Report Title:	Achieving for Children (AfC) Reserved Ownership Decisions
Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	No - Part I
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Tisi, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Windsor
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 27 March 2024
Responsible Officer(s):	Lin Ferguson, Executive 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 organisation's strategic direction through the adoption of the new Strategic Plan
- Approval of the Company's budget for 2024/25 including Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Approval of the Company's arrangements for managing cash flow through the adoption of the Treasury Plan for 2024/25

In developing these proposals AfC has engaged with relevant council officers and members. 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 approves:

- i) the new AfC Strategic Plan (appendix A)
- ii) the detailed 2024/25 budget (appendix B) including Medium Term Financial Strategy (appendix C)
- iii) the Treasury Plan (appendix D)

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 Cabinet has a key role in the oversight and decision making for AfC. The detailed responsibilities are outlined in a previous report to Cabinet:

https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s45552/Item%208%20Reserved%20Ownersip%20D ecisions%20Covering%20Report.pdf

- 2.3 This report seeks approval of the following matters that are reserved to the Local Authority as a jointly owner of AfC:
 - Approval of the organisation's strategic direction through the adoption of the new Strategic Plan;
 - Approval of the Company's budget for 2024/25 including Medium Term Financial Strategy;
 - Approval of the Company's arrangements for managing cash flow through the adoption of the Financial Plan (known as the Treasury Plan) for 2024/25;

Options

Table 1: Options arising from this report

Option	Comments
The Cabinet approves the Strategic Plan,	This will ensure that AfC has agreed
AfC budget including Medium Term	strategic objectives, agreed budget
Financial Strategy and Treasury Plan	and Treasury Plan.
This is the recommended option	
The Cabinet does not approve the Strategic	If this option is chosen AfC will move
Plan, AfC budget including Medium Term	into the new year without agreed
Financial Strategy and Treasury Plan	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.
The Cabinet approves the Strategic Plan,	If this option is chosen AfC will
AfC budget including Medium Term	discuss the suggested changes with
Financial Strategy and Treasury Plan with a	the other owning councils and seek
number of requested changes which will be	virtual agreement to support
subject to mutual approval of the other two	strategic direction and budget clarity
owning boroughs.	as soon as possible. It is recommended that Cabinet
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	delegates final sign off to the Chief
	Executive Officer in conjunction with the lead member for Cabinet
	Member for Children's Services,
	Education and Windsor to support a
	timely final decision.

3. Reserved Matter Decision One: Approval of strategic direction via the new Achieving *More* for Children Strategic Plan

- 3.1 Cabinet last approved the existing five year Business Plan in February 2023. This plan comes to an end in March 2024 and AfC has developed a new plan, in consultation with stakeholders, for the period April 2024 March 2029. There are a number of sections to the Plan which can be used individually for different audiences and different purposes:
 - Children and Young People's version This summarised version is written to the child /

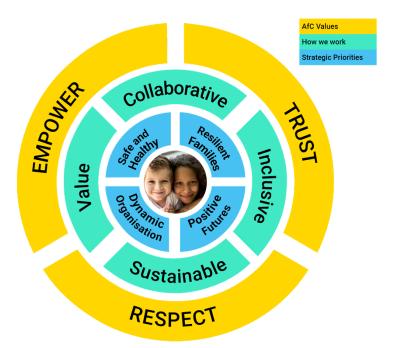
young person and contains a high level summary of our commitment to young people and how this feeds through to our strategic priorities, ways of working and behavioural values.

- **Strategic Priorities** This section is aimed at explaining AfC's strategic priorities and values to practitioners and partners who work with us to support children and young people.
- **Priority Programmes** This section outlines planned priority programmes for the coming five years that will support AfC to achieve its strategic priorities.
- Who We Are This section explains who AfC are as an organisation, including what services AfC delivers, and how we work with children, young people and families. It is aimed at professionals and partners who are interested in working with, or learning more about, AfC.
- 3.2 The new Plan has been developed with significant reference to Richmond, Kingston and Windsor and Maidenhead strategic plans as well as engagement with stakeholders. Engagement activity has included:
 - Joint workshop with the AfC Board and children and young people
 - Young People invitation to comment
 - AfC leadership and AfC Board development sessions
 - Staff and partner invitation to comment
 - Meetings with the AfC Ownership Board, which includes representative councillors from each of AfCs owning local authorities, Chief Executives and Contract Commissioners
- 3.3 The AfC Board considered and approved the Strategic Plan in January 2024 and is recommending that each of the owning councils now formally sign off the strategic direction and associated plans. Once approved by Richmond, Kingston and Windsor and Maidenhead the Plan will be launched in April 2024.

Strategic Plan - Achieving More For Children

- 3.4 The updated **Strategic Plan** (page 1 7) is attached at **appendix A**. Since the creation of Achieving for Children in 2014, our objective has been to support children and young people to achieve the best possible outcomes and this drives everything that we do. We want children and young people to have the best start in life and to live safe and fulfilled lives.
- 3.5 The AfC Strategic Plan aligns well with the new RBWM Council Plan 2024 2028 which is due to be launched in April this year. The new RBWM Council Plan contains 5 strategic aims, one of which is that children have a great start in life and access to opportunities through to adulthood. There are a number of key deliverables set out in the RBWM Council Plan which will help us to achieve this aim, together with a set of performance indicators against which success will be measured.
- 3.6 The AfC Strategic Plan summarises our strategy and ways of working as follows:

Diagram 1: Strategic Plan



3.6 The new strategy outlines four strategic priorities that will shape what we do over the coming years:

- Safe and healthy- Supporting children and families to live safe and healthy lives.
- **Positive futures-** Supporting children and young people to achieve meaningful outcomes from birth until they transition to adulthood and enabling them to live, learn and thrive locally.
- **Stronger families-** Supporting young people and families to develop resilience and independence.
- **Dynamic workforce-** Developing a workforce and organisation that is tailored to the needs of children, young people and families of our boroughs.
- 3.7 The strategy moves on to define four working principles as follows:
 - **Inclusive** Embracing inclusion and diversity is not just a checkbox exercise for us: it's a conscious effort to create an inclusive space that celebrates differences, promotes innovation and empowers people to reach their full potential.
 - **Sustainable** We are committed to ensuring that we are proactive in minimising the environmental footprint of our own activities, to promote a sustainable environment for future generations to enjoy.
 - Value for Money We will maximise the impact of the money and resources we have by being transparent about what money is available, how it is being spent and regularly review whether it is aligned to our priorities.
 - Collaborative We will support and promote strong, effective and respectful partnership

working, not only with other agencies such as schools, the police, health, adult social care, the voluntary sector, but also with our children, young people and families.

- 3.8 AfC launched three behavioural values in 2019. The values of Trust, Empower and Respect are well embedded into all our policies and processes and are still relevant so they have not been changed. AfC's values align well with RBWM's recently refreshed and re-launched values of Humility, Empowerment, Respect, One Team (HERO) which creates clear synergies between the two organisations and provides a strong platform continued shared working. We have included a more detailed definition in the strategy of what they mean for how AfC colleagues will work with young people and families, with each other and with partners.
- 3.9 The **Priority Programme Plan (page 8 22)** details programmes of work that align to the priorities and that will support AfC to support young people to achieve their best outcomes. The Plan notes which programmes will apply to all three AfC boroughs and which are specific to RBWM.
- 3.10 The programmes will be reviewed each year to ensure they remain relevant and progress will be monitored and reported through a narrative and KPI dashboard. Progress will be monitored and reported via the AfC Leadership Team, Contract Commissioners and the AfC Ownership Board.

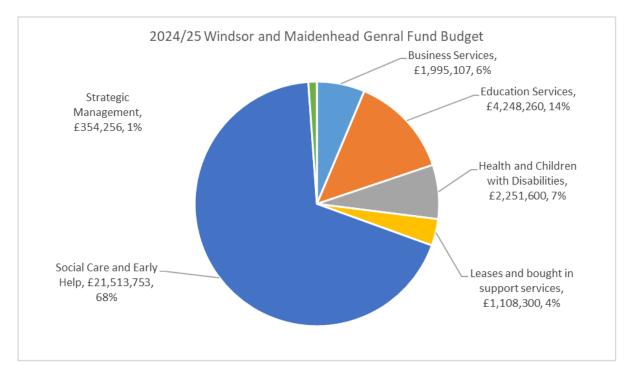
4. Reserved Matter Decision Two: Approval of the AfC Budget 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy

- 4.1 The approval of the AfC budget is a reserved matter decision and provides the three owning councils with a significant amount of control over AfC's finances. **Appendix B** to this report contains a copy of the AfC Budget Report which was considered and approved by the AfC Board in January 2024, subject to final approval by AfCs three owning councils.
- 4.2 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 council's own budget paper. This is also the case for Kingston and Richmond.
- 4.3 A net revenue operating budget of £209,573,065 is proposed for AfC in 2024/25 as follows:

Contract Prices	Richmond £	Kingston £	Windsor and Maidenhead £	Total £
General Fund	54,570,600	50,161,000	31,471,275	136,202,875
Dedicated Schools Grant	29,990,300	27,656,000	15,723,890	73,370,190
TOTAL	84,560,900	77,817,000	47,195,165	209,573,065

table 2: AfC Budget

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



- 4.5 The provisional Dedicated Schools Grant allocations were released for all three boroughs on the 19th December 2023. AfC is responsible for administering the Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) but the income and expenditure forms part of each councils' 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 and is not repeated here. The Windsor and Maidenhead paper was presented to Cabinet in February. 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.
- 4.6 A Medium Term Financial Strategy is also presented at appendix C. The 2024 strategy will continue to focus on achieving financial sustainability 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.
- 4.7 The strategy prioritises ensuring services are affordable as follows:
 - Ensure there is a mutual understanding of what is affordable for each local authority in terms of funding and quality of services;
 - 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.

- 4.8 The strategy recognises that the cost of AfC's children's services benchmark well but that there is still an affordability gap for services and areas for further development particularly in relation to SEND and social care. The next couple of years will be hugely challenging and the strategy draws out a number of themes and activities from the Strategic Plan that will be a key focus to achieve sustainability.
- 4.9 The Cabinet is asked to approve the AfC 2024/25 budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as part of the Council's role as joint owner of AfC. A detailed budget report is included in appendix B and the MTFS is attached as appendix C.

5. Reserved Matter Decision Three: Treasury Plan

- 5.1 The approval of the Treasury Plan for AfC is a reserved decision for AfCs three owning councils. The plan is approved annually and when events require a review. It was last approved in February 2023.
- 5.2 The Treasury Plan outlines how AfC is permitted to borrow and invest for cashflow purposes in the coming year. The Plan also provides assurances to the councils around the procedures in place for banking and treasury management in AfC and for monitoring by the Local Authorities.
- 5.3 The treasury management and banking functions in AfC are overseen by the Chief Operating & Finance Officer and carried out by suitably experienced staff with appropriate training. Treasury transactions are undertaken on the basis of formal proposals and authorisations requiring at least two members of staff and following the current treasury procedures and policies of the Company. Physical transactions are carried out using a secure internet banking system. AfC plans and reviews its treasury activities on a regular basis and longer term plans are reviewed at least annually in line with AfC's business planning process.
- 5.4 The 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. Banking institutions used by AfC to hold money are approved by the three Local Authorities. Proposed changes to the Treasury Plan are agreed at officer level prior to reporting to the Cabinet. AfC will take advice from Local Authority officers on all aspects of its treasury management function and will comply with any instruction or direction from the councils, acting jointly, with regard to its treasury activities and investments.
- 5.5 The Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the 2024/25 Treasury Plan outlined in **appendix D**.

Table 3: Key Implications

Outcome	Unmet	Met	Exceeded	Significantly Exceeded	Date of delivery
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 Strategic Plan including priorities outlined for future years	Progress made on all key priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan including priorities outlined for future years	31st March 2029
AfC delivers services within the agreed budget envelope	Overspend	Nil overspend	Underspend or reinvested surplus	Underspend or reinvested surplus	31st March 2025

6. FINANCIAL DETAILS / VALUE FOR MONEY

6.1 The detailed financial implications are outlined in the report and associated appendices. AfC has worked with Local Authority officers to reach a proposed 2024/25 budget and the budget detailed in this report is also reflected in the Council's draft budget proposal. It is clear that there will continue to be significant financial pressures in relation to children's services moving into 2024/25 and it is important that the Council continues to gain assurance on what AfC is doing to proactively manage those pressures.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 With regards to the recommendations concerning approving the Strategic Plan, the detailed 2024/25 budget and the Treasury Plan these are band 3 Reserved Matters which require approval of the Cabinet.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 The specific risks are outlined in the various appendices to this report and the three key risks are highlighted in table four.

Risk	Level of uncontrolle d risk	Controls	Level of controlled risk
Risk that the strategic direction of AfC becomes misaligned with that of its three owning councils	Medium	The approval of the strategic direction and budget for AfC is a decision reserved for the three owning councils. This governance approach provides the three councils with a mechanism to directly control AfC's strategic direction. In putting the various strategies and plans together AfC has engaged with the Ownership Board which includes representation from all three councils as well as the council's 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	

Table 4: Impact of risk and mitigation

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	Risk that the cost of delivering services exceeds budget	High	are discussed within AfC and with the	Medium
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9. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 9.1 AfC produces an Annual Equalities Report which is published on its website and sets out actions to address any inequalities identified. The AfC ED&I Board has recently updated the AfC Action Plan, in consultation with staff, and this will be launched in the new financial year to drive improvement over the coming two years and beyond. Equalities Assessments are completed in the planning stages for all key programmes and publicly available at the following link: https://www.achievingforchildren.org.uk/pages/about-us/reports-and-documents
- 9.2 The updated Strategic Plan (page 6) includes a specific commitment to working in an environmentally sustainable way and working towards carbon neutrality by 2030.
- 9.3 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.

10. CONSULTATION

10.1 In putting together the Strategic Plan, AfC has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders including young people, families, partners, the councils and AfC staff. AfC and the Local Authority will work together to consult on specific proposals in the Strategic Plan and budget as required as part of the implementation plans for each project or change.

11. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

11.1 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
- 11.2 The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is approving the reserved matters in this report jointly with the Royal Borough of Kingston and the London Borough of Richmond. All three councils will be meeting to consider and approve the reserved matters with implementation of the revised documents from 1st April 2024. The full implementation stages are set out below.

Table 5: Key dates

Date	Details	
29 January 2024	AfC Board	
22 February 2024	Richmond Education and Children's Committee	
12 March 2024	Kingston People Committee	
27 March 2024	Windsor and Maidenhead Cabinet	
1st April 2024	Implementation	

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 This report is supported by five appendices:
 - Appendix A1 Strategic Plan, Achieving *More* for Children (Young people version)
 - Appendix A2 Strategic Plan, Achieving *More* for Children (Professionals version)
 - Appendix B 2023/24 Budget
 - Appendix C Medium Term Financial Strategy
 - Appendix D Treasury Plan

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 13.1 This report is supported by two background documents:
 - AfC Reserved Matter Decisions <u>https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s45552/Item%208%20Reserved%2</u> <u>0Ownersip%20Decisions%20Covering%20Report.pdf</u>
 - AfC Governance Review
 https://rbwm.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s29683/Governance%20proposed%20next%20steps%20January%202020240220.pdf

14. CONSULTATION

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
Mandatory:	Statutory Officer (or deputy)		
Elizabeth Griffiths	Executive Director of Resources & S151 Officer	14/2/24	18/3/24
Elaine Browne	Deputy Director of Law & Governance & Monitoring Officer	14/2/24	22/2/24
Deputies:			
Andrew Vallance	Deputy Director of Finance & Deputy S151 Officer	14/2/24	

Jane Cryer	Principal Lawyer & Deputy Monitoring Officer	14/2/24			
Helena Stevenson	Principal Lawyer & Deputy Monitoring Officer	14/2/24			
Mandatory:	Procurement Manager (or deputy) - if report requests approval to go to tender or award a contract				
Lyn Hitchinson	Procurement Manager 14/2/24				
Mandatory:	Data Protection Officer (or deputy) - processing of personal data;				
Samantha Wootton	Data Protection Officer 14/2/24				
Mandatory:	Equalities Officer – to advise on EQiA, or agree an EQiA is not required				
Ellen McManus-Fry	Equalities & Engagement Officer	14/2/24	21/2/24		
Mandatory:	Assistant Director HR – to advise if workforce implications	report has pote	ential staffing or		
Nikki Craig	Assistant Director of HR, Corporate Projects and IT				
Other consultees:					
Directors (where relevant)					
Stephen Evans	Chief Executive	14/2/24	21/2/24		
Andrew Durrant	Executive Director of Place				
Kevin McDaniel	Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Health	14/2/24			
Lin Ferguson	Executive Director of Children's Services & Education	13/2/24	14/2/24		

Confirmation relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Windsor	Yes
consulted		

REPORT HISTORY

Decision type:	Urgency item?	To follow item?
Key decision First entered into the Cabinet Forward Plan: 26/01/24	No	No

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

Appendix A - Equality Impact Assessment

For support in completing this EQIA, please consult the EQIA Guidance Document or contact equality@rbwm.gov.uk



1. Background Information

Title of policy/strategy/plan:	AfC Strategic Plan, Budget, Treasury Plan
Service area:	Childrens Services
Directorate:	Childrens Services

Provide a brief explanation of the proposal:

- What are its intended outcomes?
- Who will deliver it?
- Is it a new proposal or a change to an existing one?

This report sets out the new five year Strategic Plan, 2024/25 budget and 2024/25 Treasury Plan. All the proposals in the plans aim to support children and young people to live safe, healthy and fulfilled lives. The plan will be delivered by Achieving for Children in partnership with the RBWM council as well as partners. Although the Strategic Plan is a new plan the intended outcome and aspirations for children and young people have remained consistent from the previous plan. The budget has become more challenging and EQIAs have been undertaken for key programmes of work.

2. Relevance Check

Is this proposal likely to directly impact people, communities or RBWM employees?

- If No, please explain why not, including how you've considered equality issues.
- Will this proposal need a EQIA at a later stage? (for example, for a forthcoming action plan)

The activities and priorities outlined in this report will impact on children, young people and families. Individual EQUIAs will be undertaken for specific programmes of work as it is important the impact of each project / activity is considered so that the detail does not become lost in a generic assessment.

If 'No', proceed to 'Sign off'. If unsure, please contact equality@rbwm.gov.uk

3. Evidence Gathering and Stakeholder Engagement

Who will be affected by this proposal? For example, users of a particular service, residents of a geographical area, staff
Children, young people, families.
Among those affected by the proposal, are protected characteristics (age, sex, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, marriage/civil partnership) disproportionately represented? For example, compared to the general population do a higher proportion have disabilities?
Too early – see individual EQIAs
 What engagement/consultation has been undertaken or planned? How has/will equality considerations be taken into account?
 Where known, what were the outcomes of this engagement?
Too early – see individual EQIAs
What sources of data and evidence have been used in this assessment? Please consult the Equalities Evidence Grid for relevant data. Examples of other possible sources of information are in the Guidance document.
Too early – see individual EQIAs

4. Equality Analysis

Please detail, using supporting evidence:

- How the protected characteristics below might influence the needs and experiences of individuals, in relation to this proposal.
- How these characteristics might affect the impact of this proposal.

Tick positive/negative impact as appropriate. If there is no impact, or a neutral impact, state 'Not Applicable'

More information on each protected characteristic is provided in the Guidance document.

	Details and supporting evidence	Potential positive impact	Potential negative impact
Age	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Disability	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Sex	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Race, ethnicity and religion	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Sexual orientation and gender reassignment	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Pregnancy and maternity	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Marriage and civil partnership	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Armed forces community	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Socio-economic considerations e.g. low income, poverty	Too early – see individual EQIAs		
Children in care/Care leavers	Too early – see individual EQIAs		

5. Impact Assessment and Monitoring

If you have not identified any disproportionate impacts and the questions below are not applicable, leave them blank and proceed to Sign Off.

 What measures have been taken to ensure that groups with protected characteristics are able to benefit from this change, or are not disadvantaged by it?

 For example, adjustments needed to accommodate the needs of a particular group

 Too early – see individual EQIAs

 Where a potential negative impact cannot be avoided, what measures have been put in place to mitigate or minimise this?

 • For planned future actions, provide the name of the responsible individual and the target date for implementation.

 Too early – see individual EQIAs

 How will the equality impacts identified here be monitored and reviewed in the future? See guidance document for examples of appropriate stages to review an EQIA.

 Too early – see individual EQIAs

6. Sign Off

Completed by: Lucy Kourpas	Date: 26/2/24
Approved by:	Date:

If this version of the EQIA has been reviewed and/or updated:

Reviewed by:	Date: