

Report Title:	Achieving for Children (AfC) Reserved Ownership Decisions
Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	No
Cabinet Member:	Cllr Stuart Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Health, Mental Health and Children's Services
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet - 31st March 2022
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 ownership decisions in relation to the strategic direction of the company jointly with the two other council owners. 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 2022/23
- Approval of the Company's arrangements for managing cashflow through the adoption of the Financial Plan (known as the Treasury Plan) for 2022/23

In developing these proposals AfC has engaged with relevant council officers and members of the AfC Ownership Board. The budget for Windsor and Maidenhead based AfC services mirrors the budget proposed as part of the Local Authority's budget approval process.

### **1. DETAILS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**RECOMMENDATION:** That Cabinet notes the report and:

- i) approves the AfC Business Plan including the Business Development Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy (appendix A,B,C)**
- ii) approves the detailed AfC 2022/23 budget (appendix D)**
- iii) approves the AfC Treasury Plan (appendix E)**

Achieving for Children

**Business Plan 2020-24 (2022-23 refresh)**

# **Achieving **more** for Children**

# 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 and we will of course 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 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
- developing our business and delivery models
- implementing smarter and more agile working practices
- striving to 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 an independent fostering agency (IFA) across all boroughs which has now been operating effectively for almost two years and has led to an increase in the number of approved fostering households. It is currently looking after 142 children and young people
- achieved 'Good' inspection ratings of our Youth Offending Services in Kingston and Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead which demonstrates our high quality support to those young people who are involved in criminal activity
- launched the new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Register in Kingston and Richmond to capture the details of more children and young people with SEND to encourage greater engagement with families. All those that sign up receive a Disability Awareness Card, which was designed in collaboration with children and parents, and provides proof of a child's disability

In October 2019, Ofsted revisited our SEND services in Windsor and Maidenhead and confirmed that we were making good progress against six of the eight areas identified as requiring improvement.

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 SEND, 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 cost 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. As such, one of our key areas for development will be establishing local placement sufficiency and agreeing a model for the delivery of local placements.

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. More

positively, it has also provided us with many learning opportunities such as the benefits of hybrid working for our workforce, and improved participation of children and young people receiving our support through online engagement.

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 that demonstrates 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 (AfC) was created as a community interest company in 2014 by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to deliver all their children's services. In 2017, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead became a third owner of the company. 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, this will be done 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 came 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. This is offered alongside targeted early help 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. 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 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.

Most 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 £163 million. In addition, the company manages the allocation of over £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. This is a national trend, which is beginning to also become evident in Windsor and Maidenhead in terms of a deficit position. 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 support service operating model which delivers efficiencies and resilience from a single approach to 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.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on workforce stability and so this remains a key area of focus for us, particularly in frontline roles that are proving hard to recruit to. 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 Green Leas, a 17-bed unit offering 24-hours supported accommodation in Kingston in 2017, and opened Hope House, our first children's home, in March 2020.

Overall, we have reduced the costs of delivering services for the councils by £12 million since 2014 and in Windsor and Maidenhead, we are in the lowest 10% of costs per head of the child age population when benchmarked nationally.

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 which are considering alternative delivery models, or which 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. We have recently taken on responsibility for the Berkshire-wide Sensory Consortium Service, which includes the management of 40 qualified teachers for visually and hearing impaired children and young people. The service provides sensory impairment support across Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough, Bracknell Forest, Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire.

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 and business development**

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, 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, we have generated £5 million in traded services with schools and from our improvement consultancy offer to 12 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 make sure we take advantage of opportunities, a business development strategy has been developed to sit alongside this overarching business plan. The Achieving for Children 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 Achieving for Children 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 boroughs where there are clear ethical, financial or developmental benefits.

You can read the strategy on our [website](#).

### **Our leading performance**



- Ofsted rates our children’s social care services in Kingston as ‘**Outstanding**’ and as ‘**Good**’ in Richmond and in Windsor and Maidenhead.
- **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 each year 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**.
- Since AfC was created in 2014, 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 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 04 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, stakeholders, young people and families 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 Conversation also enabled us to make sure 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. We report on progress with the implementation of our business plan through our quarterly project and financial monitoring which goes to the AfC Board and senior leaders across the organisation. We also produce an annual report and impact report each year which set out our key achievements over the previous 12 months.

Secondly, we monitor progress through a set of key performance indicators and quality measures that are reported as part of our contractual arrangements. 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 the 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.

For 2022-23, as part of the refresh of the business plan, we have reviewed our priority projects. We have new priority projects across our whole organisation relating to our equality and diversity and our environment strategy, and in relation to leaving care in Kingston and Richmond. We have also amended and combined a number of other projects including those relating to our practice framework, residential care provision, business development activity, and transitions for young people in care and young people with SEND.

In addition, a number of projects have now been removed from the business plan. These are set out below.

## **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.*

This project is now considered to be business as usual. Apprentices continue to be fully supported, face-to-face when possible, but also through virtual learning platforms and remote teaching mechanisms including our e-learning platform. Several schools across our operational areas are supporting apprentices to complete qualifications in teaching, early years and business administration. New apprenticeship opportunities are developing with more and more local employers wishing to recruit. Progression rates remain very good for existing apprentices, with over 80% of employers offering advanced apprenticeships or permanent employment opportunities for their existing apprentices. The initiatives we offer include:

- KickStart: we are officially a partner in the government's KickStart scheme which involves fully funding and supporting 16 to 24 year olds to complete six months of paid work to gain valuable work skills, knowledge and experience. We have offered a number of our internal KickStart roles to care leavers and our SEND young people with EHCPs.
- Positive Directions: aimed at 16 to 24 year olds not in education, employment and training and includes a bespoke training offer to help develop skills. 43 young people have started the programme, with 19 young people have accessed the programme, and of these, two have progressed into employment or training and a further six have job offers.
- Youth Employment Skills: aimed at young people who have social, emotional or mental health needs aged 16 to 24. It consists of one-to-one mentoring and support along with small group or one-to-one workshops focussing on employability and character traits. This programme started in May 2021 and we have 28 spaces on the programme over two years.
- Able2: this programme is similar to the Youth Employment Skills, but aimed at young people with long term health needs and physical disabilities. This programme started in June 2021.
- Traineeships: in terms of local traineeship provision - Brentford FC Community Sports Club are now offering a traineeship. The latest cohort started on 21 June 2021 and they plan to run them throughout the next academic year. Harlequins Rugby Club is also currently recruiting for trainees for their traineeship programme. Both opportunities are not just aimed at young people interested in sport - they include a range of work placement opportunities in different sectors. We have also recently shared external offers for digital marketing and a sports-related traineeship and have a young person due to start a riding stables traineeship in Richmond Park shortly.
- Internship: at our invitation, Mencap recently established a supported internship specifically aimed at young people with EHCPs as an alternative to traineeships for those who need a more supportive offer.
- We have offered a number of supported internships to young people in Windsor and Maidenhead via local colleges including Reading

College, Langley College and the Berkshire College of Agriculture.

- The supported employment service in Windsor and Maidenhead, which is available to our young people, is delivered by Optalis. This includes self-referral via their website and a free first consultation, with additional support provided at a cost based on a threshold to ensure those most in need can access the service.

### ***Excellent workforce***

*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.*

Our most recent staff survey indicated that our workforce considers Achieving for Children to be a good employer, with a strong and positive organisational culture.

Our values - Empower, Trust and Respect - are now well embedded across the organisation, with 79% of staff reporting they can see how the values are demonstrated by others in their team in our annual staff survey.

As such, this project is considered completed, with the focus turning to improving our inclusiveness and diversity across Achieving for Children. This is reflected in a new priority project in the business plan.

### ***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.*

This activity is now completed. The Kingston and Richmond participation strategy has now been published on our Achieving for Children Local Offer website. The new strategy aligns with the existing engagement strategy in Windsor and Maidenhead. Both strategies have a strong focus on the participation of parents and carers, as well as maintaining the existing comprehensive participation of children and young people. To support this in Kingston and Richmond, we have recruited two SEND participation officers to work with our parent carer forums.

By aligning the strategies, we are aiming to bring a strategic approach to participation across the organisation whereby we share skills, knowledge, expertise and learning.

### ***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.*

This activity is now considered business as usual. There is no longer an intention to create a specific borough based alternative education provision in Richmond. Instead, we will be buying back places from Malden Oaks Pupil Referral Unit for secondary pupils which enables us to effectively meet demand. This mirrors the arrangement we have in Windsor and Maidenhead with Haybrook College in Slough.

In addition, we are developing alternative key stage 3 and key stage 4 provision for vocational pathways in the next academic year. We are considering venues on the borough boundary as the location. If this is successful, we would move primary alternative education provision to this site as well.

This activity will enable us to support those children and young people who find it difficult to access mainstream education by providing 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.

## **COVID-19**

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, an impact on our business plan. The pandemic has provided the opportunity to develop new ways of delivering our services, for example, through the increased use of digital solutions. As part of our recovery planning, we will be reviewing the lessons learnt and will apply best practice to our service delivery models so we can continue to effectively meet the needs of our children, young people and families in an affordable way. Some projects set out in this plan have been delayed or may no longer be necessary because our response to COVID-19 has required a major programme of work, and resources have been diverted to support the continuation of services and the wellbeing of Achieving for Children staff and service users.

## **Our commitment to equality and diversity**

Within Achieving for Children, we have recognised the need to strengthen our equality and diversity practice and better understand our workforce and the issues that impact them. To support this, we have established the staff-led Equality and Diversity Board which includes senior managers and staff from across the organisation. The board's purpose is to drive our equality and diversity change agenda, in line with our organisational values. Its aim is to support staff to understand differences and behave respectfully to each other so that people want to work and stay working in the company and that Achieving for Children can respond to the different needs of service users. The board will help

implement our equality and diversity action plan which aims to promote, improve and sustain equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation. The plan was developed based on responses to our equality and diversity staff survey. We will continue to seek the views of staff and provide a range of engagement mechanisms to ensure we hear their voice and learn from their experiences. For example, we are in the process of developing employee resource groups, which will be established to represent different characteristic groups from across Achieving for Children.

Along with colleagues in Richmond and Wandsworth, we are also part of the Workforce Race Equality Standard pilot, which is based on a successful programme implemented in the NHS to improve the experiences of staff from minoritised ethnic groups. The pilot aims to collate data on staff from ethnic minority backgrounds in relation to areas such as recruitment, training, promotion, and turnover, and use this to create an action plan to address any issues identified. The project is aligned to the work of the Equality and Diversity Board and will be overseen by Equality and Diversity Board members.

We have included a new priority project in the business plan in relation to equality and diversity for this upcoming year.

### **Our commitment to the environment**

As an organisation we are committed to taking proactive steps to minimise the environmental impact of our activities. This year we have developed our first environment strategy, which sets out this commitment. We will seek to deliver children's services in an environmentally-friendly way, through identifying areas of change which will result in fewer carbon emissions. We will work with Kingston, Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead councils to contribute to our boroughs' efforts in creating a sustainable and biodiverse environment.

We have identified six key areas where we can focus on having an impact.

- Staff awareness and engagement
- Waste and recycling
- Energy efficiency and biodiversity
- Travel and transport
- Commissioning and procurement



- Young people's participation

Alongside the environment strategy, we have developed an action plan which will support our aims in reducing our carbon footprint and take forward the key priorities identified under each theme. The action plan is overseen by an environment taskforce, coordinated by the Strategy, Policy and Programmes team. Where possible, it will capture how impact will be measured.

The action plan is presented to the Achieving for Children Board of Directors twice a year and is regularly scrutinised by the Kingston and Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead youth councils.

We have included a new priority project in the business plan in relation to our environment strategy for this upcoming year.

The strategy itself can be found [here](#).

## 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 the 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.

We aim to have consistently good quality services that support children and young people to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives. By 2024, our social care services will be judged to be 'Good' quality 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. We will have clear action plans in place to address any 'written statement of action' in relation to our special education needs or disabilities services and will be able to demonstrate progress implementing these actions. Most importantly, satisfaction with our services of 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 support 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 the 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. 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, reduced 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 processes and have invested in new technology and digital solutions that enable 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 have strengthened our commissioning practices to foster innovation and achieve higher quality services at a lower cost and will have a well established sufficiency model that supports local and good quality care and support for young people in all three of our boroughs. We will remain open to opportunities to bring onboard 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: Stronger families***

#### *What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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 realise the benefits of joint working to support our children, young people and families

#### *Why is this important?*

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 really benefit from collaboration and joined-up working.

***Strategic priority: Positive futures***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

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.

***Strategic priority: Excellent workforce***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

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.

***Strategic priority: Financial stability***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

Given the financial context, 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.

**Strategic priority: Successful organisation**

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

As the needs of young people and our owning councils change we will develop and adapt our business and delivery models to ensure we continue to meet their needs and offer value for money.

**Strategic priority: Smarter working**

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

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.

## **Achieving more for Children across our whole organisation**

### ***Strategic priority: Stronger families***

#### *Priority project*

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.

#### *Lead*

Chief Operating and Finance Officer

#### *How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

#### *What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

Service delivery will have returned to normal, with best practice identified during COVID-19 implemented, such as 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.

### ***Strategic priority: Positive futures***

#### *Priority Project*

Through the implementation of our sufficiency strategy, continue to increase the capacity of **residential support** for children and young people in care and of supported accommodation for young people leaving care, either as a provider or a commissioner, so that more young people are able to stay local and closer to their support networks. This will include providing additional placement capacity to the market with any income

generated reinvested into local services for children in care and on the edge of care.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Provider Services

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

**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 supported to full independence and adulthood.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

**Any additional placement capacity is provided to the market** with income generated from the commercial strategy for residential care reinvested each year into local services for children in care and on the edge of care.

We will have agreed a delivery model with our owning councils that increases the amount of local accommodation and will have a clear roadmap that shows what provision will open when in each of our boroughs.

We will have supported the development of at least one new residential children's home and 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.

*Priority Project*

Strengthen the quality and effectiveness of services delivered by the **independent fostering agency (IFA)**, so that it supports the recruitment, training, development and retention of more foster carers and enables more children and young people to benefit from in-house family-based care.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Provider Services

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

Our IFA will be judged as 'Good' 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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

Our IFA will be judged 'Good' by Ofsted. We will have increased our total number of foster carers by **25** families.

***Strategic priority: Excellent workforce***

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Workforce

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

Our voluntary turnover rate will be **18%** and our agency staff rate will be **16%**. **60%** of our employees will say that Achieving for Children is a good place to work.

*Priority Project*

Ensuring Achieving for Children is an **inclusive and diverse** organisation that celebrates differences and that represents the local communities it serves.

*Lead*

Equality and Diversity Board

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

The workforce will be more reflective of the local community that it services, with established staff equality groups that work alongside the Equality and Diversity Board to ensure that Achieving for Children is known for embracing diversity and championing inclusion for our workforce and the children and families that we work with, so that their identities are promoted and their individual needs are met.



*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

We will have implemented the majority of actions in the 2022-23 Equality and Diversity Board, including taking part in the Workforce Race Equality Standard and supporting the development of staff equality groups.

***Strategic priority: Financial stability***

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director of Business Development and Strategic Commissioning

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

We will have robust and comprehensive commissioning arrangements including effective joint commissioning with the CCG. Procurement and contract management has been strengthened across the organisation. Placement commissioning is a strength for AfC, embedded into our company culture and supports cost efficient and high quality services and support.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

A new commissioning framework has been agreed with a focus on joint commissioning, supported by a skilled commissioning team. The workforce is upskilled in commissioning and procurement practice and the policy framework for this area is reviewed and strengthened.

***Strategic priority: Successful organisation***

*Priority Project*

Develop and implement a more formalised approach to **business development** through a new Business Development Strategy and Business Development Plan. This will include the development and implementation of 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.

*Lead*

Associate Director of Business Development and Strategic Commissioning

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

The company generates **£1 million** annually through fundraising for investment in prevention and early intervention activities for the most vulnerable children and young people.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

The company generates **£250,000** through fundraising for investment in prevention and early intervention activities for the most vulnerable children and young people.

*Priority Project*

Take opportunities to **expand the company, should they present themselves**, 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. Any expansion will be subject to decision by the owning councils.

*Lead*

Director of Children's Services, RBWM

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

If suitable opportunities have arisen, there will be 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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

Potential opportunities have been identified and reviewed, with exploratory discussions to ascertain their interest in exploring an integrated delivery model with services in Windsor and Maidenhead.

***Strategic priority: Smarter working***

*Priority Project*

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, with an immediate focus on bringing HR in house.

*Lead*

Chief Operating and Finance Officer

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

The service level agreements for IT have been reviewed with changes made to strengthen these support services. HR services have been successfully brought in-house, delivering **£150,000** in efficiency savings.

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Business Efficiency and Digital Transformation

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

Achieving for Children is a lean and efficient organisation; **100%** of routine tasks, such as booking appointments, have been digitised.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

The digital transformation strategy has been implemented leading to the digitisation of at least **60%** of routine business support tasks.

*Priority Project*

Develop and implement an Achieving for Children **Environment Strategy** that sets out our commitment to taking proactive steps to minimise the environmental impact of our activities, which will enable us to support our owning councils in their efforts to address the climate change emergency.

*Lead*

Chief Operating and Finance Officer

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

Having identified areas of change within Achieving for Children which will result in fewer carbon emissions, we will be able to demonstrate our environmental impact and will have contributed to a reduction of carbon emissions for our owning councils.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

The environment task force will be established and will have led on the implementation of the actions in our environment strategy action plan for 2022-23.

## **Achieving more for Children in Kingston**

***Strategic priority: Stronger families***

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Quality Assurance and Review

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

*Priority Project*

Further embed the **Families First** practice framework for early help and children's social care services, including adopting positive changes implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as digital visits and direct work with children, that will enable us to better support families to make sustainable change and reduce risks to children and young people.

*Lead*

Director of Children's Services

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

The Families First 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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

The Families First 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 our services to be at least good or outstanding.

*Priority Project*

Through the continued implementation of the **early help strategy** and partnership offer, further strengthen the early help resilience networks 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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Early Help

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

*Priority Project*

*Lead*

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

## ***Strategic priority: Positive futures***

### *Priority Project*

Review and reconfigure the **Leaving Care service** to ensure the offer to young people leaving care remains high quality and effectively meets their needs, while the service is well positioned to manage any potential increased demand.

### *Lead*

Director of Children's Social Care

### *How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

**100%** of recommendations from the leaving care review have been implemented, with the newly configured service in place and delivering an excellent offer to young people leaving care that supports them to prepare for adulthood and the transition to independence.

### *What will we achieve by March 2023?*

The initial review is complete and work is underway to implement the recommendations, with **25%** successfully complete.

### *Priority Project*

Review and reconfigure the future delivery of **health services** in line with the development of the new integrated care services. This will include establishing an operating model that promotes high quality and integrated services to support children and young people to maximise their independence, resilience and health outcomes, and reviewing our health staff offer to support a permanent and stable workforce.

### *Lead*

Associate Director for Health Services

### *How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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 education, health and care planning.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

Work is underway to develop a 'first 1000 days' service, which would bring together public sector and voluntary sector organisations to improve outcomes of young children aged 0 to 3 and reduce the longer-term need for statutory services and support.

*Priority Project*

Using the safety valve funding, and through the delivery of the **SEND Futures Plan and the implementation of the written statement of action**, 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.

*Lead*

SEND Programme Director

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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. 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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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 or mitigations of £2.5m per plan year. 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.

*Priority Project*

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.



*Lead*

Associate Director for SEND

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

**25%** of recommendations identified in the therapies review are implemented

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for SEND

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

All young people with SEND have an effective transition plan in place by the age of 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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Emotional Health

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

The priorities in our plan for Kingston are aligned with the Corporate Plan for 2019-23 - 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: Stronger families***

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Quality Assurance and Review

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

*Priority Project*

Further embed the **Families First** practice framework for early help and children's social care services, including adopting positive changes implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as digital visits and direct work with children, that will enable us to better support families to make sustainable change and reduce risks to children and young people.

*Lead*

Director of Children's Services

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

The Families First 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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

The Families First 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 our services to be at least good or outstanding.

*Priority Project*

Through the continued implementation of the **Early Help strategy** and partnership offer, further strengthen the early help resilience networks 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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Early Help

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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: Positive futures***

*Priority Project*

Review and reconfigure the **Leaving Care service** to ensure the offer to young people leaving care remains high quality and effectively meets their needs, while the service is well positioned to manage any potential increased demand.

*Lead*

Director of Children's Social Care

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

**100%** of recommendations from the leaving care review have been implemented, with the newly configured service in place and delivering an excellent offer to young people leaving care that supports them to prepare for adulthood and the transition to independence.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

The initial review is complete and work is underway to implement the recommendations, with **25%** successfully complete.

*Priority Project*

Review and reconfigure the future delivery of **health services** in line with the development of the new integrated care services. This will include establishing an operating model that promotes high quality and integrated services to support children and young people to maximise their independence, resilience and health outcomes, and reviewing our health staff offer to support a permanent and stable workforce.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Health Services

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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 education, health and care planning.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

Work is underway to develop a 'first 1000 days' service, which would bring together public sector and voluntary sector organisations to improve outcomes of young children aged 0 to 3 and reduce the longer-term need for statutory services and support.

*Priority Project*

Using the safety valve funding, and through the delivery of the **SEND Futures Plan and the implementation of the written statement of action**, 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.

*Lead*

SEND Programme Director

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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. 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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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 £2m per year. 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.

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for SEND

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

**25%** of recommendations identified in the therapies review are implemented.

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for SEND

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

All young people with SEND have an effective transition plan in place by the age of 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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Associate Director for Emotional Health

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

The priorities in our plan for Richmond are aligned with the Corporate Plan for 2018-22 - 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: Stronger families***

### *Priority Project*

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 delivering the actions in the Ofsted improvement plan and strengthening the multi-agency focus on quality assuring EHCPs for children and young people with SEND.

### *Lead*

Director of Children's Social Care

### *How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

### *What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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: Positive futures**

### *Priority Project*

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.

### *Lead*

Schools Leadership Development Manager

### *How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*



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.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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.

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Schools Leadership Development Manager

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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'.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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'.

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

Schools Leadership Development Manager

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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).

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

The local service is judged 'Good or better' by Ofsted. The permanent exclusion rate has reduced by **10%** compared to 2018-19.

*Priority Project*

Work with adult care and housing providers to improve **pathway and transition planning** for young people with SEND and 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.

*Lead*

Schools Leadership Development Manager

*How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

All young people with SEND have an effective transition plan in place by the age of 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. All care leavers have an effective transition plan in place by the age of 15 that plans for their independence into adulthood including where they will live.

*What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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. Care leavers are engaged in agreeing their pathway plan and there is suitable accommodation to support young people of differing needs into adulthood.

*Priority Project*

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.

*Lead*

## Schools Leadership Development Manager

### *How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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).

### *What will we achieve by March 2023?*

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: Smarter working***

#### *Priority Project*

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.

#### *Lead*

Director of Children's Services

### *How will we know we've been successful in 2024?*

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.

### *What will we achieve by March 2023?*

Following a successful business case, approved by RBWM and AfC, the migration of the data to the new system is underway and core social work processes have been identified with planned go live dates.

The priorities in our plan for Windsor and Maidenhead are aligned with the Corporate Plan for 2021-2026 - Building a borough of opportunity and innovation.

## 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 AfC'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 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.

The medium term financial plan can be found on our [website](#).

## 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 and Richmond who each 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 joint 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 were also 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: AfC Ownership Decision Governance**

<b>Reserved Matters</b>	<b>Band</b>	<b>Decision Making Mechanism</b>
Permit the registration of any New Member of the Company	1	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	2	Chief Exec / Leader

prescribed by the Members.		
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 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.	3	Cabinet
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 2022/23
- Approval of the Company's arrangements for managing cashflow through the adoption of the Financial Plan (known as the Treasury Plan) for 2022/23

## Options

**Table 2: Options arising from this report**

Option	Comments
The Cabinet approves the Business Plan, AfC budget and Treasury Plan as recommended  <b>This is the recommended option</b>	This will ensure that AfC has agreed strategic objectives, agreed budget and Treasury Plan.
The Cabinet does not approve the Business Plan, AfC budget and Treasury Plan as recommended	If this option is chosen AfC will move into the new year without agreed strategic objectives or an agreed budget and Treasury Plan. An emergency Ownership Board would be arranged to discuss and agree to an alternative plan put forward by the Local Authority.



Option	Comments
<p>The Cabinet approves the Business Plan, AfC budget and Treasury Plan with a number of requested changes which will be subject to mutual approval of the other two owning boroughs.</p>	<p>If this option is chosen AfC will discuss the suggested changes with the other owning councils and seek virtual agreement to support strategic direction and budget clarity as soon as possible. It is recommended that Cabinet delegates final sign off to the Chief Executive Officer in conjunction with the lead member for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Health and Mental Health to support a timely final decision.</p>

### 3. KEY IMPLICATIONS

#### **Reserved Matter Decision 1: Approval of strategic direction via AfC 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:  
<https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s28856/fullAfC%20Business%20Plan%202020-24-%20December%202019-%20for%20RBWM%20v2.pdf>
- 3.2 The Plan sits alongside the company's Medium Term Financial Strategy and Business Development Strategy.
- 3.3 The Business Plan and associated strategies have been updated to reflect the changing context in which AfC operates and also emerging priorities. More detail has been included on the organisation's Environment Strategy given the increasing focus and prioritisation of this work.
- 3.4 The AfC Board considered and approved the Business Plan in February 2022 and in refreshing the plans AfC officers have sought feedback from:
- AfC Board
  - AfC leadership teams
  - Council Joint Ownership Board
  - Other relevant council officers

#### **AfC Business Plan - Achieving *More* for Children**

- 3.5 The updated AfC Business Plan is attached at appendix 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.”

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

**Table 3: AfC’s Six Strategic Priorities**

<b>Strategic priority</b>	<b>What we will achieve for children and young people?</b>	<b>Why is this important?</b>
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 realise the benefits of joint working to support our children, young people and families.	<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 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>
Successful organisation	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>

3.7 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 borough’s service and financial priorities.

3.8 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
  - Improving the environmental footprint of services across all three boroughs
- 3.9 The Windsor and Maidenhead specific programmes are outlined on pages 37 to 41 of the plan attached in appendix A and include:
- Improvement to high needs education support to address points raised in the Written Statement of Action, improve early intervention, pathway and transition planning and development of alternative provision to support young people with challenging behaviours achieve better outcomes and wellbeing.
  - Reducing the attainment gap for children eligible for Pupil Premium Grant.
  - Implementation of a new case management system to improve practice consistency and efficiency / quality of recording and reporting.

### **Business Development Strategy**

- 3.10 A Business Development Strategy was developed last year to better define AfC's Business Development ambitions. The strategy is attached at appendix B.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 This strategy complements the main AfC Business Plan and the priority areas for further work and development will be key themes within the overarching Business Plan.
- 3.14 The strategy outlines three key areas for development as follows:

**SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY** – Meeting AfCs needs in a cost effective way and making best use of those assets.

These projects should emerge from the Sufficiency Strategy and look to address growing children's 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** – Developing efficient ways of working/ best practice and sharing.

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. There will be a specific focus on developing and marketing the emerging digital offer over the coming years.

**GRANTS / RESEARCH** – Proactively looking for external funding and reputation building opportunities.

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.

3.15 Over the next 12 months there will be a specific focus on programmes in three 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.
- Further 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.
- Proactive marketing of a number of AfC provisions where there is surplus capacity including short break respite care for children with disabilities and family contact.

3.16 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.

### **Medium term Financial Strategy (MTFS)**

3.17 The draft Medium Term Financial Strategy is attached at appendix 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.

3.18 The 2022 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

3.19 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

3.20 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 and social care. 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:

**Table 4: Financial Control**

<b>PRIORITY ACTIVITY TO CONTROL COSTS</b>	<b>HOW WILL IT BE DELIVERED?</b>
<p><b>DEMAND MANAGEMENT</b></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 understand the threshold guidance.</p>
<p><b>LOCAL PROVISION</b></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 Sufficiency Strategy has been agreed by all three Local Authorities and progress continues on implementing the recommendations including development of the Independent Fostering Agency, development of commissioning expertise and capacity, evaluation of options associated with increasing local residential placements and associated support</p>

	services.
<p><b>COMMISSIONING/PROCUREMENT COMPETENCE</b></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 Associate Director of Business Development and Strategic 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><b>REVIEW</b></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 needs is most significant.</p>
<p><b>MODERNISATION OF WORKING PRACTICE</b></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>AfC's 'Future Ways of Working Strategy; outlines how we will 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 Human Resources arrangements to lead to a more consistent offer across AfC and in time improvements in recruitment and retention.</p>
<p><b>FINANCIAL MONITORING &amp; PLANNING</b></p> <p>Detailed monitoring of all high risk areas on an ongoing basis and consistent reporting internally, 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</p>

	awareness and confidence in managing budgets across the organisation.
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- 3.21 The Cabinet is asked to discuss and approve the AfC Business Plan and associated strategic documents.

### **Reserved Matter Decision 2: Approval of the AfC budget 2022/23**

- 3.22 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. Appendix D to this report contains a copy of the AfC Budget Report which was considered and approved by the AfC Board in February 2022, subject to final approval by AfC's three owning councils.
- 3.23 AfC fully engages in Windsor and Maidenhead's 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 Local Authority's own budget paper. This is also the case for Kingston and Richmond.
- 3.24 A net revenue operating budget of £168,696,985 is proposed for AfC in 2022/23 as follows:

**Table 5: AfC Total Budget**

<b>Contract Prices</b>	<b>Kingston £000</b>	<b>Richmond £000</b>	<b>Windsor and Maidenhead £000</b>	<b>Total £000</b>
General Fund	38,862,700	41,030,700	29,876,365	<b>109,769,765</b>
Dedicated Schools Grant	22,323,200	23,617,000	12,987,020	<b>58,927,220</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>61,185,900</b>	<b>64,647,700</b>	<b>42,863,385</b>	<b>168,696,985</b>

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

**Table 6: Breakdown of Windsor and Maidenhead budget**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Budget £</b>	<b>Budget %</b>
Social Care and Early Help	£22,405,373	52%
Education	£15,666,550	37%
Commissioning and Help	£1,743,090	4%
Business Services	£1,496,812	3%
Leases and Bought in Support Services	£1,249,770	3%
Strategic Management	£301,790	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>£42,863,385</b>	<b>100%</b>



- 3.26 The provisional Dedicated Schools Grant allocations were released for all three boroughs on 16th December 2021. AfC is responsible for administering the Dedicated Schools Grants (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 Dedicated Schools Grant will be spent is available as part of each Council's detailed budget setting papers. 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 (e.g. Admissions Team, Early years Advisory Team, high needs education placements). The DSG not included in the contract price relates to amounts that are passported to education providers in accordance with a pre-determined formula.
- 3.27 The Cabinet is asked to approve the AfC 2022/23 as part of the Council's role as joint owner of AfC. A detailed breakdown of the proposed budget is detailed in appendix D.

### **Reserved Matter Decision 3: Treasury Plan**

- 3.28 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. It was last approved in March 2021.
- 3.29 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.
- 3.30 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.
- 3.31 The Local Authorities 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 the Cabinet. 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.
- 3.32 The Treasury Plan is attached at appendix E.

### **Borrowing**

- 3.33 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.

- 3.34 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 councils 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 percentage splits for 2022/23 based on the new contract prices:

**Table 7: Borrowing**

<b>Council</b>	<b>Current Borrowing 2021/22</b>	<b>Current Borrowing 2021/22</b>	<b>Max Borrowing 2022/23</b>	<b>Max Borrowing 2022/23</b>
	<b>£000</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>£000</b>	<b>%</b>
LB Richmond upon Thames (LBR)	8,890	38.8%	17,246	38.32%
RB Kingston upon Thames (RBK)	8,196	35.8%	16,321	36.27%
RB Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM)	5,814	25.4%	11,433	25.41%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22,900</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>45,000</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### **Investment**

- 3.35 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.
- 3.36 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.
- 3.37 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.
- 3.38 The current Plan includes the following limits:

**Table 8: Maximum investments by bank**

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

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

3.39 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.

3.40 The Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the 2022/23 Treasury Plan outlined in appendix E.

**Table 9: Key Implications**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Unmet</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Exceeded</b>	<b>Significantly Exceeded</b>	<b>Date of delivery</b>
AfC is strategically aligned to the council's priorities for children's services	Inadequate progress made against key priorities	Progress made on all key priorities outlined in the Business Plan	Progress made on all key priorities outlined in the Business Plan including priorities outlined for future years	Progress made on all key priorities outlined in the Business Plan including priorities outlined for future years	31st March 2023
AfC delivers services within the agreed budget envelope	Overspend	Nil overspend	Underspend or reinvested surplus	Underspend or reinvested surplus	31st March 2023
AfC borrows and invests in a way that is acceptable to the Council	Losses due to inconsistent treasury management	No treasury management losses	No treasury management losses	No treasury management losses	31st March 2023

## Next Steps

3.41 The Cabinet will receive further updates on Reserved Matter decisions over the course of the year including progress against the plans outlined in this report. The next planned items are:

- SEPTEMBER - AfC Annual Report and Statement of Accounts
- SEPTEMBER - AfC Annual Impact Report

## 4. FINANCIAL DETAILS / VALUE FOR MONEY

4.1 The detailed financial implications are contained in the report and associated appendices. AfC has worked with council officers to reach a proposed 2022/23 budget and the budget that was approved at full council in February 2022. It is clear that there will continue to be significant financial pressures in relation to children's services moving into 2022/23 and it is important that the Council continues to gain assurance on what AfC is doing to proactively manage those pressures.

## 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 With regards to the recommendations concerning approving the Business Plan (including the Business Development Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy, the detailed 2022/23 budget and the Treasury Plan, these are band three Reserved Matters which require approval of the Cabinet. A list of band three decisions is contained in table one of this report.

## 6. RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 The specific risks are outlined in the various appendices to this report and the three key risks are highlighted in Table nine.

**Table 10: Impact of risk and mitigation**

Risk	Level of uncontrolled risk	Controls	Level of controlled risk
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<p>Risk that the strategic direction of AfC becomes misaligned with that of its three owning councils</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>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 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</p>	<p>Low</p>
<p>Risk that Covid 19 delays implementation of key programmes or causes additional budget pressure</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Medium</p>
<p>Risk that the cost of delivering services exceeds budget</p>	<p>High</p>	<p>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 delivery models, placement</p>	<p>Medium</p>

		<p>sufficiency and commissioning strategies to improve AfC's ability to drive value for money and control costs. The biggest risk to the budget position next year relates to inflation in relation to the pricing and complexity of placement budgets. Inflationary impact will be carefully monitored and whenever possible mitigated. The overall budget is monitored on a monthly basis and where needed mitigating actions are discussed within AfC and with the councils to reduce the scope for overspends and reach a mutually agreed position.</p>	
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## 7. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 7.1 AfC produces an Annual Equalities Report which is published on its website and sets out actions to address any inequalities identified. Equalities Assessments are completed in the planning stages for all key programmes and publicly available at the following link:  
<https://www.achievingforchildren.org.uk/equality-diversity-documents/>
- 7.2 The updated Business Plan now includes further information explaining AfC's Environment Strategy. AfC has engaged with all three councils in developing the strategy to support strategic alignment.
- 7.3 AfC completes data protection impact assessments for all significant programmes of work that could have data protection implications. AfC has a qualified Data Protection Officer who oversees compliance against GDPR.

## 8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 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.

## 9. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 9.1 The Council is approving the reserved matters in this report jointly with London Borough of Richmond and Royal Borough of Kingston. All three councils will be meeting to consider and approve the reserved matters with implementation of

the revised documents from 1st April 2022. The full implementation stages are set out in table 10 below.

**Table 11: Implementation timetable**

Date	Details
2 September 2021	AfC Ownership Board
4 February 2022	AfC Board
7 February 2022	Richmond Education and Children's Committee
18th March 2021	Kingston People Committee
31st March 2022	Windsor and Maidenhead Cabinet
5th April 2021	Implementation (follows call in period)

## 10. APPENDICES

10.1 This report is supported by five appendices:

- Appendix A - Business Plan, Achieving *More* for Children
- Appendix B - Business Development Strategy and Plan
- Appendix C - Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Appendix D - 2022/23 Budget
- Appendix E - Treasury Plan

## 11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

11.1 This report is supported by two background documents:

- AfC Business Plan approval December 2019  
<https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s28856/fullAfC%20Business%20Plan%202020-24-%20December%202019-%20for%20RBWM%20v2.pdf>
- AfC Governance Review  
[https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s29683/Governance%20proposed%20next%20steps%20January%202020\\_240220.pdf](https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s29683/Governance%20proposed%20next%20steps%20January%202020_240220.pdf)

## 12. CONSULTATION

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Mandatory:</i>		<i>Statutory Officers (or deputies)</i>	
Adele Taylor	Executive Director of Resources/S151 Officer	10/2/22	21/2/22
Emma Duncan	Deputy Director of Law and Strategy / Monitoring Officer	10/2/22	21/2/22
<i>Deputies:</i>			

Andrew Vallance	Head of Finance (Deputy S151 Officer)	10/2/22	none received
Elaine Browne	Head of Law (Deputy Monitoring Officer)	10/2/22	14/2/22
Karen Shepherd	Head of Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer)	10/2/22	15/2/22
<i>Mandatory: Procurement Manager (or deputy) - if report requests approval to award, vary or extend a contract</i>			
Lyn Hitchinson	Procurement Manager	10/2/22	none received
<i>Other consultees:</i>			
<i>Directors (where relevant)</i>			
Duncan Sharkey	Chief Executive	10/2/22	23/2/22
Andrew Durrant	Executive Director of Place	n/a	n/a
Kevin McDaniel	Executive Director of Children's Services	9/2/22	none received
Hilary Hall	Executive Director of Adults, Health and Housing	10/2/22	10/2/22
<i>Heads of Service (where relevant)</i>			
N/A			
<i>External (where relevant)</i>			
N/A			

Confirmation relevant Cabinet Member(s) consulted	Cllr Stuart Carroll, Lead Member for Adult Social Care, Health, Mental Health and Children's Services	Yes
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## REPORT HISTORY

Decision type:	Urgency item?	To follow item?
Non key decision	No	No

Report Author: Lucy Kourpas, Achieving for Children Chief Operating and Finance Officer, lucy.kourpas@achievingforchildren.org.uk
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Champions for children and families

**Achieving for Children  
Business Development Strategy  
February 2022**

## **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 and the pandemic on the national and local finances is also still emerging 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 is 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](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.

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** – Meeting AfCs needs in a cost effective way and making best use of those assets.

These projects should emerge from the Sufficiency Strategy and look to address growing children’s 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** – Developing efficient ways of working/ best practice and sharing.

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. There will be a specific focus on developing and marketing the emerging digital offer over the coming years.

**GRANTS / RESEARCH** – Proactively looking for external funding and reputation building opportunities.

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:

<b>Tollgate 1</b>	<b>Tollgate 2</b>	<b>Tollgate 3</b>
Plan on page that explains proposal and assesses compliance with the business development principles at a very high level.  Assessment undertaken by Head of New Business with relevant colleagues and	More detailed business case and risk assessment developed by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leadership sponsor</li> <li>- Board sponsor</li> <li>- Service lead</li> <li>- Finance lead</li> <li>- Data lead</li> <li>- Business</li> </ul>	Final proposal presented to CLT. Board, Councils depending on scale of proposal.  Final decision

Board member.	development lead Assessment undertaken by leadership team	
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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.





Champions for children and families

## **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY** **2022-2025**

### **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
- National factors including the pandemic and economy

### **2. KEY OBJECTIVE OF THE MTFS**

2.1 The 2022 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 since 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 2021/22 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 AfC is committed to working partnership to implement solutions that are both affordable and achieve good outcomes for children and young people.
- 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.

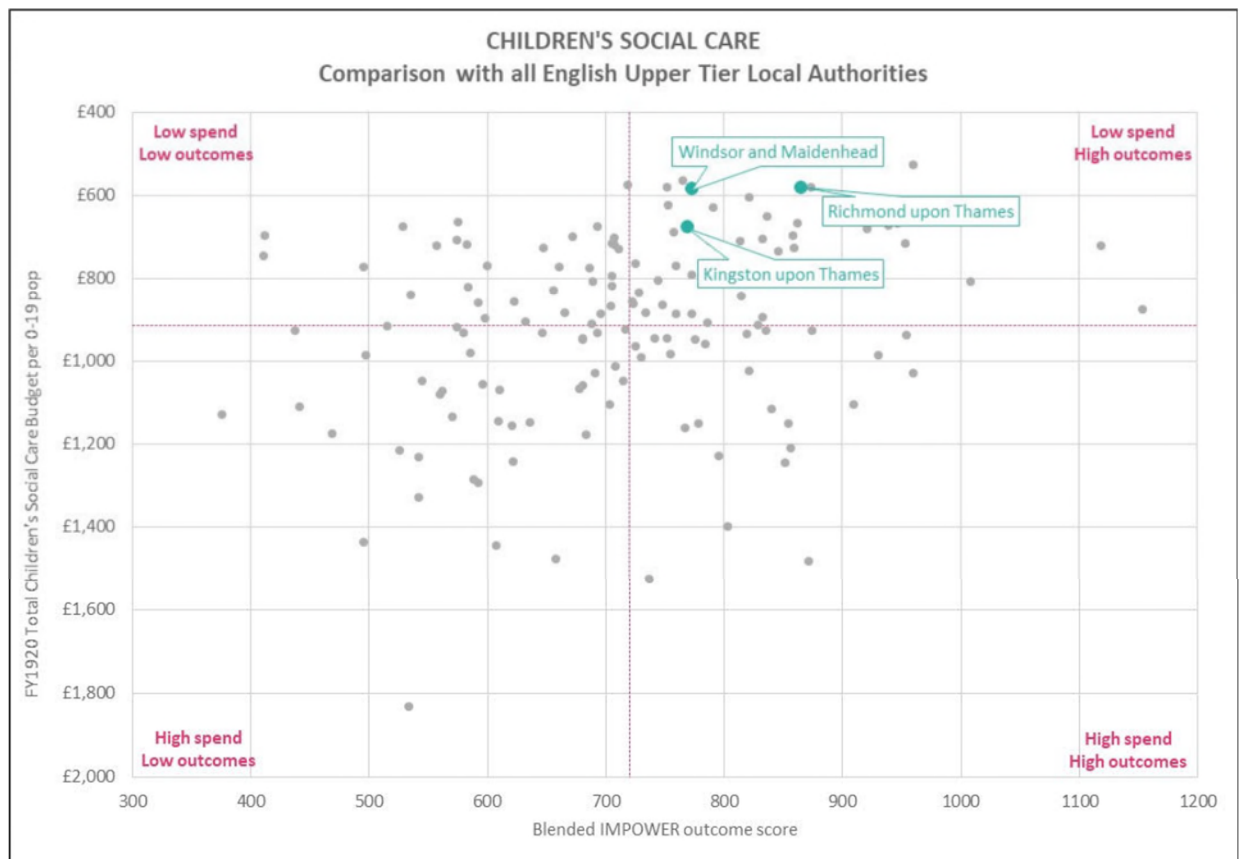
### 4. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

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

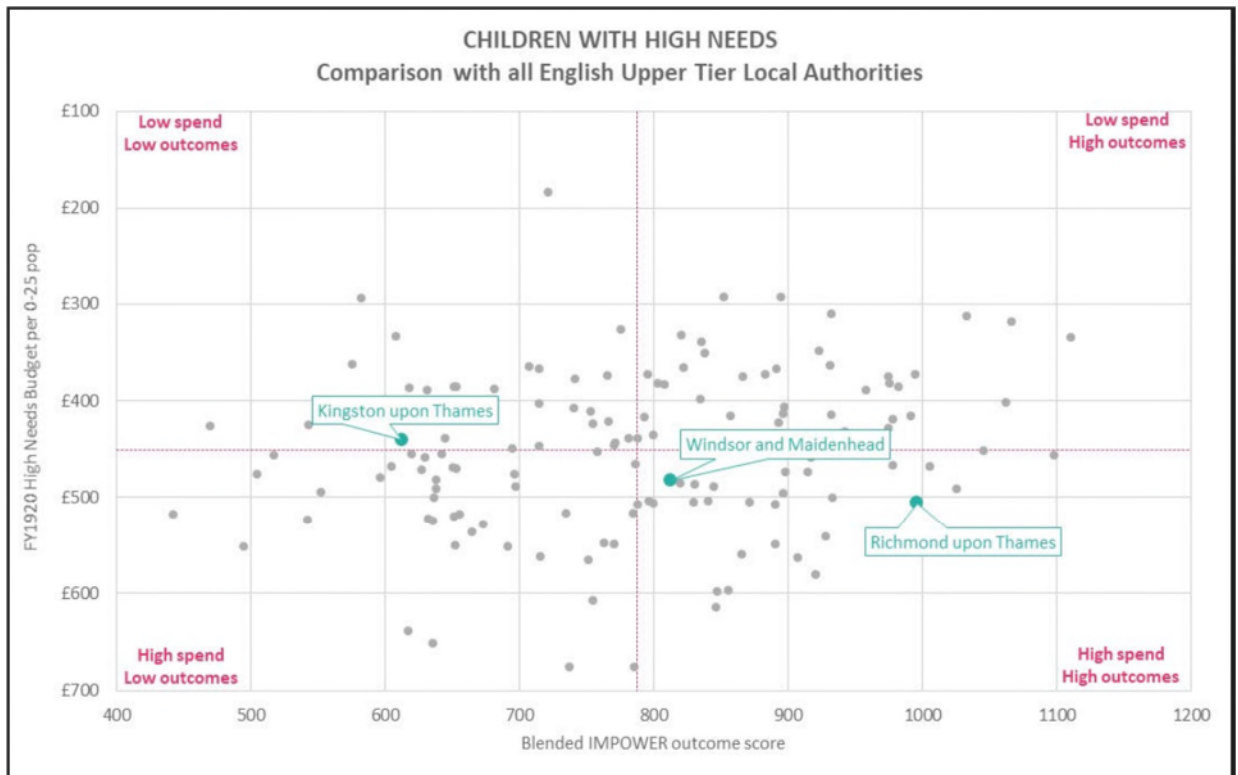
- Relative value for money
- Ability to deliver services within what is affordable for each commissioning council

**Value for money**

4.2 AfC aims to deliver low cost and good quality services across all three council contracts. The most recent Impower Index (2019/20) demonstrates that AfC’s 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.



Windsor and Maidenhead = Low Spend High Outcomes  
 Richmond upon Thames = Low Spend High Outcomes  
 Kingston upon Thames – Low Spend High Outcomes



Windsor and Maidenhead = High Spend High Outcomes  
 Richmond upon Thames = High Spend High Outcomes  
 Kingston upon Thames – Low Spend Low Outcomes

4.3 When looking at the latest available actual spend benchmarking data (2019/20) all three council contracts continue to be delivered at a relatively low cost, particularly given the positive inspection ratings that have been received.

	Richmond	Richmond	Kingston	Kingston	Windsor & Maidenhead	Windsor & Maidenhead
	Average spend per head	Rank compared to 151 comparable LAs	Average spend per head	Rank compared to 151 comparable LAs	Average spend per head	Rank compared to 151 comparable LAs
Children’s Social Care	£447.67	14	£435.16	12	£424.35	11
Non Schools Education	£165.35	13	£187.25	91	£55.39	3

**Commissioning Council Affordability**

4.4 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

- Inflationary pressures associated with general inflation, market dynamics and escalations in complexity of need that is being supported in placements.
- 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

4.5 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 the 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 continues to be one of the Company's key priorities in 2022/23 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 ensure we are able to realise the	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.

	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.
SUCCESSFUL ORGANISATION	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 efficient including developing our

	their families to improve outcomes for them.	accommodation and flexible working strategy.
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## 6. KEY BUSINESS PLAN / DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

- 6.1 It is clear that affordability of services must continue to be a key focus over the term of this strategy and the Business Plan across all three boroughs. Increasing need, inflation and complexity of needs is continuing to add pressure across education, social care and health services. This has been further complicated by the ongoing impact of the pandemic. 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><b>DEMAND MANAGEMENT</b></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><b>LOCAL PROVISION</b></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 Sufficiency Strategy has been agreed by all three Local Authorities and progress continues on implementing the recommendations including development of the Independent Fostering Agency, development of commissioning expertise and capacity, evaluation of options associated with increasing local residential placements and associated support services.</p>
<p><b>COMMISSIONING/PROCUREMENT COMPETENCE</b></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 Associate Director of Business Development and Strategic 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</p>

	with commissioning partnership arrangements for SEND and social care.
<p><b>REVIEW</b></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 needs is most significant.</p>
<p><b>MODERNISATION OF WORKING PRACTICE</b></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>AfCs 'Future Ways of Working Strategy; outlines how we will 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><b>FINANCIAL MONITORING &amp; PLANNING</b></p> <p>Detailed monitoring of all high risk areas on an ongoing basis and consistent reporting internally, 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 2022/23 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 2022.

<i>Contract price movements</i>	<b>Kingston £000</b>	<b>Richmond £000</b>	<b>Windsor and Maidenhead £000</b>	<b>Total £000</b>
<b>2021/22 Q2 contract price excl DSG</b>	<b>36,314,677</b>	<b>38,437,731</b>	<b>28,632,825</b>	<b>103,385,233</b>
<i>Growth</i>	2,709,123	2,954,537	3,400,268	<b>9,063,928</b>
<i>MTFS Savings</i>	-743,000	-885,000	-565,000	<b>-2,193,000</b>
<i>Savings associated with unfunded Inflation</i>	-162,000	-162,000	-80,000	<b>-404,000</b>
<i>Inflation - pay</i>	442,700	442,700	238,000	<b>1,123,400</b>
<i>Inflation - health and social care levy</i>	161,200	161,200	77,000	<b>399,400</b>



<i>Inflation - contracts</i>	492,700	341,232	260,000	<b>1,093,932</b>
<i>Unfunded Inflation - contractual increments</i>	162,000	162,000	80,000	<b>404,000</b>
<i>Grant and virement changes</i>	-72,000	21,000	-2,166,728	<b>-2,217,728</b>
<i>Growth to be awarded in year - pay award</i>	-442,700	-442,700	0	<b>-885,400</b>
<b>2022/23 opening contract price excl DSG</b>	<b>38,862,700</b>	<b>41,030,700</b>	<b>29,876,365</b>	<b>109,769,765</b>
<i>DSG funding in contract price</i>	22,323,200	23,617,000	12,987,020	<b>58,927,220</b>
<b>2022/23 base contract price incl DSG</b>	<b>61,185,900</b>	<b>64,647,700</b>	<b>42,863,385</b>	<b>168,696,985</b>

7.2 The budget is planned to be spent as follows:

<i>Service</i>	<b>Budget (£)</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Business Services</i>	6,749,412.00	4%
<i>Commissioning and Health</i>	13,600,590.00	8%
<i>Education Services</i>	65,456,550.00	39%
<i>Leases and Bought in Support Services</i>	7,669,670.00	5%
<i>Strategic Management</i>	2,363,290.00	1%
<i>Social Care and Early Help</i>	72,857,473.00	43%
<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>168,696,985.00</b>	<b>100%</b>

7.3 The biggest risk to achieving a balanced position on general fund services is the cost of needs led services both in terms of potential increases in the number of children needing support and the average cost of that support.

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. 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 each year to ensure that medium term financial planning remains aligned. 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.

	2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	TOTAL £
<i>Needs led growth</i>	5,860,228	3,011,233	2,613,649	2,542,487	2,472,822	<b>16,500,419</b>
<i>Covid 19 / Government Changes Growth</i>	1,541,200	-456,200	0	0	0	<b>1,085,000</b>
<i>Other Controllable Growth / Investment</i>	1,662,500	499,000	400,000	335,000	400,000	<b>3,296,500</b>
<i>Savings</i>	-	-865,500	-325,000	NYA	NYA	<b>-3,383,500</b>
	2,193,000					
<i>Savings - increments</i>	-404,000	-404,000	-404,000	-404,000	-404,000	<b>-2,020,000</b>
<i>Inflation - contractual</i>	1,093,932	1,100,587	727,438	750,134	773,289	<b>4,445,380</b>
<i>Inflation - pay award</i>	1,123,400	1,132,707	1,155,361	1,178,468	1,202,038	<b>5,791,974</b>
<i>Inflation - increments</i>	404,000	404,000	404,000	404,000	404,000	<b>2,020,000</b>
<i>Inflation - NI levy</i>	399,400	0	0	0	0	<b>399,400</b>
<i>Other grant/virement changes</i>	-	0	0	0	0	<b>-2,217,728</b>
	2,217,728					
<b>Net change before budget adjustments</b>	<b>7,269,932</b>	<b>4,421,826</b>	<b>4,571,449</b>	<b>4,806,090</b>	<b>4,848,149</b>	<b>25,917,445</b>

- 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. It is also recognised that significant work needs to be undertaken to reduce down the level of year on year growth required for needs-led social care placements.
- 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. AfC also periodically reviews delivery models to support efficiency of the service offer and how it is delivered.
  - 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.

Detailed plans are in place and AfC continues to work closely with the councils, DfE and partners to review and improve the position.

- 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 director to spend above this limit. The director 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 leadership team 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><b>Controllable budgets</b> 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>Leadership Team 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 Leadership Team</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 leadership teams monthly</p>
<p><b>Stepped Costs</b> 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 every increase in demand but where there are a certain number of staff needed to maintain caseloads within an agreed range.</p>	<p>Leadership Team approval of all vacancies prior to recruitment.</p> <p>Leadership Team consideration of alternative options via the request form before recruitment decisions made</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 Leadership Team 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 Leadership Team monthly</p>

<p><b>Demand led budgets</b> 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 Leadership Team monthly</p> <p>Development of the commissioning team and placement sufficiency strategy</p>
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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 having 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>
Risk of cross subsidy as the level of funding that can be afforded by each LA becomes more distinct	<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>
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> <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
- Implementation of Workforce Strategy to improve recruitment
- Progression of this strategy alongside the AfC Business Plan and 2022/23 budget through council decision making processes





<b>ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN BOARD OF DIRECTORS</b>
<b>DATE:</b> 4th February 2022
<b>REPORT AUTHOR:</b> Lucy Kourpas - Chief Operating and Finance Officer
<b>SUBJECT:</b> ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN BUDGET 2022/23
<b>PURPOSE:</b> To present the draft 2022/23 budget for approval

## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the proposed 2022/23 budget for Achieving for Children (AfC). The budget has been discussed in detail with each of the three councils that commission services from AfC. The final budget approval is a matter reserved to Richmond, Kingston and Windsor and Maidenhead councils as AfCs owners and will be formally presented for approval in February / March 2022. The following table summarises the proposed contract prices:

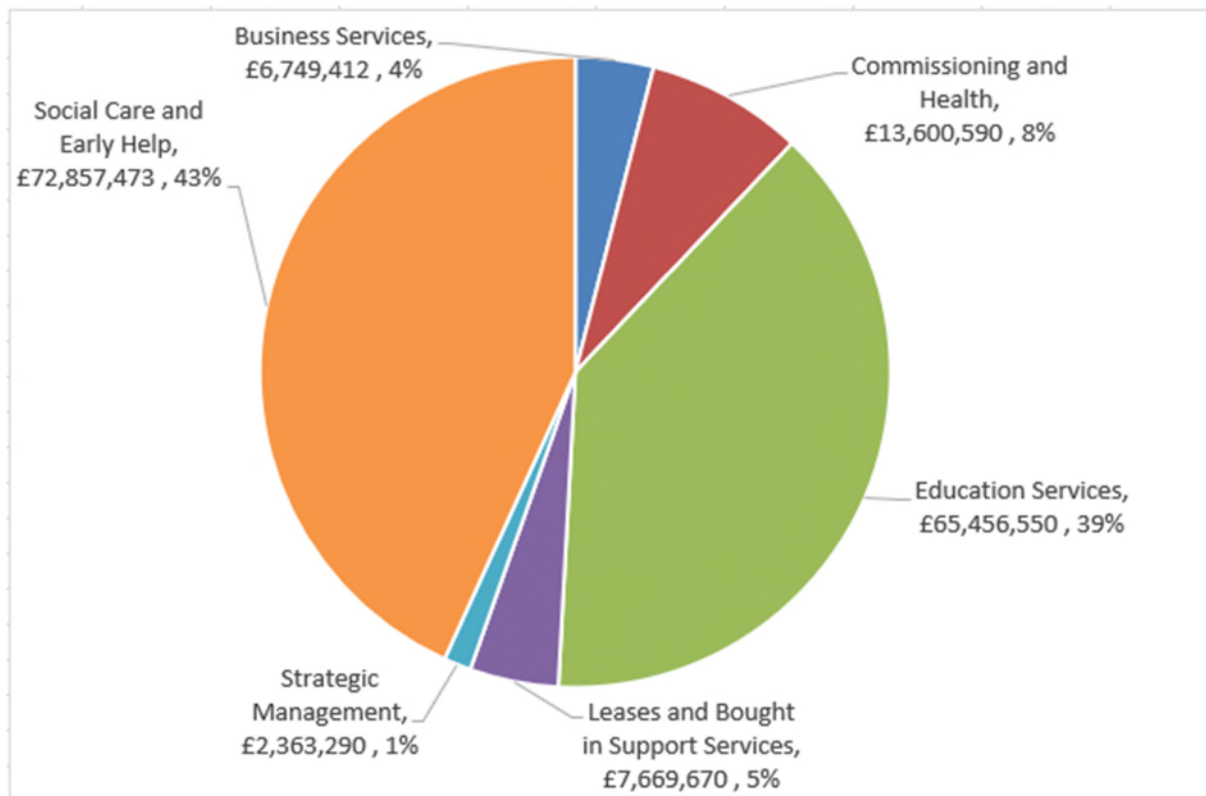
<b>Contract Prices</b>	<b>Kingston</b>	<b>Richmond</b>	<b>Windsor and Maidenhead</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>£000</b>	<b>£000</b>	<b>£000</b>	<b>£000</b>
<b>General Fund</b>	38,862,700	41,030,700	29,876,365	<b>109,769,765</b>
<b>Dedicated Schools Grant</b>	22,323,200	23,617,000	12,987,020	<b>58,927,220</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>61,185,900</b>	<b>64,647,700</b>	<b>42,863,385</b>	<b>168,696,985</b>

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

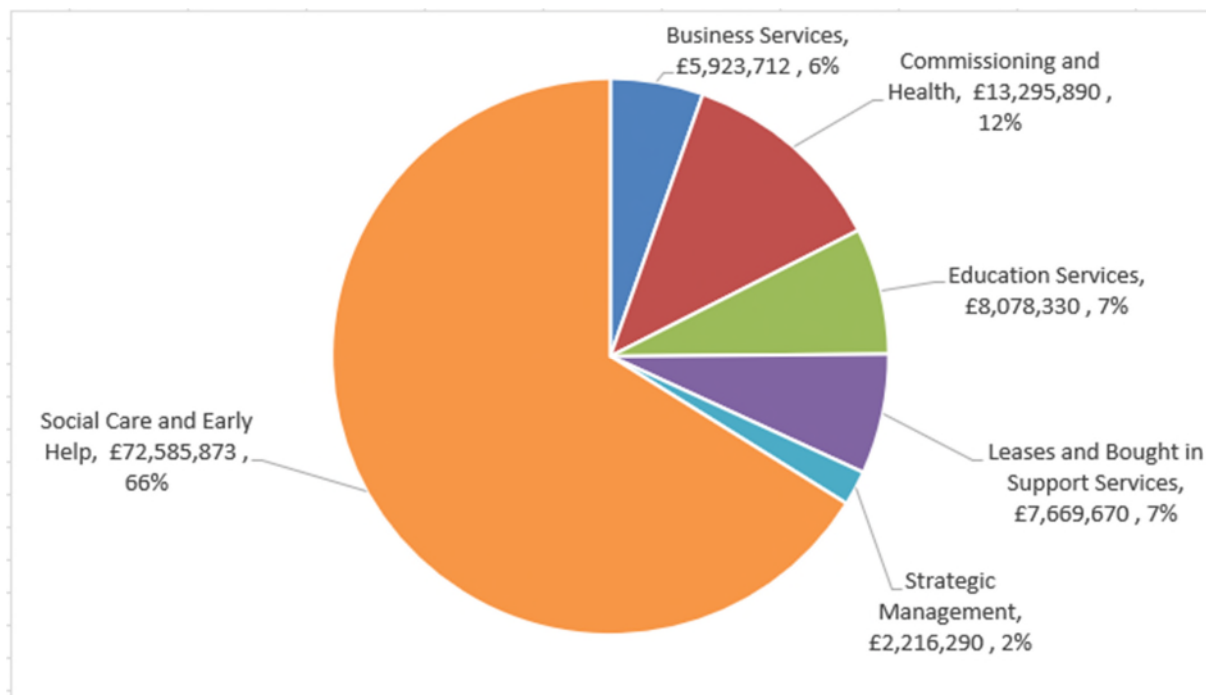
- 2.1 The Board is asked to agree to the 2022/23 budget that will go forward to the councils for approval.

## 3. GENERAL FUND BUDGET

3.1 The overall AfC budget is proposed at £168,696,985 profiled as follows:



3.2 The General Fund AfC budget (excl DSG) is proposed at £109,769,765 profiled as follows:



3.3 AfC have been fully engaged in each of the three budget setting processes taking place in the Local Authorities and have undertaken the company's detailed budget setting process

alongside their respective timetables. This budget, once agreed, will form part of the three commissioning council's political budget setting processes which concludes in Councillors approving budgets in late February and early March 2022. Each of AfCs owning councils is also required to consider and approve the AfC budget and Business Plan each year.

3.4 The proposed changes to the 2022/23 AfC budget are outlined below:

Contract price movements	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000
<b>2021/22 Q2 contract price excl DSG</b>	<b>36,314,677</b>	<b>38,437,731</b>	<b>28,632,825</b>	<b>103,385,233</b>
Growth	2,709,123	2,954,537	3,400,268	<b>9,063,928</b>
MTFS Savings	-743,000	-885,000	-565,000	<b>-2,193,000</b>
Savings associated with unfunded Inflation	-162,000	-162,000	-80,000	<b>-404,000</b>
Inflation - pay	442,700	442,700	238,000	<b>1,123,400</b>
Inflation - health and social care levy	161,200	161,200	77,000	<b>399,400</b>
Inflation - contracts	492,700	341,232	260,000	<b>1,093,932</b>
Unfunded Inflation - contractual increments	162,000	162,000	80,000	<b>404,000</b>
Grant and virement changes	-72,000	21,000	-2,166,728	<b>-2,217,728</b>
Growth to be awarded in year - pay award	-442,700	-442,700	0	<b>-885,400</b>
<b>2022/23 opening contract price excl DSG</b>	<b>38,862,700</b>	<b>41,030,700</b>	<b>29,876,365</b>	<b>109,769,765</b>
DSG funding in contract price	22,323,200	23,617,000	12,987,020	<b>58,927,220</b>
<b>2022/23 base contract price incl DSG</b>	<b>61,185,900</b>	<b>64,647,700</b>	<b>42,863,385</b>	<b>168,696,985</b>

#### GROWTH (£9.063m)

3.5 Growth requests have been provisionally approved in all three boroughs. The anticipated 2022/23 growth levels are listed in the table below. Where growth is not funded, AfC will need to identify in-year mitigations to avoid overspending.

Growth	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	Total
	£	£	£	£

## Appendix D

Social Care (incl Legal) current demographic growth	816,351	1,105,019	908,163	2,829,533
Social Care (incl Legal) future demand	945,530	758,750	985,105	2,689,385
SEN Transport current demographic	136,850	68,452	0	205,302
SEN Transport future growth	23,942	32,066	0	56,008
Regional Adoption	40,000	40,000	15,000	95,000
<b>Total Demand Growth</b>	<b>1,962,673</b>	<b>2,004,287</b>	<b>1,908,268</b>	<b>5,875,228</b>
Social Care Covid-19 permanent impact on demand (placement) budgets	220,500	273,500	360,000	854,000
Safeguarding (Covid-19 additionality pressures)	100,000	140,000	0	240,000
Referral and Assessment (Covid-19 additionality pressures)	129,200	87,000	0	216,200
Leaving Care (Increased staffing in Personal Advisor and Team Leader)	55,500	55,500	0	111,000
NQT Recruitment Income (permanent change due to Government funding arrangements)	42,500	42,500	0	85,000
Family hub property costs	0	0	35,000	35,000
School improvement, Education Welfare			130,000	130,000
<b>COVID-19/Government Funding Changes</b>	<b>547,700</b>	<b>598,500</b>	<b>525,000</b>	<b>1,671,200</b>
Business Service Leadership Capacity (Business Development and Procurement)	43,750	43,750	0	87,500
Corporate Insurance Contract	25,000	25,000	15,000	65,000
Social Care future year staffing requirements (Social Workers in CLA and Leaving Care)	0	42,500	0	42,500
SEND including Preparing for Adulthood	130,000	87,500	40,000	257,500
Information Governance, Access to work, Health & Safety			78,000	78,000
<b>General Fund Controllable Pressures</b>	<b>198,750</b>	<b>198,750</b>	<b>133,000</b>	<b>530,500</b>
Social care low caseload target operating model	0	0	509,000	509,000
Domestic Abuse Team	0	0	161,000	161,000
Mental health Initiatives	0	57,000	0	57,000

Youth Outreach	0	91,000	0	91,000
Education - Violence Against Women and Girls	0	5,000	0	5,000
Edge of Care Team	0	0	164,000	164,000
<b>Investment priorities</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>153,000</b>	<b>834,000</b>	<b>987,000</b>
<b>2022/23 Budget Growth</b>	<b>2,709,123</b>	<b>2,954,537</b>	<b>3,400,268</b>	<b>9,063,928</b>

3.6 Covid-19 has been incorporated into the growth requests for all three boroughs. There is a risk, as the pandemic continues, that 2022/23 budgets will face greater pressure than has been anticipated. The growth requests incorporate known and expected demand pressures, as well as specific controllable budget growth items.

### SAVINGS (£2.597m)

3.7 A significant challenge for the Company relates to savings targets set by the councils as part of the wider public sector regime of budget reduction as well as savings required due to unfunded growth. The following table summarises the budget reductions that have been built into the 2022/23 budget.

Savings	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	Total
	£	£	£	£
MTFS Savings	743,000	885,000	565,000	<b>2,193,000</b>
Unfunded Inflation	162,000	162,000	80,000	<b>404,000</b>
<b>2022/23 savings</b>	<b>905,000</b>	<b>1,047,000</b>	<b>645,000</b>	<b>2,597,000</b>

3.8 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
- **Unfunded inflation** – Inflationary pressures that are not funded in the agreed contract prices

3.9 Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of the agreed general fund savings. The savings are subject to formal agreement at the various council political meetings in February/March. If the councils do not wish to proceed with any of the proposed savings at this stage in the process AfC will first look to propose alternative savings (where possible) and if alternatives can not be agreed the councils will need to provide growth to avoid overspending next year.

3.10 The unfunded inflation of £404,000 relates to contractual staff increments which are not allowed for in the council’s contract prices.

### INFLATION (£3.021m)

- 3.11 AfC submitted inflationary growth requests to each borough in the Summer / Autumn 2021 and the following table summarises the outcomes of these bids:

Inflation	Kingston	Richmond	Windsor and Maidenhead	Total
	£	£	£	£
Increments (unfunded)	162,000	162,000	80,000	404,000
Pay award	442,700	442,700	238,000	1,123,400
Contract inflation	492,700	341,232	260,000	1,093,932
National Insurance (health and social care levy)	161,200	161,200	77,000	399,400
<b>2022/23 inflation</b>	<b>1,258,600</b>	<b>1,107,132</b>	<b>655,000</b>	<b>3,020,732</b>
Growth to be awarded in year - pay award	-442,700	-442,700	0	-885,400
<b>2022/23 inflation</b>	<b>815,900</b>	<b>664,432</b>	<b>655,000</b>	<b>2,135,332</b>

- 3.12 The cost of contractual salaries increments will not be funded by any of the boroughs and so this will be an additional pressure to be met from existing budgets.
- 3.13 All three boroughs have agreed to fund a pay award next year. In Windsor and Maidenhead this is a local decision and likely to be 2%. In Richmond and Kingston this is negotiated at a national level and 2% has been set aside in the council's accounts pending the outcome of national negotiations. The actual amount given will be adjusted to reflect the final National Joint Council / Teachers pay award.
- 3.14 The new Health and Social Care 1.25% National Insurance Levy will be fully funded by all three councils.
- 3.15 Where AfC holds contracts with specific inflationary increments this has also been provided for using RPI as an indicator. The table below details this inflationary growth and there is a risk that if inflation exceeds the 2% built in that a pressure, requiring mitigation, will materialise during next year.

#### **GRANT AND CONTRACT CHANGES (-£2.217m)**

- 3.16 The contract prices will also change for a number of agreed adjustments to reflect estimated Government Grant amounts or one off prior year service funding. 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. The most substantial items relate to one off grant funded services that were delivered by AfC in 2021/22 e.g. the Household Support Fund and Local Covid Support Grant. These budget adjustments are agreed at an officer level between the councils and AfC during the year.

#### **4. DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT**

- 4.1 The provisional grant settlement for the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) was announced on 16th December 2021. AfC will continue to manage the DSG grant funds on behalf of the three councils although not all of the money will be included in the annual contract prices. This means that AfC will be responsible for the management of those funds including passporting funding directly to schools and early years settings. AfC will also deliver significant education services with the most material being high needs education services but also including services such as school admissions, early years advisory services and school improvement.
- 4.2 The table below details the anticipated DSG budgets for each borough, after block transfers which are expected to be agreed as part of each council's budget setting process.

<b>Block</b>	<b>Richmond 2022/23 Budget (£m)</b>	<b>Kingston 2022/23 Budget (£m)</b>	<b>Windsor &amp; Maidenhead 2022/23 Budget (£m)</b>
Schools Block	134.505	121.448	102.297
Central School Services Block	0.818	1.065	1.035
Early Years Block	14.841	13.118	10.042
High Needs Block	33.659	28.560	26.322
<b>Total</b>	<b>183.823</b>	<b>164.192</b>	<b>139.697</b>

- 4.3 The funding must be applied to education services with a significant portion being passported to schools and early years providers as de-delegated budgets.
- 4.4 AfC have drafted detailed budget reports for each council and so the details will be formally approved in February and March. The links to the detailed budget reports are detailed below for information:
- [Richmond Schools Budget Report](#)
  - [Kingston Schools Budget Report](#)
  - [Windsor and Maidenhead Schools Budget Report](#)
- 4.5 The most significant challenge for next year will remain the management of high needs education services within the budget available. In Richmond and Kingston this budget has been agreed with the DfE and council as part of the five year Safety Valve Funding agreement and will exceed the amount of grant funding available (shown in table above). In Windsor and Maidenhead the expenditure on high needs is also expected to exceed the grant funding available and a Deficit Management Plan is now in place to bring spend into line with grant funding over the coming years.
- 4.6 The cumulative deficits on all three DSG funds remains a significant risk to AfC and the councils and the addressing of those deficits must remain one of AfCs top priorities next year. The importance of the plans is recognised in the AfC Business Plan. In recognition that

shortfalls in high needs education funding is a growing national issue, 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.

- 4.7 The SEND Futures Plans in Richmond and Kingston will remain a major priority moving into next year and there will be continued focus on implementing the deficit management plan in Windsor and Maidenhead. The Board will already be familiar with the plans and the latest versions can be viewed on the relevant Local Offer websites.

## 5. RISKS AND MITIGATIONS

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

RISK / CHALLENGE	ACTION
Inflation	Inflationary increases have been built into budgets but it is possible given the escalation in RPI and CPI that it may exceed the amount allowed for. Robust commissioning practises as well as partnership working will be key to understanding this pressure and mitigating it wherever possible.
Continuing/escalating impact of Covid 19	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 and associated costs will continue to grow at a higher than expected rate due to the continuation of the pandemic. There is also uncertainty on how business as usual budgets, particularly in relation to income generation, will perform as restrictions are lifted. 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 reaction to financial pressure with importance of making decisions in best interest of children	The Leadership Teams review the monthly monitoring and agree on all financial actions that could impact on services. This ensures that the service impact of financial action plans is considered and risks identified/ monitored. Director overview of all decisions relating to their directorates



<p>Placement budgets – Increasing average cost and demand pressures</p>	<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>Updated Sufficiency Strategy</p> <p>Engagement with joint 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>
<p>Achievement of savings and agreement of one off costs for redundancy etc.</p>	<p>Regular monitoring of progress against savings plans.</p> <p>Project plans for each of the high value schemes with regular reporting to the Leadership Teams</p> <p>Quarterly progress reporting to the AfC Board and Commissioners.</p>
<p>Risk of cross subsidy if the level of funding that can be afforded by each LA differs</p>	<p>Operational area budgets recorded separately to avoid high level cross subsidy. Demand budgets ringfenced to ensure that placement / transport budgets are not vulnerable to cross subsidy</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 and Chief Operating Officer</p>
<p>Risk that Councils do not agree proposed savings and growth</p>	<p>Regular briefings for councillors throughout the budget setting processes</p>

## 6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Budgets will be carefully monitored during 2022/23 to ensure that appropriate action is taken where financial pressure arises. The combination of inflationary, demand pressures, Covid-19 and savings required means that 2022/23 will be another challenging year in financial terms.
- 6.2 Balancing the ever increasing financial pressure with the responsibility to ensure the best outcomes for children remains a significant challenge going into 2022/23. Increases in demand 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 significant

levels of growth and so it is important that the budgets are prioritised effectively to ensure demand is managed within the available budget envelope.

- 6.3 The underfunding of high needs education, rising inflationary pressures and the step up in complexity of support needed by children and young people remain the greatest challenges next year and it is important that as an organisation we periodically review delivery models and make changes to support value of money.
- 6.4 Challenging savings targets have been built into the budget for next year and it is important that progress against these projects and achievement of planned budget reductions is monitored. The achievement of planned savings and managing demand will need to continue to be a high priority for all staff that have authority to commit to spend. Where projects under-achieve savings targets or there are demand-led overspends, cost reductions will need to be found from elsewhere to ensure the Company can operate within the contract funding envelope agreed with the councils.
- 6.5 It is important that AfC continues to embed a culture of financial restraint into all officers with spending power and that the Company regularly reviews the financial position to ensure that money is aligned to service needs and priorities. Expenditure restraint policies and procedures will need to continue into 2022/23 to ensure that controllable budgets remain balanced and resources can be effectively prioritised in demand led budgets.

## **7. CONTACTS**

Lucy Kourpas

Chief Operating & Finance Officer

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## Achieving for Children: Treasury Plan

### Borrowing

1. AfC will only borrow from the Councils and in accordance with the terms set out in the Revolving Credit Facility (RCF).

### Investment

2. 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.
3. 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
<b>Total Investment</b>	<b>£14,000,000</b>

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

4. 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.
5. The treasury management and banking functions in AfC will be supervised by the

Chief Operating Officer and undertaken by appropriately experienced staff within the finance section of AfC. Treasury activity will be planned and reviewed weekly and longer term plans prepared at least annually.

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

**ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD**  
**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**EqlA : Title of EQIA**

**Essential information**

Items to be assessed: (please mark 'x')

<b>Strategy</b>	x	<b>Policy</b>		<b>Plan</b>	x	<b>Project</b>	x	<b>Service/Procedure</b>	
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<b>Responsible officer</b>	Kevin McDaniel	<b>Service area</b>	Childrens Services	<b>Directorate</b>	People Directorate
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<b>Stage 1: EqIA Screening (mandatory)</b>	Date created: 22/3/22	<b>Stage 2 : Full assessment (if applicable)</b>	Date created : xx/xx/xxxx
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**Approved by Head of Service / Overseeing group/body / Project Sponsor:**

*"I am satisfied that an equality impact has been undertaken adequately."*

**Signed by (print):** Lucy Kourpas

**Dated:** 22/3/22

# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### EqlA : Title of EQIA

#### **Guidance notes**

##### **What is an EqlA and why do we need to do it?**

The Equality Act 2010 places a 'General Duty' on all public bodies to have 'due regard' to:

- Eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act.
- Advancing equality of opportunity between those with 'protected characteristics' and those without them.
- Fostering good relations between those with 'protected characteristics' and those without them.

EqlAs are a systematic way of taking equal opportunities into consideration when making a decision, and should be conducted when there is a new or reviewed strategy, policy, plan, project, service or procedure in order to determine whether there will likely be a detrimental and/or disproportionate impact on particular groups, including those within the workforce and customer/public groups. All completed EqlA Screenings are required to be publicly available on the council's website once they have been signed off by the relevant Head of Service or Strategic/Policy/Operational Group or Project Sponsor.

##### **What are the "protected characteristics" under the law?**

The following are protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010: age; disability (including physical, learning and mental health conditions); gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

##### **What's the process for conducting an EqlA?**

The process for conducting an EqlA is set out at the end of this document. In brief, a Screening Assessment should be conducted for every new or reviewed strategy, policy, plan, project, service or procedure and the outcome of the Screening Assessment will indicate whether a Full Assessment should be undertaken.

##### **Openness and transparency**

RBWM has a 'Specific Duty' to publish information about people affected by our policies and practices. Your completed assessment should be sent to the Strategy & Performance Team for publication to the RBWM website once it has been signed off by the relevant manager, and/or Strategic, Policy, or Operational Group. If your proposals are being made to Cabinet or any other Committee, please append a copy of your completed Screening or Full Assessment to your report.

##### **Enforcement**

Judicial review of an authority can be taken by any person, including the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) or a group of people, with an interest, in respect of alleged failure to comply with the general equality duty. Only the EHRC can enforce the specific duties. A failure to comply with the specific duties may however be used as evidence of a failure to comply with the general duty.

**ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD  
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**EqIA : Title of EQIA**

**Stage 1 : Screening (Mandatory)**

# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EqIA : Title of EQIA

**1.1 What is the overall aim of your proposed strategy/policy/project etc and what are its key objectives?**



# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### EqlA : Title of EQIA

The proposals aim to achieve continuous improvement and development of children's services for the children and young people of Kingston, Richmond and Windsor and Maidenhead. The proposals also seek to prioritise funding to support the most vulnerable children and young people who access services delivered by AfC. There are six strategic objectives as follows:

#### ***Strategic priority: Stronger families***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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 realise the benefits of joint working to support our children, young people and families

*Why is this important?*

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 really benefit from collaboration and joined-up working.

#### ***Strategic priority: Positive futures***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### EqIA : Title of EQIA

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.

#### ***Strategic priority: Excellent workforce***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

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.

#### ***Strategic priority: Financial stability***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### EqIA : Title of EQIA

Given the financial context, 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.

***Strategic priority: Successful organisation***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

As the needs of young people and our owning councils change we will develop and adapt our business and delivery models to ensure we continue to meet their needs and offer value for money.

***Strategic priority: Smarter working***

*What will we achieve for children and young people?*

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.

*Why is this important?*

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.

# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**EqlA : Title of EQIA**

**1.2 What evidence is available to suggest that your proposal could have an impact on people (including staff and customers) with protected characteristics? Consider each of the protected characteristics in turn and identify whether your proposal is Relevant or Not Relevant to that characteristic. If Relevant, please assess the level of impact as either High / Medium / Low and whether the impact is Positive (i.e. contributes to promoting equality or improving relations within an equality group) or Negative (i.e. could disadvantage them). Please document your evidence for each assessment you make, including a justification of why you may have identified the proposal as “Not Relevant”.**

# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### EqIA : Title of EQIA

Protected characteristics	Relevance	Level	Positive/negative	Evidence
<b>Age</b>	High	High	Positive	<p>The proposals outlined aim to support children and young people living in the boroughs of Richmond, Kingston and Windsor and Maidenhead. Children's services are open to all children where there is an identified need to access services. 0-25 populations as follows:</p> <p>Windsor and Maidenhead: 45,606                      Richmond: 59,104                      Kingston: 57,891</p> <p>The proposals outlined look to modernise children's services through increased use of digital technology. Adjustments will be made to ensure that staff and service users can still access services / working models where digital exclusion is a risk.</p>
<b>Disability</b>	High	High	Positive	<p>The improvement of services for children with special education needs and disabilities are a key priority as outlined in the proposals. Children with EHCPs as follows:</p> <p><i>Windsor and Maidenhead: 1,036</i>  <i>Richmond: 1,652</i>  <i>Kingston: 1,566</i></p> <p><i>Achieving for Children employs a number of staff with disabilities and has processes and resources in place to support equality of access and opportunity.</i></p>
<b>Gender re-assignment</b>	n/a	n/a	None	n/a
<b>Marriage/civil partnership</b>	n/a	n/a	None	n/a

# ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### EqIA : Title of EQIA

<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	Low	Low	Positive	<i>Achieving for Children has established processes and resources in place to support staff through maternity / paternity. At the time of writing 21 staff were on maternity leave.</i>
<b>Race</b>	n/an/a	n/a	None	
<b>Religion and belief</b>			None	
<b>Sex</b>			None	
<b>Sexual orientation</b>			None	

### Outcome, action and public reporting

<b>Screening Assessment Outcome</b>	<b>Yes / No / Not at this stage</b>	<b>Further Action Required / Action to be taken</b>	<b>Responsible Officer and / or Lead Strategic Group</b>	<b>Timescale for Resolution of negative impact / Delivery of positive impact</b>
<b>Was a significant level of negative impact identified?</b>	No	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Does the strategy, policy, plan etc require amendment to have a positive impact?</b>	No	n/a	n/a	n/a

If you answered **yes** to either / both of the questions above a Full Assessment is advisable and so please proceed to Stage 2. If you answered “No” or “Not at this Stage” to either / both of the questions above please consider any next steps that may be taken (e.g. monitor future impacts as part of implementation, re-screen the project at its next delivery milestone etc).

**ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD**

**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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