staffing pressures within Social Care and £0.096m of operational budget pressures. These are therefore presented as an unfunded growth pressure. Growth requests totalling £0.475m have also not been agreed, but are being held centrally within the council as a demography fund contingency. This amount is for Social Care future demand pressures (£0.368m) and the potential 2021/22 pay rise (£0.108m). AfC has been clear that the Social Care future demand contingency is very likely to be required next financial year and by being held outside of Children's Services is likely to necessitate the report of an overspend.
- 2.9 Despite significant levels of growth there remains an increasing pressure within social care budgets across all three boroughs. It is imperative that the Commissioning Team is involved in placement procurement and that the Directors of Children's Services ensure there are robust arrangements for the periodic review of all placements. There is a risk that if demand and complexity continues to increase, particularly with the continuing pandemic restrictions, and/or the cohort shifts to higher cost placements that there will be budget shortfalls. The organisation will need to manage the associated cost of this and where needed liaise with commissioners should this situation arise.
- 2.10 Growth has been provided for next financial year in Richmond and Kingston in relation to Bought in Support Services, with the associated savings being moved to 2022/23. This is to allow the decision on the future delivery of Human Resources to be agreed and implemented as well as rationalisation of other support services.
- 2.11 Growth in the SEN Transport service is widely matched with the savings initiatives in this service area to ensure that the savings programme forms a key part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

GROWTH AND INFLATION HELD OUTSIDE OF CONTRACT PRICES (£0.878m)

- 2.12 The table below shows the amounts for Children's Services that are being held centrally (outside of the AfC contract price) within the respective councils. LB Richmond and RB Windsor and Maidenhead are holding funding for potential pay awards for 2021/22 in a central contingency. RB Kingston have included an amount for the 2021/22 pay award in the growth figures presented above. Actual contract prices will be adjusted upwards or downwards in line with actual pay awards.

	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor & Maidenhead	Total
Budgets Held Centrally (within Council)	£m	£m	£m	£m
2021/22 Pay award	0.000	0.402	0.108	0.510
Social Care Demography Fund	0.000	0.000	0.368	0.368
2021/22 council held growth	0.000	0.402	0.476	0.878

SAVINGS (£2.9m, £4.4m incl unfunded savings)

- 2.13 The following table summarises the budget reductions that have been built into the 2021/22 budget that are associated with savings programmes.

Savings	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor & Maidenhead	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m
MTFS Savings	0.971	0.685	1.273	2.929
Recovery Savings	0.000	0.693	0.396	1.089
Unfunded Inflation	0.151	0.151	0.120	0.422
2021/22 savings	1.122	1.529	1.789	4.440

2.14 The savings are split into three categories as follows:

- **MTFS Savings** – formal savings that are being agreed through the Councils’ political processes and contributing towards each council’s efficiency regime
- **Recovery savings** – savings associated with funding gaps where growth is not adequate to meet anticipated levels of demand
- **Unfunded inflation** – Inflationary pressures that are not funded in the agreed contract prices

2.15 Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of the proposed general fund savings. The savings are subject to formal agreement at the various council political meetings in February/March.

2.16 As well as the savings agreed with the council additional savings will also need to be achieved to allow for unfunded growth (recovery savings) in Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead. The £693k in Richmond relates to the continuing pressures in the current social care cohort, with savings required to reduce the overall placement spend levels.

2.17 In Windsor and Maidenhead the £396k shortfall is associated with unfunded staffing levels in Social Care and operating budget shortfalls, with savings required in year to mitigate the establishment pressures from additional ASYE Social Workers and additionality from the Partners in Practice Programme.

INFLATION (£0.93m, £1.35m incl unfunded)

- 2.18 AfC submitted inflationary growth requests to the councils in Autumn 2020 and the following table summarises the bids:

	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	Total
Inflation	£m	£m	£m	£m
Contractual pay increments (unfunded)	0.151	0.151	0.120	0.422
2021/22 Pay award	0.404	*0.000	*0.000	0.404
Contract inflation	0.196	0.181	0.145	0.522
2021/22 inflation	0.751	0.332	0.265	1.348

*21/22 unconfirmed pay award being held centrally by Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead

- 2.19 The cost of contractual salary increments is not funded by any of the councils and so this will be an additional pressure to be met from existing budgets. The level of 2021/22 pay award is still unconfirmed. Kingston has included a pay award figure in the AfC contract price and Richmond and Windsor & Maidenhead are holding this centrally within council rather than AfC budgets. The appropriate contract adjustments will be made dependent on the final pay award agreement. Funding for the 2019/20 pay award for Windsor & Maidenhead based staff that was previously unfunded has also now been added to the contract price. This is presented in the overall growth figure within employee related pressures.

GRANT AND CONTRACT CHANGES (£2.18m)

- 2.21 The contract prices will also reduce for a number of agreed adjustments to reflect estimated Government Grant amounts or service changes. These include where Government funding may have changed or where it has been agreed that budgets will be reflected differently between the councils and AfC

3. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT

- 3.1 The provisional Dedicated Schools Grant allocations were released for all three boroughs on the 17th December 2020. AfC is responsible for administering the Dedicated Schools Grants but the income and expenditure forms part of each council's retained budget. Some DSG funding is used to pay for services that are delivered by AfC on behalf of each council. The following tables summarise the provisional DSG grant allocations for next year and the detail of how this will be spent is available as part of each council's budget setting papers.

RICHMOND	2020/21 Allocation incl recoup	2021/22 Allocation incl recoup	Total £ change	Total % change	Change due to populatio n	Change due to pay and pension formula change	£ change due to additional funding
	£m	£m	£m	%	£m	£m	£m
School Block	121.937	131.335	9.398	7.71%	-0.019	6.038	3.379
Central Block	0.924	0.982	0.058	6.28%	0.000	0.027	0.031
Early Years Block	15.177	15.338	0.161	1.06%	0.000	0.000	0.161
High Needs Block	27.869	30.537	2.668	9.57%	0.056	0.327	2.285
Total	165.907	178.192	12.285	7.40%	0.037	6.392	5.856

KINGSTON	2020/21 Allocation incl recoup	2021/22 Allocation incl recoup	Total £ change	Total % change	Change due to populatio n	Change due to pay and pension formula change	£ change due to additional funding
	£m	£m	£m	%	£m	£m	£m
School Block	110.048	117.961	7.913	7.19%	-0.375	5.420	2.868
Central Block	1.062	1.128	0.066	6.21%	-0.002	0.094	-0.026
Early Years Block	13.664	13.812	0.148	1.08%	0.000	0.000	0.148
High Needs Block	23.269	25.897	2.628	11.29%	-0.114	0.470	2.272
Total	148.043	158.798	10.755	7.26%	-0.491	5.984	5.262

WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD	2020/21 Allocation incl recoup	2021/22 Allocation incl recoup	Total £ change	Total % change	Change due to populatio n	Change due to pay and pension formula change	£ change due to additional funding
	£m	£m	£m	%	£m	£m	£m
School Block	91.762	99.611	7.848	8.55%	2.426	4.513	0.909
Central Block	1.073	1.097	0.025	2.31%	0.007	0.082	-0.064
Early Years Block	8.918	9.025	0.106	1.19%	0.000	0.000	0.106
High Needs Block	22.157	24.186	2.028	9.15%	0.131	0.338	1.559
Total	123.911	133.918	10.007	8.08%	2.564	4.933	2.510

- 3.2 The provisional settlement would indicate healthy levels of increase across all three DSG funds. Despite this, all three funds will continue to experience pressure due to underfunding of high needs education in 2021/22 and increasing numbers of schools are also reporting challenges in setting balanced budgets. Covid 19 and the expectation that the increasing demand trajectory for education health and care plans will continue into next financial year will exacerbate this pressure. AfC is working closely with a number of schools to assist them in finding solutions to balance their budgets.
- 3.3 The DfE issued guidance last year to strengthen the DSG fund ringfence and has provided a three year statutory override to provide a temporary reprieve in terms of impact on wider council finances. AfC officers have drafted updated service improvement and deficit management plans and initial discussions have been held with the DfE in Richmond and Kingston to explore further solutions. The message from the DfE is that the councils / AfC must find a way to bring the cost of high needs support in line with the available budget and that the DfE will look at solutions for the cumulative deficit over the longer term where it is not possible for this to be repaid.
- 3.4 The SEND Futures Plans in Richmond and Kingston will remain a critical priority for AfC moving into next year and there will be a new focus on implementing a smaller scale deficit management plan in Windsor and Maidenhead. The updated plans for each borough and detailed budget setting for the wider DSG fund will be approved by each council as part of the 2021/22 DSG budget setting process and the detail is not repeated in this report. The plans focus on both continuing to improve services for children and young people with SEND as well as on continuing to improve value for money. On the value for money side the following key themes will be prioritised within AfC over the coming year:

Demand Management	Consistent threshold management, close working with schools, managing parental expectations, supporting young people to be as independent as they are able
School place and SEND support sufficiency	Increasing and improving local provision to keep up with increasing levels of need and realignment of provision to match need. Includes places, post 16 opportunities, therapies etc. Aligning funding to place usage.
Improving commissioning practice and associated funding models	Developing a clearer SEND commissioning strategy, proactive negotiation, engagement with consortia, annual reviews, contract management, reviewing how school SEND support is funded.
Improved partnership working	Proactive action and review to ensure that partners are paying a fair share towards need - health, adult social care, children's social care, schools and high needs education
Alignment of DSG education funding to need	Annual assessment of how the DSG is spent and allocated between priorities

4. RISKS AND MITIGATIONS

4.1 The following table summarises key financial risks for the coming year and associated actions

RISK / CHALLENGE	ACTION
Continuing/escalating impact of Covid 19	The Covid-19 impact is forecast to be £3.4m across all three contracts in 2020/21. All efforts have been made to ensure that growth requests have incorporated the impact on demand budgets and increasing activity. There is a risk that demand will continue to grow at a higher than expected rate due to the continuation of the pandemic and imposed restrictions. There is also uncertainty on how business as usual budgets, particularly in relation to income generation, will perform as restrictions are lifted. Detailed budget monitoring separating business as usual from Covid-19 will continue as a priority and form part of the monthly monitoring updates to all key stakeholders.
Ongoing overspend and balancing control of financial pressure with importance of making decisions in best interest of children	The Leadership Teams review the monthly monitoring and agree all actions that could impact on services. This ensures that the service impact of financial action plans is considered and risks identified/ monitored. Oversight by borough based Directors of Children's Services and Chief Operating & Finance Officer of all decisions relating to LA areas / services.
Placement budgets – Increasing average cost and demand pressures	Internal review system for all placements to ensure they are the most appropriate in terms of service and cost. Detailed financial monitoring at an individual placement level. Updated sufficiency strategy, with a fully resourced centralised commissioning team model overseen by the Director of Commissioning. Engagement with joint LA commissioning groups / initiatives to drive down cost and increase purchasing power Monthly financial monitoring updates provided to each Council and quarterly meetings with commissioners to discuss latest performance and activity data, risks and associated actions
Achievement of savings and agreement of one off costs for redundancy etc.	Regular monitoring of progress against savings plans. Project plans for each of the high value schemes with regular reporting to the Leadership Teams.

	Quarterly progress reporting to the AfC Board and Commissioners.
Risk of cross subsidy as the commissioning councils have different affordability levels	<p>Operational area budgets recorded separately to avoid high level cross subsidy</p> <p>Need led budgets ringfenced to ensure that placement / transport budgets can not be vulnerable to cross subsidy</p> <p>DSG funds ringfenced to ensure the grant is only used for the benefit of pupils in the borough for which it was intended (separate budgets and cost recording)</p> <p>Scrutiny of DSG budgets by borough based Schools Forums</p> <p>Definition of core service provided by Business Services and agreement about level of support for each borough in the context of funding levels</p> <p>Annual financial exercise undertaken to check actual expenditure levels against contract prices</p> <p>Oversight by borough based Directors of Children's Services and Chief Operating & Finance Officer.</p>
Risk that Councils do not agree proposed savings	<p>Regular briefings for Councillors throughout the budget setting processes</p> <p>Clear breakdown of financial implications of savings proposals not being agreed</p>

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Budgets will be carefully monitored during 2021/22 to ensure that appropriate action is taken where financial pressure arises. The combination of demand pressures, Covid-19 and savings required means that 2021/22 will be another challenging year.
- 5.2 Balancing the ever increasing financial pressure with the responsibility to ensure children are safe and achieving good outcomes remains a significant challenge going into next year. Increases in levels of need and high average cost of placements is a national issue that is causing budget pressure for most providers of children's social care and education services. The councils have provided growth and it is important that the budgets are prioritised effectively to ensure demand is managed within the available budget envelope. We already know that growth management will be challenging, and so it is important that action is taken to reduce average costs and prioritise funding appropriately.
- 5.3 It is important that developing commissioning competence and capacity remains a focus over the coming year as effective placement commissioning is critical to the management of needs

led budgets as is the application of consistent thresholds. In addition, the organisation will be implementing the recommendations of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy which looks to develop the organisation's ability to either effectively provide or commission affordable placement options in the medium term.

- 5.4 The underfunding of high needs education remains the biggest financial challenge in terms of scale of funding shortfall next year. AfC are supporting the councils in conversations with the DfE about the plans in place and what more can be done to resolve the funding gap.
- 5.5 It is important that AfC continues to embed a culture of financial restraint into all officers with spending power and that the organisation regularly reviews the financial position to ensure that money remains aligned to service needs and priorities. Expenditure restraint arrangements will need to continue into 2021/22 to ensure that controllable budgets remain balanced and resources can be effectively prioritised.

6. CONTACTS

Michael Smith
Associate Director of Finance
Achieving for Children
michael.smith@achievingforchildren.org.uk

Lucy Kourpas
Chief Operating & Finance Officer
Achieving for Children
lucy.kourpas@achievingforchildren.org.uk

2021/22 LBR CHILDREN'S SERVICES SAVINGS

TOTAL incl unfunded savings £'000s
TOTAL excl unfunded savings £'000s

Appendix D2
1,378
685

AfC Saving Theme	Title	Project Description	Key Risks	Deliverability RAG	Financial Risk RAG	Saving Target 2021/22 £'000
Unfunded growth	Social Care Demand Unfunded Pressures	Pressures relating to unfunded growth in the current cohort of Children Looked After and Leaving Care. AfC will look to implement a range of initiatives to reduce pressure in these budgets including regular placement reviews to ensure high cost placements are stepped down as soon as the young person is ready, improved commissioning arrangements activity to support a broader range of placement options, review of a number of contractual arrangements to ensure best value, strong threshold management	- Budget shortfall causing pressures on overall demand/controllable budgets. - Covid-19 system pressures expected to continue into 2021/22 in Social Care	Amber	Red	693
Maximising Independence	SEN Transport - maximising independence through collection points, parent pay and Independent Travel Training (ITT)	Continuation of the delivery review for the SEN Transport (SENT) service focussing on maximising independence through the redesign and promotion of Collection Points, Independent Travel Training and Parent Pay. In addition there will be a focus on service resources and structures to ensure the most efficient delivery model and structure.	- Covid-19 could continue to negatively impact collection point expansion - Difficulties around Independent Travel Training during Covid-19 - Future demand on service could erode savings as numbers of Education, Health and Care Plans continue to increase	Amber	Amber	250
Leaving Care and UASC Service Offer Review	Leaving Care Service Review (incl income and grant)	Leaving Care income review to maximise young people/accommodation provider accessing Housing Benefits, with the introduction of a service charge contribution	- case by case review needed (all circumstances differ) - placement breakdowns can lead to cessation of benefit payments - requires provider buy-in and support - capacity and availability of team to undertake reviews during Covid-19	Amber	Amber	75
Early Help and Resilience	Whatever it Takes (WIT) Programme/Initiative	Working collaboratively with Whatever It Takes (WIT), a new charity that is aiming to break the destructive cycle of children and young people committing crimes so that, instead, they make a positive contribution to society and build better lives for themselves.	- new initiative with uncertain impact - lead in time needed to work effectively with young people	Amber	Green	50
Commissioning and Procurement	Reducing Placement Commissioning average costs	Improved commissioning of placements across Social Care and Early Help across all placement types and provision	- Covid-19 impacting ability to negotiate with providers - appropriate, local provision is increasingly at capacity - complex cases and support leading to increased average costs in 20/21	Amber	Amber	50
Care Provision	Opening Richmond Children's Home	Reducing average costs in residential placements with the opening of the Richmond Children's Home	- lead-in time required for Hope House - new home with a gradual mixing of young people will offer incremental results	Amber	Amber	50
Commissioning and Procurement	Procurement and Commissioning of contracts and services	Review all contracts, including voluntary sector, to assess best-value strategic delivery model	- Covid-19 impacting on negotiation and viability of cheaper delivery - Procurement and Commissioning capacity - Charity and voluntary contracts included in the review and may be adversely impacted	Amber	Amber	35
Care Provision	Review of Respite provision	Detailed review of the respite provision used both in and out of the borough to support the best quality respite care as well as the most efficient delivery model.	- availability of alternative, local provision - delays in the opening of the Moor Lane Respite Centre	Amber	Amber	30
Leaving Care and UASC Service Offer Review	Case reviews/appeals for No Recourse to Public Fund (NRPF) clients	Continued investment in best practice for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and No Recourse to Public Fund young people to reduce numbers with no access to Home Office funding or benefits.	- delays in case reviews with Home Office - government guidance on case closures during Covid-19	Green	Green	25
Leaving Care and UASC Service Offer Review	Improved Transitions between Children's and Adults Services	Improved Transitions between Children's Service and Adults Services with a more efficient transition in support packages between the Children's Act and Adults Social Care Act.	- Transitions system is complex and is currently being reviewed end to end with a view to smoothing the transition between Children's and Adults - Complex young people who may not fully meet Adult's Social Care criteria	Amber	Amber	25
Care Provision	Increasing the capacity of In-House Foster Carers	Increasing the number of In-House Foster Places in use as part of the placement sufficiency strategy.	- Recruitment of the right type of carers and skills is challenging - Higher cost placements many not be the right fit for In House Foster Care - Demand may outweigh recruitment - Covid-19 disrupting placements and availability of carers and respite	Amber	Amber	25
Care Provision	Expansion of Direct Payments to families for short breaks and respite	Increased use of direct payments to increase flexibility and options for families whilst reviewing the contracts currently in place with providers.	- increased demand for direct payments during Covid-19 - increased in-house administration and pressure on staffing - change in approach for families	Amber	Amber	20
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Service transformation from remote working and digital strategy	Promotion of digital strategy, remote working and revised travel policy.	- savings remove potential for re-investment in digital growth and transformation	Green	Green	20
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Review the Early Years Finance and Business Support team structure	Review of the Early Years support functions with a view to rationalising available resources.	- reduced resource within the Early Years team	Green	Green	15
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Workforce Development - rationalising resources	Merge Way2Work apprenticeships with workforce development and rationalise resource to deliver both services. Second year of saving.	- reduced capacity in workforce development and income generating teams	Green	Green	15

2021/22 RBK CHILDREN'S SERVICES SAVINGS				TOTAL	971	
AfC Saving Title	Title	Project Description	Key Risks	Deliverability RAG	Financial Risk RAG	Saving Target 2021/22 £000
Maximising Independence	SEN Transport - maximising independence through collection points, parent pay and Independent Travel Training (ITT)	Continuation of the delivery review for the SEN Transport (SENT) service focussing on maximising independence through the redesign and promotion of Collection Points, Independent Travel Training and Parent Pay. In addition there will be a focus on service resources and structures to ensure the most efficient delivery model and structure.	- Covid-19 could continue to negatively impact collection point expansion - Difficulties around Independent Travel Training during Covid-19 - Future demand on service could erode savings as numbers of Education, Health and Care Plans continue to increase	Amber	Amber	276
Commissioning and Procurement	Post 16 accommodation strategy (element 1 of PeopleToo savings)	Improved working with providers to develop alternative 'on contract' provision and approach to semi-independent accommodation. This saving is attributable to the Better Contracting savings programme.	- Covid-19 is impacting negotiation potential with providers - Risk of increased vacancy rate on block bookings or on contract placements	Amber	Amber	190
Commissioning and Procurement	Reducing Placement Commissioning average costs	Improved commissioning of placements across Social Care and Early Help across all placement types and provision (incl Parenting Assessments)	- Covid-19 impacting ability to negotiate with providers - appropriate, local provision is increasingly at capacity - complex cases and support leading to average cost pressures	Amber	Amber	150
Leaving Care and UASC Service Offer Review	Leaving Care Service Review (incl income and grant)	Leaving Care income review to maximise young people/accommodation provider accessing Housing Benefits, with the introduction of a service charge contribution	- case by case review needed (all circumstances differ) - placement breakdowns can lead to cessation of benefit payments - requires provider buy-in and support - capacity and availability of team to undertake reviews during Covid-19	Amber	Amber	88
Early Help and Resilience	Whatever it Takes (WiT) Programme/Initiative	Working collaboratively with Whatever It Takes (WIT), a new charity that is aiming to break the destructive cycle of children and young people committing crimes so that, instead, they make a positive contribution to society and build better lives for themselves	- new initiative with uncertain impact - lead in time needed to work effectively with young people	Amber	Green	50
Care Provision	Reviewing internal accommodation provision	Review of supported accommodation to reprofile staffing levels to level of complexity.	- reducing workforce could increase the risk of placement breakdowns and staff retention	Amber	Green	37
Commissioning and Procurement	Procurement and Commissioning of contracts and services	Review all contracts, including voluntary sector, to assess best-value strategic delivery model (e.g. YMCA contract, Systems, Health contracts)	- Covid-19 impacting on negotiation and viability of cheaper delivery - Procurement and Commissioning capacity - Charity and voluntary contracts included in the review and may be adversely impacted	Amber	Amber	35
Leaving Care and UASC Service Offer Review	Case reviews/appeals for No Recourse to Public Fund (NRPF) clients	Continued investment in best practice for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers and No Recourse to Public Fund young people to reduce numbers with no access to Home Office funding or benefits.	- delays in case reviews with Home Office - government guidance on case closures during Covid-19	Green	Green	25
Leaving Care and UASC Service Offer Review	Improved Transitions between Children's and Adults Services	Improved Transitions between Children's Service and Adults Services with a more efficient transition in support packages between the Children's Act and Adults Social Care Act.	- Transitions system is complex and is currently being reviewed end to end with a view to smoothing the transition between Children's and Adults - Complex young people who may not fully meet Adult's Social Care criteria	Amber	Amber	25
Care Provision	Increasing the capacity of In-House Foster Carers	Increasing the number of In-House Foster Places in use as part of the placement sufficiency strategy.	- Recruitment of the right type of carers and skills is challenging - Higher cost placements many not be the right fit for In House Foster Care - Demand may outweigh recruitment - Covid-19 disrupting placements and availability of carers and respite	Amber	Amber	25
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Service transformation from remote working and digital strategy	Promotion of digital strategy, remote working and revised travel policy	- savings remove potential for re-investment in digital growth and transformation	Green	Green	20
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Workforce Development - rationalising resources	Merge Way2Work apprenticeships with workforce development and rationalise resource to deliver both services. Second year of saving.	- reduced capacity in workforce development and income generating teams	Green	Green	15
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Review the Early Years Finance and Business Support team structure	Review of the Early Years support functions with a view to rationalising available resources.	- reduced resource within the Early Years team	Green	Green	15
Care Provision	Expansion of Direct Payments to families for short breaks and respite	Increased use of direct payments to increase flexibility and options for families whilst reviewing the contracts currently in place with providers.	- increased demand for direct payments during Covid-19 - increased in-house administration and pressure on staffing - change in approach for families	Amber	Amber	10
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	School Meals increased income generation	Realigning income budget to level of income generation achieved from the Pupil Support School Meals Contract	- No risks identified, achieved in 2020/21	Green	Green	10

2021/22 RBWM CHILDREN'S SERVICES Savings

TOTAL incl unfunded savings £'000s
TOTAL excl unfunded savings £'000s

1,573
1,273

AfC Theme	AfC Saving Title	Project Description	Key Risks	Deliverability RAG	Financial Risk RAG	Saving Target 2021/22 £000
Maximising Independence	Home to School transport statutory service only	Review all discretionary travel delivery (in pre and post sixteen) within the service with a view to moving to a statutory only offer.	- Impact on current and future users, particularly post 16 - Formal member approval pending - Consultation for users required	Amber	Green	300
Commissioning and Procurement	Placement Commissioning Efficiencies	Optimise costs of placements for children in the care of the local authority.	- Covid-19 impacting ability to negotiate with providers - appropriate, local provision is increasingly at capacity - complex cases and support leading to average cost pressures	Amber	Amber	250
Unfunded savings	Social Care and Early Help - employee (salary) budget shortfalls	Funding shortfall relating to employee positions within Social Care. This includes ASYE Social Worker (£118k) and workers funded previously through the Partners in Practice grant funding (£182k) which ceases on 31 March 2021. Therefore additional, currently unidentified savings are required to fund these posts.	- Service overspend pressures on controllable salary budgets	Green	Red	300
Early Help and Resilience	Community Hubs Transformation Programme	Rollover of prior year savings in Youth and Early Year services that were planned through service delivery from two Family Hubs, focusing on statutory services and targeted support for vulnerable groups. (Saving for 2020/21 £450,000 increasing to £600,000 for 2021/22)	- The original implementation date of July 2020 was delayed due to COVID-19 with a revised implementation date of April 2021. - continuation of the pandemic may impact the revised implementation date.	Amber	Green	150
Early Help and Resilience	Health Visitor Service	Reduction in the Health Service Visitor service. This savings is in relation to a reduction in grant (held within RBWM).	- Reduction in provision and services offered	Amber	Amber	150
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Assessment and Therapy services - dedicated team	Simplifying the therapy offer to a smaller set of interventions that are provided by a dedicated team.	- reduced therapy offer for children and young people due to a tightening of criteria	Amber	Amber	100
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Education Services - charge Inclusion Advisor to Schools Block	Moving the cost of the Inclusion Advisor service into the Education Services service budget in line with Dedicated Schools Block guidance. This will allow critical skills to be available to schools with a view to increasing the effectiveness of High Needs spending.	- increased pressure on HNB central costs	Green	Green	90
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Early Years Education Services	Remove non-statutory support for early years settings (childminders and nursery groups) which is currently offered to support those judged as required improvement or inadequate.	- withdrawing a service previously promoted to settings - impacting on team resilience as some roles supported overall EY functions	Amber	Green	60
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	New ways of working reduce expenses for travel and other external	Use virtual technologies to support fewer face to face meetings.	- savings remove potential for re-investment in digital growth and transformation	Green	Green	50
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Redesign Business Support to drive increased resilience and efficiency	Restructure business support roles to create fewer, multi-skilled and longer hour roles which cover the support to statutory and early help services.	- reduced capacity in Business Support functions and wider service delivery administrative support - Risk of redundancy	Green	Green	45
Service Transformation and income generation (incl Digital)	Redesign Finance to a statutory only service	Reduce finance team to statutory minimum for direct LA services and also charge RBWM maintained schools for Finance functions provided to them.	- reduced capacity in finance functions and service delivery	Green	Green	28
Leaving Care and UASC Service Offer Review	Care Leavers - Supported living options	Project to establish location and scale of accommodation needs and determine if services are directly provided or commissioned. This should assist in reducing average costs for supported living placements.	- Investment (Capital) required to grow in-house provision - Scarce availability of some provision	Green	Green	20
Care Provision	Independent Fostering Agency - income from OOB young people	IFA development to have more carers than needed for AfC area families, and a commercial offering to others. Increasing the number of In-House Foster Carers as part of the placement sufficiency strategy. This includes promotion of competitive rates for potential future carers and retention of current highly skilled carers.	- Recruitment of the right type of carers and skills is challenging - Higher cost placements many not be the right fit for In House Foster Care - Demand may outweigh recruitment - Covid-19 disrupting placements and availability of carers and respite	Green	Green	15
Care Provision	Disabled Children - more effective transition	Improvements in provision to support the young person's transition to a sustainable adulthood with a view to reducing the costs of Education Services and care for some young people.	- capacity to ensure system change is implemented and embedded	Green	Green	15



TREASURY PLAN 2021/22

Introduction

1. AfC is not allowed to enter into any borrowing, credit facility or investment arrangement (other than trade credit in the normal course of business) unless it has been approved by the Councils. The Financial Plan (the Plan) provides the authorisation for AfC to borrow and invest in the particular situations specified and the Plan has to be approved by the Members, as the owners of AfC. The decision to approve the Treasury Plan has been delegated to the Ownership Board (formerly Joint Committee) as a Band Three Reserved Matter.
2. The Plan will be reviewed at least annually and when events require a review in order to ensure that the Company's banking and treasury activities are operating efficiently and that risks are being appropriately managed in order to comply with the Councils' treasury policies.

Borrowing

3. AfC will only borrow from the Councils and in accordance with the terms set out in the Revolving Credit Facility (RCF) which is attached to the contractual Inter Authority Agreement.
4. AfC can only borrow from the Councils to fund 'Qualifying Expenditure' which is:
 - I. The Borrower's working capital requirements in connection with the Contracts.
 - II. Any deficits incurred by the Borrower in providing the services to the Lenders under the Contracts (including the original set-up costs).
 - III. Any expenditure incurred by the Borrower in relation to the provision of children's services that is ancillary to the expenditure incurred in providing services under the Contracts to the Lenders (for example the advice and support services that have historically been, and continue to be provided to schools).
 - IV. Any other expenditure of the Borrower as the Lenders may from time to time approve in writing in advance as being Qualifying Expenditure, such permission of the Lenders not to be unreasonably withheld or delayed, provided that such permission shall not be given in circumstances where this may give rise to a breach of the State Aid Regulations.

5. Loans from the Councils are short-term and AfC is required to repay loans outstanding on each interest date (31 March and 30 September) and re-borrow any requirement as new loans.
6. Interest is set at 0.5% above base rate and applies to borrowing in relation to the 'Qualifying Expenditure' to comply with State Aid rules.

Investment

7. AfC will only invest surplus funds, including sums borrowed under the RCF, in order to manage its cash flow to make payment of its obligations in a timely manner without having to borrow on a frequent basis from the Councils.
8. Such investment will be on the following basis:
 - a) Investment will be in deposit/instant access bank accounts that can be withdrawn at notice on the same day
 - b) Investment will be in banks approved by the Councils
 - c) Investment in each bank will be subject to a maximum amount (or limit) invested at any time
 - d) The aggregate of investments in all banks will also be subject to a maximum amount
 - e) The banks that AfC can make investments in and the limits are as follows:

BANK	LIMIT OF INVESTMENT
Barclays	£4,000,000
Nationwide	£3,000,000
NatWest bank	£5,000,000
Svenska Handelsbanken	£2,000,000
Total Investment	£14,000,000

The total aggregate investments that AfC can have outstanding at any time is £14million

9. At any time the Councils can jointly agree to
 - a) remove approval or vary the investment limits for any of the banks, and vary the total aggregate investments
 - b) approve additional bank(s) with appropriate limits on investment, and
 - c) any such changes shall be agreed in writing (email) by the Finance Directors of each Council and AfC (or their appointed deputies for this purpose) and shall be reported to the next meeting of the Ownership Board and adopted as a change to the Plan as soon as practical and appropriate.
10. The treasury management and banking functions in AfC will be supervised by the Chief Operating & Finance Officer and undertaken by appropriately experienced staff within the finance section of AfC. Treasury activity will be

APPENDIX E

planned and reviewed weekly and longer term plans prepared at least annually.

11. AfC will take advice and act on instructions from the Councils, acting jointly, on its treasury activities and investments.