



FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

8th December 2022

Report of the Executive Director - Children's Services

Update on Delivery of Children's Services Strategy

1. Divisions Affected

All

2. Key Decision

2.1 Not a Key Decision

3. Purpose

3.1 The purpose of this Report is to update the Cabinet on progress with development and delivery of the Children's Services Strategy 2022-25.

3.2 The Strategy has been in development since Spring 2022 and has been coproduced with staff across all delivery areas within Children's Services. To date the Strategy has been shaped and developed by the Children's Senior Management Team and Extended Senior Management Team, and has been discussed at the Council's Corporate Management Team, Lead Member for Children's Services and Safeguarding, and Lead Member for Education, and has been updated on progress with development of the Strategy over summer 2022.

3.3 Engagement with Strategic Partners on development of the Strategy is underway, alongside engagement with the Chairs of Locality Children's Partnerships. At the time of writing this report work is at an early stage, and further engagement with strategic Partners, Districts and Boroughs,

and the wider community are planned as part of the further development of the Strategy, prior to final publication.

- 3.4 The ambition of the Children's Services Strategy is ambitious for children, young people and families in Derbyshire County. In order to ensure critical deadlines are achieved, and that Children's Services make sufficient progress with delivery of a challenging and comprehensive programme of action, delivery of some critical aspects of the Strategy are already underway.
- 3.5 Any feedback or reflections from Cabinet are welcome at this stage of the development and delivery of the Children's Services Strategy.

4. Information and Analysis

Context

- 4.1 As a Council we want to ensure that the County of Derbyshire is a great place for all children and young people to grow up.
- 4.2 Many children and young people in the County experience positive outcomes in relation to educational attainment, health and well-being, and successful transition to independent adulthood. The majority of children and young people in Derbyshire have their needs met through universal services, for example through local schools, GPs and health services. They also benefit from access to a range of activities they can enjoy with their friends and families, through which they can continue to grow and develop. When facing challenges or difficulties, most children, young people and families in Derbyshire are able 'cope' because they have the means to access the support they need relatively quickly.
- 4.3 However, for a growing number of children and young people in the County, there is a higher chance of poor outcomes because their circumstances mean they are exposed to higher levels of risk and are therefore more vulnerable. Universal services – whilst of crucial importance to these children and young people – often cannot meet all the needs of our more vulnerable children and young people. We want to ensure our more vulnerable and/or disadvantaged children and young people are supported to have every opportunity of achieving the same social, educational, health and economic outcomes as their peers. We are committed to helping our more vulnerable children and young people achieve personal growth, live happy and fulfilling lives, and feel hopeful and aspirational for their futures.

4.4 The Children's Services Strategy 2022-25 sets out how we will drive the continuous improvement and transformation needed to deliver better outcomes for all children, young people and families in Derbyshire. The ambition set out in the Strategy is:

We will work creatively and collaboratively to inspire and empower children, young people and their families to be the best they can be. Our ambition is that all children and young people in Derbyshire are safe, healthy, happy, learning and ready for work.

4.5 The Strategy is being developed in exceptionally challenging and fast-changing circumstances: the combination of sustained pressure on public finances; rising pressures associated with cost of living; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic both in terms of immediate impact and emerging pressures which set up challenges for the future; changing legislation and expectations from Central Government and several important reform agendas affecting significant areas of Children's Services all give rise to extremely challenging conditions in which to achieve our ambitions for all children and young people in the County.

4.6 The priorities and actions set out in this Strategy represent the best possible route to achieve our goals.

Our Focus

4.7 In the light of the context set out above, in addition to ensuring our universal offer is of an excellent standard, our Children's Services Strategy (2022-25) will focus on improving outcomes for children and young people who:

- Are in care or leaving care
- Are a Child in Need or have a Child Protection plan
- Have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND)
- Go missing and/or run away
- Are not in full time or mainstream education
- Are not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- Are young offenders or have had contact with Youth Justice services
- Are living in low-income families
- Are affected by domestic violence
- Are affected by parental conflict or conflict in the home
- Have parents with mental health needs and/or substance misuse issues
- Have disabilities and/or long-term health conditions
- Are at risk of exploitation

- Are at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour and/or youth violence
- Are homeless or in temporary housing
- Have caring responsibilities
- Are vulnerable and have migrated to the County from outside the UK

4.8 In addition, there are some children and young people who do not appear vulnerable but who may not be coping as well as we think or whose circumstances are not secure. For these children and young people only small changes or challenges in life may make things difficult. Being aware of children and young people “on the edge” of vulnerability is important, particularly in the context of the sustained effects of the pandemic and cost of living pressures experienced by some families. There is a growing body of evidence across the children’s system that the pandemic has heightened vulnerability, and generated increases in “hidden harm” (harm to children and young people which may not have been detected by services, for example resulting from the impact of pandemic-related restrictions on face-to-face services). Looking to the future, this heightened vulnerability for some children and young people is likely to give rise to increased demands for support. The challenges arising from this need to be addressed strategically.

4.9 Our Strategy aims to address these sorts of challenges by developing and embedding innovative new models of delivery, which reflect best practice in the sector, and our own experiences of building and developing services which have proven to have positive impact on outcomes for children and young people. We are also committed to strengthening the effectiveness of our Partnerships, to ensure we take a local area approach to addressing the many likely challenges in the years ahead.

4.10 Some key principles have emerged from meetings to develop the Children’s Services Strategy, which have informed our thinking around priorities and the key actions we will take to achieve these. These are summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Principles which have helped to shape our Strategy

Principles	Description
Early Intervention and Prevention and Early Help	Early Help and Early Intervention and Prevention may be needed at any point in a child or young person's life. It refers to interventions made early in a child's life as well as interventions early in the development of a problem. It can refer to support at an early stage to help families solve problems, or to reduce the impact of problems that have already emerged. Acting early and ensuring the right support is in place at the right time is a key principle which underpins our Strategy and the actions in our Action Plan.
Strengthening Inclusion	Taking an evidence-based and targeted approach to 'narrowing the gap' in positive outcomes between vulnerable children and young people, and the average for the County can involve strengthening inclusion of children and young people with SEND in mainstream education; reducing school exclusions through provision of behavioural support; empowering and enabling vulnerable children and young people to remain at home rather than in the care system.
Focusing on Sufficiency and Managing Demand	Ensuring we manage demand for our services by investing in and reshaping our preventative services, and ensuring we have sufficient provision in place to achieve this and provide the right kind of specialist support when this is essential in order to meet a child or young person's need.
Focusing on Quality and Raising Standards	Driving a culture of learning and constructive challenge, to raise standards across children's services. Ensuring the voice of the child and young person is heard and central to our approach to service development and continuous improvement.
Working Together to Focus on Outcomes	The Divisional Plans and "Big Ticket" programmes which collectively deliver the Children's Services Strategy are organised around Strategic Priorities which bring services across the Department together and depend on effective strategic Partnership working. This strategic Partnership working needs to include effective teamworking within the Council; between Derbyshire County Council, Districts and Boroughs; between the Council and Partners from other agencies. Governance arrangements for delivery are being designed to facilitate cross-service and multi-agency working, and breaking down silos to genuinely hold outcomes for children at the heart of everything we do.
Ensuring the Voices of Children, Young People	A key tenet of the Children's Services Strategy is to put children, young people and families at the heart of everything we do. This means ensuring we focus on needs and improving outcomes. Our ambition reflects these objectives, and our

and Families are Heard	selection of strategic priorities is designed to ensure that the actions we take have the greatest possible positive impact on the lives of children, young people and families. Our delivery and monitoring of progress through our Governance arrangements will also clearly reflect the voices of children, young people and families.
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Our Strategy

- 4.11 The Children’s Services Strategy (2022-25), and some of the key activities which Divisions across the Service will take to deliver it, is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Alignment with the Council Ambition and Council Plan

- 4.12 Appendix 1 shows how the ambition for children and young people set out in the Strategy aligns with the Council’s Ambition set out in the Council Plan 2022-25, and how the Council Values will be delivered by Children’s Services in the course of delivering the Strategy. The Appendix also shows how Children’s Services Strategy aligns with key Council-wide initiatives such as Thriving Communities, Enterprising Council and Vision Derbyshire.

Strategic Priorities

- 4.13 Within this strategic context, the Children’s Services Strategy 2022-25 sets out 5 Strategic Priorities:

1. Partnerships and Systems Leadership
2. Models and Structures that Deliver
3. Workforce Development
4. Strategy and Financial Sustainability
5. Quality, Practice and Performance

- 4.14 Appendix 1 also sets out three key channels of activity to deliver the Children’s Strategy:

1. **Divisional Plans** – specific plans with key activities to deliver the strategy which will be taken forward by Schools and Learning; Early Help and Safeguarding; Performance, Quality, Partnerships and Commissioning. Overall governance of Divisional Plan delivery will sit with the Executive Director/Statutory DCS and her Directors, collectively as the Senior Leadership Team
2. **Big Ticket items** – major strategies and programmes which bring Divisions together with strategic partners to tackle complex and

systemic issues, and achieve priorities in the Children's Services Strategy

3. **Strategic Partnerships** – work with strategic Partners across the County to take a joined up, collaborative and coproduced approach to delivering the strategic priorities

4.15 Appendix 1 sets out some of the content of the Divisional Plans, focusing on “shared priority areas” beneath each of the 5 Strategic Priorities. These are priority areas for improvement, development and delivery which all Divisions in Children's Services share, which the SMT will own in terms of governance.

4.16 Appendix 1 also sets out a high-level summary of “Big Ticket” strategies and programmes and a timetable for delivery over the next 18 months. These Big Ticket strategies and programmes are in development currently, with some already underway. Each of these Big Ticket areas address complex, systemic issues facing Children's Services, the wider Council and strategic Partners. Each Big Ticket strategy and programme will require further consultation and engagement as part of the development and delivery process.

Governance Arrangements

4.17 Our Governance Arrangements for delivery of the Children's Services Strategy are also set out in Appendix 1.

4.18 The Children's Services SMT will govern the delivery of the Divisional Plan priorities, meeting fortnightly to review progress (the first of which was on 25th October 2022). Some matters may be reserved for Cabinet and SMT will consult as and when it is appropriate to do so as part of the governance arrangements.

4.19 The Strategy Delivery Board – comprising SMT plus members of staff in key strategic support roles such as project management, HR and Finance – will meet fortnightly to review progress with delivery of “Big Ticket” strategies and programmes, as well as overall success with delivery of the Children's Services Strategy. The Strategy Delivery Board will also meet fortnightly (alternating with weeks in which SMT meet).

4.20 Strategic Partnerships will also be a key component of the governance arrangements for delivery of the Children's Services Strategy. At the time of writing, these arrangements are currently under review and will be developed further as part of the next stage of work on the Strategy. Appendix 1 shows that Partnerships include Districts and Boroughs, as

well as bespoke Partnership arrangements established to deliver Big Ticket strategies and programmes.

- 4.21 Appendix 1 also shows that ensuring the voices of children, young people and families are heard and incorporated into our planning and delivery, is a key principle which applies to all aspects of our governance arrangements.

Further Developments of the Children's Services Strategy (2022-25)

- 4.22 Although the Children's Services Strategy is at an advanced stage of development, and several of the key actions are already underway in order to ensure that all children and young people in the County are supported to flourish and thrive, there are several areas of activity related to the Strategy yet to complete prior to final publication.

A summary of these are as follows:

- a) **Further consultation and engagement with Partners and key stakeholder groups.** (Please see details in the Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation section below)
- b) **Development of a contextual narrative.** The final published version of the Strategy will include a short contextual narrative, setting out the context in which the Priorities and Key Actions for the Strategy have been developed
- c) **Summary of evidence base.** Related to the contextual narrative, the final version of the Strategy will summarise the key qualitative and quantitative evidence which justifies the identification of the Priorities within the Strategy
- d) **Development of appropriate impact, performance and success measures.** Work to develop appropriate measures of success and impact is underway and will play a critical role in ensuring effective governance of delivery. Children's Services is a highly regulated area and performance management arrangements are complex: the next stage of work will address the challenge of identifying the most meaningful and appropriate measures of success to monitor in order to determine impact on outcomes for children, young people and families
- e) **Further work to align the Children's Services Strategy with wider Council and Partner Strategies, Programmes and Initiatives.** From the start of the Strategy development process, every effort has been made to ensure strong strategic alignment with wider Council Strategies and Programmes. Work will continue in the next phase to ensure this alignment is sustained as the Council continues to evolve its strategic response to priority areas, including wider challenges

around workforce development and ensuring an effective approach is in place to address significant financial challenges in a sustainable way.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 At the time of writing, the Strategy has been subject to extensive consultation with the Children's Services Senior Management Team and Extended Senior Management Team. All staff in Children's Services were invited to a session to discuss the strategy and input into its onward development in April 2022. This session drew out several useful contributions and received significant positive feedback from staff. The Extended Senior Management Team (which includes all Heads of Service, Senior Business Partners, Assistant Directors, Directors and the Executive Director) will continue to meet on an approximately 6-week to 2-monthly basis to discuss progress with delivery of the Strategy and focus on key issues and topics to help drive delivery forward. The Council's Corporate Management Team have also received an update on progress and fed back on the direction the Strategy should take. Some Members of the Cabinet including the Lead Member for Children's Services and Safeguarding and Lead Member for Education have been updated and engaged over the summer in development of the Children's Services Strategy, including through attendance at Children's Service senior leadership away day held in August 2022. This engagement has also helped to strengthen and steer work on the Strategy.
- 5.2 Further consultation and engagement is planned as the next phase of work on the Strategy begins. This includes (but is not limited to) further work to engage strategic Partners from other agencies; further consultation and engagement with Districts and Boroughs; continued consultation with other Council Departments and the Council's Corporate Management Team; and development of a plan for consultation and engagement with the wider community including children, young people and families in the County.

6. Alternative Options Considered

- 6.1 Alternatives would be
- a) Not to create a single overarching Strategy for Children's Services, which would generate risks around fragmentation of delivery, loss of focus on priority areas, and disconnect from the wider strategic agenda of the Council. This option was therefore ruled out at an early stage.

b) To use the current Children's Services Plan as the single point of reference for strategic goals and priorities in Children's Services. However, the Plan in its current form was viewed as not sufficiently addressing strategic priority areas which are relevant now and likely to be relevant in the coming years.

6.2 The decision was taken therefore to establish a Children's Services Strategy which aligns with the current Children's Services Plan.

6.3 The overall approach to planning moving forward will be reviewed as part of the next phases of work, with full engagement from appropriate stakeholders across the Council, in order to ensure an efficient and effective approach to strategy and planning.

7. Implications

7.1 Appendix 1 **attached** to this report sets out the implications of the Children's Services Strategy for delivery across Children's Services and wider partnerships. Appendix 1 **in the body** of this report sets out Financial, Legal, HR and other implications.

8. Background Papers

8.1 No background papers other than the Appendix 1 which is **attached** to this report.

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Children's Strategy (2022-25) – Progress to date with development of the Children's Services Strategy, including Divisional Plans, Big Ticket projects and programmes, and Governance arrangements

10. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- a) Note and discuss progress to date with development and delivery of the Children's Services Strategy, and provide Officers with any feedback that may help inform the next phase of work
- b) Discuss approach to future updates to Cabinet on progress with development and delivery of the Strategy and provide any feedback

11. Reasons for Recommendations

- 11.1 Recommendation a) will help guide Officers' approach to the next phase of work on the Children's Services Strategy.
- 11.2 Recommendation b) will help Officers to plan ahead for future updates to Cabinet on progress with developing and delivering the Children's Services Strategy.

12. Is it necessary to waive the call in period?

- 12.1 No.

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Appendix 1

Implications

Financial

- 1.1 As this report is an information update, there are no Financial implications arising directly from this report. Work to develop the Children's Services Strategy to date has been carried out within existing resources.
- 1.2 One of the key priorities in the Children's Services Strategy focuses on "Strategy and Financial Sustainability", and one of the Big Ticket strategies and programmes is the Financial Strategy for Children's Services. A key objective of the Children's Services Strategy is to improve outcomes for children, young people and families in a way that is Financially viable and sustainable.
- 1.3 Colleagues in the Corporate Finance function are closely engaged in development of the Children's Services Strategy, and form part of the membership of the Children's Strategy Delivery Board, which will oversee further development and delivery of the Strategy.
- 1.4 Financial implications of any aspect of delivery of the Children's Services Strategy will be considered in detail at the appropriate stage, and any recommendations relating to use of financial resources to achieve key objectives will be subject to the appropriate governance processes.

Legal

- 2.1 As this report is an information update, there are no Legal implications arising directly from this report.

- 2.2 Children's Services is a highly regulated area of the Council, with various statutory responsibilities to children, young people and families falling within its remit. The Children's Services Strategy aims to ensure that all statutory duties arising are met to a high quality standard. The fifth priority around Quality, Practice and Performance addresses these obligations. In addition, Governance arrangements set out in Appendix 1 attached to this report aim to ensure that legal and statutory duties falling within the remit of Children's Services are given sufficient and appropriate focus.

Human Resources

- 3.1 As this report is an information update, there are no HR implications arising directly from this report.
- 3.2 Workforce Development is one of the 5 key strategic priorities within the Children's Services Strategy. Work is already underway to align work in this area with the Council's broader approach to HR and refresh of the CS People Plan which supports the corporate People Strategy. If required, future updates can include reports on progress with this alignment and area of work.
- 3.3 The Senior HR Business Partner for CS is closely engaged in development of the Children's Services Strategy, and form part of the membership of the Children's Strategy Delivery Board, which will oversee further development and delivery of the Strategy.

Information Technology

- 4.1 As this report is an information update, there are no Information Technology implications arising directly from this report.
- 4.2 Models and Structures that Deliver is one of the 5 key strategic priorities within the Strategy. Work to deliver on this priority will include exploration of innovative alternative models of delivery, which could include use of digital and IT to provide efficient and effective services to children, young people and families. If required, future updates on progress could incorporate updates on this aspect of delivery.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 As this report is an information update, there are no Equality Impact implications arising directly from this report.
- 5.2 The section of this report with the header "Our Focus" set out several priority groups with relatively greater levels of vulnerability which the

Children's Services Strategy aims to focus on, in terms of ensuring needs are met, and inequalities in outcomes are addressed. These priority groups have been discussed as part of work to date on the Strategy in order to ensure that those in greatest need of support get the focus and support they need to thrive, and that inequalities in outcomes are addressed in a meaningful way.

- 5.3 The section of this report with the header "Further Developments of the Children's Services Strategy" refers to work on the evidence base behind the Strategy, and the Big Ticket strategies and programmes which will help deliver it. The work on this evidence base will also enable a richer understanding of Equality Impact implications in delivery. The Further Developments section and Consultation section of this report also refers to planned further work on consultation and engagement with key stakeholders – outcomes from these activities will also help to shape and inform understanding of the Equality Impact of the Strategy.
- 5.4 An appropriate, evidence-based Equality Impact Assessment will be completed prior to final sign off and publication of the Children's Strategy 2022-25.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 6.1 Appendix 1 attached to this report sets out how the Council Ambition and the Ambition of the Children's Services Strategy align. The Appendix also sets out how the Council Values align with the Values which underpin the Children's Services Strategy. Appendix 1 also sets out how Council Plan 2022-25 priorities frame those set out in the Children's Services Strategy, and the alignment between key Corporate objectives and initiatives such as Thriving Communities, Enterprising Council and Vision Derbyshire, and the 5 key strategic priorities in the Children's Services Strategy.
- 6.2 From the start of the Strategy development process, every effort has been made to ensure strong strategic alignment with wider Council Strategies and Programmes. Work will continue in the next phase to ensure this alignment is sustained as the Council continues to evolve its strategic response to priority areas and objectives, including (but not limited to) wider challenges around workforce development and ensuring an effective approach is in place to address significant financial challenges in a sustainable way.

Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report.